

SOVEREIGN GRACE GUARANTEES A GOOD DEATH

Genesis 49:28—50:14

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

What are the things that most often disappoint you? Describe a recent time you were disappointed. How do you usually respond to disappointment?

If there is one thing you can count on in life it is that you are going to be disappointed. Things break, people don't keep their word, illness strikes at the most inopportune times, accidents happen, it rains when you want the sunshine, it stays sunny when you want the rain. How are we to maintain hope in the midst of the, at times, overwhelming disappointment. How do we make it to the end of life believing in a good and kind God when so many things go wrong?

The story of Jacob's death, funeral and burial is designed to show us how God enables us to die well by living well. Moses gives us more detail about Jacob's death (2 1/3 chapters) than any other death in the Bible, except for Jesus, because he wants us to learn how to live well, even when our lives are one major disappointment after another. Jacob's life was as full of disappointment as you can imagine and yet he died in faith. How did this happen? Moses shows us several things that are necessary if we are going to die well by living well. If God is able to bring a man like Jacob to such a hope filled and honorable death as this, then he is able to rescue anyone out of whatever trouble he may find himself. This death teaches us that the gospel of Jesus Christ guarantees us a good death so that we will live God-glorifying lives now.

STUDY

1. Gen. 49: 29-32 record the last words Jacob said to his 12 sons and 2 adopted grandsons. Summarize the content of these last words.

He asserts that his death is imminent and that when he dies he expects to be together with his people, i.e., Abraham, Isaac, etc. He commands his sons to bury him in the cave that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite in which to bury Sarah (See Genesis 23). He gives a very detailed description of where it is and of the legal title that he and they have to the land due to the purchase of it by Abraham. He recounts that Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah are all buried there.

2. Why does he give so much detail about the cave and who is buried there? Why does he command that he be buried in this cave? (compare with Gen. 47:28-31)

He doesn't do it because they need instructions on to how to get there. The gravesite of their grandparents, great-grandparents and the mother of six of these sons is well known to them. Jacob gives such an extensive description for several reasons. First, he is full of eager anticipation at being "gathered to his people". The language of "being gathered to his people" is not simply a desire to be buried in the same place as his relatives. It is a declaration that he knows that he is going to join Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah and Leah in a living fellowship with God himself. The physical land of Canaan is a symbol of the ultimate location of God's holy people, the new heavens and the new earth, which is the inheritance that God will give to all of his people at the last day.

Second, he emphasizes that the land and the cave where he is to be buried is his legal possession as the heir of Abraham who bought it from the Hittites. This small piece of the land of Canaan is a "down payment" of the full inheritance that will come into the possession of his descendants. His desire to be buried there with his forefathers is evidence of his absolute confidence that what God has begun in giving this small portion of Canaan to his nomadic people, he will complete by giving the entire land of Canaan to his descendants in the future.

Finally, he gives such an extensive description because he wants to build the faith of his sons. He wants them to see how this cave and field that belongs to them points ahead to the much greater fulfillment that will one day be theirs. He wants these sons to travel to Canaan and to bury him with their forefathers so that they will remember that Canaan is their home, not Egypt. The presence of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

buried in the cave at Macphelah will be a continual reminder of God's promises and an inducement to the nation Israel while living in the suffering of slavery that God is going to fulfill his promises to them. Ultimately these details point to the promises of God.

3. What does all this detail tell us about what Jacob has been thinking about a lot?

He has spent much time thinking about the promises that God has made and is convinced that his word is true. Jacob came to live a life of faith and so came to a good end because his mind and heart were fixed upon the promises of God.

4. Are you able to give as detailed a description of heaven and the down payments of heaven that Christians have received through Christ as Jacob gives of this burial plot?

5. In 50:1 we are told that when Jacob dies his father falls on him weeping and kisses him. Why does he do this?

He grieves over the loss of his father. He grieves over another parting for he knows not how long. He grieves at the loss of the presence of his dad. He grieves over him because he loves him. If Joseph had not grieved the loss of his father we could only assume that he did not love him.

6. Is it right or wrong for Joseph to weep over the death of his father? See 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18.

We know that of all Jacob's sons, Joseph is the one who has lived by faith his whole life long. Therefore, we can be confident that his weeping is not an expression of unbelief. He is not grieving like those who have no hope. There are different kinds of sorrows that are legitimate for the child of God to experience. Joseph expresses one of those griefs here. His obedience to bury his father in Canaan is an expression of his faith in the promises of God and that his hope lies in God's promises not living a comfortable life in Egypt.

7. How would you know if you are grieving like a person who has no hope?

There are several ways to tell if your grief is a hopeless and therefore sinful grief. Hopeless grief causes you to complain against God and man. Hopeless grief blames others, including God, for causing the grief. Hopeless grief is just that, hopeless. There is no mixture of joy or anticipation of good in the future but only a sense of blackness and darkness. You believe the lie, "Not even God can help me." Consider these three examples of hopeless/joyless grief: Numbers 14: 1-12, 2 Samuel 18:31-19:8, Matthew 27: 1-10.

8. 1 Peter 1:5-6 says, "...in this (coming salvation) you greatly rejoice though now for a little while you have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." Can you relate a time when you have experienced the "joyous grief" that Peter is talking about here and that Joseph experienced?

9. Moses wrote the book of Genesis for the nation Israel while they wandered in the desert waiting for all those who were 20 years old and up at Kadesh Barnea to die so that the Lord could take them into the Promised Land. This account of Jacob's death and burial would have first been read by those who had escaped from slavery in Egypt and were waiting to obtain the promises of God in Canaan. How would this story of Jacob's burial strike them? What would stand out to them in light of their recent experiences?

They would recognize the many similarities between their leaving Egypt and the burial of Jacob. Joseph had to ask Pharaoh for permission to "go up" to Canaan, just like Moses and Aaron asked Pharaoh for permission to leave Egypt to worship the Lord. All of Israel's family except for the little children "went up", just as all of Israel "went up" out of Egypt. Egyptians accompanied Jacob's family just as many Egyptians joined with the Hebrews when they left Egypt. The route the burial procession followed is probably the same route the nation Israel followed after the Exodus.

Additionally they would recognize some significant differences between their experience and the burial of Jacob. Joseph only had to ask Pharaoh once, not ten times for permission to leave Egypt. Also, Pharaoh's officials and all the dignitaries of Egypt went up to bury Jacob, whereas all the officials were enemies of the nation Israel. Besides all the family of Jacob, all the powerful people of Egypt went up

to honor Jacob and went up to the Promised Land. In addition, in v. 9, the Egyptian army went along to protect them. In the Exodus, the Egyptian chariots and horsemen chased after them in order to destroy them and then God destroyed the Egyptian army by drowning them in the Red Sea. Not only are the Egyptians and their army a part of this procession into the Promised Land but also the Canaanites, the forefathers of those tribes that Israel will be commanded by God to wipe out because of their wickedness, are so impressed with this funeral that they commemorate the mourning of Jacob by naming a portion of the land of Canaan in honor of his funeral. What would have been shocking to the Israelites is that all their enemies mourned the death of Jacob and were a part of the journey up into the land of Promise.

10. What would these similarities and differences communicate to the Israelites and what do they communicate to us about what God is doing?

God has been working to save his people out of the morass of human sin and misery since before the world began. The Exodus out of Egypt by the nation Israel is the prototype of God's saving his people through the work of Christ. The picture of our being rescued out of the slavery of sin and death is repeatedly used in the NT. The burial procession of Jacob is the prototype of the Exodus and therefore of the salvation of God through Christ. The power of this story is to show us that God's plans to save his people are eternal plans. He has purposed this salvation from eternity past and so we can have confidence that he is going to complete what he has begun. This entourage of Jews and Gentiles points to the church of Jesus Christ. God's salvation is not a salvation that is limited to one race or class of human beings. His salvation is a salvation for the entire world. The mixed burial procession of Jacob points ahead to that ultimate day when all the nations of the world will gather around the throne of God and around the Lamb and worship and it points to the ingathering of the nations throughout history until that great day when Christ returns. Jesus said, We are a part of that great company who have joined in the procession up to the Land of Promise. There are people being gathered into that company every day all around the world. There is a day coming when all the peoples of the world will stream to the mountain of the Lord to bow before a crucified and resurrected descendant of Jacob, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is our destiny and we ought to be full of joyful anticipation of that great day.

11. How often do you think about the work of God throughout history gathering people into the great Exodus out of the sin and misery of this world into the Promised Land where we will live with him forever? How does or how should thinking about this reality affect you?

12. How would vv. 12-14 affect those first Israelites who read it? Consider that they had just spent the previous 400 years living as slaves in Egypt.

This return to Egypt resulted in 400 years of slavery for the people of God. They would have been plagued with questions it seems to me. Why, O why did Joseph and his brothers not bring their children and livestock with them and just stay in the Promised Land? Why this return to Egypt? Why would God do this to them? Why would he make them go through all those years of suffering? Why expose them to the seductive, pagan practices of the Egyptians? It's not only the suffering of the Israelites but it also means God having to put up with the rebellion and unbelief of those millions of Israelites wandering in the desert for forty years. If the goal of God was to give this land to the Jewish people, why didn't he do it when they buried Jacob? Think of all the misery and sin that could have been avoided if Joseph and his brothers would have brought their children and flocks under the protection of the Egyptian army and taken over Canaan or a portion of it right then.

13. Why does God want Joseph and his brothers to return to Egypt and live in slavery for 400 years? See Exodus 6:7, 7:1-5, 9:13-16, 10:1-2.

God wanted the Israelites to return and live in Egypt and to be oppressed by the Egyptians so that he could glorify himself by delivering them out of their slavery. It is God's goal to display the glory of his own name in the salvation of his people. He displays his glory in punishing the wicked and in saving all those who trust in his promise in Jesus, just as he glorified his justice and mercy in delivering Israel out of Egypt by sending the 10 plagues against Egypt.

14. How would knowing that God has a good plan to save his people enable Joseph and his brothers to leave behind the Land of Promise to

go live in Egypt when they knew it was going to mean slavery for their people?

Joseph and his brothers were willing to leave behind the land of Promise and return to the land of Egypt because they knew that God had good purposes for them and for their descendants. They left behind the land of their birth, the land where their fathers were buried, the land they were promised, to wait for God's perfect timing. They lived and died as strangers in a foreign land awaiting the day of God's deliverance. They did not know all the details of what God was going to do. They only knew that God was going to deliver them in his time. They knew that he was working in all of the details of their lives and of the lives of their descendants to accomplish his perfect salvation. They knew that God is committed to glorify his name in the world and since God had promised he was going to make them into a great nation and give them the land of Canaan, then they knew God would keep his word. If God does not keep his word, then he will be not be glorified in the world but will be mocked.

15. How does seeing God return this family into the land of slavery and suffering help us to endure the suffering of our lives?

God has called us to remain in the land of slavery and suffering while we await the day of final deliverance. We can know that he is going to fulfill all his promises to us and so we can endure whatever trouble comes to us in this world. Just like the suffering of Joseph was necessary to gain the salvation of the world from famine; just as the suffering of Israel in Egypt was necessary to display the power and love of God in their exodus; just as the suffering and death of Jesus was necessary for him to gain the glory of being the Savior of the world; so we have a life of endurance that we must live to attain to the glory that is promised to us. These stories are meant to show us the way in which God works in his world. We want salvation now. God has ordained his salvation to be worked out over a long period of time and through much suffering. We want Joseph and his brothers to stay in the land of Canaan. God wants them to return to the land of suffering and wait for his perfect timing. One day we will see the many ways that God has been glorified in our patient endurance of the trouble that we have encountered in this life. One day our joy will be fuller because we have faithfully remained in the land of slavery and suffering and have not

attempted to work our own salvation apart from God. We will come to a good end after living a good life as we faithfully remain in this life of trouble and don't impatiently try to escape into a salvation of our own making. The wreckage of this world is a necessary part of the salvation that Christ is achieving. We do not need to be afraid of it but can wait for God to save us out of it just as he saved Israel and just as he saved Christ out of the dead.

God guarantees us a good death so that we will live a good life by...

- **Remembering the promises**
- **Regretting that we are not yet home**
- **Rejoicing in the victory of Christ**
- **Remaining in the land of suffering until we are called home**