

The Deaths of Jacob and Joseph (Genesis 49:28-50:26)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Genesis

I. Background and Introduction

- a. We have come to the last chapter in the book of **Genesis**.
- b. The book began with the creation of two important people; it will close with the death (and burial) of two important people.
- c. In **Genesis 49:1-27** Jacob gives the final blessing to his 12 sons; including the famous prophetic blessing to his fourth son, Judah.
- d. Then Jacob dies at the age of 147.
- e. I know that those listening want to hear uplifting, encouraging lessons with practical applications; however, the text here is largely about *two funerals!* We will do our best to stay with the text and see what we find there.

II. Jacob's Body is Buried in Canaan (Read **Genesis 49:28-50:14**)

- a. Jacob had directed his sons to bury his body back in his homeland in Canaan.
 - i. He wants to be buried with his forefathers.
 - ii. In the same cave near Hebron (see **Genesis 23**) that Abraham purchased as a burial plot after Sarah died.
 - iii. This is where Jacob's grandparents (Abraham and Sarah), his parents (Isaac and Rebekah) and his first wife, Sarah, were buried.
- b. Jacob dies. His body is embalmed by the Egyptians over a 40-day period, and there is a time of mourning.
 - i. Embalming:
 1. Without embalming, decomposition takes place rapidly, especially in warm climates.
 2. Embalming in places like Egypt was a time-consuming process by which fluids and soft organs that would easily decompose are removed.
 3. Then the body cavity could be packed with spices, salts, etc. to preserve it and keep it from decaying.
 - ii. This story of the death of a parent reminds me of seeing my own mother die earlier this year, at the age of 87.

1. Body was taken away by the undertakers very soon after death.
2. The next morning the funeral director called to verify that we did not want to have her body embalmed.
3. My mother was from a Roman Catholic tradition. In the last year of my mother's life, we talked about death and she read *Think Well On It*, a short book which provides 30 days of reflection on the subject of death. The book was written by Richard Challoner (1691-1781, British bishop). My mother appreciated the convictions presented in the book, and wondered why such a critical subject (preparing for death) was almost never discussed in sermons. Two selections from 'Day Seven' meditation, *On Death*, follow.
 - a. **Day Seven, Fourth Point.** "Consider the folly and stupidity of the greatest part of men, who though they daily see some or other of their friends, acquaintances or neighbors carried off by death - and that very often in the vigor of their youth, very often by sudden death - yet always imagine death to be at a distance from them, as if those arrows of death which are falling on all sides of them would not in their turn reach them too; or as if they had a greater security than so many others, who are daily swept away. Senseless Worldlings! Why will you not open your eyes? Why will you fondly imagine yourselves secure from the stroke of death, when you cannot even promise yourselves so much as one single day of life? How many will die before the end of this month that are as young, as strong and as healthy as you are? Who knows but you may be of that number? Ah, Christians, take care lest you be surprised! Set your house in order; and for the future, fly from sin, the only evil, which makes death terrible. Live always in those dispositions in which you will gladly be found at the hour of your death. To act otherwise is to renounce both religion and reason."
 - b. **Day Seven, Fifth Point** (*This presents a very graphic and disturbing image, one that I have never forgotten- CP*)
"Consider the state and condition of this corruptible body of ours as soon as we are dead. Alas, it immediately becomes pale, stiff, loathsome and hideous, insomuch that our dearest friends can scarcely endure to watch one night in the same room with it, much less bear to lie in the same bed! And so fast does it tend to

stench and corruption that is nearest relations are the first to desire to get it out of the house and to lay it deep underground, that it may not infect the air. But what companions, what attendants must it meet with there? Worms and maggots. For these, O Man, thou art pampering thy body! These are to be thine inheritance - or rather, they are to inherit thee. Whatever thou art today, tomorrow thou art to be the food of worms. Ah, Worldlings, who are enamored with your own and others' beauty, and thereby too often drawn from your allegiance to God, vouchsafe for once to reflect upon the condition to which both you and they must soon be reduced, and you will see what little reason you have to set your affections upon these painted dunghills, which will so quickly betray what they are and end in stench and corruption. We read that St. Francis Borgia was so touched with the bare sight of the ghastly countenance of the Empress Isabella after death, whom he had seen a little before in all her majesty and with all her charms, as to conceive an eternal disgust of this world and a happy resolution of consecrating himself wholly to the service of that King who never dies. Let similar considerations move us to a similar resolution."

4. *Let us consider the truth of what Challoner is saying about death, and take stock of our own mortality and eternal destiny!*

- c. Joseph gets permission from Pharaoh to bury his father in Canaan. A large group including all Jacob's (adult) descendants, and many Egyptian officials escort the body to Canaan.
- d. After a period of mourning and the burial, they all return to Egypt.

III. Joseph's Brothers, Afraid, Lie to Protect Themselves (Read Genesis 50:15-21)

- a. Joseph's brothers fear Joseph will retaliate against them now that their father is dead. Therefore, they tell Joseph a made-up story about their father's dying request that Joseph his brothers for their past treachery. After telling this lie, they throw themselves at Joseph's feet vowing to be his servants. This further deception reveals their wicked hearts and provides a striking contrast to the soft heart of Joseph toward them.
- b. Joseph believes their story about his father's apparent request. We can learn much from his attitude and response:
 - i. Joseph breaks down in tears and is willing to forgive his brothers who sinned against him (showing yet another way that he is like Jesus).

- ii. He sees that his brothers intended evil. (“But as for you, you meant evil against me...”) Joseph does *not* assume, like many today, that those doing evil are in reality “good, deep inside”. He sees their wickedness and calls things as they are.
- iii. Yet Joseph also sees that God, in His sovereignty, worked it all out for a greater good in the end. (“... but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”)
 - 1. How many thousands of people were saved through these events, which included Joseph being wrongly imprisoned for three years?
 - 2. Joseph sees the hand of God working all things out for good. (This reminds me of what Paul said in **Romans 8:28.**)
- iv. His response in **Genesis 50:19** is, in the LXX, “I am of God” or “I belong to God” In the Masoretic Text that response is rendered, “Am I in the place of God?” (a rhetorical question, with the obvious implied answer being, “No”). Either way, it is a response of humility. He sees God as the architect and overseer of all things, using all things to His own purpose and to the greater good.
- v. Joseph sees his place under God, and never became bitter.
 - 1. He sees God as a loving God. It is not about him and how he is treated.
 - 2. God is working things out, and Joseph is content being in his place as simply a servant of God. That is why he never became bitter.
 - 3. To Joseph, it was never just about him and how others were treating him.
- vi. Joseph’s heart in all of this is a great example for us to follow.

IV. The Last Days of Joseph (Read **Genesis 50:22-26**)

- a. Before Joseph dies, he gives specific instructions regarding his remains.
 - i. His bones are to be kept in reserve, not finally buried until the Israelites return to Canaan. So, he is embalmed, put in a coffin, and stored in a protected place for until Israel return to Canaan, at the end of the 400 year period.
 - ii. Remember what God had told Abraham, Joseph’s great-grandfather:
 - 1. “Then He said to Abram, ‘Know certainly that your seed will be strangers in a land not theirs, and will serve them; and they

will afflict and humble them four hundred years.” (**Genesis 15:13**, LXX, OSB)

- b. Joseph has his brothers promise solemnly that they (with the promise carrying forward to their descendants) will return his bones to Canaan.
 - i. I wonder how they managed to faithfully hand down the promise each generation, for 400 years! Solemnly repeat to each generation father-to-son? Or perhaps with a large sign or engraving over the coffin?
 - ii. Notice that, unlike his father Jacob, Joseph does not specifically request that they bury bones in the special cave in Hebron where his forefathers were interred.
- c. Events in this chapter are mentioned in **Hebrews 11** in connection with Joseph’s faith. They are listed among the list of great examples of faith to inspire Christians.
 - i. “By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.” (**Hebrews 11:22**, NKJV)
 1. I can understand the personal faith involved in other classic examples of “by faith...” offered in **Hebrews 11**, such as:
 - a. By faith Noah built an ark
 - b. By faith Abraham left his homeland
 - c. By faith Sarah conceived a child in her old age
 - d. By faith Abraham offered up his son Isaac
 - e. HOWEVER, what does it mean that “by faith” Joseph gave instruction concerning his bones? In what sense did doing *that* involve a real demonstration of faith on his part?
 2. In **Hebrews 11**, we see aspects of Joseph’s faith being held up as an example for us, based on what he did in **Genesis 50**. Recall that faith is defined as, “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (**Hebrews 11:1**, NKJV).
 - a. Therefore, Biblical faith as the term is used throughout **Hebrews 11** pertains to something you believe, but cannot yet see; and it pertains to something that you hope for.
 - ii. **Question:** When Joseph gave instruction regarding his bones, what was he *hoping for*?

1. Hope #1: Certainly he was hoping for the return of his people to Canaan.

iii. **Some Follow-Up Questions to Consider:**

1. Couldn't Joseph simply have said, "Just *believe me*, you are all going to go back to Canaan."?
 2. Why was it necessary for Joseph to "give instruction about his bones"?
 3. After all, once you are dead, what difference does it make where your bones are buried?
- d. While this "bones" topic might seem like a very minor side-issue to most, consider that Joseph's bones are referred to in 5 or 6 books of the Bible!
- i. First time mentioned: in the **Genesis** account we just read.
 1. "Thus Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.'" (**Genesis 50:25**, LXX, OSB)
 - ii. Second time mentioned: in **Exodus**, when Moses and the Israelites depart Egypt, about 400 years later (Read **Exodus 13:17-19**).
 1. "Now Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you.'" (**Exodus 13:19**, LXX, OSB)
 - iii. Third time mentioned: in the last chapter of the book of Joshua, after the people have entered and taken over the land of Canaan, we find out where both Joshua's and Joseph's bones were laid to rest. (Read **Joshua 24:30-33**, from a translation based on the Septuagint.)
 1. "Now it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten years. They buried him within the boundary lines of his inheritance at Timnath Serah, on Mount Ephraim on the north side of Mount Gaash. In his grave they placed with him the stone knives with which he circumcised the sons of Israel at Gilgal, when he brought them out of Egypt, as the Lord ordered them. They remain there to this very day. The children of Israel also brought up the bones of Joseph from Egypt and buried them at Shechem, in the plot of land which Jacob purchased from the Amorites who dwelled in Shechem for one hundred lambs, and which was given to Joseph as his portion." (**Joshua 24:30-33**, LXX, OSB)

2. While we are focused on Joseph's bones, let's first take a look at something quite remarkable we learn in this passage about Joshua's burial.
 - a. There are some differences in the text between the LXX and the Masoretic Text here, as you may have noticed.
 - b. In this passage we just read, the LXX states that the stone knives of the "second circumcision" were for some reason *buried with Joshua*.
 - i. You can read about the "second circumcision" of the nation of Israel in **Joshua 5**. This circumcision was done at Gilgal as the uncircumcised generation of Israelites were about to enter Canaan/the Promised Land.
 - c. Recall that the name "Joshua" (*Jesus* in Greek of the LXX), was not the one he was born with. He was born "*Hoshea* the son of Nun". He was one of the 12 spies sent out to spy out the land in **Numbers 13:1-16**. There it says Moses changed his name to "*Joshua*" (Hebrew), which in Greek is "*Jesus*" (his name in the LXX; also see **Hebrews 4:8** in an interlinear Greek New Testament). He represented the tribe of Ephraim, so was descended from Joseph.
 - d. Based on that, what do you think Paul (who quotes from the LXX, as does Jesus and the other apostles), when he said:
 - i. "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (**Colossians 2:11-12**, NKJV)
 - ii. The second circumcision was the one done by Jesus, with stone knives (stones or rocks frequently referring to the Christ throughout the Old Testament). Notice that the knives of that "second circumcision" were *buried with Jesus* according to the LXX account of **Joshua 24**. It foreshadowed baptism, our own circumcision through which we are buried with Jesus as well.

3. Let's now return to the fate of Joseph's bones. This is the third passage that speaks of Joseph's bones, telling us that the Jews brought Joseph's bones up from Egypt and buried them at Shechem.
 - a. (The Masoretic Text says that the land where Joseph was to be buried had been earlier purchased by Jacob for 100 pieces of silver; in the LXX it says it was purchased for 100 lambs).
 - b. In both accounts, this points back to **Genesis 33:17-20**, where Jacob purchased a parcel of land in Shechem. This was purchased before Dinah was violated and the two sons of Jacob slaughtered the Shechemites.
 - c. We also learned that when Jacob blessed the two sons of Joseph in **Genesis 48**, the last thing he said to Joseph was, "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you back to the land of your fathers. Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers; I am giving you Shechem, which I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and bow." (**Genesis 48:21-22**, LXX, OSB)
 - d. So, we see that Jacob believed that Joseph would be brought back to Canaan, and he communicated that to Joseph.
- iv. Fourth time mentioned: in **Acts 7** where Stephen gives a brief recount of the spiritual history of Israel. He mentions the relocation of Joseph's bones there (and may refer to some other relocation of dead bodies as well)
- v. Fifth time mentioned: in **Hebrews 11:22** in the "hall of heroes of the faith" discussion, as we previously discussed.
- vi. (Possible) sixth time mentioned: (May be in your Bible, depending on *which Bible* you have!) From the book of **Sirach**, in the midst of an extended discussion about heroes of the Jewish faith, it holds up Joseph with the short statement:
 1. "Neither has a man like Joseph been born, the leader of his brothers and the support of his people; and they watched over his bones." (**Sirach 49:15**, LXX, OSB)
 2. Note: **Sirach** has always been included in Roman Catholic and Orthodox Bibles. It was in the LXX, and even in the original King James Version (and for 200+ years thereafter). However,

Sirach is not in modern Protestant Bibles. It is also known by the name "**Ecclesiasticus**" (not to be confused with **Ecclesiastes**).

3. Consider, along with the mention of Joseph's bones in **Sirach 49:15**, other parallel references to the bones of other righteous men, in the same book:
 - a. Regarding the righteous judges (like Barak and Gideon): "The judges also, each by his name, whose heart did not fall into idolatry, and whoever did not turn away from the Lord – May their memory be blessed! May their bones revive from their place. And may the name of those honored live again in their sons!" (**Sirach 46:11-12**, LXX, OSB)
 - b. Regarding the bones of the Twelve (a/k/a "Minor") Prophets: "May He indeed revive the bones of the twelve prophets from their place. For they encouraged the people of Jacob and redeemed them with steadfast hope." (**Sirach 49:10**, LXX, OSB)
- e. Consider **Hebrews 11** again.
 - i. By faith Noah built an ark, Sarah in her old age conceived a child, Abraham sacrificed his son Isaac, Joshua defeated Jericho...and Joseph gave instructions regarding his bones???
 1. Of all the amazing things that Joseph did during his life (resisting Potiphar's wife, forgiving his brothers, saving thousands of lives, persevering through tough times) ***why would Joseph be held up for his faith for this final seemingly unimportant thing, giving instructions regarding his bones?***
 - ii. There are many aspects of saving faith held up in **Hebrews 11**, including: believing God's promises, obeying his commands, and persevering to the end. However, one more thread runs through this great chapter.
 1. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (**Hebrews 11:1**, NKJV)
 2. "By faith [Abraham] dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (**Hebrews 11:9-10**, NKJV)

- a. Recall that Peter and Paul use the imagery of a current tent versus a future permanent structure to illustrate the difference between our current bodies (temporary dwellings) and the ones they will be transformed into at the resurrection. (See **2 Peter 1:13-14** and **2 Corinthians 5:1-2**)
 - b. So, they are saying our old bodies/ bones will be replaced by new bodies at the resurrection. What an incredibly encouraging promise!
- 3. “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.” (**Hebrews 11:17-19**, NKJV)
- 4. “Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.” (**Hebrews 11:35**, NKJV)
- 5. And now, in that context, let’s revisit what Joseph is held up for. “By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.” (**Hebrews 11:22**, NKJV)
- f. Let us return to the **Question:** Why did Joseph give instruction regarding his bones “*by faith*”?
 - i. Certainly, Joseph believed God would bring Israel back to Canaan.
 - ii. But I believe there it is more to this. Joseph, like so many other righteous men and women of the Old Testament, understood *that it is not over* at death. Something would happen to his bones: in fact, *God would resurrect his dead bones!*
 - iii. In **1 Corinthians 15**, this is exactly what Paul tells us is going to happen on the Last Day.
- g. Passages from both the Old Testament and New Testament speak about the resurrection of our bodies/ dead bones:
 - i. “The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’

So I answered, 'O Lord GOD, You know.' Again He said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!'" (**Ezekiel 37:1-4**, NKJV)

- ii. "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt." (**Daniel 12:2**, NKJV)
- iii. Jesus said, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." (**John 5:28-29**, NKJV)
 - 1. **Question:** What is it that is in the grave?
 - 2. **Answer:** our dead bones (our *bodies*, not our spirits)!
- iv. "Now Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'" (**John 11:21-24**, NKJV)
- v. **Hebrews 6:1-2** includes belief in resurrection of the dead to be one of the 6 foundational Christian teachings (along with faith, repentance and baptism).
- vi. Throughout the history of God's people, belief in the resurrection of the body (our dead bones) was widespread and commonly accepted.
- h. What is the significance of this for us today?
 - i. *We must also have faith in the resurrection of our own bones on the Last Day.*
 - ii. We cannot live for this life. We look forward to the resurrection of the flesh, the "substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen."
 - iii. The Bible teaches that it really does matter how we think about the resurrection of our not just our spirit, but also our bones, and the flesh on them!
 - 1. "Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power." (**1 Corinthians 6:13-14**, NKJV)

2. “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 **Corinthians 6:18–20**, NKJV)
3. Our bodies belong to God. We especially do not want to sin against God by sinning *with our flesh*.
- iv. The **Hebrews** writer says that it is *for hope of the resurrection of our bodies* that heroes in the past persevered. This is the same motivation why *we* must persevere; why *we* must endure to the end; why *we* must not shrink back. He cites 10 examples of faith from the book of **Genesis** for us to follow, the last being that of Joseph.
- v. This is yet one more reminder why it is so important for Christians to study and know the stories contained in **Genesis**. These stories give us a deeper understanding of the New Testament. They provide us with so many examples of faith to inspire us to persevere and overcome on our own spiritual journey; so that, with God’s power and help, *our own* bones may be resurrected on that Last Day!