

End of an Era, but the Promise Lives On

Genesis 49.29-50.26

Scripture says that ‘it is appointed unto men once to die’ – but *how* we die, and *how* we face death, reflects the reality of our faith. The final scenes in Genesis recount the deaths of Jacob and Joseph, and demonstrate their faith in God and His promises, at the end of life.

Scene 1: Jacob dies, and is buried in Canaan (49.29-50.14)

Jacob remembers God’s promise on his death bed. His sons demonstrate faith in God’s promise in his burial.

Scene 2: Joseph calms his brothers’ fears (50.15-21)

The brothers concoct a story to gain Joseph’s forgiveness. Joseph declares his faith in God, and calms their fears.

Scene 3: Joseph’s faith in God’s promise, and death (50.22-26)

Joseph prophesies Israel’s return to Canaan, and makes them promise to carry his remains there when they go.

Lessons from the Deaths of Jacob and Joseph

- *How we face death reflects our faith in God’s promises.*
- *How we respond to fear displays faith’s impact in our lives.*
- *How we approach death shows the reality of our future hope.*



Digging Deeper

1. Genesis 49.29-32 records Jacob’s deathbed instructions to his sons, and he is specific! As he earlier told Joseph (47.29-32), he now tells all his sons to bury him in Canaan. This reflects the biblical idea that true life is found in relationship with God, and that this life is eternal, both before physical death and after it. What does Jacob’s insistence on being buried with his ancestors show about his faith?
2. In Gen. 50.1-3, Joseph follows Egyptian custom by embalming his father (Israelites did not practice this). Egyptians embalmed the honored dead to assist them in their afterlife journey. Joseph accommodated to the ways of Egypt without compromising the wishes of his father, or belief in God. This reflects a vital truth for our lives: While we may adapt to cultural norms, we must never abandon God’s truth. What areas in modern culture may we adapt to, while also diligently avoiding conforming to sin?
3. The struggle between fear and faith is part of life, especially at a time of death. Joseph’s brothers acted in fear after Jacob died, thinking Joseph would exact revenge for them selling him into slavery almost 40 years before! Joseph had done nothing to make them think he was vengeful, but fear led them to invent a conversation with Jacob asking Joseph to forgive them. This is no time to heap guilt on ourselves, but we’ve all probably done something like this in our lives! Why do you think Joseph wept when his brothers told him this? Contrast his faith in God, and in God’s providence, with his brothers’ lingering lack of faith.
4. Joseph’s brief summation of his brothers’ action toward him is famous (50.20): *You meant it for evil; God meant it for good.* Has God ever turned evil intentions to good in your life?
5. Joseph enjoyed years of blessing in Egypt (22-23), but always saw Canaan as the promised land (24), and makes his brothers (or their offspring) swear to take his remains there (25). How do his final recorded words as his death neared show his faith? How can a Christian today show faith in the face of death?