



"Believing is a matter of the will. A man does not believe without being willing to believe."

—Charles H. Spurgeon

25-May-12

The Faith of Joseph (Part Two)

Last time, we saw that the pinnacle of Joseph's [faith](#), recorded in [Hebrews 11:22](#), involved his confidence in the promises passed down from Abraham regarding the children of Israel's return to the Promised Land. Joseph commanded that his bones be carried back to the land by the Israelites. But his reason for wanting his remains returned to the land was more than mere sentiment. Notice his father's words when he was about to die:

Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but [God](#) will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow." ([Genesis 48:21-22](#))

Thus, it was not just the children of Israel *in general* that would return to the Promised Land. As he lay dying, Jacob was rightly confident that God would bring *Joseph* specifically back to the land of his fathers, which is why Jacob tells him that he would receive a double portion.

However, Joseph lived his entire life, dying in Egypt, never receiving his inheritance. As [Hebrews 11:39](#) says, he "obtained a good testimony through faith" but "did not receive the promise." Had God been unfaithful? On the contrary, the next verse explains: "God having provided something better for us, that they should not be *made perfect* [in the resurrection] apart from us." So, when Joseph gave the command regarding his bones, he was contemplating the resurrection! This is highly significant because, as far as we know, there had never *been* a resurrection up to this point. (Elijah performed the first recorded resurrection in I Kings 17.)

In the absence of a direct revelation from God, it is likely that Joseph's faith on this point stemmed from Abraham's story and faith. God considered Abraham to be faithful because he accounted that God *must* resurrect the "sacrificed" [Isaac](#) for the promises to be fulfilled ([Hebrews 11:19](#)). The Bible does not tell us exactly what was explained to Abraham about the resurrections, nor does it say what was taught to Joseph. Yet, we know that God's promises were passed down, as undoubtedly was the story of Abraham's accounting, giving Joseph an example of how to reason and conclude correctly about God's promises.

From the story of Abraham and Isaac, and Abraham's demonstration of faith that a man's death does not hinder God's purpose, Joseph must have correctly determined that for him to inherit the double portion, he would be resurrected! Thus, Joseph gave commandment regarding his bones. He wanted his bones back on the land of his fathers, so that when God resurrects him, he will already be there.

There is something else to consider here. [Exodus 13:19](#) records that, hundreds of years later, [Moses](#) took charge of Joseph's bones. He cites the fact that the children of Israel were put under a solemn oath: When God visited them, they would be obliged to carry Joseph's bones with them. Later, [Joshua 24:32](#)—right at the end of the book—reports that the bones of Joseph were finally buried at Shechem *after* the death of Joshua.

Moses, hundreds of years after Joseph's death, was well aware of the solemn oath, and he did his part to see it fulfilled. The Israelites carried Joseph's bones out of Egypt during the Exodus. They were carried through the Red

Sea and for *forty years* through the wilderness. After Moses died, Joshua became the protector of the bones and had them carried across the Jordan. After Joshua died—like Joseph, at the age of 110—Joseph's bones were finally buried.

We know that the children of Israel, through Joshua's time, knew about the oath that they were bound to. But thoroughly intertwined with that oath was the *faith* that Joseph demonstrated in prophesying of Israel's deliverance from captivity, and his absolute assurance in the [resurrection of the dead](#) that would bring him back to life in the land of his fathers. Joseph's faith did not die with him; it was carried with Israel all through the wilderness and throughout the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land. Joseph's coffin was a testimony to all who remembered the story that God was absolutely dependable in carrying out His promises and that death is not the end. God saw to it that Joseph's faith was continually recounted for generations to come as the Israelites transported his coffin everywhere they wandered.

Hebrews 4 relates that [the gospel](#) was preached to the Israelites, but that it did not profit them. What is the gospel? It is much more than just forgiveness for sins. The Israelites probably would have believed in that, for their descendants in the [nations of Israel](#) today believe wholeheartedly in it, but it does not really profit them either.

Rather, the gospel is about the [Kingdom of God](#) being established on this earth, and it includes the future resurrection of the dead. The resurrection resides at the very core of the gospel, and we see that the Israelites carried a reminder of a future resurrection with them throughout the long lives of Moses and Joshua. Could Joseph's coffin, and thus the story of Joseph's solid belief, have been a major part of the preaching of the gospel to them?

It took a certain kind of faith for Joseph to endure and overcome the tumultuous years of his youth—yet those trials were thrust upon him, and in one sense, he had no choice but to walk through them. Yet, he did not give his deathbed instructions under duress, so this act can be seen as signifying a higher level of faith. He could have taken his place among the great leaders of Egypt, but he chose instead to demonstrate his faith in what God had said to his ancestors by instructing that the children of Israel carry his bones with

them when they returned to Canaan. Even though resurrections were apparently still theoretical at that time, he was confident that he would live again. He trusted, just as Abraham had accounted, that God was able to raise him up to fulfill the promises.

This is the faith of Joseph that God highlights in Hebrews 11.

- David C. Grabbe

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

Even though Joseph was born into a highly dysfunctional family, he nevertheless had a high batting average when it came to making the right moral choices, even when the consequences appeared initially to his own detriment. Joseph stayed the course, doing good even when it became a stumbling block with his associates, trusting in the fairness and righteousness of God. His experiences and their impact on his family reveal that God can use people and bring about their repentance without taking away their free moral agency. As a type of Christ, Joseph serves as a model of making right moral choices despite intense opposition.

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by John O. Reid

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