

Israel Died and Was Buried

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain how the descendants of Joseph and Benjamin would have a very different worldly and eternal focus, even though they were full brothers. Once Israel finished telling his twelve sons what would happen in their futures, we see that he died and was buried by his sons. That will be the focus of this topic.

Genesis 49:28-33 says, “All these *are* the twelve tribes of Israel, and this *is* what their father spoke to them. And he blessed them; he blessed each one according to his own blessing. Then he charged 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, 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 as a possession for a burial place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave that *is* there *were* purchased from the sons of Heth.’ And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.” Here, we see that Israel finished giving a blessing to each of his twelve sons. He also gave prophecies about their individual futures as they were different for each tribe.

Then, Israel told his children that it was time for him to die and so, he gave instructions about his burial. He wanted his body to be buried in the same cave where Abraham, Isaac and their wives were buried. That was also the place where he had buried Leah. In death, Leah had received the thing she had desired throughout their marriage. Israel recognized her right as the older sister and buried her where he wanted to be buried when he died. This burial place had been purchased from Ephron, the Hittite. This purchased possession had been witnessed by the sons of Heth and so, it was recognized by the people of the area as the possession of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and included both the cave and the field which surrounded it.

Then, we see the way Israel finished his life. He finished what he was saying to his sons. He had, apparently, been sitting on the bed with his feet on the floor as he talked to his sons. Once he finished talking, he put his feet back into the bed and breathed his last. His life on this earth was completed and he was gathered to his people. This word refers to death but also includes the fact that our lives continue beyond death and the fact that we are reunited with those who have died at an earlier time. When the Lord later appeared to Moses, He said, in Exodus 3:6, “Moreover He said, ‘I *am* the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.” Christ fully explained this verse when He said, in Matthew 22:32, “““I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of

Jacob”? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” All, who have a strong belief in the resurrection, can have peace when they face death, and we see that in the life of Israel.

Genesis 50:1-6 says, “Then Joseph fell on his father’s face, and wept over him, and kissed him. And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. Forty days were required for him, for such are the days required for those who are embalmed; and the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days. Now when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, ‘If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the hearing of Pharaoh, saying, “My father made me swear, saying, ‘Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.’ Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back.”’ And Pharaoh said, ‘Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear.’” Here, we see the love Joseph had for his father. He showed that love by his actions. Joseph knew he would miss his father, even though he would see him again in the future.

Joseph also wanted to obey the instruction of his father to bury his body in the same cave where Abraham and Isaac were buried. We see the Egyptians had specific things they did to embalm the body of a person of importance in order to prepare the body for burial. That process was certainly needed in order to take the body of Israel back to the land of Canaan, so he could be buried in the burial place of his fathers. The Egyptian process to prepare a body they wanted to preserve as a mummy took a period of forty days. They had to take the inner parts out of the body, dry the rest of the body, and then wrap the body for burial. We see that Joseph gave his servants the command to have the physicians of Egypt do that preparation on the body of his father. The Egyptian custom was to have a period of seventy days of mourning for one who died, so the embalming of the body was completed, and then additional time was allowed for the period of mourning to be complete.

Then, Joseph had to arrange with the men of the household of Pharaoh for him to be gone for the time it took to travel from Egypt to Canaan, bury the body, and return to the land of Egypt. Joseph asked the men of the household of Pharaoh to make the arrangements with Pharaoh so he would have official permission from Pharaoh to be gone for that length of time. Joseph had those who spoke tell Pharaoh what Israel had asked Joseph to promise when he said, “My father made me swear, saying, ‘Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.’” Here, we see that Israel had made preparations for the burial of his body before he left the land of Canaan. He had dug the grave inside the cave that was in the field of Machpelah, and that was where his father wanted to be buried. Pharaoh told Joseph he had permission to do exactly as he had promised his father. There were five years more of the famine after Israel arrived in Egypt, but he had lived in Egypt for a total of seventeen years, so, this was twelve years after the end of the famine.

Genesis 50:7-14 says, “So 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, as well as all the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father’s house. Only their little ones, their flocks, and their herds they left in the land of Goshen. And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen, and it was a very great gathering. Then they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which *is* beyond the Jordan, and they mourned there with a great and very solemn lamentation. He observed seven days of mourning for his father. And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, ‘This *is* a deep mourning of the Egyptians.’ Therefore its name was called Abel Mizraim, which *is* beyond the Jordan. So his sons did for him just as he had commanded them. For his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as property for a burial place. And after he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who went up with him to bury his father.” Here, we see that a large group of people traveled with Joseph to bury Israel.

This group included all of the brothers of Joseph and the adult members of his family. The brothers of Joseph did not take their younger children, their flocks or their herds with them but left them in Egypt. We also see that Pharaoh sent a much larger group of people to mourn the death of Israel and bury him. This included all of the elders of the land of Egypt and all of the elders of the servants in his household. Pharaoh also sent chariots and horsemen with this group so everyone would be protected. As a result, this was a very large group that traveled from Egypt to the land of Canaan for the burial.

This large group of people all arrived at the threshing floor of Atad. The threshing floor was the place where people would take their grain and separate the wheat from the small pieces of straw called chaff. This was located on the west side of the Jordan River between the Jordan and Jericho. The entire group spent seven days at this location to mourn the death of Israel. This was a very sorrowful time for all those who had come with Joseph and his brothers. Many Canaanites saw the family of Israel and the Egyptians mourning his death. As a result, they named the place Abel Mizraim, which means meadow of Egypt.

We see that what Israel had requested to happen after his death, his sons did exactly as was requested. The sons took the body of Israel and traveled to the field of Machpelah, which was near the city of Hebron. This meant that the field and cave of Machpelah was about nineteen miles south of the city of Jerusalem. The fact that this large group spent seven days mourning the death of Israel in Abel Mizraim, meant that they did not take the most direct route to the burial place, but fulfilled the desire of Israel for his sons to have a time of mourning at Abel Mizraim. Because the Canaanites gave this name to this event shows that this death also had an impact on them. This area was also called Mamre. Genesis 23:17-18 says, “So the field of Ephron which *was* in Machpelah, which *was* before Mamre, the field and the cave which *was* in it, and all the trees that *were* in the field, which *were* within all the surrounding borders, were deeded to Abraham as a

possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city.” The people of Canaan recognized that this land belonged to the family of Abraham because there had been many witnesses of the purchase. This reminded the nation of Israel of the land that God had promised to them during the entire time that they were in the land of Egypt. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why the burial of Israel in Canaan was an important event in the history of the nation of Israel. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain why this gave hope to Israel even when they suffered greatly in Egypt.