

6. The Hebrews writer lastly turned his attention to Joseph in closing out his consideration of the patriarchs (11:22). This isn't the least surprising, given that he cited Jacob's blessing of Joseph – in the persons of his two sons (ref. again Genesis 48:8-16) – as demonstrating his faith. Joseph enjoyed a certain preeminence in Jacob's blessing, and so it was appropriate for the writer to include him in his catalog of Israel's faithful. And all the more as faith looks to the future realization of what God has promised, and Joseph was a key figure in the Abrahamic promises and their outworking in the life of Abraham's descendents. Joseph was God's instrument for preserving the covenant household (Genesis 50:15-21), but such that it would inherit the promised land in the manner God determined: as the result of a great work of deliverance and ingathering (cf. Genesis 15:12-21; Exodus 3:1-10, 6:1-8, 15:1-18).

As he did with Isaac and Jacob, the writer noted Joseph's faith by means of one brief observation, but one that underscores both his role in God's purposes *and* his awareness of it. As Joseph approached the time of his own death, he, too, looked to the future with all confidence in the faithfulness of his God; Yahweh would indeed give His covenant people the inheritance He'd pledged to them. And when that day came, Joseph wanted to be part of the great assembly that made its way to the promised land (11:22).

- a. In the writer's words, Joseph "*made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel,*" and his language indicates, not a passing comment on Joseph's part, but Joseph giving voice to a matter that he always held in the forefront of his conscious hope and longing. That matter was the future day when God would fulfill His oath to Abraham to give him and his descendents the land of Canaan for their inheritance. Almost certainly Joseph had known of that promise since his childhood, for it was his family's great hope. *But what made him connect it with his family's circumstance in Egypt?*

It's impossible to know what expectation had been passed down from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, but, for its part, the Genesis account doesn't mention Egypt in connection with God's promise of deliverance from bondage (ref. 15:14). So also, it's not entirely clear that Joseph connected his own hope with that specific promise. But he *did* know of God's promise concerning Canaan, and that alone told him that his family would not remain in Egypt forever. God's faithfulness meant that one day there would be an exodus from Egypt; one day his family would indeed inherit the promised land.

One other thing worth noting is that Joseph's hope of departing from Egypt wasn't tied to an expectation of future suffering; he died without knowing what lay ahead for his family. It wasn't until sometime later, after the death of the pharaoh he served, that things began to change and the favor his family had enjoyed in Egypt turned to hatred and oppression (Exodus 1:8-14). No, Joseph had no supernatural insight into the future and what awaited his descendents in Egypt. He only knew what God had promised, and he was fully convinced that He would fulfill His word. Joseph's expectation and longing derived from his faith in the God who faithful, not his knowledge of what the future had in store.

- b. The writer affirmed Joseph's faith in two particulars associated with the time of his death: first, his reminder to his family that God's promise and faithfulness assured them of a coming day when they would leave Egypt; and second, his instruction to them concerning his own remains. Just as he expected them to hold fast to God's promise, so he had the expectation for himself. He, too, clung to the assurance of the future inheritance of Canaan, and he was determined to participate in Israel's departure from Egypt and inheritance of the promised land. Joseph knew that he wouldn't live to see God fulfill His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but he was absolutely certain that day would come, and he was committed to being part of it, even if only in his bones (Genesis 50:24-26).

Joseph's life is the centerpiece of the last fourteen chapters of Genesis, and that account presents all sorts of evidence for his faith. And yet the writer, as he did with Jacob, chose to demonstrate Joseph's faith by how it expressed itself at the end of his life. But he distinguished the two men by using a different verb for Joseph's death, one that is relatively uncommon in the New Testament writings. Indeed, this is the only time the Hebrews writer used it in his entire epistle.

This verb also denotes the act of dying (cf. Matthew 2:19, 9:18; Luke 7:2; John 11:39; Acts 2:29, 7:15; etc.), but it carries the connotation of death as a completing event – death as bringing life to its end. Thus it emphasizes the *significance* of death more than the mere fact of it. One can only speculate why the writer chose to use this verb in speaking of Joseph, and not of Jacob. (The verb he used in verse 21 emphasizes death as *expiration*, that is, the cessation of biological life, as suggested by the expression, “breathed his last.”) Joseph's covenant forefathers also “ran their race” in their own generation, and so fulfilled the calling God appointed for them. Their deaths, as much as Joseph's, represented the completion of their lives.

But one clue is the writer's different emphasis in his treatment of Jacob and Joseph. The faith of both men looked to the future as they neared the time of their death, but Jacob's was directed toward Joseph's future bound up in his two sons. On the other hand, Joseph's faith involved his *own share* in the future God had pledged. It seems, then, that the writer was emphasizing that the completion of Joseph's life in death *was only apparent*; his life – and the purpose for it – would actually be completed in his personal share in the realized promise.

This forward-looking perspective moved Joseph to remind his kinsmen to rest in the faithfulness of their God and set their hope on the inheritance pledged to them. But it also provoked him to charge them to include him in their joyous procession to Canaan when the day finally came. He evidently sensed that that day remained a long way off, for he spoke only of carrying his *bones* with them. And Joseph's family honored his petition; when he died they embalmed his body per Egyptian practice and laid it in a sarcophagus. But they didn't *entomb* it; rather, it continued as a perpetual reminder that God would yet arise and fulfill His word. This is the note of confident faith that ends the Genesis account; the note that the book of Exodus picks up with the birth of the deliverer.