

Genesis 46:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the sons of Judah; Er, and Onan, and Shelah, and Pharez, and Zerah: but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Pharez were Hezron and Hamul.

Analysis

And the sons of Judah; Er, and Onan, and Shelah, and Pharez, and Zerah: but Er and Onan died in the ... 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

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does this verse contribute to the biblical doctrine of creation, fall, or redemption?
2. How should this truth about Beersheba Vision shape our daily decisions and priorities?
3. What connections can we trace from this verse to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

Interlinear Text

בְּנֵי	וְיְהוּדָה	עֵר	וְאוֹנָן	וְשֵׁלָה	פָּרָז	וְזֵרַח
And the sons	of Judah	Er	and Onan	and Shelah	and Pharez	and Zerah
H1121	H3063	H6147	H209	H7956	H6557	H2226
וַיָּמָת	עֵר	וְאוֹנָן	בְּאֶרֶץ	כְּנָעַן	וְהָיָה	בְּנֵי
died	Er	and Onan	in the land	of Canaan	H1961	And the sons
H4191	H6147	H209	H776	H3667		H1121
פָּרָז	וְהִצֵּר	וְהָמוּל				
and Pharez	were Hezron	and Hamul				
H6557	H2696	H2538				

Additional Cross-References

1 Chronicles 4:21 (Parallel theme): The sons of Shelah the son of Judah were, Er the father of Lecah, and Laadah the father of Mareshah, and the families of the house of them that wrought fine linen, of the house of Ashbea,

Genesis 38:10 (Parallel theme): And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also.

Genesis 38:7 (Parallel theme): And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him.

Genesis 29:35 (Parallel theme): And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the LORD: therefore she called his name Judah; and left bearing.

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