

THE STUDY OF HEBREWS—YEAR 2
LESSON 14—NOTES
HEBREWS 11:22
LIVING BY FAITH TO THE VERY END

In our scripture today the author continues to emphasize that true faith trusts in God for the future. Abraham left his country Ur even when he didn't know where God was calling him to live (11:8). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob died without seeing the promises fulfilled (11:13), but they trusted that God had a heavenly homeland for them, a heavenly city (11:16). So too, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph on their deathbeds didn't see God's promises fulfilled; but they spoke about the future in confidence and faith (11:20-22).

Facing death is the definitive test of our faith. The patriarchs all died with their faith and focus on things to come, believing that God would keep His word. Teaching us that faith faces death trusting God to fulfill His future promises, even when circumstances seem to contradict those promises. Faith trusts God for the future and believes, no matter how improbable it seems, that God will fulfill what he promised.

HEBREWS 11:22

By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.

The author of Hebrews continues (as he has done in the last several verses) to stress that the patriarchs died without ever having seen the fulfillment of God's promises. Neither Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, nor Joseph saw any of these promises come to pass. Yet, they were so confident in the promises, that they passed them on to their children.

Joseph was 17 years old when, because of the envy of his brothers was sold into slavery (Gen. 37:2). Joseph spent all of his adult life in Egypt, enduring hardship and injustice and finally after approximately 13 years in prison he rose to a commanding position of influence. He was 30 years old when he assumed the position of second in command in Egypt under Pharaoh. Even in spending his young adult years in a pagan country, he never forgot who he was and where he belonged. Prosperity did not dim his faith—He never forgot his native land and the promises associated with it.

Continuing this thought F.F. Bruce states;

Joseph's career certainly presents instances of faith in abundance, such as his steadfastness under temptation and his patience under unjust treatment: Joseph was sold as a slave: his feet were hurt with fetters, his neck was put in a collar of iron; until what he had said came to pass the word of Yahweh tested him. He endured his trials nobly and triumphed over them, for (as Stephen puts it) "God was with him, and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and over all his house" (Acts 7:9).

Joseph was the fourth-generation heir of the promise and he had never sojourned in the promised land. It had been approximately two hundred years since God made the initial covenant with Abraham. By the time of Joseph's death, none of Abraham's descendants (the descendants of promise) lived in the promised land at all.

At the end of his life Joseph demonstrated the unshakable nature of his faith when he **made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel**, which in fact would not take place for hundreds of years, but which he foresaw with assurance because of his trust in God and his promises.

Just as his father Jacob had insisted on being carried back to the promised land for burial, Joseph made his relatives swear that they would perform the same service for him, and he **gave orders concerning his bones**. Telling his brothers *"I am about to die, but God will visit you, and bring you up out of this land to the land in which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob"* (Gen. 50:24). Joseph's heart and his hope had always been there, knowing what had been promised to his ancestors. He had to look ahead to see the promise, yet he saw it clearly and confidently. While he was making his brothers swear to take his bones back to Canaan, he repeated the assuring words of faith, *"God will surely take care of you"* (Gen. 50:25).

C.H. Spurgeon comments that this was,

A sure proof that he believed they would come out of Egypt. He would not be buried among the Pharaohs, though a prominent place would have been assigned to him there; but he would have his bones lie with those of his ancestors, Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. He wished his unburied body to share with the people of God in their captivity and their return. He was so certain that they would come out of the captivity that he postpones his burial until that glad event, and so makes what would have been but a natural wish a means of expressing a holy and gracious confidence in the divine promise.

It was not until the Exodus (approximately 4 centuries later) that Joseph's bones were actually taken to Canaan. Moses *"who took the bones of Joseph with him"* (Ex. 13:19), as the Israelites left Egypt and sojourned toward the promise land. Later, Joshua completed the delivery of

Joseph's bones following the death of Moses and led the Israelites into Canaan. *"Now they buried the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel brought up from Egypt, at Shechem"* (Joshua 24:32).

Philip E. Hughes adds,

We are to note, then, that even by the circumstances of their burial these patriarchs declared that they awaited the fulfillment of the covenant promises and eternal life beyond the grave, and, as Calvin says, "sharpened the desire of the people so that they would look more earnestly for their redemption."

The lesson for the Hebrew listeners/readers is clear. Like Joseph they should be looking forward to and trusting in what God will do in the future. He will certainly deliver his people. In addition to that, their home is not on earth. Even though Joseph was a ruler in Egypt, he recognized that he was an exile, that his true earthly home was Canaan and his eternal home was the *"better country"* (11:16). So too, the readers should recognize that their true home is the better country—the heavenly city; like Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph they should trust God's promises even in death.

From Joseph we learn why faith is *"the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"* (Heb. 11:1). Joseph, had not seen his homeland since he was 17, but his eyes of faith looked to it still. He is one of those who *"died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen and welcomed them from a distance"* (Heb. 11:13).

"The one incident singled out by our author to illustrate his faith belongs to the end of his life, because, above everything else recorded of him, it expresses his conviction regarding things to come."

- F.F. Bruce

Continuing along this line, Thomas Schreiner adds;

When we think about all that could be commented on in the life of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph it is remarkable that in every case the author reflects on what they said in their old age or when they were on their deathbed. He doesn't comment on anything these people did in their lives that manifested faith. Instead, he zeroes in on what they said and how they prophesied about the future when they were about to die. In every case they continued to believe in the promises at their death, even when it became apparent they wouldn't be fulfilled in their lifetimes.

In Joseph we are reminded that God expects us to live by faith right up to the end of our life. In our last breath, when we have nothing left to give in terms of our own human energy, we find a

way to bless the generations that are to come, being a reminder and a testimony by faith, of the faithfulness of God.

Arthur W. Pink beautifully encourages us when he says,

Neither the honors nor the luxuries which Joseph received while in the land of exile, made that holy man forget the promises of God, nor bound his soul to the earth. His mind was engaged in higher things than the perishing baubles of this world. Learn them, my reader, it is only as our hearts ascend to heaven that we are able to look down with contempt upon that which this world prizes so much.

References

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Sons of Jacob / Tribes of Israel

