

GENESIS

The Death of Jacob

²⁹ Then he gave them these instructions: "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, ³⁰ the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. ³¹ There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. ³² The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites."

³³ When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

Genesis 49:29-33 [NIV]

¹ Joseph threw himself on his father and wept over him and kissed him. ² Then Joseph directed the physicians in his service to embalm his father Israel. So the physicians embalmed him, ³ taking a full forty days, for that was the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days.

⁴ When the days of mourning had passed, Joseph said to Pharaoh's court, "If I have found favor in your eyes, speak to Pharaoh for me. Tell him, ⁵ 'My father made me swear an oath and said, "I am about to die; bury me in the tomb I dug for myself in the land of Canaan." Now let me go up and bury my father; then I will return.'"

⁶ Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear to do."

⁷ So Joseph went up to bury his father. All Pharaoh's officials accompanied him—the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt— ⁸ besides all the members of Joseph's household and his brothers and those belonging to his father's household. Only their children and their flocks and herds were left in Goshen. ⁹ Chariots and horsemen also went up with him. It was a very large company.

¹⁰ When they reached the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan, they lamented loudly and bitterly; and there Joseph observed a seven-day period of mourning for his father. ¹¹ When the Canaanites who lived there saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning." That is why that place near the Jordan is called Abel Mizraim.

¹² So Jacob's sons did as he had commanded them: ¹³ They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre, which Abraham had bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. ¹⁴ After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all the others who had gone with him to bury his father.

Joseph Reassures His Brothers

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷ 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

The Death of Joseph

²² Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family. He lived a hundred and ten years ²³ and saw the third generation of Ephraim's children. Also the children of Makir son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph's knees.

²⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." ²⁵ And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place."

²⁶ So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Genesis 50:1-26 [NIV]

With this lesson, we come to the end of the book of Genesis, "The Book of Beginnings." After Jacob gives prophetic pronouncements and blessings on his sons, including Joseph and his two sons in chapter 48 and 49, he dies at the age of 147. (Genesis 47:28)

Jacob's dying instructions were clear:

"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 along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites.

Given that Jacob's dying command was that he be buried, "with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite," I thought it might be good, as we end our study of Genesis, to look back at exactly who was also buried in, "the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan. Abraham bought this cave along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite."

Respond to the following:

1. Read the following verses and note who is buried in the cave, near what today is known as the city of Hebron:
 - a. Genesis 23:19
 - i. ANSWER: Sarah, Abraham's wife
 - b. Genesis 25:8-9
 - i. ANSWER: Abraham
 - c. Genesis 35:27-29
 - i. ANSWER: Isaac
 - d. Genesis 49:31
 - i. ANSWER: Rebekah and Leah

Joseph obtained the Pharaoh's permission to lead a funeral procession out of Egypt and into Canaan, to Hebron, where he would find the "cave in the field" that Abraham had purchased to bury his wife Sarah. As you read these verses, Genesis 50: 7-14, notice that this funeral procession was no ordinary event; and it speaks to how respected Joseph and his father Jacob had become to the Egyptians. Specifically, Genesis 50:7-9 tells us that "all Pharaoh's officials accompanied him, the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt, besides all the members of Joseph's household and his brothers and those belonging to his father's household." We should note, as well, that in addition to this large procession, the Pharaoh also sent "chariots and horsemen."

Chariots, a new innovation in war fighting, represented great power, as did the presence of horses and horsemen. This was a royal procession on the level of the Pharaoh's own funeral procession. It would have been awesome to see with all of the dignitaries, their chariots, robes, and jewelry, plus their accompanying slaves and servants, and all of Joseph and his brothers' households.

One of the things I realized during my days at Tall el-Hammam, the site of the ruins of Sodom which is located in Jordan, is how that would have looked to the citizens of Jericho, just across the Jordan river, as this great Egyptian procession stopped at "the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan."

When you are physically standing in Sodom looking due west across the Jordan, it's very easy to see the city of Jericho since it's just across the river. If you then look to your left, to the south, you can see where the Jordan river ends in the Dead Sea. Then, continuing to turn to your left, back southeastward, is the area that many believe was the "the threshing floor of Atad."

At the Southeast edge of the ruins of Sodom, it made an excellent place for mourning the dead. Given the level of death and destruction at that location, the result was a total lack of vegetation for hundreds of years before growth began again. When vegetation finally began to return, much of this area was full of weeds, thistles, and thorny bushes—"*shittim*," or acacia bushes/acacias. The area is also referred to in the Bible as *Abel-shittim*.

Respond to the following:

2. Where else in the Bible can we read about this area, and what does it tell us about it?

- a. Numbers 22:1, 26:3, 31:12, and 33:48,49
 - i. ANSWER: Defines this area as a moist place of acacias, and indicates that it was located in the Abroth-moab or Jordan-Jericho area. In fact, it was located in the Arabah, or Jordan valley, opposite Jericho, just as Sodom was prior to its complete destruction, including the destruction of all of the top soil in the entire Valley (which accounts for the thorny acacias springing up in this area).
- b. Numbers 25:1 and 33:49
 - i. ANSWER: The text tells us that this is where the Jews camped before they crossed the Jordan to begin the conquest of the highlands of the land of Canaan.
- c. Joshua 2:1
 - i. ANSWER: We learn from this scripture that it was the place from which Joshua sent out the two spies to cross the Jordan river and spy on the city of Jericho.

After fulfilling Jacob's wish to be buried in the family cave near Hebron with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah, Joseph and the great procession returned home to Egypt. Upon returning home, Joseph is once again approached by his brothers who fear for their lives now that Jacob, their father, is dead and the period of mourning for him has passed. To Joseph's credit, he continues to honor God in all that he says and does. Joseph wisely acknowledges that, while his brothers had intended harm to him, God had a different plan: "the saving of many lives."

Paul writes in Romans 12:3, "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you." Clearly, Joseph demonstrated this humility. He reassured them that he would provide for them and their children, and they all lived in peace until Joseph's death.

Scripture tells us that Joseph died at the age of 110. Given that he came as a slave to Egypt at the age of 17, this means that he lived in Egypt for 93 years, well past the seven years of feast and seven years of famine (he was 44 when the

famine ended). He served another 66 years after that and lived to be a great-great grandfather to Ephraim's children and a great grandfather to the children of Manasseh. (Genesis 50:22-23)

Like his father Jacob, he gave instructions regarding what was to become of his bones. Joseph was to be buried in Egypt, and his bones would not leave Egypt until the time when "God will come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place." (This request would ultimately be fulfilled by Moses in Exodus 13:19.)

We see in the closing verses of Chapter 50 that Joseph's death and (initial) burial followed respected Egyptian practices. Joseph was embalmed and "placed in a coffin in Egypt." (Genesis 50:26)

Praying you have a blessed week, as you continue studying God's Holy Word.

In Christ,

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