

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

וְאַתָּה הָ	חֲשַׁבְתָּ הָ	עַל יָ	רָעָה	אֱלֹהִים
H859	But as for you ye thought	H5921	evil	against me but God
	H2803		H7451	H430
חֲשַׁבְתָּ הָ	לְטוֹבָה הָ	לְמַעַן	עָשָׂה הָ	כִּי יוֹם
But as for you ye thought	unto good	to	bring to pass	as it is this day
H2803	H2896	H4616	H6213	H3117
הַיְּהוָה הָ	עַם	רַב:		
H2088	alive	people	much	
	H2421	H5971	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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