

Genesis 41:55

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do.

Analysis

And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said... 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

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. What does this passage reveal about God's sovereignty and human responsibility?
2. What obstacles prevent us from living out the truths presented in this verse?
3. How does this verse fit into the broader biblical story culminating in Christ?

Interlinear Text

אָל	בָּשָׂר	מִצְבָּה	וַיַּצְאַת	קָרְבָּן	מִצְבָּה	כִּי	אָז	כִּי	וַיִּתְרַעַב	אָל
was famished	H3605	And when all the land		of Egypt	H4714	cried		the people	H413	
H7456		H776		H6817		H5971				
אָל	לְכָה	מִצְבָּה	וְיִמְצָא	לְלִכְמָה	פְּרָעָה	לְכָל	פְּרָעָה	וְיִאָמֶר	לְאַמְתָּה	אָל
and Pharaoh	for bread	said	and Pharaoh	H3605	H6547	of Egypt	H1980	H413	H4714	
H6547	H3899	H559	H6547							
אָל	לְכָה	מִצְבָּה	וְיִאָמֶר	אֲשֶׁר	וַיֹּסֶךְ	תַּעֲשֵׂה	לְכָה	וְיִאָמֶר	אֲשֶׁר	אָל
unto Joseph	H834	said	H0	to you do	H6213					
H3130		H559								

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 17:5 (Parallel theme): While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

Matthew 3:17 (Parallel theme): And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.