

Life of Joseph

Lessons in Humility, Leadership and Forgiveness

Jacob's Burial

- When Jacob died, Joseph fell on his face wept over him and kissed him [Gen 50:1].
- Once Joseph gathered himself, he ordered that Jacob be embalmed [Gen 50:2].
 - Jacob and Joseph [Gen 50:26] are the only two people said to be embalmed in the Bible.
 - Embalming was an Egyptian practice, not part of the Jewish burial rites.
 - This “mummification” process was instigated because of the Egyptian view of the afterlife.
 - The Egyptians believed that the body must be preserved or the soul itself would be lost.
 - Embalming was an expensive process and was normally reserved for Pharaohs.
 - The embalming of Jacob indicated the esteem the Egyptian people had for Joseph’s family.
 - Joseph had his physicians embalm Jacob, but the Egyptian priests were not involved.
 - This was to honor Jacob without including the Egyptian religious rites and practices.
- The embalming process took forty days to complete, but the Egyptians mourned Jacob’s death for seventy days [Gen 50:3].
 - The Egyptians would mourn the death of a Pharaoh for seventy-two days.
 - The fact that this period of mourning was just two days shy of that indicates the great respect the Egyptians had for Joseph.
- Once the period of mourning was over, Joseph asked Pharaoh if he could honor his father’s burial wish [Gen 50:4-6].
 - Joseph did not go directly to Pharaoh because he was “impure” having handled Jacob’s body.
 - He included in his appeal the fact that Jacob had made him take an oath.
 - Joseph also promised that he would return.
 - Pharaoh trusted that Joseph would indeed return to Egypt and he honored Jacob’s request for burial in the land of Canaan.
 - This was out of respect for Joseph and because, like Pharaoh, Jacob had planned his own burial.
- Joseph and his family, along with a huge procession, went to Canaan to bury his father [Gen 50:7-9].
 - This procession included Egyptian dignitaries.
 - This was the first time in 39 years that Joseph had been back to his homeland.
 - This fulfilled the promise God had made to Jacob when he was leaving for Egypt [Gen 46:4].
 - The Egyptian attitude of respect for the Jewish people would fade, but this event would serve as an encouragement for the Jews under slavery.

- The family left behind their valued children and livestock as an indication that they would return.
 - The chariots and horsemen that traveled with them into Canaan constituted a military escort.
 - This is a foreshadowing of the destruction of the chariots and horsemen years later when the Jews escaped through the Red Sea [Ex 14:6-28].
- As they were approaching Canaan, the group paused at the threshing floor of Atad to mourn Jacob's death [Gen 50:10-11].
 - The mourning lasted seven days, a fairly common practice [1 Chr 10:11-12; Job 2:11-13].
 - The Canaanites saw the Egyptians mourning at Atad and the place was named Abel-mizraim (meadow/mourning of Egypt).
- Jacob's sons buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah and then returned home [Gen 50:12-14].
 - The sons had honored their father's dying charge [Gen 49:29-32].
 - The statement that the field/burial site had been bought by Abraham is important as the Promised Land was still possessed by the Canaanites.
 - The family and everyone who had gone up from Egypt returned, fulfilling Joseph's promise to Pharaoh.
 - The repetition of the phrase “bury his father” in verse 14 indicates the magnitude of this event.