

“By faith Joseph, as he was nearing the end of his life.....” Hebrews chapter 11 verse 22

Joseph, having been sold into slavery in Egypt and rising to prominence there, never returned to the land of Canaan, which was his home, and the land that had been promised to the descendants of Abraham by God. He had brought his family to live in Egypt to escape the widespread famine that God had sent him there to make provision for.

But he always knew that Egypt was not their true home, and that they were only temporary residents there, and that God's promise that their descendants would one day inhabit it as their own would be fulfilled. At the end of his life he said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will certainly come to your aid and bring you up from this land to the land he swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” He made them swear that, when the time came for the Israelites to return to Canaan, they would take his remains with them. Sure enough, having been there for 400 years, when they were delivered from their slavery to the Egyptians, the book of Exodus tells us that they took the bones of Joseph with them.

The bones of Joseph must have been a visible sign to the Israelites of God's promise throughout their time in Egypt. They must have given them hope, especially when the Egyptians enslaved them. Joseph had spoken in faith, and the presence of his remains must have been a source of faith for them. They would not be there forever, but God had a better place for them.

In just the same way, no one who has ever lived, or lives now, or ever will live will be on this earth forever. Our human life spans are limited and, when held up against eternity, are no more than the blink of an eye.

In his letter to the Corinthian Christians, Paul speaks of the temporary nature of our lives here on this earth. One day, he says, our physical bodies will be destroyed, but for those who come under God's governance, care and guidance by faith in Jesus Christ, there is an eternal dwelling in the heavens, not made with human hands.

This is the big point that the writer to the Hebrews wants to make in presenting us with this list of faithful people. He says “These all died in faith, although they had not received the things they were promised. But they saw them from a distance, greeted them and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth. Now those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they were thinking about where they came from, they would have had the opportunity to return. But they now desire a better place – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

We may have great hope for what we might receive from God, but perhaps feel that we have not really seen the full extent of them. But even if we see little in this world, the full abundance of what God has promised awaits us in the next.

Prayer

Father, by faith we look to an eternal home in heaven. Thank you for all you give us and do in and through us in this world. We know that there is always more, and we seek you for it, because we want our lives to be fruitful for your glory. But we know that the full extent of your blessing waits for our eternal home, where we will enjoy all you have for us in company with all your children. Thank you Father. In Jesus name, amen.

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