

JOSEPH ... whose funeral lasted 450 years
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(GENESIS 50: 25)

Joseph died 450 years before he was finally buried. His funeral procession was the longest in history-it extended through four centuries. As friends and descendants followed the bier, it became necessary to change the bearers many times, for the faithful men who served in this capacity aged and died. It is not too much to say that before the bones of Joseph were laid to rest, thousands of Israelites passed away. As the dignified procession proceeded, onlooking nations wondered why ceremonial should be so observed. They probably found it difficult to understand why the strange Israelites refused to dig a grave immediately. Solemn vows dictated Israel's actions, for their fathers had told them how "Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence."

The Bones of Remembrance

" So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt" (v. 26). Thus ended the earthly career of one of Clod's greatest servants. His foresight and unsullied purity had gained an abiding place in the affections of his brethren ; they never forgot how he had saved them during the distressing famine which devastated Egypt. Knowing that God would restore Israel to their own land, the patriarch requested that his mortal remains should accompany the redeemed people; that on no account should his bones be left in an alien land. When he died, his body was carefully embalmed and placed in a coffin ; but it was never buried. Probably it was given an honored resting place, and this became a shrine. Whenever visitors stood silently before the sacred casket, they remembered gratefully the one who had brought their salvation, and were constantly reminded of their increasing debt of gratitude.

The Bones of Responsibility

The years passed by, and ultimately the faith of Joseph was vindicated. "And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go . . . Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you ; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you " (Exod. 13:17-19). Thus did Moses lead the nation out of the land of bondage ; but even he did not realize the journey to Canaan would last forty years. The sacred remains of their beloved ancestor were not finally buried until Israel possessed the promised land. When the invasion of Canaan had been brought satisfactorily to a conclusion, the people assembled for the strangest and most delayed funeral service ever known. "And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph " (Josh. 24: 32). During the entire period no treasure was afforded greater protection than that given to the sacred bones of their ancient savior. Thus the Egyptian coffin accompanied them everywhere, and the very fact that Israel revered its contents guaranteed that ultimately God would bring His people to their land of rest.

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The Bones of Resemblance

It would be easy for us to imagine Moses saying, " We must do this till He come." When we remember how that ancient funeral procession extended through the years ; when we consider the affectionate devotion with which the coffin was carried, we think of Another who made a similar request. Many years of arduous pilgrimage may stretch between the land of our deliverance and our eternal home ; our path of service may lead to many strange places, but God has ordained that certain things will provide the inspiration necessary for the journey. The greatest of these is the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Gratefully remembering His sacrifice, we meet around His table to handle reverently the emblems of His death. Every day we carry these in our hearts, and this we must continue to do until possession of our promised home is an accomplished reality. Then faith will be lost in sight.. The communion service will be superseded by the marriage supper of the Lamb ; we shall eat and drink together in the-- Kingdom of God. This great assurance strengthens us as we proceed on our way ; these sacred emblems of the body and blood of our Lord mean far more to us than the bones of Joseph ever meant to Israel. We draw near to His table to whisper-

Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

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