

Exhortation

"By faith . . ."

9. Joseph (Heb. 11:22)

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IN THIS ARTICLE we consider the faith of Joseph, and its lessons for us, based on the words of Hebrews 11:22, which reads: "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones". This short statement refers to the fact that Joseph had faith in God's promises concerning the land of Israel.

In Genesis 50 we read: "And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (v. 24). One example of what the Lord had sworn is recorded in Genesis 13: "And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (vv. 14,15). Joseph's everlasting inheritance would be in the land of promise with Abraham, the Lord Jesus and many other faithful of all ages.

Joseph also knew and believed the promise recorded in Genesis 15:13,14 that the Lord would deliver His people from the affliction they would suffer in Egypt and bring them to the land of Israel. Joseph had faith that this would happen after his death. Like Abraham, Joseph believed that what the Lord had promised He would perform.

It was only natural, therefore, that Joseph would want his bones taken to the promised land at the time of the Exodus. This indeed happened, for we read in Exodus: "And 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" (13:19). These words reveal the degree of Joseph's faith.

What exhortation can we take to ourselves from the attitude of Joseph? I would suggest we

need to examine the strength of our faith in our promised inheritance. Do we believe that what God has promised He is able to perform? Are our thoughts centred on the coming Kingdom of God? Do we long for the restoration of the kingdom of Israel?

Like Joseph, Paul's hope was strong when he stated before Agrippa: "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers" (Acts 26:6). This was the hope of resurrection and inheritance of the land for ever. This is why Joseph wanted his bones taken to the land of promise.

This hope is ours also, because by our faith and by our baptism into Christ we are "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). Although Joseph had to sojourn in Egypt, as we have to in the world, he had faith that the Lord God was in control of his life, and that his time in Egypt was one of probation. He looked to the land of Israel for his everlasting possession.

So, in our examination, we have to assess where our continuing city is. Are we so preoccupied with the things of this life that our vision of and desire for the Kingdom is dulled? Joseph had a very responsible position, but he never forgot his roots as a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Joseph also realised that, through the circumstances of his life, the Lord God had made him a saviour for that particular time, a role which pointed forward to the greater work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do we see our lives as a preparation for the Kingdom age? By wanting his bones removed to Israel, Joseph identified himself with the land of promise and the hope of Israel, in which we share.

Let us get our priorities right by having a strong faith that God will fulfil His purpose, and by supplementing that faith with obedience to the moral law of God, which Joseph did not forget during his sojourn in Egypt.