

Jacob's Funeral

HN 7/11/04 pm

Reading: Genesis 49:29 -50:26, Hebrews 4

Study: Genesis 49:29-50:14

Palms : 84:1-5, 84:8-12, 124:1-6, 124:7-8

Slim Dusty was given a state funeral some time ago and then more recently Keith Miller was given the same honour. These were famous men in our nation. Not everyone is given a state funeral although they do seem to be more freely given nowadays. Are you hoping to get a state funeral?

Jacob was a sojourner, a nomad, living in the land of Canaan. He came as a refugee to Egypt and spent his last days in Goshen. In the eyes of the world he was a 'nobody'. But remember how he blessed the Pharaoh, the king of Egypt (47:7, 10). He was 'somebody' in the eyes of God. He was chosen by God to inherit the promises.

We find here extensive coverage of Jacob's death and burial, more extensive than any other in Genesis (cf. Sarah). He was given what can only be described as a royal funeral after he died in Egypt at the age of 147. The Egyptians mourned for him 70 days, a period reserved for the mourning of kings. Then Joseph mourned for him 7 days up in Canaan. Calvin is somewhat critical of such ceremony for a burial, but there is a purpose for according Jacob such a funeral.

Jacob has been the focus of half the book of Genesis. In chapter 25 he was granted/stole the birthright. In chapter 28 God gave him the promises at Bethel. Genesis draws to a close with the death of this patriarch and his burial in Canaan. In fact it was in chapter 47 that he began preparing for his death. He got Joseph to swear that he would not bury him in Egypt but would carry his body up out of Egypt. Then he called all his sons together to pronounce a prophetic blessing over each one.

By faith Jacob when he was dying blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, as he as he leaned on the top of his staff (Hebrews 11). This is how the writer to the Hebrews summed up the life of Jacob. As he died his thoughts and hopes lay in Canaan. The future for his descendants lay in Canaan. It was appropriate therefore that his burial in Canaan be recorded as a signal event. We might see this as acted prophecy.

Death

Jacob was not fearful. *I am to be gathered to my people* he said. *He drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people.* This is an interesting phrase, one that we have seen before with reference to his fathers. He did not see death as the end, as annihilation. In some way he was going to see his fathers, his people. Abraham remember believed in the power of God to raise the dead (Hebrews 11) and Jacob did also. Jesus referred to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the God of the living not the dead (Matthew 22).

Jacob's ancestors were buried in the cave at Machpelah awaiting the resurrection of the body. We learn here that not only Sarah, Abraham, and Isaac were buried there but his mother Rebekah and his wife Leah also. This cave was in the field of Machpelah near Mamre (Hebron) in Canaan. Abraham bought it from Ephron the Hittite. It was the only land he possessed. It was all Jacob owned also apart from a small parcel at Shechem.

This cave is described in detail twice in this passage, not to bore us or because of some editorial mix up. The repetition confirms that Jacobs dying instructions were carried out precisely. Repetition is a means of emphasis, clarity and exactness.

Funeral

Joseph arranged to have Jacobs body embalmed in order to take him for burial in Canaan. This was a complex procedure requiring professional help and taking 40 days to complete. According to local custom, and indeed the custom for royalty, he was mourned for 70 days.

Joseph approached Pharaoh indirectly, possibly because he was ritually unclean. He asked for permission to go and bury his father and promised that he would return to Egypt. Despite his high position Joseph always respected the king.

The funeral procession was enormous – *a very great gathering*. He was honoured with the equivalent of a state funeral. *Servants of Pharaoh and elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt*. There were a lot of Egyptian dignitaries in this gathering. And then there was his own household of course – all except the little ones went up. And the flocks and herds – why are these mentioned in relational to a funeral? In the exodus that is here prefigured they would be included.

Though a refugee, a pilgrim in the land of Egypt Jacob was given the funeral of a king. God promised that he would be the father of a great nation, *a company of nations and kings shall come from your body*(35:11). He promised that in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. God saw Jacob as a king and he was given the funeral of a king.

Exodus

Go up and bury your father. Joseph went up. They went up... they left Goshen and came to the threshing floor of Atad which is beyond the Jordan. There the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land observed their mourning.

It seems that the route they followed went around the Dead Sea and up the eastern side of the Jordan. A similar route was followed by Moses 400 years later. In fact many aspects of this journey point to the exodus of the people of God from Egypt and their entry into the Promised Land 400 years later. This is an acted prophecy as stated earlier.

Joseph had faith just like his father. He also gave instructions for burial in Canaan, for his bones to be taken up out of Egypt. God will surely visit you he told his descendants and bring you out of this land. *By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the*

departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. Of all that Joseph did this is all that the writer to the Hebrews records (Hebrews 11:22).

Jacob and Joseph believed in God and his promise. In the next book, the book of Exodus, we see God bring them up out of Egypt to the Jordan ready to enter the Promised Land under Joshua. The promise of land, the land of Canaan, first made to Abraham was fulfilled.

The land of Canaan was not the final fulfilment of this promise. In Hebrews we are told that the promise of entering the rest remains. It is His rest, the rest that believers have in Jesus Christ. *We who have believed do enter that rest.* Abraham, Isaac and Jacob died in faith, faith in God who had prepared a better country for them, a heavenly home in Christ Jesus.

Home in Heaven

The royal style funeral given to Jacob does not of course compare to the welcome that the servants of God receive in heaven. What glory awaits the people of God when they enter their Father's house? Few and evil were the days of Jacob in this world – maybe he was thinking of the glories of heaven when he uttered those words. He had now entered into that glory, leaving behind all suffering and pain. *The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us* (Romans 8:18).

Whenever I visited a tribal village in India I was given a fantastic welcome. As I came along the path I was met by a band of people, some beating drums, others dancing and singing with great fervour. They escorted me into their village and put a garland around my neck. They washed my hands and then invited me to sit in a large room while a rich banquet was laid out before me. I was sitting on the floor and the food was chicken curry and rice, but it was given in abundance and with wonderful grace.

But such a warm and wonderful welcome does not compare to the welcome we will receive in heaven. Jesus said *I go and prepare a place for you; I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am you may be also* (John 14:3). Abraham is there – he welcomed Lazarus (Luke 16). Isaac and Jacob are there and countless other saints. What a glorious day that will be. We will be caught up praising the One upon the throne – *you are worthy O Lord to receive glory and honour and power.* Is this the hope you have, the hope of glory in the presence of your saviour and Lord.

Even now, here in this world we have a rich foretaste of that glory in Christ Jesus. Come to me and I will give you rest he said. This is the same rest promised to Joshua. Christ has been glorified here on earth. Let us draw near to him, nearer each and every day. We will see his glory more and more clearly, we will rejoice in him and praise him with more and more fervour. So that like Jacob we will be ready on that day to be gathered to his people, to step into heavenly glory.

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