

Genesis 38:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.

Analysis

And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in ... 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

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does understanding this verse shape our doctrine of humanity, sin, or salvation?
2. How can we apply the principles from this passage to contemporary challenges in family, work, or church?
3. What connections can we trace from this verse to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

Interlinear Text

וְיָהִי	בְּמִשְׁלֵשׁ	יָמִינְךָ	וְיָהִי
H1961	And it came to pass about three	months	after that it was told
	H7969	H2320	H5046
וְיָהִי	אָמַר	בְּלֹתָךְ	בְּנֵי
said	hath played the harlot	Tamar	thy daughter in law
H559	H2181	H8559	H3618
וְיָהִי	בְּבָבָה	לִזְנוּןִים	וְיָהִי
and also behold she is with child	by whoredom	said	And Judah
H2030	H2183	H559	H3063
וְתִשְׁבַּרְךָ:			Bring her forth
and let her be burnt			H3318

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 21:9 (Parallel theme): And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire.

Ezekiel 23:44 (Parallel theme): Yet they went in unto her, as they go in unto a woman that playeth the harlot: so went they in unto Aholah and unto Aholibah, the lewd women.

Ezekiel 23:5 (Parallel theme): And Aholah played the harlot when she was mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians her neighbours,

Ezekiel 23:19 (Parallel theme): Yet she multiplied her whoredoms, in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt.

Hosea 2:5 (Parallel theme): For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.

Judges 19:2 (Parallel theme): And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father's house to Beth-lehem-judah, and was there four whole months.