

Genesis 50:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed: and the Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days.

Analysis

And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed: an... 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 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What theological truths about Jacob's Death and Burial emerge from this passage?
2. What obstacles prevent us from living out the truths presented in this verse?
3. How does understanding Christ as the ultimate fulfillment illuminate this passage's meaning?

Interlinear Text

יְמָלָא וְ	לֹ	אַרְבָּעַ יָמִים	יָוֹם	כִּי	כִּי	יָ
for him for so are fulfilled	H0	And forty	days	H3588	H3651	
H4390		H705	H3117			
יְמָלָא וְ	יָוֹם	הַחֲנֻטִּים	וַיִּכְכּוּ	אֶת		
for him for so are fulfilled	days	of those which are embalmed	mourned			H853
H4390	H3117	H2590	H1058			
מִצֵּרְיִם	שָׁבַע יָמִים	יָוֹם				
and the Egyptians	for him threescore and ten	days				
H4714	H7657	H3117				

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 34:8 (Parallel theme): And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.

Numbers 20:29 (Parallel theme): And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.