

Genesis 42:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies.

Analysis

Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may... 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

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does understanding this verse shape our doctrine of humanity, sin, or salvation?
2. What specific changes in thinking or behavior does this verse call us to make?
3. What connections can we trace from this verse to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

Interlinear Text

וְשִׁלַּח וְ	אֶתְּ	אֶחָיְכֶם	וְיִקֶּחַ	אֶתְּ	אֶחָיְכֶם	וְיִקֶּחַ
Send			of you and let him fetch		your brother	
H7971			H3947		H251	
וְהָאֵלֶּיךָ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ
and ye shall be kept in prison	may be proved	that your words				
H631	H974	H1697				
וְהָאֵלֶּיךָ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ
whether there be any truth	in	you or else	by the life	of Pharaoh		
H571	H854	H518	H3808	H2416	H6547	
וְהָאֵלֶּיךָ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ	וְיִבְחֲנוּ
surely ye are spies						
H3588	H7270	H859				

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 42:11 (Truth): We are all one man's sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies.