

Jacob Breathed His Last and Was Gathered to His People

49:29 to 50:3

DIG: Why is it so important to Ya'akov that he be buried in Canaan (46:1-4; 47:29-31)? What does this say about Jacob's faith in God's promises?

REFLECT: Do you have the assurance that you will see your loved ones again after they have passed away? Do you see death as an active foe or a conquered enemy?

Jacob had previously made Joseph swear that he would not bury his father permanently in the land of Egypt, but return his body to Canaan (47:29-31). Now Jacob repeats that command to all his sons in order to ensure that his instructions would be carried out.⁸⁰⁶

Then he gives them these instructions, "I am about to be gathered to my people." (This phrase is a single word in Hebrew and is a synonym for *died*). Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field" (49:29-30).

There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. The fact that Rebekah and Leah had been buried in the cave of Machpelah is only mentioned here in the Bible. This demonstrates that the field and the cave that were bought from the Hittites had truly become the family burial grounds (49:31-32).⁸⁰⁷ It is ironic that Leah, and not Rachel, was buried with Jacob. She achieved in death, what she was unable to achieve in life, to be close to the one she loved.

When Ya'akov had finished giving instructions to his sons, he summoned all of his remaining strength and drew his feet up into his bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people in Sheol (49:33). He died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side (Luke 16:22), awaiting the coming Messiah and the great resurrection day.

While his brothers and sons stood there watching, it was Joseph who threw himself upon his father and wept over him and kissed him (50:1). Even though Yosef knew he would see his father again, there was still a void and he grieved the loss. Death is the great enemy (First Corinthians 15:26), and will be conquered in the future (Revelation 21:4). However, for the present, death causes sorrow. After a while, Yosef composed himself and proceeded with the necessary duties for the dead. As God had promised, Joseph's own hand closed Ya'akov's eyes (46:4), and he died content (45:28; 46:30).⁸⁰⁸

*For the unbeliever, death is a curse, or a penalty for sin. For although death does not bring about extension or the end of existence, it cuts one off from any opportunity of obtaining eternal life. Looking at death as an enemy, the unbeliever sees nothing positive in it and recoils from it in fear. However, for those who believe in Christ, and as a result are righteous, death has a different character. The believer undergoes physical death, but its curse is gone because Christ became a curse for us by dying on the cross (**Galatians 3:13**). Therefore, for the believer, death is no longer an active enemy, but a conquered enemy who now serves not to condemn and destroy, but to free us from the dreadful conditions which sin has introduced.⁸⁰⁹*

It was customary in Egypt to **embalm** the dead, so **Joseph directed the physicians in his service to embalm his father Isra'el**. They used an elaborate process that assured that **his** remains would remain preserved almost indefinitely. For **Yosef**, it was a practical solution to the difficult problem of how to preserve **his father's** body until **he** was returned to Canaan for **burial**. **He** used **his** own personal **physicians** and not professional embalmers so as to avoid the magic and mysticism practiced by the embalmers. Some of the remains were dedicated to the spirits of the underworld. **So Joseph's physicians embalmed him, taking a full forty days, for that was the time required for embalming. And because he** became known as a true man of **God** during the seventeen years that **he** had lived in **their** country, **the Egyptians themselves mourned for him seventy days (50:2-3).**⁸¹⁰ The mourning period for a Pharaoh was seventy-two days. Thus, **he** was highly respected as the **father** of **Joseph**.