

Genesis 41:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favoured and leanfleshed; and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river.

Analysis

And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favoured and leanfleshed; and... 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

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What does this passage reveal about God's sovereignty and human responsibility?
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

וְהִנֵּה	וְהִנֵּה	בַּעַשׂ	שֶׁבַע	וְתִּזְבְּחַת	וְתִּזְבְּחַת	אַחֲרָת	אַחֲרָת	עַל	עַל	אַמְרִיכָן	מִן
H2009	And behold seven			kine		other		came up		after them	H4480
		H7651		H6510		H312		H5927		H310	
of the river		ill		favoured		and leanfleshed					
H2975		H7451		H4758		H1851		H1320		and stood	by
										H5975	H681
פִּיאָרָה:		עַל	שֶׁפֶת	עַל	פִּיאָרָה:						
kine	H5921	upon the brink	H8193	of the river	H2975						
H6510											

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