

Genesis 50:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians: wherefore the name of it was called Abel-mizraim, which is beyond Jordan.

Analysis

And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they sa... 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

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What theological truths about Jacob's Death and Burial emerge from this passage?
2. How does this passage challenge modern cultural assumptions about identity, purpose, or morality?
3. What connections can we trace from this verse to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּרָא	וַיֹּשֶׁב	הָאָרֶץ	הַכְּנַעֲנִי	אֶת	אֲבֵל
saw	And when the inhabitants	of the land	the Canaanites	H853	mourning
H7200	H3427	H776	H3669		H60
בְּגִן	הָאֵטָד	וַיֹּאמְרוּ	אֲבֵל	כִּי	זֶה
in the floor	of Atad	they said	mourning	This is a grievous	H2088
H1637	H329	H559	H60	H3515	
לְמִצְרַיִם	עַל	כִּי	קָרָא	שְׁמָהּ	אֲבֵל
H4713	H5921	H3651	was called	wherefore the name of it	H0
			H7121	H8034	Abelmizraim
					H67
אֲשֶׁר	בְּעֵבֶר	הַיַּרְדֵּן			
H834	which is beyond	Jordan			
	H5676	H3383			

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 24:6 (Parallel theme): And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again.

