

Genesis 37:25

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt.

Analysis

And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of ... This passage is part of the Joseph narrative, a masterfully crafted account demonstrating God's sovereign providence working through human choices and circumstances to accomplish His redemptive purposes. The Joseph cycle shows how God transforms evil intentions into instruments of salvation.

Central themes include divine providence orchestrating events toward redemptive ends, the testing and refinement of character through suffering and success, forgiveness overcoming betrayal and injustice, and the preservation of God's covenant people through famine. Joseph's rise from slavery to second-in-command of Egypt illustrates how God exalts the humble and uses seeming disasters for ultimate good.

Theologically, these chapters reveal:

1. God's meticulous sovereignty over all events, even evil human actions
2. suffering as preparation for future service rather than punishment
3. forgiveness as reflecting divine character and enabling reconciliation
4. God's covenant faithfulness across generations ensuring the survival and blessing of His people

5. how present suffering gains meaning when viewed from the perspective of God's larger purposes.

Joseph's words "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (50:20) epitomize biblical theodicy and providence.

Historical Context

The patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-50) reflect the cultural, social, and legal customs of the ancient Near East during the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 BCE). Archaeological discoveries including the Mari tablets, Nuzi tablets, and Egyptian records confirm many details: nomadic pastoralism, covenant-making ceremonies, marriage customs, property laws, and international travel patterns described in Genesis.

The cultural practices reflected include: treaty/covenant forms (Genesis 15), bride-price customs (Genesis 24, 29), inheritance laws favoring firstborn sons (Genesis 25, 27), adoption practices (Genesis 15, 30), levirate-type arrangements (Genesis 38), and Egyptian administrative systems (Genesis 41, 47). These parallels confirm Genesis's historical reliability while showing how God worked within ancient cultural frameworks to accomplish His purposes.

For later Israelites, these narratives established their identity as Abraham's descendants, explained their claim to Canaan, justified their possession of Joseph's bones (Exodus 13:19), and provided models of faith despite imperfection. The patriarchs' failures and God's faithfulness encouraged Israel that covenant relationship depended on God's grace rather than human merit. The movement from Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt set the stage for the Exodus and conquest narratives.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does this verse deepen our understanding of God's character and His relationship with creation?
2. How should this truth about Sold into Slavery shape our daily decisions and priorities?
3. How does this passage point forward to Christ and the gospel of redemption?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּשְׁבוּ	לֶאֱכֹל	לֶחֶם	וַיִּשָּׂא יָם	עֵינֵיהֶם	וַיִּרְאוּ
And they sat down	to eat	bread	and they lifted up	their eyes	and looked
H3427	H398	H3899	H5375	H5869	H7200
וְהִנֵּה	אֶחָד ת	יִשְׁמְעֵאלִים	בָּא ה	מִגִּלְעָד	
H2009	and behold a company	of Ishmeelites	came	from Gilead	
	H736	H3459	H935	H1568	
וּגְמֻלֵיהֶם	וַיִּשָּׂא יָם	נִכְאֹת	וְצָר י	וְלִט	הוֹלֵךְ יָם
with their camels	and they lifted up	spicery	and balm	and myrrh	going
H1581	H5375	H5219	H6875	H3910	H1980
לְהוֹרִיד	מִצְרָיִם:				
to carry it down	to Egypt				
H3381	H4714				

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 43:11 (Parallel theme): And their father Israel said unto them, If it must be so now, do this; take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds:

Genesis 37:28 (References Egypt): Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

Jeremiah 8:22 (Parallel theme): Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?

Genesis 37:36 (References Egypt): And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.

Psalms 14:4 (Parallel theme): Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the LORD.

Proverbs 30:20 (Parallel theme): Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness.

Jeremiah 46:11 (References Egypt): Go up into Gilead, and take balm, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt: in vain shalt thou use many medicines; for thou shalt not be cured.

Genesis 31:23 (Parallel theme): And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilead.

Genesis 39:1 (References Egypt): And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither.

Amos 6:6 (Parallel theme): That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.