

Jacob's Pilgrimage Closes**Lesson Scope:** Genesis 49:28 to 50:26*References in brackets refer to Genesis 49 to 50 unless otherwise noted.***Lesson Focus**

Jacob at 147 years was facing the end of his life on earth. He had resided in Egypt for seventeen years. Twelve years had passed since the great famine ended. His eyesight (48:10) and general health were failing (48:1). He had already made preparations for his death, conveying the birthright to Joseph (1 Chronicles 5:2), as well as adopting and blessing Joseph's two sons (48:5, 14-22). He had shared what God had revealed to him concerning his sons and the tribes of their posterity. Now at the end of his life, he gave clear direction that showed he desired to be identified with his fathers and Canaan, the land promised to his family.

Jacob had lived with a desire to be faithful to God. Now, in the face of death, he was prepared. His family and many others were affected by his desire to be identified with his fathers.

Death ushers the man of faith into the presence of God and of the departed faithful. This prospect should cause the righteous to prepare for this divine appointment.

Be careful to keep it clear that whatever care we take in handling the dead or their desires in no way benefits the departed soul. The mourning and weeping that follows death changes nothing for the departed soul. But this care and mourning is for the good of those remaining. Our level of respect for the departed is evidenced in our handling of the body and their desires. It is as we follow in the footsteps of the faithful before us that we can fully benefit from their faithfulness.

Joseph also asked to have his bones carried out of Egypt (Genesis 50:25)

Lesson Aim: To learn basic truths about death.**Theme Verse:** Psalm 116:15. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.**Lesson Text****Gathered Unto His People**

Genesis 49:28-33

All these *are* the twelve tribes of Israel: and this *is it* that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.

²⁹ And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that *is* in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

³⁰ In the cave that *is* in the field of Machpelah, which *is* before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace.

³¹ There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah.

³² The purchase of the field and of the cave that *is* therein *was* from the children of Heth.

³³ And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.

Mourned With Great Lamentation

Genesis 50:1-11

And Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him.

² And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel.

³ And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed: and the Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days.

⁴ And when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spake unto the house of Pharaoh, saying, If now I have found grace in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying,

⁵ My father made me swear, saying, Lo, I die: in my grave which I have digged for me in the land of Canaan, there shalt thou bury me. Now therefore let me go up, I pray thee, and bury my father, and I will come again.

⁶ And Pharaoh said, Go up, and bury thy father, according as he made thee swear.

⁷ And Joseph went up to bury his father: and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt,

⁸ And all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house: only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen.

⁹ And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen: and it was a very great company.

¹⁰ And they came to the threshingfloor of Atad, which *is* beyond Jordan, and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation: and he made a mourning for his father seven days.

¹¹ And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, This *is* a grievous mourning to the Egyptians: wherefore the name of it was called Abelmizraim, which *is* beyond Jordan.

Buried in the Promised Land

Genesis 50:12-14

And his sons did unto him according as he commanded them:

¹³ For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a buryingplace of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre.

¹⁴ And Joseph returned into Egypt, he, and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father.

Questions for Study

Gathered Unto His People

1. What attitudes did Jacob possess as he faced death?
2. What is the meaning of death?
3. What preparations should we make for death?

Mourned With Great Lamentation

4. How did Jacob's family express their grief? Why is the expression of grief important?
5. What was the value of Jacob's family being involved in the burial proceedings? What is its value today?
6. How can we comfort those who have lost loved ones?
7. How should the death of the righteous be a witness to the unsaved?

Buried in the Promised Land

8. How did Jacob's sons honor their father at his death?
9. Give Scriptural reasons that, when possible, burial is the God-approved way to care for the dead.

Analyzing the Passage

Jacob's expectation (49:29) to be "gathered unto [his] people" was realized in 49:33. Not only had Jacob identified with his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, but he also had chosen to claim their God as his God. Therefore he

could look forward to eternity with God.

The Egyptians embalmed to preserve dead bodies so the soul of the departed could return and occupy the body again. This was not Joseph's reason for commanding that his father be embalmed; rather, it likely was to show respect in Egyptian culture, and to facilitate the journey to Jacob's burial.

After the seventy days of mourning, Joseph asked Pharaoh's house to request of Pharaoh that he could go and bury his father as he had promised he would (47:30, 31). It likely would have been improper for him, as a mourner, to appear before Pharaoh. Pharaoh's affirmative answer shows his continuing respect for Jacob and Joseph.

The journey to Canaan was a circuitous route of at least three hundred miles. This trip was quite an undertaking for this large group of the "elders of the land of Egypt," the house of Jacob, servants of Pharaoh, and horsemen and chariots with provisions for the journey.

According to 50:13, it is possible that only Jacob's family would have traveled to Machpelah, the burial site. Here Joseph and his brothers buried their father as they had been charged.

Principles and Applications

Gathered Unto His People

1. The righteous desire continuing blessings on those they leave behind (49:28). Let us lead our children and others to the Gospel and to church life where the faith is embraced. This is the only way to experience full joy and peace. Only as we have faithfully blessed others in life can our final blessings be full of meaning.

2. Death reunites the saint with the faithful who have gone before (49:29, 33). Death ushers the saint into a timeless eternity and God's holy presence, where there will be no separation. Of necessity, the temporal body with its curse of sin is left on this decaying earth. In heaven the saints of all ages will together praise the Lord eternally.

3. The faithful desire to leave a legacy of identity with God's people and His promises (49:29-32). The Egyptians likely wondered why Jacob asked his sons to carry his body the whole way to Canaan for burial. But Jacob was only sojourning in Egypt. His homeland was Canaan, and his eye of faith saw the Israelites returning to Canaan. This request clearly showed Jacob's desire to identify with this godly heritage rather than Egyptian culture.

4. Proper preparation allows one to meet death in peace (49:33). It can be a blessing to both the dying saint and to those left behind, to discuss, before

death, funeral plans and plans for the future. Then these questions can have ready answers when grief and shock fill the minds of those left behind. Many people die unexpectedly; therefore, to be assured that we can meet death in peace, we must have our hearts prepared all the time. For the safety of any children left behind and to help others who need to make adjustments, it is good for us to have our desires in a written will.

Mourned With Great Lamentation

5. Death is a separation that brings grief to the living (50:1). Suddenly the soul of this loved one cannot be reached until our souls leave this flesh and go where he has gone. Grief is expected and right. It is a necessary response. Tears of grief are God's method of releasing inexpressible emotions and allowing emotions torn by separation to find healing. May we never make light of or criticize the grief of those who have experienced the death of family or friends.

6. When possible, the family should be present at death and be involved in the funeral and burial process (50:1-10). Death is final and serious. It is inescapable unless Christ returns first. Involvement in the burial process helps our minds adjust to the reality of the death that has taken place. A direct acquaintance with death is good for all ages; it impresses on us the necessity of preparing our own souls for death.

7. The bereaved receive comfort as others mourn with them (50:3, 7-11). In Genesis 24:67, it seems that Rebekah, Isaac's new wife, had an important part in comforting Isaac after the death of his mother. Those who take time to listen to and weep with the hurting can be a tremendous source of comfort. Choice words of encouragement carry great weight. Cards, letters, and small gifts of sympathy can be a great encouragement in weeks and years to come. But advice must be given very cautiously in time of grief. Let us not forget that God alone is the source of ultimate comfort.

8. The death of the righteous leads others to consider the reality of death (50:11). It causes both the godly and the ungodly to sense more clearly the spiritual dimension of life. Funerals may be one of the few church services that some people attend. The death of a godly person with a lively hope, and the hope which the remaining righteous hold, speaks clearly to the unsaved and leaves them wondering at and desiring this peace in the face of death.

Buried in the Promised Land

9. The living honour the dead by giving a respectful burial (50:12-13). Although the soul of a departed saint is not affected by the condition of his body, we show respect for the dead and for human life by fulfilling their

convictions and desires when possible. If we lack this respect, we are likely to experience a like disrespect from our children and others. As the godly buried the dead in Bible times, so we honor God and the dead with burial rather than cremation. "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19). This also fits with the Christian's anticipation of a bodily resurrection.

10. For the living who remain, life must go on (50:14). Yes, there will be major differences, but God will provide what the Christian needs to make these changes and to be useful where God wants him. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). God desires that weeping would heal and lead to joy in the hope of eternal life with Christ.

Important Teachings

1. The righteous desire continuing blessings on those they leave behind (49:28).
2. Death reunites the saint with the faithful who have gone before (49:29-33).
3. The faithful desire to leave a legacy of identity with God's people and His promises (49:29-32).
4. Proper preparation allows one to meet death in peace (49:33).
5. Death is a separation that brings grief to the living (50:1).
6. When possible, the family should be present at death and be involved in the funeral and burial process (50:1-10).
7. The bereaved receive comfort as others mourn with them (50:3, 7-11).
8. The death of the righteous leads others to consider the reality of death (50:11).
9. The living honour the dead by giving a respectful burial (50:12-13).
10. For the living who remain, life must go on (50:14).

Answers to Questions

1. What attitudes did Jacob possess as he faced death?
He was concerned for those he was leaving behind (49:28). He humbly desired to be buried with his forefathers. He did not try to make himself a special name but rather desired to be one of the godly line (49:30-32). He made it clear to those around that he did not want to be buried in Egypt but wanted to be buried in his homeland, Canaan. Perhaps by giving clear direction, Jacob was trying to prevent conflict between his sons after his death.

2. What is the meaning of death?

It is the release of the soul from this mortal body and decaying earth, and an entrance into eternity, in which the soul never dies. It is the close of opportunity to change one's destiny and the beginning of an eternal reaping of what one has sown in life. It takes the soul from the reach of those remaining on the earth.

3. What preparations should we make for death?

We must be sure that our sins have been washed away by the blood of Jesus and that our lives are controlled by the power of Christ. Since one may die at any time, our record with God and others must be constantly kept clear. When death is anticipated days in advance, it is helpful to have funeral plans prepared and plans made for other significant changes that will be needed. It is good to have a written will so children and property can be cared for without government interference.

4. How did Jacob's family express their grief? Why is the expression of grief important?

"Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him" (50:1). At least Joseph was involved in the seventy-day mourning (50:3), and seven-day mourning (50:10).

Death is a tearing of emotional ties which cannot be properly healed without an expression of these emotions. To refuse to allow emotions to show is to try to shut out reality, which keeps these scars from properly healing. As we allow emotions to be expressed, we can be a blessing to others in the experience as well.

5. What was the value of Jacob's family being involved in the burial proceedings? What is its value today?

It brought them into direct contact with death, with Jacob's identity with his fathers, and even with the land of Canaan that had been left behind seventeen years before.

It connects young and old with the God of those who have gone on before. Direct encounters with death help to put life into perspective. It is good for adults and children alike to encounter death and its finality and seriousness. Involvement of immediate family aids the emotions in grasping reality and healing the wounds of separation.

6. How can we comfort those who have lost loved ones?

Be willing to weep when they weep. Do not expect that the hurt should soon go away, but continue to recognize the loss. Give words and cards of encouragement. Be willing to just listen, and give time to show you are thinking of them. Be careful to not look at them as inferior because of their

lot. Be very careful when giving advice in a time of grief.

7. How should the death of the righteous be a witness to the unsaved?

The peace and submission of the righteous in the time of death speaks loudly to the ungodly who have not such rest. It should be obvious to those around that death is serious and that it is the gateway to eternity. We should relate to it in a way that shows our high regard for human life.

8. How did Jacob's sons honor their father at his death?

They received the charge to take his body to Canaan (Joseph swore that he would do so in Genesis 47:30-31). They mourned for him and carried him to Canaan as he desired.

9. Give Scriptural reasons that, when possible, burial is the God-approved way to care for the dead.

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19). Burial is the literal outworking of this. Burial fits with the hope of a bodily resurrection, shows respect for the creation of God, and is the example given us by the godly in the Scriptures. Burning of bodies has historically (in Bible times and after) been a disgraceful and even heathen practice.

Summarizing the Lesson

Although death is a fearful experience to the flesh, the righteous who have properly prepared can face death with peace and joy. Death brings separation; therefore, it brings grief and tears as well. It calls loudly to all involved and all who observe to make their "calling and election sure." Let us each learn from our encounters with death, to "number our days" and to allow these experiences to spur us on in our Christian lives so that when our turn comes to die, we can face it in peace.

Research Guide

1. Genesis 23 records Sarah's death and the purchase of the cave of Machpelah.
2. Genesis 25:8-10 records Abraham's death and burial.
3. Genesis 35:29 records Isaac's death.
4. Revelation 21 and 22 describe the home of righteous souls.