

Weekly Scripture and Sermon Study: History & Context Guide
Genesis 47:27-31; 50:22-26

History, Culture, & Context

In these sections from Genesis, we first read about Jacob's move to Egypt and his request to be buried back in his homeland in chapter 47. Then we shift to chapter 50 and read about Joseph's final words to his brothers that God will come to their aide, and to also to bury him in Israel with his ancestors.



In chapter 47, verse 27 explains how Israel in Egypt had "...gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly." This verse emphasizes the growing strength of the Israelites in Egypt. When Jacob/Israel was on his deathbed, he told his son Joseph "If I have found favor with you, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal loyally and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt." The idea of swearing an oath with a hand under someone's thigh is also seen in Genesis 24:2 when Abraham made his oldest servant swear in a similar way to not get his son a wife from the Canaanites. Putting your hand under someone's thigh, close to the organs of procreation, was a sign of solemnity and emphasized the importance of an issue. Verse 30 points out Jacob's instructions for his burial, specifically to "...carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their (his ancestors) burial place." This is the Cave of Machpelah (see Genesis 23:1-20; 25:9; and 49:29-52).

In chapter 50, we read about Joseph's final days and his words to his brothers that "I am about to die; but God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land (Egypt) to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." This assurance of God coming to their aide is fulfilled beginning with the Book of Exodus and completed in the Book of Joshua, as is the request to bring his bones out of Egypt (see Exodus 13:19).

Questions to Consider

1. Jacob had Joseph promise to bury him in his homeland. No written contract was necessary because his word carried as much weight as such a contract. How can we speak and live the truth in such a way?
2. What is the significance of Jacob and Joseph wanting their bones removed from Egypt and be buried with their ancestors? Why was this so important to them?
3. How can we learn to rely on the promises of God in the same way that Jacob and Joseph exhibited in these verses?