

# FAITH BUILDING FUNERALS

Genesis 49:29 - 50:26

I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but both Jacob and Joseph were Egyptian mummies.

## Genesis 50:2-3 (ESV)

2 And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. 3 Forty days were required for it, for that is how many are required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

## Genesis 50:26 (ESV)

So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.



Keep in mind Jacob was the father of the number two man in Egypt and Joseph was the man who saved Egypt through the great famine. Pharaohs were nationally mourned for 72 days; Jacob was nationally mourned 70 days. With what honor would the Egyptians have treated both the bodies of Jacob and Joseph? No doubt their coffins were as elaborate as this one.

Why would Moses conclude the book of Genesis with the deaths and burials of Jacob and Joseph skipping 50 years of history in between? To answer that question, let's open our Bibles to Genesis 49:29.

## Genesis 49:29-31 (ESV)

29 Then he commanded them and said to them, "I am to be gathered to 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 at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah—



At the time of his death, Jacob was living with his family in Egypt in the territory of Goshen. Jacob made it clear he wanted to be buried in Canaan, not Egypt. Privately, Jacob had Joseph swear that Jacob would not be buried in Egypt, but Canaan (Gen. 47:27-31).

Why was this so important to Jacob? What did it matter where he was buried? It was important to Jacob because of his faith. Where he was buried was a statement of his faith in God. Though he hadn't purchased any land in Canaan, Jacob believed with all his heart that according to God's promise, he and his descendants would one day

possess all of Canaan. His funeral was a statement of his faith.

Joseph was faithful to follow his father's wishes.

## Genesis 49:33-50:6 (ESV)

33 When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people. 1 Then Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. 2 And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. 3 Forty days were required for it, for that is how many are required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days. 4 And when the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, 5 'My father made me swear, saying, "I am about to die: in my tomb that I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me.'" Now therefore, let me please go up and bury my father. Then I will return.'" 6 And Pharaoh answered, "Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear."

In the verses following (50:7-14) Moses records that a very large assembly of people accompanied Jacob's body to Canaan. Jacob's funeral was a declaration of his faith to all the Egyptian dignitaries and soldiers on that trip.

Jacob's funeral was a powerful expression of his faith, but it also was an event that prompted fear.

**Genesis 50:15–21 (ESV)**

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." 16 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: 17 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you."' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

For the previous seventeen years Joseph's brothers assumed Jacob's presence had kept Joseph under control. They concocted a story, then offered themselves as slaves in hopes of placating Joseph's wrath. They couldn't believe that Joseph's forgiveness was complete and unconditional. But Joseph had forgiven them completely. As he explained to them, he clearly saw the hand of God in all that had happened to him, including his brothers' abuse. They had nothing to fear from Joseph, instead, he promised to provide for them and their families.

Over fifty years later, when Joseph knew he was dying, he gave the following instructions to his brothers:

**Genesis 50:24–26 (ESV)**

24 And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." 25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." 26 So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Like Jacob, Joseph's burial instructions were a powerful declaration of faith. Joseph prophesied that God would come to the Hebrew people and take them back to Canaan. They were to carry Joseph's bones to the Promised Land. His unburied coffin would remind generation after generation that God was coming to take them home to the Promised Land.

The original readers of Genesis were the generation experiencing the fulfillment of Joseph's prophecy. Four hundred years later, the liberated Hebrew slaves carried Joseph's coffin out of Egypt to the Promised Land.

**Exodus 13:18–19 (ESV)**

18 ... And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. 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."

In death as in life, Joseph was a profound example of faith in God's power and promises.

Hebrews 11:22 tells us:

**Hebrews 11:22 (ESV)**

By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

The funerals of Jacob and Joseph were faith builders. Their funerals pointed their people to the future; Egypt was not their home, their home was in Canaan.

Don't you want your funeral to be a faith builder. Wouldn't you like to know that your funeral pointed your people to the future; to their home in heaven?

**Conclusion**

If we want our funeral to be a faith builder then we need to prepare for our funerals.

## Our faith should guide our funeral arrangements.

- **Our faith should set us free to think and talk about our death.**

We need to think through and communicate to our spouse and children what is to be done at the time of our death: will you be cremated or buried? Where will you be buried? What do you want at your memorial service and graveside service? Who gets what and how are your financial and legal affairs to be handled? How are your assets to be distributed after your death?

Thinking these things through, writing them out and communicating them with your family is one of the most loving things you can do. The way you prepare for your death is a profound testimony to your faith in Jesus Christ.

I have witnessed families torn apart because Dad or Mom never talked to their children about what was to be done when they died.

On the other hand, I've witnessed families come through the same experience with peace and unity.

If you're uncomfortable talking about your death it's because you have not spent enough time meditating and imagining those things that lie beyond the grave. It's not enough to hear about our resurrection bodies or the rapture or seeing Jesus and God the Father in the new heaven and the new earth; they become real only when we picture them in our mind's eye; upload images of them into our imagination.



Randy Alcorn's book "Heaven" might help you in this process.

In May, my father, without any sense that he was going to die within the year, had a family meeting in which he gave us children clear instructions. In a file I found after his passing, Dad had written a one page summary of his life which we used for his obituary and a second page which listed things he wanted at his memorial service. All of his financial information was written out making it easy for me to step in and manage their affairs. His preparation has protected us from conflict. It was because of his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that my father was unafraid and, even more than that, motivated to prepare well for his death.

- **Second, the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ should be the centerpiece of your funeral.**

Jacob and Joseph declared their faith in God through their deaths and burials. What is the most important message unbelievers need to hear at your funeral? What is the most comforting message for believers to hear at your funeral? So make sure in your obituary that you include your testimony of faith in Jesus. Choose songs and Scripture passages that glorify Jesus. Tell the preacher to preach a gospel message. Make sure your funeral declares your faith and pray God uses it to save the lost and build the saved.