

Joseph Buries His Father

Introduction:

In this final Bible study on the life of Joseph, we see two funerals.

The first is that of Jacob and is described in detail. It is a large and very impressive funeral.

Later, Joseph also dies: this is described in only five verses.

We read from the Bible (AMP): Genesis 47:27-31, Genesis 49:33, and Genesis 50:1-26.

Genesis 47:27-31

27Now [the people of] Israel lived in the country of Egypt, in [the land of] Goshen, and they gained possessions and acquired property there and were fruitful and multiplied greatly.

28And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the length of Jacob's life was a hundred and forty-seven years.

29And when the time drew near for Israel to die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If now I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh and [promise to] deal loyally and faithfully with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt, 30but when I lie down with my fathers [in death], you will carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place [at Hebron in the cave of Machpelah]." And Joseph said, "I will do as you have directed."

31Then he said, "Swear to me [that you will do it]." So he swore to him. Then Israel (Jacob) bowed in worship at the head of the bed.

Genesis 49:33

33When Jacob (Israel) had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people [who had preceded him in death].

Genesis 50:1-26

Burial Preparations and Mourning for Jacob

1Then Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept over him and kissed him [tenderly].

2Then Joseph ordered his servants the physicians to embalm (mummify) his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel (Jacob). 3Now forty days were required for this, for that is the customary number of days [of preparation] required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept and grieved for him [in public mourning as they would for royalty] for seventy days.

4When the days of weeping and public mourning for him were past, Joseph spoke to [the nobles of] the house of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your sight, please speak to Pharaoh, saying, 5'My father made me swear [an oath], saying, "Hear me, I am about to die; bury me in my tomb which I prepared for myself in the land of Canaan." So now let me go up [to Canaan], please, and bury my father; then I will return.' " 6And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear."

7So Joseph went up [to Canaan] to bury his father, and with him went all the officials of Pharaoh, [the nobles of his court and] the elders of his household and all [the nobles and] the elders of the land of Egypt— 8and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father's household. They left only their little ones and their flocks and herds in the land of Goshen. 9Both chariots and horsemen also went up [to Canaan] with Joseph; and it was a

very great company. 10When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they mourned there with a great lamentation (expressions of mourning for the deceased) and [extreme demonstrations of] sorrow [according to Egyptian custom]; and Joseph observed a seven-day mourning for his father. 11When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning for the Egyptians." Therefore the place was named Abel-mizraim (mourning of Egypt); it is west of the Jordan.

Burial at Machpelah

12So Jacob's sons did for him as he had commanded them; 13for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, east of Mamre, which Abraham bought along with the field as a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. 14After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him.

15When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph carries a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him?" 16So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father commanded us before he died, saying, 17'You are to say to Joseph, "I beg you, please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong." ' Now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18Then his brothers went and fell down before him [in confession]; then they said, "Behold, we are your servants (slaves)." 19But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? [Vengeance is His, not mine.] 20As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present outcome, that many people would be kept alive [as they are this day]. 21So now, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and support you and your little ones." So he comforted them [giving them encouragement and hope] and spoke [with kindness] to their hearts.

Death of Joseph

22Now Joseph lived in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived a hundred and ten years. 23Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's children; also the children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born and raised on Joseph's knees. 24Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up out of this land to the land which He promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob [to give you]." 25Then Joseph made the sons of Israel (Jacob) swear [an oath], saying, "God will surely visit you and take care of you [returning you to Canaan], and [when that happens] you shall carry my bones up from here." 26So Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Explanation:

When Jacob knows he will soon die, he calls Joseph to him. Jacob asks Joseph to bury him in Canaan, in the family grave.

They survived the famine in Egypt, but the family's future lies in Canaan. Joseph swears that he will bury his father there.

When the time comes for Jacob to die, he calls all his children together. He has a word for each of them. Very personal, about their past actions, and also words predicting the future.

When he is finished, he asks his sons what he had previously asked Joseph: bury me in the family grave, in the Cave of Machpelah. "I want my body to lie with my fathers." Then Jacob dies: he gives up the ghost and is reunited with his ancestors. This seems to represent that after this life, one is reunited with previously deceased family members. Thus, Jacob is with his ancestors, body and spirit.

Joseph has his father's body embalmed, an Egyptian custom. This preserves the body longer, allowing it to be transported to Canaan. Joseph asks Pharaoh for permission to leave the country so he and his family can bury Jacob. He receives permission. Many of Pharaoh's servants and the Egyptian leaders also accompany him. Only the young children and livestock remain behind.

When the inhabitants of Canaan see the vast crowd mourning, they are deeply moved. They name the threshing floor where the funeral is held Abel-mizraim, which means "mourning of Egypt." After the burial, they return to Egypt. Here they have built their lives and acquired possessions. Here God blesses them: they are fruitful, and their family expands.

Joseph lives another 54 years after his father's death. These years are described in a few verses: he sees the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Ephraim born. When he is 110 years old, he tells his brothers: "I am going to die soon, but God will provide for you. He will bring you out of this land to the land he promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Years later, God would lead the people of Israel out of Egypt; this is described in the book of Exodus.

But this also happened later, personally, to Joseph's brothers: after their death, their bodies were taken to Shechem and buried in the plot of land Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor for 100 pieces of silver. (Acts 7:15-16 states: 15 Jacob remained in Egypt and died there. His sons also lived there until their death. 16 Their bodies were taken to Shechem and laid in the tomb Abraham had bought for a large sum from the family of Hamor.)

Joseph also said to the children of the family, "God will surely visit you, and you must carry my bones up from here."

Joseph also wanted to be buried in Canaan, but not immediately. He confidently affirmed that God would lead the people of Israel out of Egypt to the land He had promised them. Joseph knew that God would keep His promise. And Joseph wanted to remain with his people until then. As a boy, his brothers cut him off from the people, his family. He was the only one to go to Egypt. Later, he realized that he had gone before them; he had kept them alive, thanks to God.

He emphasized this to his brothers again when, after his father's death, they asked forgiveness for what they had done to him when they were young adults. Joseph was deeply moved when they told him this.

He says, "You have been bad to me, but God has used that for good, because he wanted to preserve a great nation."

Joseph doesn't want to be sent ahead again; he wants to stay with his family, his people, in Egypt. When he dies, he is embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Joseph's bones were later taken by the Israelites when they left Egypt. After arriving in the Promised Land, they buried his bones in Shechem, in the plot of land where his brothers are also buried. This land belonged to the inheritance of Joseph's sons (Joshua 24:32 states: The bones of Joseph, whom the people of Israel brought out of Egypt, were buried in Shechem, in the plot of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor for one hundred pieces of silver. That plot was in the territory allotted to the tribe of Joseph).

The patriarchs (and mothers) are buried in the Cave of Machpelah. The patriarchal era is over.

Joseph is not among them.

Nor does the promise continue with him: the promised redeemer will be born from the lineage of his brother Judah.

Not from Reuben, the firstborn son of Jacob and Leah. He does not receive the promise because he slept with Bilhah, his father's wife.

Nor from Joseph, the firstborn son of Jacob and Rachel. But from Judah.

Joseph is blessed by the adoption of his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, as Jacob's sons;

They belong to the 12 tribes of Israel instead of Joseph. (Israel is another name for Jacob.) So Joseph receives a double portion.

God began His promise with one man: Abraham. Now, four generations later, it has become a very great nation.

"Look at the stars, Abraham. Count them if you can. So countless will your family become."

Prayer: Lord, the life of Jacob, and later the life of Joseph, comes to an end. We are only temporarily on earth. Yet, there is immense grief when someone we love dies; we see it in this story.

Lord, You are with us from the beginning of our lives to the end of our lives. And after that, You are still with us. Beyond death, we may live in perfection with You if we choose a life close to You. We want to thank You for that, Lord.

Questions:

1. We see in this story that Joseph and his brothers grieve because their father has died.

a. What is grief? Have you ever experienced (deep) grief? Or do you know someone who is grieving?

b. Someone once said: 'Grief never goes away, it just takes on a different form.' Do you recognize that?

c. How can you be there for someone who is grieving?

2. In this story, Joseph is the one who arranges the funeral. He decides what happens. What would this have been like for the brothers?

3. Not only are Jacob's sons grieving, but throughout the land of Egypt there is a 70-day national mourning. All the important officials of Pharaoh's palace and all the leaders of Egypt travel to Canaan to bury Jacob.

a. Would they have known Jacob personally?

b. Would Jacob have spent much time in the palace with his son Joseph during the 17 years he lived in Egypt?

4. Yet, the promise of the promised Messiah does not continue with Joseph, but with the (family of) Judah. Can you explore why this happened?

5. After Jacob's burial, the brothers again fear that Joseph will punish them for having sold him earlier.

a. Why do they revisit something that Joseph had already said years earlier: "I forgive you"?

b. Do you ever (in prayer) revisit sins that God has long since forgiven you? (If so, why?)

c. Is it difficult to believe that forgiven sins are truly completely gone?