

Genesis 42:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food.

Analysis

And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly... 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

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What theological truths about Brothers' First Journey emerge from this passage?
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

וַיֵּרָא	וַיֹּסֶף	אֶת	אֶתְּ יוֹ	וַתֵּנֶכֶּ ר	וַתֵּנֶכֶּ ר	אֵלָיוּם
saw	And Joseph	H853	his brethren	and he knew	and he knew	H413
H7200	H3130		H251	H5234	H5234	
וַיִּדְּבֵר	אֶתְּ	קָשׁ וְ	וַיֹּאמֶר ו	אֵלָיוּם		
unto them and spake	H854	roughly	unto them and he said	H413		
H1696		H7186	H559			
מֵאֵין	בָּאֵתְּ	וַיֹּאמֶר ו	מֵאֵרֶץ	כְּנָעַן		
unto them Whence	come	unto them and he said	From the land	of Canaan		
H370	H935	H559	H776	H3667		
לִשְׂבֹּר	אֹכֶל:					
to buy	food					
H7666	H400					

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 42:30 (Parallel theme): The man, who is the lord of the land, spake roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country.