

Genesis 42:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.

Analysis

And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, beh... 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

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

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. How does this passage point forward to Christ and the gospel of redemption?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמְרוּ	שְׁנֵי יָמִים	עֲשָׂרָה	עֲבָדֶי יְיָ	אֲחֵי יִצְחָק	בְּנֵי יִצְחָק	וְהַיּוֹנֵק
And they said	are twelve	H6240	Thy servants	brethren	H587	the sons
H559	H8147		H5650	H251		H1121
אִישׁ	וְהָאֶחָד	בְּאֶרֶץ	כְּנָעַן	וְהִנֵּה	וְהַיּוֹנֵק	אֶת
man	and one	in the land	of Canaan	H2009	and behold the youngest	H854
H376	H259	H776	H3667		H6996	
אֲבִי יִצְחָק	הַיּוֹם	וְהָאֶחָד	אִינוֹנוּ			
with our father	is this day	and one	H369			
H1	H3117	H259				

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 37:30 (Parallel theme): And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?

Genesis 44:20 (Parallel theme): And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him.

Genesis 42:32 (Parallel theme): We be twelve brethren, sons of our father; one is not, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.

Genesis 43:7 (Parallel theme): And they said, The man asked us straitly of our state, and of our kindred, saying, Is your father yet alive? have ye another brother? and we told him according to the tenor of these words: could we certainly know that he would say, Bring your brother down?

