

## Lessons From a Dead Man's Bones

Genesis 50:24-26

### I. INTRODUCTION: I

- I. **2** The story of Joseph's life is one of the most interesting and thought-provoking stories in the entire Bible (Gen. 30-50). Let's recall some things about Joseph:
  - A. First son born to Rachel (Gen. 30:24)(Jacob's other wives: Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah).
  - B. Jacob was very protective of Joseph (Gen. 33:2: put Joseph and Rachel in the back when confronted by Esau).
  - C. Benjamin was his full brother (Gen. 35:24).
  - D. Jacob loved Joseph more than his other children (**Gen. 37:3**: "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. "), which was a source of strife among his brothers (**Gen. 37:4**: "But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.").
  - E. This animosity increased when Joseph had two dreams where he was superior to them (Gen. 37:5: their sheaves bowed to his sheave; and 37:9: sun, moon and eleven stars bowed to him.).
  - F. Joseph's brothers vented their hatred by selling him into slavery (Gen. 37:12-35):
    - (1) He found his brothers tending sheep in Dothan; at first they were going to kill him.
    - (2) Reuben stepped in and they cast him into a pit and eventually sold him to the Ishmaelites.
    - (3) His brothers lied (brought back Joseph's coat soaked in blood) to Jacob so that he concluded Joseph was killed by a wild animal (Gen. 37:33).
  - G. Joseph ultimately ends up a slave in Potiphar's household in Egypt (Gen. 37:36).
  - H. Due to God's help and guidance, Potiphar makes Joseph the master of his house (Gen. 39:1-6).

**Gen. 39:2-6**: "*The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. 3 And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. 4 So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority. 5 So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field. 6 Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate.*"
  - I. We see Joseph's sterling character as he rebuffs the seductive advances of Potiphar's ungodly wife and is imprisoned (Gen. 39:7-20, esp. vs. 9).
  - J. However, even in the trial and tribulation of the prison "*the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison*" (Gen. 39:21) such that the warden of the prison put all the prison "*under Joseph's authority*" (Gen. 39:23).
  - K. While in the prison Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker (Gen. 40); "*Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.*" (Gen. 40:23) and Joseph languished in prison.

- L. However, through God's providential care, Joseph ultimately interpreted Pharaoh's dreams and Pharaoh appointed Joseph second in command (Gen. 41:1-45); "*Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt'*" (Gen 41:41).
  - M. Joseph discharges his duty well and Egypt is saved from the drought and ensuing famine (Gen. 41:46-54).
  - N. Jacob sends Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy grain and in the process Joseph's dreams about his brothers are fulfilled (Gen. 41:55-chap. 45; 50:18).
  - O. Jacob and all the family ultimately travel to Egypt and the family is providentially saved and the children of Israel prosper (Gen. 46-47).
2. There are so many important events and lessons we can learn from the life of Joseph, one barely knows where to begin.
  3. However, I want us to focus in on one specific aspect of Joseph's life (Gen. 50:24-26; the fate of his bones; which took at least 360 years to fulfill!).  
**Gen. 50:24-26:** "*And Joseph said to his brethren, 'I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.' 25 Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.' 26 So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.*"
  4. Years after Joseph's death the Bible says more concerning his bones:
    - A. Moses makes sure Joseph's instructions are obeyed:  
**Ex. 13:19:** "*And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you.'*"
    - B. Joshua fulfills Joseph's instructions (Josh. 24:32: buried Joseph's bones at Shechem, on the plot of ground Jacob bought from Hamor the father of Shechem; cf. Acts 7:15-17).
    - C. Finally, the Hebrew writer mentions Joseph's bones: **Heb. 11:22:** "*By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.*"
  5. **3** So, today let's consider some "Lessons From A Dead Man's Bones."

## II. DISCUSSION:

**A lesson we can learn from a "dead man's bones" is...**

- I. **4** God's promises are sure and certain.
  - A. When Joseph gave instructions concerning his bones he was acting on promises that were already at least 230 years old!
    - (1) Gen. 12:1-3: promises first given to Abraham (great grandfather),
    - (2) Gen. 15:13-21: promises reiterated to Abraham along with the prophecy concerning Egyptian bondage,
    - (3) Gen. 26:3-4: promises passed on to Isaac,
    - (4) Gen. 28:13-15: promises passed on to Jacob.
  - B. Yet Joseph didn't even give it a second thought that the promises wouldn't be fulfilled.

- C. To the logical human mind it appeared there were just too many obstacles blocking the fulfillment of the promises, e.g.:
- (1) A great nation requires many people! Abraham had no children! Sarah was “*past the age*” (Heb. 11:11) and Abraham was “*as good as dead*” (Heb. 11:12).
  - (2) Joseph languished for years in prison in a country not noted for a progressive “penal system”!
  - (3) Then when Joseph gained authority in Egypt it hardly appeared necessary for Israel to have their own land; they flourished in Egypt!
  - (4) Then, once Israel fell into disfavor and became slaves, there appeared to be no chance they could escape the shackles of bondage and the cruel oppression of Pharaoh’s ungodly government.
  - (5) Even if Israel managed to escape Egypt they were nothing but an unorganized bunch of “clans,” they had no government, they were not a nation; they were merely a poor, helpless band of slaves who for all appearances were destined to perish as vagabonds.
  - (6) And even if they did survive as roving slaves, they were totally unequipped to wage the certain war that would be necessary to overthrow the nations in the “Promised Land.”
- D. From a human perspective one would have concluded the fulfillment of God’s promises must have seemed, at best to be remote, and more likely to be absolutely impossible.
- E. But, despite all the obstacles and objections to their survival and success, the firm foundation of God’s promise standeth sure! The land was theirs! “*All came to pass*”!
- Josh. 21:43-45:** “So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. 44 The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. 45 **Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.**”
- F. Joseph made his request based on the surety and certainty of God’s word and God’s promises and was not disappointed! We too can have that same trust!
- 2 Pet. 1:10-11:** “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

### **A lesson we can learn from a “dead man’s bones” is...**

#### **2. 5 The revealed word of God is true.**

- A. It was only through revelation Joseph learned of the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- B. Hence, Joseph knew that because God had spoken it, it was true; therefore, it would “surely” come to pass:

**Gen. 50:24-26:** “And Joseph said to his brethren, ‘I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.’ 25 Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.’ 26 So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.”

- C. Joseph knew God’s word is inviolate, unchangeable and immutable:

**Matt. 24:35:** *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”*

**Num. 23:19:**

*“God is not a man, that He should lie,  
Nor a son of man, that He should repent.  
Has He said, and will He not do?  
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”*

D. The promises had not been made to him directly, but to his fathers; but still he put his complete faith and trust in them!

(1) The promises were not fulfilled during his lifetime.

(2) But still, Joseph knew the word of God was *“true and righteous altogether”*:

**Psa. 19:9:** *“The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.”*

**Heb. 6:18:** *“that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.”*

**A lesson we can learn from a “dead man’s bones” is...**

3. **6** Time is of no consequence to the truthfulness of God’s word and fulfillment of His promises.

A. There were at least 230 years between the first promise to Abraham and Joseph’s request concerning his bones. Then at least another 360 years between the death of Joseph and the fulfillment of his burial in the Promised Land.

B. So, Joseph knew that time was not a hindrance to bind and impede the promises of God’s word!

(1) Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew this also:

**Heb. 11:13:** *“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”*

(2) Such is the theme of 2 Peter 3: consider vss. 3-4; vs. 8:

**2 Pet. 3:3-4:** *“knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 4 and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’”*

**2 Pet. 3:8:** *“But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”*

(a) Time is a factor in the fulfillment of the word of man, but it is of no consequence to the Lord.

(b) If Christ delays His return, we can’t allow the length of days to deceive us into thinking God has forgotten, or that He will not keep His promise—*“the day of the Lord will come”*!  
2 Pet. 3:10

(3) The discouraged Hebrews of the New Testament needed to learn this lesson.

(a) They were suffering trials and temptations; they were on the verge of giving up.

(b) But they needed to remember and be reassured their sufferings would pass and that God’s word would be fulfilled to them in due time (Heb. 10:19-12:29):

**Heb. 10:35-39:** “Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

37 “For yet a little while,  
And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.

38 Now the just shall live by faith;  
But if anyone draws back,  
My soul has no pleasure in him.”

39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”

C. If God has said it, if He has promised it, as Joseph said, “God will surely” do it! Time is no factor!

#### **A lesson we can learn from a “dead man’s bones” is...**

##### **4. Faith has confidence and assurance in the word of God.**

A. In Joseph’s case what the eye of flesh could not see, the eye of faith beheld as clearly as the midday sun:

**Heb. 11:22:** “By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.”

B. Joseph learned his faith from his fathers (e.g., Abraham, Isaac and Jacob); hence, “Who against hope believed in hope...according to that which was spoken...And being not weak in faith...He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God...And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.” (Rom. 4:18-21)

C. Joseph essentially said, “God said it, and though I cannot even begin to perceive how it shall occur, ‘I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me.’” (Acts 27:25: That’s what Paul said when all seemed lost in the storm at sea.)

(1) Such was the faith of Mary; she knew there was no possibility of her being pregnant, “seeing I know not a man” (Lk. 1:34). But, what did she say? Lk. 1:38 (“be it unto me according to thy word”)

(2) Such was the faith of Peter; being a professional fisherman, he knew when and where to fish, and when an itinerant carpenter/preacher gave him an inconvenient command and bad fishing advice, he was tempted to hesitate:

(a) But what did he say? **Luke 5:5:** “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.”

(b) What happened? **Luke 5:6:** “And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking.”

(3) Such was the faith of Paul:

(a) During a storm at sea, “when all hope that we should be saved was taken away,” God told Paul that all would be saved.

(b) Despite the seeming impossibility of their deliverance, let alone that every last one of them should be saved, Paul said, “I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me” (Acts 27:23-34, 44). And it was!

D. \*\* We need to burn such statements (e.g., Mary, Peter, Paul) into our hearts!

- (1) “be it unto me according to thy word”
- (2) “Nevertheless...at thy word I will”
- (3) “I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me”

**A lesson we can learn from a “dead man’s bones” is...**

**5. 8 Application:**

- A. We could end this lesson here, but we would be doing ourselves a great disservice if we failed to make some specific applications.
- B. Recall the four basic lessons we’ve learned from a dead man’s bones:
  - (1) God’s promises are sure and certain.
  - (2) The revealed word of God is true.
  - (3) Time is of no consequence to the truthfulness of God’s word and fulfillment of His promises.
  - (4) Faith has confidence and assurance in the word of God.
- C. I submit to you these four lessons provide a paradigm, a model, a pattern for us when we study and consider God’s word on ANY subject and consider its impact on our lives.
- D. The model or pattern is this: Whenever we consider God’s word on any subject:
  - (1) God’s promises are sure and certain: God’s promises are as sure and certain on ANY subject just as they were in Joseph’s case.
    - (a) Someone has said the only sure things are “death and taxes.”
    - (b) But, that statement is false! Those living when Christ returns will not die (**1 Thess. 4:17**: “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”) and we’ll surely not file our taxes that year!
    - (c) Therefore, there is nothing in this entire universe surer than God’s promises!
    - (d) God’s promises are even surer than the sun’s rising tomorrow!
 

**2 Pet. 3:10**: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”

**1 Cor. 10:13**: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”
  - (2) The revealed word of God is true: It was true in Joseph’s case and it is true in EVERY case!
    - (a) There is precious little truth in this world! **Jn. 18:38**: “What is truth?”
    - (b) But, God’s word is truth! **Jn. 17:17**
    - (c) So, we don’t have to worry about being blown about by “every wind of doctrine” or of being deceived “by the trickery of men” (**Eph. 4:14**); **IF** our faith is built solely upon God’s revealed word!
    - (d) What God has said is the “ultimate reality.” **Psa. 119:89**: “Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.”



- (e) “...it is impossible for God to lie, we might have consolation [NIV: “greatly encouraged”], who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.” (Heb. 6:18)
- (3) Time is of no consequence to the truthfulness of God’s word and fulfillment of His promises: Time was of no consequence in Joseph’s case and therefore should be of no consequence to us! (e.g., Consider our studies in the Old Testament, esp. the prophets! God has His timetable!)
- (a) God is not a creature bound by the fetters of time as we are (**2 Pet. 3:8**: “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”).
- (b) We simply must have a Joseph-like faith and the patience to “wait on the Lord” when it concerns the fulfillment of His word:
- Isa. 40:31**: “But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.”
- Psa. 27:14**: “Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!”
- (4) Faith has confidence and assurance in the word of God: Joseph expressed his confidence in God’s word by making his request “By faith” (Heb. 11:22).
- (a) Based on the previous three truths; “faith” expressed by a “confident assurance” in God’s word is the only logical response a Christian should ever exhibit!
- (b) Such faith will always respond to God’s word in the following “confident and assured” ways:
- ☛ **Mary**: “be it unto me according to thy word” (Lk. 1:38)
  - ☛ **Peter**: “Nevertheless...at thy word I will” (Lk. 5:5)
  - ☛ **Paul**: “I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me” (Acts 27:25)
- E. 9 Examples: We could spend hours looking at applications and examples, but let’s just briefly consider a few (think of others yourself!).
- (1) The fact that the majority deny God’s word will not change it from being as it is!
- (a) Baptism: Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Gal. 3:27; 1 Pet. 3:21
- (b) Oneness of Christ’s church: Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:41, 47; Col. 1:18; Eph. 4:4
- (c) Marriage-divorce-remarriage: Matt. 19:9
- (2) No matter how far we put God’s word out of our immediate thoughts and consideration; we cannot change it or avoid its ultimate fulfillment!
- (a) Personal responsibility: 1 Cor. 10:13 (“We’re only human!” No, we’re responsible!)
- (b) Judgment: 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:5: “...will...bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts...”; **2 Pet. 3:10-11**: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. I I Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,” (but, Rev. 21:3-4; Rev. 22:1-5) The earth is going out of business!

- (3) **I 0** No matter how unbalanced our emphasis might become; we cannot change the fact that God expects us to do **ALL** of His will! **Jas. 2:10**: *“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”*
- (a) Most wouldn’t dream of “violating” certain “basic” doctrines (e.g., Mk. 16:16; Eph. 4:4-6; Matt. 26:26-29; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Phil. 1:1; etc., etc.)
  - (b) Yet many are not obedient to other things God has said! e.g., **1 Jn. 3:17**: *“But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”*; Jas. 1:27 Are not these things part of the same “word” as e.g., Mk. 16:16?
- (4) No matter how discouraged we might become; no matter how dark and dreary our own personal lives might become; we cannot change the fact that God really does care and is constantly there to aid, comfort, and encourage us! **1 Pet. 5:6-7**: *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”*
- (a) We can fully trust in God no matter how dire our circumstances! **Eph. 3:20**: *“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think,”*
  - (b) Furthermore, God has proven His willingness to help us with all of our problems by the fact He’s solved our single greatest problem! Rom. 5:8-10; 8:31-39  
**Rom. 5:8**: *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*  
**Rom. 8:32**: *“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”*
  - (c) Thus, regardless of our circumstances we can live the abundant life! Jn. 10:10 We can have *“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”* (Phil. 4:7)

### III. CONCLUSION: I I

1. How about you? Have you learned the lessons from a “dead man’s bones”? Do you...
  - A. Believe: God’s promises are sure and certain?
  - B. Believe: The revealed word of God is true?
  - C. Believe: Time is of no consequence to the truthfulness of God’s word and fulfillment of His promises?
  - D. Faith has confidence and assurance in the word of God?
2. In the final analysis the first three of these things are not an issue...they are settled! The real question revolves around the fourth...the real issue is the extent of our faith! **Lk. 18:8**: *“...when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”*
3. Do you view the world through the “eye of faith” or the “eye of the flesh”? **Heb. 11:6**: *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”*

Adapted from an article, “Joseph’s Bones,” by Larry Hafley.