

So Joseph Went Up to Bury His Father

50: 4-14

DIG: Why such details concerning the funeral? Why such a large company of mourners? What does this have to say about the importance of Jacob? Of Joseph?

REFLECT: How do you feel about the whole subject of death and dying? Is it something that you can talk about, or is it something you avoid? Why?

Joseph was faithful to the last, burying **his father** with great pomp and ceremony in the patriarchal tomb in the land of Promise.⁸¹¹ **When the seventy days of mourning had passed, Yosef and his brothers** were determined to follow through with **their** pledge to bury **him** in **Canaan**. But this was easier said than done. Even though the famine had ceased, the Israelites had become very important to the **Egyptian** economy. **Yosef**, especially, was judged indispensable by **Pharaoh** and there might have been some real resistance to **his** leaving.

As a result, **Joseph** very diplomatically first gained the support of **Pharaoh's court** for **his** request, and then asked *them* to **speak to Pharaoh** on **his** behalf. **He** assured them that the Israelites would all **return** after the burial. **He** also appealed to **their** strong sense of respect for the dead by pointing out that **his father** had made **them swear** a solemn **oath** to **bury him** where **his** ancestors were buried.⁸¹² **Pharaoh** could see that **Yosef** was sincere and said to **him**, "**Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear to do**" (50:4-6). **Pharaoh's** words do not end with, "and then come back to me," because **Joseph** had said **he** would. This is another indication of **his** unspoken trust in **Joseph's** truthfulness.⁸¹³

So Yosef went up to bury his father, but **he** did not go alone. **All Pharaoh's officials accompanied him** - the dignitaries of **his court** and **all the dignitaries of Egypt** - besides **all the members of Joseph's household** and **his eleven brothers** and **those belonging to his father's household**. The accompaniment by **Egyptian dignitaries** and a military escort reflect the importance of **Joseph** and the dignity that is thereby accorded to **Jacob**. It also served a theological purpose, showing how far this little family of Abraham's had come. **God** promised to make them a great nation and bless them. Now all of **Egypt** stopped and paid attention to the passing of Abraham's grandson.⁸¹⁴ **Only their children and their flocks and herds were left in Goshen**, a fact that assured any skeptical **Egyptian** that **they** would indeed return (50:7-8).

A military escort of **chariots and horsemen also went up with him** for his protection. It ended up being **a very large company (50:9)**. The funeral march did not take the normal route from **Egypt to Canaan**, but, for some unknown reason, it took a detour and traveled around the Dead Sea and up the east side of the **Jordan River**.⁸¹⁵

On the way to the burial site in Hebron, the funeral procession stopped **when they reached the threshing floor of Atad**, on the east side of the **Jordan**. There **they lamented loudly and bitterly; and there Yosef observed a seven-day period of mourning for his father (50:10)**.

Even the **Canaanites** were impressed by the great sorrow expressed **there**. **When they saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said to one another: The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning. That is why the place near the Jordan is called Abel Mizraim (50:11)**. In Hebrew the word for **mourning** is *aveil*, and it translates into English as **Abel** (with **Mizraim** being the Hebrew word for **Egypt**). **The Canaanites** realized that it was very unusual for **dignitaries from Pharaoh's court** to come to **Canaan**, so **they** gave it the unusual name, *the mourning of Egypt*, or **Abel Mizraim**.

So Jacob's sons did as he had commanded them. They carried him across the Jordan to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre, which Abraham had bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field (50:12-13). There **they buried him, as he had commanded, giving testimony not only to the love of their father, but also to their faith in the LORD's promises concerning the Land, which someday would go to their descendants as an everlasting possession**.⁸¹⁶

After burying his father, Yosef finally returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all the others who had gone with him to bury his father (50:14). **God** had led them into **Egypt**, and it would be up to **Him** to lead them out again. **They** probably realized that **they** would be there for a long time. **ADONAI** had said that **their descendants would be strangers in a country not their own, and they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years**. It would not be until the **fourth generation** that **their descendants** would go back to the Promised Land **(15:13-16)**.