

Genesis 50:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

Analysis

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is t... 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

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What does this passage reveal about God's sovereignty and human responsibility?
2. How does this passage challenge modern cultural assumptions about identity, purpose, or morality?
3. How does this verse fit into the broader biblical story culminating in Christ?

Interlinear Text

אַתָּה בְּשָׁבַע הַעֲלֵל בְּשָׁבַע הַעֲלֵל אֶלְהִים
H859 But as for you ye thought H2803 H5921 evil H7451 against me but God H430

בְּשָׁבַע הַעֲלֵל לְטוֹב הַעֲשֵׂה הַעֲשֵׂה וְמִמְּלֵא
H2803 But as for you ye thought H2896 to H4616 bring to pass H6213 as it is this day H3117

בְּבָבִי תְּהִלֵּה עַמּוֹד לְפָנֵי
H2088 alive H2421 people H5971 much H7227

Additional Cross-References

Romans 8:28 (Good): And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Psalms 119:71 (Good): It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

Acts 2:23 (Evil): Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

Acts 3:26 (References God): Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

Genesis 37:4 (Parallel theme): And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

Psalms 56:5 (Evil): Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil.

Isaiah 10:7 (Parallel theme): Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few.

Psalms 76:10 (Parallel theme): Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

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