

The God of Help and Hope

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn to our reading for this evening, and we are continuing on in Genesis. So do turn to Genesis and chapter 45.

We have plenty of visitor Bibles scattered around the place, so do grab a visitor Bible if you need one. And if you are in the visitor Bible, that's page 39.

So Genesis chapter 45, and we're picking up from verse 16. Last time we were in the story, and Joseph revealed himself to his brothers.

And they have now returned home, and Joseph has instructed them to bring his father. So we're picking up verse 16. When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, Joseph's brothers have come.

It pleased Pharaoh and his servants. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, say to your brothers, do this. Load your beasts and go back to the land of Canaan, and take your father and your households and come to me.

[1 : 1 7] And I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat the fat of the land. And you, Joseph, are commanded to say, do this. Take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come.

Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours. The sons of Israel did so. And Joseph gave them wagons according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey.

To each and all of them he gave a change of clothes. But to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five changes of clothes.

To his father he sent as follows. Ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey.

Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, do not quarrel on the way. So they went up out of Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob.

[2 : 2 6] And they told him, Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt. And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them.

But when they told him all the words of Joseph which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

And Israel said, it is enough. Joseph, my son, is still alive. I will go and see him before I die. So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the lord of his father Isaac.

And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, here I am. Then he said, I am God, the God of your father.

Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and will bring you up again.

[3 : 37] And Joseph's hand shall close your eyes. Then Jacob set out from Beersheba. The sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him.

They also took their livestock and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt. Jacob and all his offspring with him, his sons and his sons' sons with him, and his daughters and his sons' daughters.

All his offspring he brought with him into Egypt. Now these are the names of the descendants of Israel who came into Egypt. Jacob and his sons.

Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and the sons of Reuben. Hanok, Palu, Hezron, and Carmi. The sons of Simeon. Jemiel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shul.

The son of a Canaanite woman. The sons of Levi. Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. The sons of Judah. Ur, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah.

[4 : 46] But Ur and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamel. The sons of Ishakah, Tola, Puva, Job, and Shimron.

The sons of Zebulun, Sered, Elon, and Jalil. These are the sons of Leah, whom she brought to Jacob in Paddan Aram, together with his daughter Dinah.

Altogether, his sons and his daughters numbered 33. The sons of Gad, Ziphion, Haggai, Shuni, Esbon, Eri, Eredi, and Erela.

The sons of Asher, Imna, Ishva, Ishvi, Berea, with Sarah, their sister. And the sons of Berea, Heber, and Malkiel.

These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah, his daughter. And these she brought to Jacob, 16 persons. The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife, Joseph, and Benjamin.

[5 : 52] And to Joseph, in the land of Egypt, were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potipharah, the priest of On, bore to him. And the sons of Benjamin, Bela, Betcha, Ashbel, Gerah, Naaman, Ehai, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard.

These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob, 14 persons in all. The sons of Dan, Hushim. The sons of Nathali, Jaziel, Guni, Jeraz, and Shilam.

These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel, his daughter. And these she brought to Jacob, seven persons in all. All the persons belonging to Jacob, who came into Egypt, who were his own descendants, not including Jacob's sons, wives, were 66 persons in all.

And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two. All the persons of the house of Jacob, who came into Egypt, were 70. Amen. And may God bless his word to us this evening.

We'll do turn with me, if you would, to Genesis 45 and 46, and the passage that we read together. Now, we're in the center now, and the great turning point of this great drama.

[7 : 18] And the first scene of this central drama opened with famine and fracture. In chapter 42, you remember a fractured family facing starvation and potential death, and fractured relationships right across the whole clan.

And father and sons, and estranged brothers at enmity with one another. Jacob, the great patriarch, was a broken man. He was disillusioned, facing death, and desperately needing food from Egypt for his family.

Chapter 42, verse 2, that we may live and not die. So it's a pretty sad and sorry state of affairs, particularly for this people who apparently are chosen by God to bless the whole world.

And yet now, here we are in chapter 45 and 46, after all these harrowing and deeply humbling experiences for these brothers, and everything is utterly transformed.

And the picture is one of feasting, fellowship, and wonderful fulfillment. God's extraordinary mercy, and through the extravagant grace of Joseph's forgiveness, and of Judah's courageous self-giving, here is real reconciliation.

[8 : 38] And it's been brought to this family with all its dysfunction, with all its disaster, and with all its near self-destruction. And there is real restoration, real rescue, not just from the life-threatening starvation that would have destroyed them from without, but also, and even more importantly, from the soul-threatening sin that was destroying them from within.

And the measure of the turnaround here is summarized, really, in Jacob's words there, in chapter 45 and verse, where is it, verse 28. It's enough.

Joseph, my son, is alive, and I will go and see him before I die. So, from fear of death by starvation, and laments about going down to the grave in misery and in grief, here he is completely changed, liberated into joy, into great satisfaction.

He's at peace with his own mortality, and he's at peace with God. Now, of course, we mustn't lose sight of the big picture of this story.

This passage here marks a hugely significant turning point in that wonderful story of God's unfolding promise of salvation. It tells us how the covenant people are going to move en masse out of Canaan and into Egypt.

[10 : 04] As you remember, God had told them hundreds of years ago would happen, that they would stay there for some 400 years. Go back and read that in Genesis 15. It's what explains the subsequent exodus out of Egypt under Moses that followed those hundreds of years later.

In the great story that goes on through the Bible and comes only to its ultimate fulfillment in the great Savior of God's people, the son of Abraham, the son of Jacob, the son of Judah, the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And that is the story that Moses is unfolding here for his people, and for us, of course. Preserved for us so that we might know the extraordinary faithfulness of God, his consistent commitment to his covenant promise, the promise in which we, as his people today, still share in.

And yet, as we've seen again and again all through the story, the individual people in the story are never just pawns in God's hands.

They're never just those who are there to move on his purposes in their age. No. In every age of history, God's deep care for his covenant is manifest also in his deep care for his children, his beloved church.

[11 : 25] And that's what we see here in embryo in the covenant family of Israel. And what we see here is the unchanging pattern of God's grace among those that he calls his own.

Despite all their mess, despite the baggage, the chaos of their sin, and he brings reconciliation, he brings restoration and renewal to their very lives.

And in a way, what we see in this story of Jacob's own family is simply a microcosm of what God's whole story, all through the Bible, is about. He is reconciling to himself and to one another all of those that he is calling to be his own, to be his family, to be his through his great Savior, King.

What we see here in this family story is just what it means to have this God, to have the God of Jacob as our God also. Psalm 146, verse 5 says, Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.

And that's what this passage is in the Bible here, to teach us. Because our only hope for all the future, for all eternity, and our only help for our life today, for our life this coming week, is exactly there too, in this same God.

[12 : 49] And only in this same God. He it is, the God of Jacob, who is our hope, and who is our help. And friends, because that is the case, we are greatly, greatly blessed.

And you might say, well, why? Why is that so? Well, let's look here and see what this Scripture teaches us about him, about the Lord, the God of Jacob. First of all, look at verses 16 to 24 of chapter 45, because these verses show so clearly the abundance, the abundance of God's provision.

All the focus here is on the lavish generosity of the Lord our God to a totally undeserving and unlikely people. Through both Pharaoh and Joseph, who are the instruments of God's blessing.

First of all, we see Pharaoh's provision in verse 2. It tells us that the whole of Egypt heard about Joseph's emotional reunion with his brothers. And verse 16 tells us here that Pharaoh was pleased.

He was pleased at this turn of events. He was glad for his prime minister, Joseph. But I wonder if he was also a little bit worried that perhaps now Joseph would have hankerings for home.

[14 : 07] He didn't want to lose this vital ruler who had saved all Egypt, remember, from famine. So maybe that's why he was so quick to offer this generous hospitality to the whole family, for them to come to Joseph, rather than for Joseph to end up going off home.

Well, anyway, he offers certainly lavishly, doesn't he? Look at verse 18. The very best of the agricultural land of Egypt. The fat of the land.

By the way, that's where we get our expression from. The fat of the land. So many of our expressions come from the Bible, don't they? And verse 20 offers them the best things in the land. That refers presumably to homes and possessions and that sort of thing.

The Lord our God is not short of resources. And when he chooses, he will use even great kings and rulers as instruments of blessing to his people.

And this is extraordinary lavish provision in the midst of, well, remember, it's a famine, a worldwide recession, we might say. And it's worth remembering, isn't it, that God is in control of all rulers, of all powers, of all economies.

[15 : 14] And God is working even through them for the blessing, for the good of his people and for his purpose, however it might look to us at times. It's not always so obvious, of course.

If you read on into Exodus, we find that another Pharaoh later on was apparently doing the very opposite by harming God's people. And yet he too was but an instrument in God's hand for the blessing of his people, even though he was defiant of God, even though he hated God's people.

What does Paul say in Romans chapter 9? That Pharaoh was raised up for the very purpose that God might display his power through him, that God's name might be proclaimed in the whole earth.

And that's what was happening here. But happily, this Pharaoh was blessed himself because he was consciously choosing to bless the people of God with extraordinary generosity. And all for the sake of Joseph.

So he's an instrument of God's abundant blessing for this, well, we have to say, utterly undeserving covenant family. But then added to Pharaoh's provision, there's Joseph's own abundant provision.

[16 : 23] Look at verses 21 to 24. There's wagons, there's provisions, there's changes of clothing. And changes of clothing were particular tokens in terms of esteem in that culture.

There was beast, there was food, and all sorts. It's quite ironic, isn't it? Because once they had torn the tunic off Joseph's own back and sold him. But now here's what you might call reconciliation by tunics.

New clothes all around, offered from Joseph to his brothers. And do you see verse 22? Five times as many for Benjamin. And yet now there doesn't seem to be any jealousy from the brothers, does there?

That's a mark, isn't it, of people who have been humbled by God's grace. That they know that none of them deserve any of God's great gifts.

And it's a mark, isn't it, of people who have been humbled by grace that they can rejoice when God gives lavishly to others. Even things that they don't have.

[17 : 24] And they don't resent them because they're so conscious of God's grace to them and what he's done for them. But it's a wonderful picture, isn't it, of the fruit of God's redeeming work in the lives of his people.

And the purpose of it all. Here's a comment from William Stowe. From Joseph's revelation of himself onwards, there's a quite exhilarating pace and grace in the narrative.

This is no mere artistic effusion, but a pouring out of the grace of God which attends wrongs that have been righted and almost impatiently wants to unleash its floods of joy on souls reconciled to each other.

The abundance of God's provision and the grace that it works in people's lives. Not only does God's grace rescue us from a bitter past, a disastrous past, it restores abundantly, overabundantly, to a present and to a future of abundant joy.

It's almost, it's almost too good to be true, isn't it? And I'm sure that's what accounts for Joseph's word of farewell, if you see in verse 24. Our version says don't quarrel on the way, but the word more literally says don't tremble or be agitated.

[18 : 44] And it's generally translated as meaning don't be fearful, don't be disturbed, don't panic. And if that is what Joseph's saying here, what he's saying is fear not. Don't doubt as if this all really is too good to be true.

Don't doubt that this forgiveness, this generosity is real, that it's lasting. I think Joseph was perhaps worried that having got away from Egypt, the brothers wouldn't come back again.

They would be fearing that, well, as soon as Joseph saw his father once again, then he would turn on the brothers and wreak vengeance on them after all. Later on when we get to chapter 50, when Jacob dies, we see that that fear was still very real in their minds, even then.

They thought Jacob, being out of the way, Joseph would now come and wreak his vengeance. And so Joseph says, no, no, no, don't fear. Don't be disturbed. The grace that you've experienced, it's not fake, it's real and it's lasting.

Don't doubt the abundance of God's promises, even to the most undeserving. And we can easily do that, can't we?

[19 : 58] We can doubt God's grace to us. We can harbor fears that perhaps it is all too good to be true, that one day he'll turn on us, he'll give us what we really deserve for what we're really like.

And at our low moments when we're very conscious of our own sin, we can fear that sometimes, can't we? But no, you see, the God of Jacob is an abundant provider. He lavishes grace, even on the most undeserving.

And he assures us, he says, don't be disturbed, don't be agitated, don't fear on the way as you walk with him in this new life of abundance and joy. His grace is real.

It's not an illusion, it won't suddenly vanish and fail. Now that was surely a message that Moses' people, who he was writing for at first, that they needed to hear as they were on their way back to Canaan 400 years later.

They were very conscious of all their failings. And I think it's a message that God's people need to hear still today and every day. Our God is an abundant provider.

[21 : 10] It's not too good to be true. So don't tremble on the way. Well, verse 25 to 28 tell us that they arrived back in Canaan.

And these verses tell of the astonishment that meets God's patriarch. Jacob is astonished. And we're astonished at the wonderful goodness of God to those who just throw themselves wholly on God's mercy.

What a wonderful contrast this scene is with the two previous times when the brothers have come back to their father. Do you remember? And both of those times brought such mourning and grief.

In chapter 37, there was his terrible grief at the thought of Joseph being lost and killed. Then chapter 42, remember, when they came back from Egypt without Simeon and with a threat even to Benjamin's life.

And then all Jacob could speak about was going down to his grave in bitter grief. But here, what a turnaround. He's now talking about going down to see Joseph before he dies and dies in peace.

[22 : 17] Utterly satisfied. Verse 26 describes the moment that his sons blurt out the news. Not only is Joseph alive, he's the ruler of the world.

The ruler of Egypt. No wonder his heart was stunned. His heart became numb because he didn't believe them. What did he think?

Did he think they were perhaps playing a cruel trick on him? Or was it just another thing that was too good to be true? What would you think? What would you think if your child had been snatched from a holiday apartment 20 years ago and you'd live with bitter grief for these decades?

And then all of a sudden somebody comes and tells you not only are they alive but they're the president of the United States or something like that. I mean, you wouldn't believe it, would you?

No wonder Jacob was stunned. The very thing he had spent years and years grieving and desperately, desperately hoping to hear. And yet with every year that went past knowing that he was less and less likely ever to hear it, that very thing has just been told him and he couldn't believe it.

[23 : 28] And yet look at verse 27, you see there was hard evidence. There were these words of Joseph reported to him. And there was the fact of all of these wagons laden with treasure.

And so, well, just like the disciples, you remember, when they heard the words of Jesus and when they saw him and when they touched him after his resurrection, it was just like that.

Jacob revived. He believed the hard evidence. And his whole life was transformed in that moment. It's enough. Joseph, my son, is alive.

It's extraordinary, really, how Jacob's experience mirrors that of Abraham's. Because, like Abraham, he also receives his son back from the dead, as it were.

And yet, poor Jacob waited such a long, long time, didn't he? Perhaps it took that time for grief to do its gracious work in his soul for God to bring this complex man, a man full of contradictions, to bring him to that place of abandonment to God's sovereign will, to the place where, well, like Abraham, he really was willing to surrender everything that was most precious to him and entrust it into the hands of the sovereign God.

[24 : 58] We saw previously how the real turning point happened where Jacob's sorrow really began to turn to joy. It was back in chapter 43, verse 13.

Do you remember where he did surrender up Benjamin? And he uttered that prayer of faith and trust in El Shaddai and the covenant God. He committed everything into the hands of his mercy.

May God have mercy. And so it is that now at last the last deception in the life of this great deceiver is brought to an end.

And all the years of pain and agony and grief with it. Having learned at last in the deepest way possible that the way of life is death, that the way of gain is the way of utter abandonment, of trust, of submission to the sovereign control of God, God alone.

And having done that, Jacob is just astounded, isn't he, at the sheer goodness of his God, the wonderful satisfaction, the fulfillment that he brings to his life.

[26 : 09] It is enough, he says. But here's a man who at last is satisfied, he's fulfilled in life. He says he's ready to face death, to die well at peace with God and at peace with himself, at peace with his family and the whole world.

See what Moses is teaching his people here. He's just illustrating, isn't he, in Jacob's own experience what his gospel constantly taught his people and still teaches us.

That Jacob's sorrow turned to joy when he stepped out in faith, when he cast himself wholly on the mercy of God, when he surrendered his life in every way to God, when he trusted him and therefore he obeyed him, when he has submitted himself to God's will, to God's word.

That's what Moses called choosing life, do you remember? Deuteronomy chapter 30. Loving the Lord, obeying his voice, holding fast to him, for he is your life.

And your length of days. He is the way, he's saying, and he's the only way to peace, to joy forever, to peace and joy and satisfied fulfillment in life now as well.

[27 : 23] Or as the Lord Jesus put it, seek first the kingdom and his righteousness and all these other things will be added to you. God of Jacob astonished the patriarch with his goodness, with his grace.

And he gave him a measure of satisfaction and fulfillment and peace that he thought would never be his again in life. And he did it when at last he handed everything over to God and called only on his mercy.

And friends, God, the God of Jacob will still astonish those who do that, who entrust themselves wholeheartedly to him in their lives and with their loves and with everything.

Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel said the Lord Jesus will find it. We'll find true life. Every cherished love in our hearts that is given over to the Lord for his sake it will redound a hundredfold for God's glory but also for our great blessing.

Not all of us, of course, will have every sorrow reversed like that in this life. Few, I suspect, if any of us will receive back from terminal illness or from death loved ones or a lost son like Jacob.

[28 : 51] Just as it was the few and not the many during the earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus who received back their dead at his hand. But each of these was a token just as this reunion here is a token of the great reunion to come of the great day of resurrection when every tear when every grief will be wiped away forever.

And just like Jacob we also have evidence of that. Compelling evidence. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. We have evidence enough to say it's enough.

What a comfort that is to know that our beloved loved ones in the Lord who have died in him are still alive and we shall see them again. What a wonderful comfort to know that there is a day coming when every disappointment, when every hardship, when every privation, every grief in our tortuous lives, in our sometimes tortured lives, everyone will be swallowed up in the oil of joy and with the garments of praise.

We too, friends, will be astonished, astonished at the goodness of our God, the God of Jacob. Because we too have a hope based on solid evidence.

and so we also can trust him now with our lives and with our loves, with everything and trust it into his merciful hand. And you know, it's important here to see that Jacob's joy wasn't simply the natural joy of receiving back a son that he thought was dead.

[30 : 31] It was more than that because it was also the significance of that to him. It was the reassurance to Jacob that God's covenant promise was not dead, that it wasn't forgotten.

Jacob had believed, you see, that the promised line would be through Rachel's sons, that it would be through Joseph, her firstborn, and then failing him through Benjamin. Now he was wrong in that, but in his mind, Joseph's loss and Benjamin's peril was a threat to that whole destiny.

And now you see what a reassurance to him that the promise of God was real, it was alive, it wasn't forgotten, the seed is safe. But what about the land of promise?

How could Jacob think about leaving the land that God had said was to be for him and to be for his seed forever? Well, you see, that's what explains the first four verses of chapter 46, where we're given so clearly, and Jacob is given so clearly, an assurance of God's presence.

The Lord spoke to Jacob to assure him that he will be present with him, even in Egypt, and that he won't fail his people there, but rather that he'll bless them there for the furtherance of all his purposes of grace for them and indeed for the whole world.

[31 : 59] So verse 1, you see, Jacob came to Beersheba, the southernmost border of the promised land. And that was a place, don't forget, full, full of very rich covenant memories.

It was Beersheba, where the Lord appeared to Hagar, remember, way back in Genesis chapter 1, that 21. What did he say to her then when she was fleeing? Fear not. And then to Abraham in that very same chapter, likewise, in the face of a potentially hostile enemy, the Philistine king, to rescue him and to reassure him that God was still with him.

The everlasting God, the forever God. And then later on to Isaac, Jacob's own father, in just the same way during his lifetime in Genesis 26, when he faced the very same threat to his life and to the covenant, God said to him, fear not, I am with you.

And so here, you see, the implication is that Jacob also was fearful. Fearful, no doubt, of leaving the land that God had so clearly called him to. Fearful of the ominous example of what had happened to Abraham and all the disasters when he had gone down to Egypt.

And knowing that God then had prohibited Isaac from going out of the land down to Egypt. And maybe Jacob was even recalling God's solemn prophecy to Abraham way back in Genesis 15 of what lay ahead of them in this journey, 400 years of hardship for his people.

[33 : 28] No wonder he was fearful. And so he seeks assurance from the Lord. Notice verse 1, from the God of his father Isaac.

He offers up sacrifices on the very altar that his own father had built there in Beersheba. Don't miss the powerful significance of that, the symbolism of that, or the statement of faith that Jacob's making there.

He's calling on the God he has known not only in his own life, but through the manifest blessing and faithfulness shown to his own father in his life. He's saying, Lord, he trusted you, and so I'm trusting you.

Help me just as you always helped him and blessed him. This is a very powerfully personal prayer. Not so much now because I'm getting stiff and I've got a sore back, but I often used to make it my practice to kneel down at the chair here before I would stand up and preach.

And there are several reasons for that. One, of course, was to remind myself that I needed God's help to proclaim his word. In other words, to remind everybody else that we need God's help to hear and to heed his word.

[34 : 43] And above all, of course, I want to remind God that I need his help. But it was more than that for me because some of my earliest memories was growing up seeing my father kneel down in the pulpit before he would stand up to preach.

And so, in a sense, it was my way of saying, Lord, I'm calling on you, the God of my father. I need what you gave him. I need you to help me just as you helped him all the way through his life.

It's personal. And that's what Jacob's doing here, you see, in verse one. And God answers him in that weakness and in that dependence. Notice how he's called Israel in verse one, but in verse two, you see, God calls out, Jacob, Jacob, the weak man of the flesh.

And he assures him, I am your father's God. And he says exactly the same wonderful words that he had said to his father, fear not, I will be with you.

Don't be afraid to go down to Egypt because there, there, I will make you a great nation. You see, God had promised to Abraham and Isaac and to Jacob that they would father a great nation.

[36 : 06] But now God's telling Jacob that it's in Egypt, Egypt, that will be the womb of that great nation's birth. It will be in that strange exile that God does his wonderful work.

But he needn't fear for, verse 4, I myself will go down with you. God's presence will be with them. That won't mean that there will be no hardship and no pain, but it does mean that his protection will be on them and his purpose will certainly be accomplished.

Fear not. He will not fail ever to be the fulfiller of his promised covenant. But he says more even than that, see his words to Jacob show that this God will never fail to be a father who is near to his precious children all the way through.

Not only does he promise to make Israel seed a great nation and to bring them up again to the promised land, he promises Jacob himself personally. Do you see that Joseph, his beloved son, will close his own eyes in death?

That he'll know the peace personally of a good death surrounded by the love of a son that he thought was lost and is now found. You see, this God, the God of Jacob, is the God of extraordinary tenacity.

[37 : 36] He will never forget, he will never abandon his plan and his purpose. However dark the days might seem, he's a God of extraordinary tenacity.

tendency. But he's also a God, isn't he, of extraordinary tenderness. He'll never abandon his people. He'll never forget the deep needs of their own human hearts.

But as the psalmist say, he knows our frame, he remembers that we're dust. And as a father, shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows his tender compassion, his tender compassion to those who fear him.

He is the great hope of our future heavenly bodies in glory, but he's also the great helper today in the weakness and in the frailty of our earthly frame.

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, his God and our God too. So by the words of Jesus, do you remember to Mary on the resurrection morning, are so very wonderful.

[38 : 48] Go to my brothers, Jesus said to her, and tell them I'm going to my father and your father, to my God and your God. The assurance of God's presence, furthering his promise and all the way along, fathering his people.

It's the God of Jacob, made so wonderfully and fully known and forever in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who's with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress still.

And he'll never fail his people. And nor will he ever fail his purpose to do for us ultimately what he's promised in his marvelous covenant of grace, which can never fail.

However, however perplexingly God may seem to deviate from what we assume ought to be the way it progresses. He will never fail.

And that is the clear message, isn't it, of this last long section of this list of names from verses five to the end of the chapter. What these verses proclaim loud and clear is the accomplishment of God's purpose.

[39 : 59] Jacob set out, verse five, literally rose up. His heart was no doubt strengthened by this great assurance of God's presence. And with all his offspring, verse six, the whole family and all it had set off.

And verse seven, all his offspring he brought down to Egypt. And that follows this genealogy from verse eight onwards, which just underscores that fact. All the named descendants in order of this first wife and then their concubine and then the second wife, Rachel, and her concubine.

And surely the chief point of this whole long list is to emphasize the completeness. God's perfect ordering and execution of his purposes, despite everything, his promise of the seed and a great nation is being perfectly formed.

Verse 27, 70 persons named, the perfect number. Sixty-six sons and grandsons and so on come to Egypt.

Well, Benjamin's sons were born later in Egypt, but in principle, as it were, they came in the loins of their father, plus Ephraim and Manasseh and Joseph already there and Jacob himself, verse 27, 70.

[41 : 14] A number of perfection. It's been despite all the failure, all the sin of this family, all that's happened. They enter Egypt exactly according to God's perfectly ordered plan and purpose.

things. And what Joseph had understood, that God had sent him ahead to preserve, to provide for this people. Now, God gave evidence to all this whole generation.

God is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year. And already, they've grown from one man to this large clan. But also, think of Moses' first readers and hearers, his generation, looking back after the Exodus.

What an extraordinary testimony to what God had done since. Seventy of them, seventy went down to Egypt. And hundreds of thousands came up out of Egypt and back to the promised land.

Had that sojourn in Egypt been a mistake? Had God abandoned his people to slavery and suffering and forgotten them as they had thought? No. Not at all.

[42 : 25] God's purpose has been fulfilled all along, just as he had promised. Despite the suffering. Despite the hardship and the exile from the land. In fact, through it all, God was working the salvation and the destiny of his beloved people.

You see the message? God knows what he's doing. He's doing what he has always promised to do. Even when we may think he doesn't know what he's doing and isn't doing it and has got it all wrong and things are failing.

Isn't that a message we need dimmed into our heads? I think it is, isn't it? Because so often it looks to us as though God is doing the opposite to what we assume he ought to be doing.

He's going in the opposite direction to which we assume is the direction of blessing for our lives. In our personal life, we think blessing is through this job or that career or this relationship or that place or whatever it might be.

Or in church life, we think God's blessing depends on this strategy or that calling or this location or whatever else. And so often God seems to be doing the opposite. It looks as if everything is going wrong.

[43 : 40] Listen to John Calvin. Humanly speaking, he says, it was by no means a likely method of propagating the church that Abraham should live childless even until old age.

That after the death of Isaac, Jacob alone should remain. And that he being increased with a moderate family should be shut up in a corner of Egypt. And that there an incredible number of people should spring up from this dry fountain.

Would you have planned things that way if you were God? But you see, perhaps we're beginning to recognize the pattern. The pattern of the God of Jacob.

The God who has promised to fill the heavens and the earth with offspring of his son and to fit them also for glory everlasting. It's through the human disasters.

The human disaster of man's rebellion. Humanity's exile from Eden. It's in the midst of the curse of sin that God is multiplying his family chosen before the creation of the world.

[44 : 46] And he's doing so to the praise of his glorious grace. It was through the human disaster of this family's strife and their exile in Egypt that he preserved his remnant. Not a minority, but a multitude who came back to the land.

Through the human disaster of his own people, Israel's rejection of their own Christ. Paul says he's bringing reconciliation to the whole world. Extending his remnant to a far greater multitude still.

To all who are chosen by grace. It was through the human disaster of the scattering of the early church by ferocious persecution that the church in Acts grew and advanced and multiplied and spread throughout the whole known world.

See, it's a pattern. It's the pattern of the God of Jacob, the covenant God. It's the pattern of our God and Savior. And it's always been like this.

Out of the consequences of sin and in the midst of the crucibles of suffering, God himself is present. And he's present to accomplish his purpose according to his promise.

[45 : 55] The promise that, well, reaches its zenith, doesn't it? In the very nadir, the low point of human sin. And the terrible suffering of the cross in Calvary where at last the great cry rang out.

It is accomplished. It's finished. Here for this generation in Genesis, it was being taken out of the land to experience exile in Egypt.

That's how God's purposes were accomplished in that day for this family. And the people grew and multiplied greatly. And today, and indeed in every generation of God's people, we too need to recognize God's pattern.

God's purpose is especially when it involves upheaval, when it involves discomfort, when it involves uprooting in our own lives. God still often moves people from comfortable places they want to be and they think they're supposed to be to other places as a way of multiplying them, as a way of blessing.

And God knows what he's doing. Some of us here can look back 12 or 13 years and more and recall a great upheaval that we went through as a congregation moving us away from a home that we had and thought was ours.

[47 : 13] And yet we look back and we see that was God's way of multiplying us. And who knows? Who knows what upheavals lie in the future for us as a fellowship, for each of us here as Christian believers.

But whatever that may be and wherever we go, we have the certainty that he will never leave us or forsake us. Now we also, like Jacob, will have God's presence.

Jesus has promised to the very end of the age. And that means that we too can say as heartily as the psalmist, blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God.

Well, let's pray. Our Father, how we thank you that the God of Jacob is our fortress. The God who, in furthering your eternal plan and purpose for the whole cosmos, has time and care and tenderness to every one of your children to whom you are the everlasting Father.

How glad we are that you are our God, the God of our fathers and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Help us, we pray, to be glad and rejoice in him.

[48 : 50] Amen. And so, to serve you all our days. For we ask it in Christ's name. Amen.