

# Lesson 7 | October 15, 2023

## Jacob and Joseph Die Well

**Study Text:** Genesis 49:28 through 50:26

**Central Truth:** God enables His children to finish life well.

**Key Verse: 2 Timothy 4:6–7**

For I [Paul] am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith (KJV). As for me [Paul], my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful (NLT).

**Learning Objectives:**

- Students will examine the deaths of Jacob and Joseph, recognizing what filled their hearts at the end of their lives.
- Students will consider how God's promises were reaffirmed and clarified through the passage of time and generations.
- Students will pray for God's help in focusing on and trusting His promises even to the end of life.

## Introducing the Study

**Say:** It can sound odd to speak of someone as having “died well.” For the Christian, this usually means that a person died as he or she lived. That is, the person can reflect on their life to see the hand of God at work while also looking forward to everlasting life.

**Opening Activity—Dying Well**

*Ask: What do you think it means to die well? What examples can you give of someone who has died well?* Answers might include dying without regret—but this does not mean that the person lived a near-perfect life. Rather, the person leaves this world with a sense that his or her purpose in God's eyes has been realized. Students might cite family members or church leaders who have left a strong spiritual legacy.

**Say:** Dying well is not defined by the status of the person. Rather, it reflects the legacy of that person and the peaceful assurance that he or she leaves this world as a devoted follower of the Lord. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

This final lesson of the unit on early Israelite history touches on several key points. First, as we examine the last words of Jacob, we gain insight into not only his legacy, but the future of each of his sons within God's great plan. We also can learn from the importance he placed on being buried in Canaan—not because a place of burial matters in itself, but as a reminder of the promise that drove Jacob's life. Second, we see in the life and death of Joseph his enduring love for his brothers, played out in his lasting

forgiveness, as well as a foreshadowing of how God’s promise through His people will proceed in the generations to come.

## **Part 1—Jacob’s Final Words**

### **Bury Me with My Fathers**

Genesis 49:28–33

**Say:** What kind of legacy has been left to you by the people who shaped your life? What kind of legacy are you leaving to the people you influence? These questions can have several answers for every individual. Yet we must keep in mind that part of the answer for Christians involves a spiritual legacy. This can be seen in Jacob’s final days with his sons. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

#### **Resource Packet Item 1: The Last Words to Jacob’s Sons**

Distribute the information sheet, which discusses Jacob’s prophetic blessings given to his sons in Genesis 49:1–27. Note that this sheet describes the futures of the tribes, as given by Jacob. Of particular importance are the entries on Judah and Joseph. Students may want to study the sheet further for their own information during the coming week.

Genesis 49:28 concludes an important section where Jacob addresses each of his sons. These blessings are applied to the tribes that will later come from each—with Judah and Joseph having preeminence (see also Moses in Deuteronomy 33). The tribe of Judah dominated the history of the southern kingdom, while the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were dominant in the northern kingdom. Ephraim and Manasseh were the tribal representatives of their father, Joseph. (If you look at an Old Testament map, it will demonstrate the immense land areas of these tribes, relative to the others. Note also that Jerusalem rested in the land of Judah.)

Beginning in Genesis 49:29, Jacob spoke to his sons about his burial wishes. First and foremost, he asked to be buried with Isaac and Abraham. He had made a similar request in 47:29–31. Why? Because, first of all, God had told him this would be so (see 46:4). And it also demonstrated that Jacob’s faith in God’s covenant promise stayed strong in his heart until death. He wanted to be laid to rest in that land of promise, just as his family had been. The location of “Mamre in Canaan” (verse 30, NLT) is on the outskirts of the city of Hebron in Israel today.

Fittingly, Genesis 49:33 closes this passage by saying that Jacob finished speaking, “gathered up his feet into the bed,” breathed his last, and “was gathered unto his people” (KJV). His final words declared the reality of the promises of God and of his faith in those promises. There could be no better way for this great patriarch to die.

#### **Discuss**

? In what ways would Jacob’s desire to be buried with his fathers in Canaan testify to his confidence in God’s promises?

? What would you like your last words to your loved ones to be when you leave this world for the presence of Jesus? Why?

## **Joseph Weeps Over Jacob**

Genesis 50:1–3

**Say:** Grief is a reality in every person's life at some time. And just as it cannot be avoided, it cannot be strictly defined. Every person will grieve differently when death strikes close to home. As Genesis 50 opens, we see Joseph as an example of a God-follower experiencing intense grief. We can learn from him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Roughly half of Genesis 50 is occupied with descriptions of grief over the death of Jacob. It is important to see that the Bible recognizes grief as a legitimate, even necessary, human emotion and process. In fact, the process of grief is described in the New Testament as well as the old. Mark 5:38, for instance, reflects the practice of hiring professional mourners, which was not uncommon in the ancient world. It was part of the process of mourning and grief for the family.

All of this is to say that Scripture does not cast a negative light on this healthy human response to loss. Yet while we grieve, we do not grieve the same as those who do not have hope in Christ (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Genesis 50:1 describes Joseph openly acting out his grief in very personal ways. He laid himself across Jacob's face (likely including his upper body) and kissed him. Kissing was a common expression of affection when someone departed, just as is the case today. Clearly, Joseph felt deep grief.

Verses 2–3 describe the preparation of Jacob's body for the journey to Canaan. Embalming was an Egyptian process, but it served an important purpose in allowing Joseph to preserve Jacob's remains for the extended trip. From a larger perspective, however, scholars note that Jacob's death and mourning are described in far greater detail than other deaths in the stories of the patriarchs. Why? Many believe that this emphasizes the enduring character of God's promises. Jacob would return to the land of promise. This land is a focal point of all the Old Testament. It is a source of rejoicing as His people live there. And when they are taken from it, returning to the Promised Land is their heartfelt desire. Even the prophets focus their messages on exile as punishment and return as blessing.

This is an important message to us today. What is the focus of our deepest desires? For us, it is a restoration to the presence of God. This is ultimately the hope found in yearning for the new heavens and new earth, where we will live in perfection with our Lord forever. Death has no power to keep us from inheriting that promise.

Verses 2–3 also mention extended times of mourning for Jacob among the Egyptians. In Egypt, seventy days of mourning was a period of time reserved for the Pharaohs.

Even this pagan nation mourned the patriarch, and to the degree of a king. Truly, God had blessed the seed of Abraham—the carriers of God’s great promises—in the land of Egypt.

### **Resource Packet Item 2: Grief**

Distribute the worksheet and have students complete it in groups. First, discuss their responses, as time allows. Then discuss the personal response section at the bottom of the page.

#### ***Discuss***

? What are some common ways that Christians express grief?

? Why is it important for Christians to recognize grief and sorrow as a normal and healthy part of dealing with the death of those we love?

## **Part 2—Jacob’s Burial**

### **Jacob Buried in Canaan**

Genesis 50:4–9

**Say:** Few moments in life help us appreciate friends and loved ones more than times of grief. When we feel vulnerable and emotionally on edge, there is great comfort in knowing that we do not face those difficult days alone. Joseph experienced this from a source that we might see as unexpected, described in Genesis 50:4–9. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Notice how verse 4 begins: “When the period of mourning was over . . .” (NLT). Seventy days had been devoted to grieving Jacob. No doubt the pain of loss still stung Joseph and his brothers. But the time had come where Joseph also needed to move forward in action. He had made a promise to Jacob—and it was no small promise. By acting to make sure Jacob was buried in Canaan, Joseph affirmed the reality of God’s promise that the seed of Abraham would occupy the land of Canaan.

And so, Joseph proceeded to ask Pharaoh (through his advisors) for permission to bury his father in the tomb Jacob had prepared. (As a side note, scholars have concluded that Joseph didn’t go to Pharaoh personally because of mourning customs. There was no disrespect in his avoidance of Pharaoh.) Take special notice of the words used here. Joseph asked to “go up” to Canaan to bury his father (verse 5, KJV). This imagery of going “up” to Canaan is a key term in chapter 50 (see also verses 6–7,9,14,25, KJV). The same terminology is often applied to the Exodus (e.g., Exodus 3:8,17; 33:1). This passage foresees a time in the distant future, four hundred years later, when the seed of Abraham would go up from bondage in Egypt to the land where they belonged—the land of promise. Much would happen in the interim, and much of that would be difficult for God’s people. But His promise would endure.

As believers today, we have the advantage of being able to look at the full picture. We know of the centuries of slavery that awaited the descendants of Jacob. This slavery

required the miraculous hand of God to bring deliverance. But in the terrible moments of Joseph's grief, these Egyptians whose descendants would become slave masters here acted as friends. Pharaoh graciously included all his officials in this grand funeral procession, as well as a great number of chariots and chariot drivers (Genesis 50:6–9). It was, in a sense, a parade worthy of a king. And how appropriate this procession would be. They carried Jacob, grandson of Abraham, from whom would come the One who would give His own life to save people from their sins.

### ***Discuss***

? Have you ever been especially blessed by a friend or loved one during a time of grief or sorrow? Explain.

## **A Place of Deep Mourning**

Genesis 50:10–14

**Say:** Many people have a place that is special because of some event that took place there earlier. For some, this might be a place they associate with a person they have lost through death. The very thought of this location in the future can lead the person into reflection and contemplation. As Joseph and his brothers took their father to the place of burial, they stopped for a week of mourning in Canaan—which would later become a place of deliverance. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 50:10 records that Joseph, along with the entourage of family and Egyptians, stopped at “Atad, which is beyond Jordan” (KJV). This was likely a location near Jericho. And so, scholars note, it is very possible that the entourage followed the same route to Canaan that the Israelites would follow some four hundred years later. Once again, Scripture here foreshadows the fulfillment of God's promises in Scripture later on.

There, the entourage held a memorial and time of intense mourning for seven days (verses 10–11). This event was so striking that the Canaanites took notice and named the place Abel-mizraim, which means “mourning of the Egyptians.” It is worth noting, then, that this place would be remembered as a place where Egyptians mourned the seed of Israel—the very people they would later enslave.

It appears that Joseph and his brothers left the entourage in Abel-mizraim to proceed as a family to Jacob's burial place. Such an intimate scene also reminds us of the reconciliation that has taken place. Often, it is in times of death that such reconciliation occurs. It is far better for this to happen in life than in death. There, together, the brothers honored their father's heartfelt—and prophetic—request to be buried in the land of promise (verses 12–13). Afterward, they and the entourage returned to Egypt (verse 14).

### ***Discuss***

? Why might God have placed so many parallels in His Word between the accounts of the patriarchs and the Exodus?

? What causes families to resist reconciliation until a time of grieving? How can following the example of the brothers here, having already reconciled, make for a better family time when grief does come?

## **Part 3—Joseph Reassures His Brothers God Intended It for Good**

Genesis 50:15–21

**Say:** We all experience times in life when we have trust issues. Sometimes this happens when we wonder if our past mistakes and wrongs will come back to haunt us. Joseph's brothers faced these kinds of concerns after their father died. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As Joseph and his family returned to Egypt, his brothers made a disturbing realization. Now that their father was dead, their brother could take revenge on them without concern for offending Jacob. Perhaps they were still plagued by guilt in spite of Joseph's assurances he had forgiven them (see Genesis 45:1–15). Now, they found themselves in fear of their powerful brother (50:15).

So, in verse 16, they hatched a plan. The brothers knew Joseph always submitted to the will and authority of his father. Motivated by fear (see verses 15,19), they invented a story, sending a message to Joseph that their father had left some important instructions: "Please forgive your brothers for the great wrong they did to you—for their sin in treating you so cruelly" (verse 17, NLT). Note that in the Hebrew language, verse 17 includes three of the four words in the Old Testament for wicked deeds: In literal terms, what they did was a crime, a sin, and evil. They had committed a horrible sin against Joseph and against God.

It seems, then, that at this moment the brothers finally came to terms with the depth of the wickedness they inflicted on their younger brother. Now all they could do was beg for his forgiveness. Yet Joseph had already forgiven them, as seen in his response to their message. He wept intensely.

The message had been sent through an intermediary, likely to prepare the way for what could be a tense meeting. Upon seeing Joseph, they threw themselves at his feet declaring, "Look, we are your slaves" (verse 18, NLT). Scholars see this as the dramatic climax to the story beginning in chapter 37. The word "slaves" in 50:18 is the same as that which is translated "servants" of God in verse 17. The brothers had come full circle. They once treated Joseph as worthless, selling him into slavery. Now they see him as a surrogate for God, holding their fate in his hands.

But Joseph had no intention of treating them with anything other than affection (verses 19–21). There was no need to fear. They shouldn't equate him with God. He was not God's surrogate, but God's instrument during this critical chapter of His chosen family. The brothers must recognize that God ruled their future, not Joseph.



In the course of His plan, God had taken what they intended for harm and transformed it into something incredibly good. They sought death for Joseph, but God used him to preserve life. They sought to end him, but God used him to bring a new beginning in the next step on the path of His promise to bless the world.

We will likely never be sold into slavery. But we will experience very difficult circumstances. In such times, it is easy to ask, “Why?” With God’s grace, we can take the path Joseph chose, recognizing that God can take what is meant for evil and make something from it that is good beyond our imaginations.

### ***Discuss***

? Describe a time when God took something bad in your life and made it into something good.

Why can it be challenging to remember that God holds our future?

## **God Will Help You**

Genesis 50:22–26

**Say:** Life is filled with good times and hard times. Yet no matter our circumstances, we can share in the same message Joseph would give to his brothers: God will help you. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The death of Joseph, which closes the Book of Genesis in 50:22–26, includes two important points. First, Joseph emphasized his desire to eventually be buried in Canaan. He, like his forefathers, clung to God’s great promise to his last breath. Moses would later fulfill this request in Exodus 13:19.

Second, Joseph reaffirmed God’s promises by declaring, “God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land of Egypt” (Genesis 50:24, KJV). It would be four centuries and a profound change in status from welcomed guests to slaves before this would be fulfilled. But God would help His people—just as He surely helps them today.

### **Resource Packet Item 3: Lord of History**

Distribute the worksheet and complete it as a class. Note the critical role early Jewish history plays in the fulfillment of God’s promise in the earth.

### ***Discuss***

? Describe a time when God has helped you in a supernatural way.

## **What Is God Saying to Us?**

**Say:** Just as centuries passed before God’s people returned to Canaan, millennia have passed since God’s chosen people were given His promise to help them. Yet that promise endures, even to us today, no matter the circumstances of our lives.

# Living It Out

## Ministry in Action

- Find someone experiencing grief today and do something to be a blessing to them amid their difficult time.
- Encourage someone today by describing for them why they are important to you. Remind them that their life matters to God, and to you.
- Take time this week to study some of God's promises in Scripture. Commit them to memory so you might encourage yourself and others with these promises in the days to come.

## Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Moses' Final Blessing on Israel.  
Deuteronomy 33:1, 26–29

Tuesday:

Joshua's Final Words to Israel.  
Joshua 24:14–28

Wednesday:

David's Last Public Prayer.  
1 Chronicles 29:10–19

Thursday:

Jesus' Final Words to His Followers.  
Acts 1:4–9

Friday:

Paul Prepared to Die.  
2 Timothy 4:6–8

Saturday:

The Final Words of the Bible.  
Revelation 22:10–21