

Joseph buries his father

- Genesis 50:1-14
- I'll never forget Christmas Day, 2005. It was the last time that the four Fox men, my dad and his three sons, were together. My younger brother had been estranged from dad for 15 years, but he was home that day as our father was dying with cancer. The three of us stood around his bed and talked in hushed tones. Dad fought back tears when he talked about leaving his wife, our mother, behind. Like Jacob on his deathbed, my dad then made his best attempt to bless his three boys. "I couldn't have asked for three finer sons," he said. "I just wish I had done a better job giving encouragement and guidance for you three, but when I was growing up, all I got from my dad was the belt...and I guess I passed some of that on." I said, "Dad, we deserved every lickin' we got...and plenty we didn't get!"
- Jacob died with his 12 sons gathered around him, and it is a deeply moving scene. Joseph wept when his father died, and embraced and kissed him. Moses doesn't report this but I have to believe the other sons did the same. I think the 17 years all of them lived together in Egypt had brought times of repentance and healing. Hey, saints, life is short and it eventually gets a lot shorter. There's not enough time for us to live with unforgiveness or bitterness toward anyone, no matter how much reconciliation costs us. Let's look at this passage today under three main points: Mourning, Travel to Canaan, and Burial.
- **Mourning (verses 2-3)**
- The mourning period started immediately, and the first command Joseph gave was to the physicians to embalm Jacob. This would take 40 days. There were professional embalmers in Egypt, but Joseph asked the doctors to do this for his father. Some speculate that it was because he wanted to avoid the magic and religious rites that usually accompanied embalming a body in Egypt.
- Notice that the Egyptians wept for Jacob for 70 days, which was two days short of what would have been required for a Pharaoh. This speaks to the love the people of Egypt had for Joseph and all that he had done for them, and probably there was a bond Jacob had formed with the people in the 17 years he had lived there. Either way, Jacob was greatly honored and the people of God were greatly loved and blessed in Egypt. The family of Jacob wept when he died, but **their** mourning period would be seven days in Canaan, before they buried their beloved father.
- Why do we mourn the loss of a loved one? It is part of who we are as people made in God's image. Paul wrote, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope." (1 Thess. 4:13) Paul was informing their grief, not commanding them against it. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." (Matt. 5:4) That comfort comes by God's grace, and the Psalmist says the Lord "heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." (Psalm 147:3) That takes time and we don't need to rush it. But it will come, and we look for it as we mourn. Psalm 30:5, "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning." There is a time to weep! And a time to laugh. There is a time to receive the healing of the Lord and wipe away the tears. There is a time to rejoice in living the life God has given us here, knowing that we will be with our loved ones again who have died in the Lord. That leads us to...
- **Travel to Canaan (verses 4-11)**
- Joseph then asked the household of Pharaoh for permission to go and bury his father in Canaan. This is an amazing glimpse into the authenticity of this book; a fiction writer would have had the second most powerful man in the nation go and tell the Pharaoh directly that he was going away for a time. Or at least going to him directly to make the request. Joseph did neither of those things, and it speaks once again to his humility. Yogi Berra, bless his heart, said once, "It ain't the heat, it's the humility." Joseph was a humble man because he attributed everything he was and had to the grace of God.

- They left Egypt for the 240 mile journey. Apparently, there was something going on that prevented a more direct route, so they traveled around the east side of the Dead Sea and back down to Mamre. But what an entourage! All of Pharaoh's servants, all of the elders of the household of Pharaoh and the elders of the entire nation traveled with them. One commentator I read said this was because of their great respect for Joseph, and also because the Egyptians loved a burial procession. You can just take a glance at the pyramids and see how they went all in when somebody important died. All of the household of Joseph and his brothers went as well, of course. The only ones who stayed behind were the children and the livestock, *and* you would presume people to take care of both!
- Joseph led the procession all the way to Atad, a place near Hebron and Mamre on the west side of the Jordan. There they stopped at the threshing floor and Joseph "made a mourning for his father seven days." (verse 10) Martin Luther said, "There is no burial recorded in the Scriptures quite as honorable as this or with such wealth of detail." David Guzik wrote, "This was, no doubt, a day of rededication of the sons of Israel to the God of Israel, the God of the great covenant made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their dedication to the God of Israel would be tested over the next many hundred years, but would survive."
- The whole company entered into this 7-day period of mourning, so much so that the Canaanites who lived in the region remarked, "This is a grievous mourning by the Egyptians," and even renamed the place to that effect. That leads us to...
- **Burial (verses 12-14)**
- I love verse 12, "Thus the sons did for him as he had commanded them." These same sons, at least the 10 older ones, so often opposed their father in life. But they honored him in his death. Jacob was not a perfect parent, as none of us are and ever will be, but he deserved the respect and honor the sons fully gave him here. They honored his final wish and traveled many miles to bury him in the cave of Machpelah. It was the one piece of property in Canaan that was deeded to Abraham and therefore belonged to Jacob as well and to his sons. All of the land of Canaan had been promised by God to the people of Israel, the promised land! But at this point in Israel's history, all they could lay claim to was a place to bury their beloved patriarchs and their wives.
- After they buried Jacob, Joseph and his brothers made their way back to Egypt, where they would remain, and those who came after them, for more than 400 years. That's another story and it is told in the next book, Exodus. But consider with me that this journey from Egypt to Canaan that Joseph and his brothers took was a rehearsal for two more journeys that were very similar.
- The first journey will be led by Moses and you remember the story. God spoke to the Pharaoh through Moses and Aaron and confirmed his message to "let my people go" with ten plagues. When the Pharaoh finally relented, God's people left Egypt on their way to Canaan, the promised land, by way of the Red Sea. But look at Exodus 13:19. "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.'" It took a long time to finally be able to bury Joseph's bones! We will look at that again next week.
- The second and final journey that is like this one, is the greatest homecoming of all time, and will be led by Jesus Christ when he splits the skies and calls the dead in Christ out of the graves and those alive in Christ up to meet him in the air. We will travel with him in an instant to THE promised land, the new heavens and the new earth. Isaiah prophesied about this at the end of his book. "For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain." -Isaiah 66:22 Paul said the same of that last day: "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:17)
- Then Paul says, "Therefore encourage one another with these words."
- What can we take away from this passage? 1- Mourning is an important place to go when we lose loved ones, but it is not meant to be a place to stay. The fullness of joy we have in Christ is the place to

stay! 2- The death of a loved one in Christ can and should be a time of celebration. It also offers, by the grace of God, a time to come together as a family to honor the dead and give thanks for the living, even to be healed in the broken places.

- Prayer
- Greet One Another