

GENESIS 49:28 – 50:3 UNAFRAID TO DIE

²⁸ *All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him.*

²⁹ *Then he gave them these instructions: "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, ³⁰ the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. ³¹ There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. ³² The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites."*

³³ *When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people.*

^{50:1} *Joseph threw himself upon his father and wept over him and kissed him. ² Then Joseph directed the physicians in his service to embalm his father Israel. So the physicians embalmed him, ³ taking a full forty days, for that was the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days.*

At his death, Jacob expressed the belief that he would *be gathered to [his] people*. Biblical scholars have speculated that Jacob had a primitive understanding of the afterlife; that he did not believe that this life was all there is. Somehow there was a nether world for the dead, in which the God of the living would “gather” him with Abraham and Isaac. His understanding was not the eternal life that was made possible through the death of his ultimate successor, Jesus Christ, it was a vision of a continuity of life beyond the grave based on his experience of the eternal God.

In this world, Jacob would be buried with Abraham and Isaac in the family grave. Also, by being buried in Canaan he was to be laid to rest in the promised land of God. For the Christian, these are sacramental acts that point beyond themselves to the reality of entering God’s eternal rest with all those who are descendents of Abraham through faith.

Jacob faced his death without fear or regret, because he had learned to trust the eternal God. Through his experiences in life, Jacob had come to see that his life had meaning greater than his personal interests. God has a greater purpose and meaning for creation than we could realize on our own. Jacob had a legacy of faith in God from his ancestors that he passed down to his sons. This not only gave significance to his life, but also gave him ultimate satisfaction.

A life based on “me” can only come to an end in disillusion and fear. A life based on God has eternal significance and the guarantee of a successful outcome. Jacob had to learn that the hard way. May we be blessed to learn from Jacob and turn our personal interests over to God today. Then we will enter his rest now, as well as for ever.

Father, you are the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. As you gathered Jacob to yourself, when my time comes, I pray you will gather me also. Help me reorient my life away from a concentration on my personal interests and toward your gracious will. Prepare me in this life to live in the next so that I might face the transition satisfied and without fear. Amen.