

# BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

## “God Intended It For Good”

Genesis 49:29-50:26

2004

### Introduction

As we consider the remarkable life of Joseph, we are faced with one of life’s universal questions:

**“Why do bad things happen to good people?”**

The premise of the question is flawed, because “there aren’t any good people.”

The problem in understanding suffering has to do with our beginning point of reference:

1. If we begin with the premise that man and his happiness is the ultimate goal, then life will present us with a never-ending string of challenges and disappointments.
2. But if we begin with the premise that God and His happiness is the ultimate goal in life, then life begins to make sense and takes on an eternal perspective that the Bible teaches.

But there are a number of verses that directly answer this dilemma:

Eph 1:11 “[He] works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”

Rom 8:28 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

### I The Death Of Jacob

A. He made his **wishes** known [Verse 29-32]

1. He wanted to be buried in Canaan
2. He wanted to be buried with his family in the field of Machpelah

This wasn’t the first time Jacob communicated his desires. We find a similar request recorded for us in Gen 47:29-31.

#### Application:

1. Make a will and spell out your wishes very clearly
2. Give your stuff away while you’re living.
3. Write down your wishes for your burial and funeral arrangements:

B. He **died** and was gathered to his people [Verse 33]

This was an ancient expression describing Jacob’s reunion with those who had preceded him in death and had exercised faith in God.

As believers we have the wonderful assurance from 2 Cor 5:8 that to be “absent from the body [is to be] present with the Lord.”

C. Joseph responded to his father's death by: [Verse 1-14]

1. Grieving and making funeral arrangements

Grief is a very normal response to death. But as believers we grieve knowing that the grave is not the end of life, but rather a glorious transition into the eternal kingdom of God for those who have been born again.

**Application:**

1 Thess 4:13-14 "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him."

Joseph commanded his physicians to embalm his father.

**Embalming:** In the writings of Herodotus (b. ii., c. 86-8), we have a description of ancient Egyptian embalming:

"The body was given to the embalmers, who first took out the brains and entrails and washed them in palm wine impregnated with strong astringent drugs; after which they began to anoint the body with the oil of cedar, myrrh, cinnamon, and cassia; and this lasted thirty days. They next put it into a solution of salt for forty days longer, so that they allowed seventy days to complete the embalming; after which they bound it up in swathes of linen besmeared with gum. Being then able to resist putrefaction, it was delivered to the relatives, enclosed in a wooden or paper case somewhat resembling a coffin, and laid in the catacomb or grave belonging to the family, where it was placed in an upright posture against the wall."

2. Requesting time off to bury his father

Through intermediaries, Joseph requested Pharaoh's permission to leave Egypt, along with all the adult members of the Israelite nation, in order to bury his father, Jacob.

His request was immediately granted.

3. **Fulfilling** his father's request

Joseph was accompanied by his extended family and a large delegation of high-ranking Egyptian officials. Once they reached Canaan, they mourned seven more days before burying Jacob in the cave of Machpelah. (Acts 7:15-16)

## II The Fears Of Joseph's Brothers

While the death of Jacob brought grief to Joseph, his brothers were struggling not only with the loss of their father, but also with a growing sense of guilt and fear.

Ever since their reunion with Joseph, 17 years earlier, they had been concerned about the possibility that Joseph might be secretly planning to repay them for their wickedness in selling him into slavery in Egypt.

They couldn't comprehend Joseph's forgiveness and so they assumed that Joseph was simply biding his time out of respect for his father Jacob. But now that Jacob was gone, they were gripped with the terrifying expectation of punishment for their sins at the hand of Joseph. And Joseph, with his high status and prestige in Egypt, was certainly capable of doing anything he pleased to his brothers. And so their minds and conversations were filled with "*What if ...*"

**Application:** God's "what if" remedy

Phil 4:6-7 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

A. They were **afraid** that Joseph might: [Verse 15]

1. Hold a grudge against them
2. Pay them back for all the wrongs they did to him  
There is precedent for grudge-holding in the family of the patriarchs  
Esau nursed a grudge against his brother Jacob for 20 years - Gen 27:41.

B. They sent word to Joseph saying: [Verse 16-17]

1. Jacob requested that Joseph **forgive** his brothers  
This story is probably a fabrication motivated by fear. Certainly if Jacob had been concerned about this he would have communicated his wishes to Joseph prior to his death.

But when Joseph heard their request, he **wept**.

The question is, "Why?" Because he was grieved to realize that after 17 years his brothers were still plagued by guilt over their sin he had long since forgiven.

**Application:**

God has forgiven our sins if we have confessed and repented of them.

The Bible tells us that if we truly confess and repent of our sins:

1. They will be cast as far away as the east is from the west - Ps 103:12
2. They will be cast into the deepest part of the sea - Micah 7:19

But as was the case with Joseph's brothers, the enemy continually seeks to persuade us that we can never be truly forgiven for our sins.

C. They **threw** themselves down before Joseph [Verse 18]

What Joseph had predicted (37:5-9) and which they had sought to avoid (37:19-20) had come to pass once again.

Num 23:19 "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not

fulfill?”

### III The Mercy and Grace Of Joseph

A. He assured them of their **safety**: [Verse 19]

1. “Don’t be afraid!”

Joseph’s response to the wickedness of his brothers is nothing short of divine. But it is also the proper response of every Christian man or woman who is confronted with unjust suffering or persecution.

Luke 6:27-28 “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

Col 3:13 “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

2. “Am I in the place of God?”

From a human perspective, Joseph had the "right" and the ability to punish his brothers, but he not only refused to do so, but he went far beyond what could be expected and returned grace and kindness for their wickedness.

Rom 12:19 “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.”

B. He acknowledged their **evil** motives [Verse 20a]

1. “You intended to harm me”

Joseph does not minimize the sin his brothers had committed, which was absolutely evil! Their intention was to bring him harm – not good!

Which brings us to another philosophical and theological dilemma:  
“Why does God allow evil in the first place?”

It’s quite simple really:

God chose to entrust mankind with free-will. But with free-will comes the potential to do not only good, but also evil. It allows one person to rescue a drowning swimmer at Salt Pond and another to rob homes in Poipu. It allows one person to help his neighbor clean up after our last windstorm and another to sell crack cocaine to our kids. It allows one person to seek God and another to reject Him.

But over and above all this, the sovereignty of God dictates that even the free-will, evil acts of men are harnessed to accomplish His eternal purposes.

**Illustration:** The crucifixion of Christ

Acts 2:23-24 “This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”

Prov 16:4 “The LORD works out everything for his own ends ...”

Eph 1:11 “[He] works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will ...”

C. He recognized that God intended it for **good** [Verse 20b]

1. “To accomplish what is now being done”

a. “The saving of many lives”

Gen 45:5-8 “And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you ... So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God”

Joseph did not have the text of Romans 8:28, but he had the truth of it:

***“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”***

Unfortunately, many of us who have the text do not have the truth!

For us to benefit from this truth, we have to realize that how we define "good" is often different from how God defines “good.” To us “good” is whatever makes us happy, satisfied or brings us enjoyment. We see good as the absence of any pain or suffering. But God defines “good” as that which leads us to Christ-likeness, brings us to trust Him more or advances His Kingdom.

As I have said before, if Joseph’s brothers never sells him to the Midianites, then Joseph never goes to Egypt. If Joseph never goes to Egypt, he never is sold to Potiphar. If he is never sold to Potiphar, Potiphar’s wife never falsely accuses him of rape. If Potiphar’s wife never falsely accuses him of rape, then he is never put in prison. If he is never put in prison, he never meets the baker and butler of Pharaoh. If he never meets the baker and butler of Pharaoh, he never interprets their dreams. If he never interprets their dreams, he never gets to interpret Pharaoh’s dream. If he never gets to interpret Pharaoh’s dream, he never is made prime minister. If he is never made prime minister, he never wisely administrates for the severe famine coming upon the region. If he never wisely administrates for the severe famine coming upon the region, then his family back in Canaan perishes from the famine. If his family back in Canaan perishes from the famine, then the Messiah can’t come forth from a dead family. If the Messiah can’t come forth, then Jesus never came. If Jesus never came, then you

are dead in your sins and without hope in this world!

**Application:**

Undoubtedly, there were nights when Joseph cried out “Why Lord?”  
 “What have I done to deserve this?” And the same may also be true of you. You might be asking:

1. Why did my spouse die?
2. Why do I have cancer?
3. Why did I have to bury my child?
4. Why, why, why?

We all have questions like that, but where you go next in your thinking is critical.

1. You can either allow your doubts to cripple your relationship with God and cause you to spiral in fear and self-pity.
2. Or you can believe God by putting your confidence in His promise that “that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Rom 8:28

D. He **reassured** them of his protection: [Verse 21]

1. “Don’t be afraid”
2. “I will provide for you and your children”

Rom 12:17-21 “Do not repay anyone evil for evil ... On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

E. He spoke **kindly** to them

Luke 6:35-36 “But love your enemies, do good to them ... Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

**IV The Death Of Joseph**

More than 50 years elapsed between verses 21 and 22.

A. He stayed in Egypt with his family [Verse 22-23]

1. He lived **110** years  
 His first 17 years were spent as a young man in Canaan  
 The next 13 years as a slave in Egypt  
 And last 80 years as a ruler of all Egypt

2. He enjoyed his great-great grandchildren

B. He demonstrated remarkable **faith** [Verse 24]

1. God would come to Israel’s **aid**
2. God would take them up out of **Egypt**
3. God would bring them to the Promised Land

4. God would fulfill his **oath** to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

Heb 11:22 “By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.”

Heb 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Rom 10:17 “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

C. He made his **wishes** known [Verse 25]

1. He wanted to be buried in the Promised Land

a. It was an expression of faith and confidence that God’s covenant promises would come to pass.

Exodus 13:19 “Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God shall surely take care of you; and you shall carry my bones from here with you.”

D. He **died** and was placed in a coffin in Egypt [Verse 26]

Unlike his father, Jacob, Joseph’s body wasn’t buried immediately. Instead his coffin laid aboveground for over 400 years until it was taken back to Canaan by the people of Israel as they left Egypt under Moses’ leadership. So there it sat in Egypt for 400 years as a silent witness of Joseph’s confidence that Israel was going back to the Promised Land, just as God had said (Exodus 13:19).

**Application:**

Some of God’s promises take a long time to fulfill:

1. Noah spent 100 years building the Ark before rain even existed.
2. Abraham waited 25 years for his son of promise, Isaac.
3. Joseph waited 20 years before his brothers bowed down to him.
4. And the world waited almost 4,000 years for the Messiah to come.

Heb 11:13 “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.”

And yet, we know that each of these promises were fulfilled!

5. And now we wait for the promised return of Jesus Christ. We’ve been waiting 2,000 years so far, but He will come – we have His Word on it!

**Conclusion**

Like Joseph, we have all suffered difficulties and tragedies in this life. The question is how should we respond?

1. Don't take things into your own hands
  - 1 Peter 2:23 "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."
  
2. Recognize the sovereignty of God
  - Eph 1:11-12 "[He] works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will."
  - Rom 8:28 "... in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."
  
3. Redefine "good" according to God's Word:
  - a. That which leads to your Christ-likeness
    - Rom 8:29 "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son ..."
  - b. That which deepens your relationship with God
  - c. That which advances His Kingdom.
  - d. That which brings God maximum glory and praise!
  
4. Use your free-will to walk in obedience to God
  - John 14:21 "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."
  
5. Wait patiently for the Lord
  - Ps 27:13-14 "I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. 14 Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD."

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