

Genesis 37:28

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and ... 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

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does understanding this verse shape our doctrine of humanity, sin, or salvation?
2. What obstacles prevent us from living out the truths presented in this verse?
3. What connections can we trace from this verse to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

Interlinear Text

וַיַּעֲבֹר	וְיַעֲבֹר	יְמִשְׁכִּים	יְמִשְׁכִּים	וְיַעֲשׂוּ	וְיַעֲשׂוּ
Then there passed	H376	by Midianites	H5503	and they drew	H4900
H5674		H4084		H4900	
וַיָּלֶא	וְיָלֶא	וְיָמַר	וְיָמַר	וְיָמַר	וְיָמַר
and lifted up	H853	Joseph	H4480	out of the pit	H953
H5927		H3130		H4376	
וְיָמַר	וְיָמַר	וְיָמַר	וְיָמַר	וְיָמַר	וְיָמַר
to the Ishmeelites	H3459	for twenty	H6242	pieces of silver	H3701
וְיָמַר	וְיָמַר	וְיָמַר	וְיָמַר	וְיָמַר	וְיָמַר
and they brought	H935	and they brought	H853	Joseph	H3130
מִצְרַיִם	מִצְרַיִם				
into Egypt	H4714				

Additional Cross-References

Acts 7:9 (References Egypt): And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,

Psalms 105:17 (Parallel theme): He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant:

Genesis 25:2 (Parallel theme): And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah.

Matthew 26:15 (Parallel theme): And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.

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

Genesis 37:25 (References Egypt): 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.

Isaiah 60:6 (Parallel theme): The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD.

Psalms 83:9 (Parallel theme): Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison:

Exodus 2:16 (Parallel theme): Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters: and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock.

Matthew 27:9 (Parallel theme): Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value;