

Genesis 50:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.

Analysis

So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; ... 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

Study Questions

1. How does understanding this verse shape our doctrine of humanity, sin, or salvation?
2. How can we apply the principles from this passage to contemporary challenges in family, work, or church?
3. What connections can we trace from this verse to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	תֹּאמֶר	וְ	יְוָשָׁבָן	אַתָּה	שְׁאֵל	נָא	לֹא	שָׁעָר
H3541	So shall ye say	H3130	And Joseph	H577	I pray thee	H4994	Forgive	H6588
H559				H5375				
וְ	מִתְּפַתְּחָתֶם	אַתָּה	בְּעֵבֶד	גַּמְלֵל	וְ	שְׁאֵלָה	וְ	עֲמָתָה
	of thy brethren	and their sin	H3588	unto thee evil	for they did	H6258		Forgive
	H251	H2403		H7451	H1580		H5375	
וְ	שָׁעָר	לֹא	עָבֵד	אֱלֹהִים	אָבִיךָ	וְ	בָּרָךְ	
	H4994	now the trespass	of the servants	of the God	of thy father		wept	
	H6588	H5650	H430	H1	H1		H1058	
וְ	יְוָשָׁבָן	בְּדִבְרֵיכֶם	אַלְיוֹן					
	H3130	H1696	H413					

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 21:11 (Evil): For they intended evil against thee: they imagined a mischievous device, which they are not able to perform.

Proverbs 28:13 (Sin): He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Ephesians 4:32 (References God): And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Genesis 45:8 (References God): So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

Genesis 49:25 (Sin): Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb:

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