

45. The hope of Israel (2007)

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning, and we're back in the book of Genesis, as we've been studying in the life of Jacob. And we come this Sunday to Genesis chapter 35, page 29, if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles.

Otherwise, it's right at the beginning of the Bible. So, after that very grim chapter that we read together last week, we come now really to the end of the main story of Jacob.

You'll see, if you look at chapter 36, verse 1, there's that little formula. These are the generations of Esau. Ten sections, ten books of Genesis, really.

Ten books of beginnings that form our book of Genesis, and are coming towards the end. That verse 1 of chapter 36 begins book 9, and then at chapter 37, verse 2, these are the generations of Jacob, which is the story mainly of Jacob's sons, and that's the last big section of Genesis.

So, we're in chapter 35, coming to the end of the whole section that has been about the generations of Isaac. That is, the story of Isaac's progeny, Jacob and Esau.

[1 : 27] And so, it's a kind of rounding up chapter, rounding up and rounding off this whole story. And that's where we are now.

So, let's pick up the story at chapter 35, verse 1. Now, after all the grim events of the previous chapter, God said to Jacob, Arise, go to Bethel and dwell there.

Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau. So, Jacob said to his household and all who were with him, Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments.

Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress, and who has been with me wherever I have gone.

So, they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them or dumped them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem.

[2 : 30] And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. Which they might very well have done, of course, after the massacre and the infamy of the previous chapter.

And God protected them. And Jacob came to Luz, that is Bethel, which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. And there he built an altar and called the place El Bethel, which means the God of Bethel.

Because there God had revealed himself to him when he had fled from his brother. And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, that's Jacob's mother, she died and was buried under the oak below Bethel.

And so he called its place, its name Alon-Bakuth, the oak of weeping. God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan Aram and blessed him.

And God said to him, your name is Jacob. No longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name. So he called his name Israel and God said to him, I am God Almighty, El Shaddai.

[3 : 43] Be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you and kings shall come from your own body. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you.

And I will give the land to your offspring after you. Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone.

He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it. So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel. Then they journeyed from Bethel.

When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor and she had hard labor. When her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, do not fear, you have another son.

And as her soul was departing, for she was dying, she called his name Ben-Uni, which means son of my sorrow. But his father called him Ben-Yamin, son of my right hand or my strength.
[4 : 51] So Rachel died and she was buried on the way to Ephrath, that is Bethlehem. Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb. It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb which is there to this day.

Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the Tower of Eder. While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine.

And Israel heard of it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. The sons of Leah, Reuben, Jacob's firstborn. Simeon, Levi, Judah, Isaac and Zebulun.

The sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin. The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's servant, Dan and Naphtali. The sons of Zilpah, Leah's servant, Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram.

And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamreah, Kiriath Arba, that is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. Now the days of Isaac were 180 years.

[5 : 59] And Isaac breathed his last and he died and was gathered to his people old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

Amen. May God bless to us this His word. Well do turn with me if you would to Genesis chapter 35. When you first look at this chapter and read it, it does seem like a strange assortment of rather odds and ends.

Perhaps with not a lot of coherence. But if we look a bit more closely, I think we find that that's not so. As I said, with this chapter we reach what is really the denouement of the whole story of Jacob. Yes, he appears again before the end of Genesis. But this part really marks the end of the story where he is the main focus. So it's the end, as I said, of book 8 of Genesis, the book of the generations of Isaac, his sons.

Now, that account began back in chapter 25, verse 19, with the story of Jacob's birth. And if you remember, it told of that oracle, that prophecy, that said that there would be two nations arising from Rebecca's womb via her twin boys.

[7 : 23] And it was a story of struggle, if you remember, in childbirth. And then Jacob was born. Well, interestingly, what do we find here at the end of book 8 of Genesis?

It's a chapter that tells of that oracle being fulfilled in the two nations of Israel and of Edom in chapter 36, Esau's sons. We have another story of travail in childbirth.

And we have the birth of Israel as a people, the 12 sons, the 12 tribes who will make up that people. And, of course, we have the reaffirmation of Jacob's name change to Israel.

In fact, he's actually called Israel here for the first time. Verse 21, Israel journeyed on. Do you see, it's quite a deliberate mirroring here at the end of Jacob's story to that at the beginning.

And that tells us, really, that there's nothing random about the contents of this chapter, though it might seem so. Another thing, perhaps, to note is that this chapter also brings us to the end, full circle, with Jacob's journeyings.

[8 : 32] Back in chapter 28, remember, he left the promised land and God met him at Bethel. In fact, Jacob named the place Bethel, the house of God, because God appeared to him there with wonderful, reassuring promises about hope for his future.

And now we see that Jacob has come full circle back to Bethel again. So, you see, we're being shown the big picture. The story of Jacob's life as a whole and how it fits into the great plan of God. If you like, the camera is zooming out again to show us not the details of the lives of him and his family, but the bigger unfolding picture of the plan of God.

Because, of course, that is what this book is all about, isn't it? The book of Genesis. It's not just the story of the patriarchs and their lives. It's the story, first of all, of the promise of God.

The promise that came away back to Abraham, that through his seed all the peoples of the world would be blessed. Indeed, the promise that came, first of all, right back in the Garden of Eden, where God told Adam and Eve that the seed of the woman would, at last, destroy the serpent and would bring a reversal to that terrible curse of sin and death that had engulfed humanity in the world since that first rebellion.

[10 : 01] And so the whole of Genesis, in fact, the whole of the Bible, is really the story of the unfolding of that first promise, that first gospel, right back at the very beginning.

Well, here we are in Genesis chapter 35, all these years and generations on, and we're right at the very end of Jacob's story.

But what about the story of the promise? Where has it got to? We can go back, can't we, to Abraham's story, and we can remember the many high points in the story of the life of that great man of faith, but it hasn't been quite so exalted since then, has it?

Isaac's story was rather lackluster, and with Jacob and his family, we've certainly seen plenty of dysfunction, plenty of folly, plenty of terrible failure, haven't we?

Just think back to last week and how grim it was. So has God's promise been derailed? This family were entrusted, weren't they, with the oracles of God.

[11:08] That's how the Apostle Paul puts it in Romans chapter 3, verse 2. But what, he says, if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?

Has God rejected his people? Paul asks again in Romans chapter 11. Well, they're real questions, aren't they, when you read this story?

Because we read the story of Jacob and his family, and we say, well, what could God have to do with a people like this? And we might, of course, ask those same questions today of ourselves.

After, perhaps, things that we've done or been involved in, have brought shame to our lives. After we've felt heavy burdens, perhaps, on our own consciences.

Maybe that's a very real question for somebody here this morning. Can God really keep faith for somebody like me? Well, Paul, after asking that question in Romans, assures us very emphatically with the answer.

[12:12] No, God has not rejected his people. Because he tells us, God's salvation is not by works, but by grace.

And Moses is answering that question in exactly the same way here in Genesis chapter 35.

Because as Jacob's story draws to a close, this chapter points us again afresh to the grace of salvation, despite all the grimness of human sin.

And it heartens us with wonderful glimmerings, glimpses of a saviour to give us hope. So if any of us is wondering, well, what has happened to God's promise for me?

Maybe you're thinking, well, perhaps God has rejected me. Or perhaps God will reject me for what I've done. Then this is a very encouraging chapter for you. Indeed, it is for all of us, because it's written for us.

That's what the Apostle Paul says. Written for us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures, we also might have hope. That we might have hope in the hope of Israel.

[13:24] So let's look at the text then in a little detail. First of all, look at verses 1 to 15. They lay out for us a gracious renewal. A gracious renewal of the covenant of salvation.

Bethel is the place of renewal. Of both the covenant people and the covenant promise. Of course, it was a place of hallowed association for Jacob. And so God commanded him to return there.

Not to settle there forever, but as John Calvin says, so that as a fresh view of the place, might renew his faith in the ancient oracle and more fully confirm it.

And that's what these verses relate to us. After the horrors of chapter 34, we see here a renewed people and a renewed promise for the future.

Verses 1 to 7 tell us, don't they, about a renewed people through God's command of grace in the present. Arise, verse 1, Go to Bethel and make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.

[14:28] Notice, by the way, verses 1 and 7. You see they're like brackets, both referring to that. The God who revealed to him, revealed himself to Jacob in troubled times when he was fleeing.

But here is God's call to Jacob. And it's a sovereign command. God's call is always a sovereign command. Follow me, said Jesus.

The gospel, you see, is never a feeble offer, is it? God did not say to Jacob here, Oh, Jacob, have a think about me and let me know what your decision is about how we go on together. No.

He just said, arise and go. And verse 2 tells us Jacob responded obediently. That is, he responded in faith. Faith in the Bible is never some vague step into the dark.

No, of course, faith is the obedient response to the call of God. That's what the apostle talks about all the time when he calls it the obedience of faith.

[15:28] Likewise, the New Testament talks about the disobedience of unbelief. Real faith is always a tangible reality. It's the response to God's command.

And that's what we see here in verse 2. And do you see what it means? It means a putting off, a putting away, as well as a putting on. You see, putting away all their foreign gods, all the idols of paganism, all the things that had really filtered into their thinking and into their lives from that too close association with the pagan world that they had living in Shechem.

All the things that had led them to absolute disaster. Verse 4 tells us that these things were all unceremoniously dumped, buried under that tree and left behind.

And that signified a total change of heart. And that's why they changed their clothes outwardly. New garments to demonstrate that inward change.

Moses' first hearers understood that perfectly. After their rebellion, do you remember, in the golden calf in Exodus chapter 32, Moses did precisely that.

[16:45] He destroyed all their idols, everything. And he commanded them in the future that they were to be as ruthless with all such temptations that would face them.

Read the end of Deuteronomy chapter 7, for example. And the cleansing and the putting on of new garments was also a very familiar sign to the Israelites.

A sign of repentance and of cleansing. Of course, the signs themselves are meaningless unless what they signify is real. Unless there's a real heart attitude of change within them.

Real change. Putting away disobedience. And putting on, instead, the garments of obedience to God. Now that is what biblical faith is.

Putting off disobedience and putting on obedience to God's call. And real faith is always tangible.

It's what John the Baptist spoke about when he said, Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.

[17:46] It's what Jesus said constantly. Read Matthew 18, verses 7 to 9, for example. It's what the apostles spoke about. Put to death whatever is earthly within you, says Paul in Corossians 3.

All your sinful ways, put them away. And put on, instead, the ways of your new life in Christ. The life of faith. Real repentance and faith.

Real response to God's grace. Is always evident in its fruit. It's always evident in a visible, real renewal of spiritual life.

Or else it's just false. And it always also bears fruit in real assurance. See how Jacob, in his obedient response, becomes so conscious of God's presence, verse 3.

The God who answers me in my distress. And also of God's protection, verse 5. The terror of God that surrounded them, restraining all their enemies.

[18:51] Well, that's what we sung, isn't it? When we walk with the Lord in the light of his word, what a glory he sheds on our way. And we are kept as we trust and obey.

Because God's grace is not cheap grace. It never is. It's covenant grace. It's a grace that demands our wholehearted loyalty. And that means, you see, you can't possibly have assurance of your salvation.

Assurance of God's presence. Assurance of God's protection on your life. You can't have that, can you? Except by faith. And real faith is the obedience of faith.

And Jacob is reminded of that here. After the disasters of chapter 34. Just as Abraham, his grandfather, was reminded of it in Genesis chapter 17. After his lapse in faith.

In chapter 16, do you remember? That led to the birth of Ishmael through Hagar. God comes to Abraham and said, Walk before me and be blameless. That I may renew my covenant with you.

[19:58] You see, God must have undivided loyalty. If anyone loves me, says the Lord Jesus, He will keep my word.

And the Father and I will come to him and make our homes with him. Now that was such an important lesson for Jacob to learn here. And it's very important for us too, isn't it?

Sometimes we might complain, Well, I just don't feel God is present with me. I don't have an assurance. There just isn't that light on my path. Well, perhaps sometimes we need to ask, Am I really trusting God?

In other words, am I really obeying God's call, God's command on my life? See, we tend to fear God's commands, don't we?

We shrink from them as though somehow God's commands were going to be the things that bring misery to our lives. That's the story of the Garden of Eden, isn't it?

[21:03] Don't believe what God says, that will lead you to misery. That's what we've thought ever since as human beings. But no, the truth is that in God's commands is life itself.

It's in obedience to him that is the path of peace and of joy. And that's what God is teaching Jacob and his family here, as he takes them right back to basics, right back to the beginning, to Bethel. It's as if he's saying, Jacob, don't you remember all the things that I've done for you? Don't you remember how you committed yourself to me way back then at the altar? You made those vows, Jacob.

But do you really love me? Do you really love the God who changed your name and destiny? Do you really trust me and do what I say?

It's rather like Jesus on the beach with Simon Peter, isn't it? In a way, taking him back to basics, calling him by his old name after his lapse and his denial, and then giving him that new command of renewal, Simon, feed my sheep.

[22 : 13] And often the Lord does have to take his people back to the beginning, back to basics, to start all over again sometimes. Because it's not just Jacob, is it? It's not just Simon Peter who make a mess of their life of discipleship.

But there is a way back to fulsome fellowship with the Lord when we learn again to trust and to obey.

What favor he shows, what joy he bestows upon all who will trust and obey. And that's what Moses is showing his people here.

God's command is the way of life and assurance. And in his call of grace comes the grace to respond. And Jacob rediscovers here that obedience really is the path of blessing.

That was Moses' constant message to his people. His commandment is life. He said, see, I set before you today life and death. Now choose life. Loving the Lord your God.

[23 : 21] Obeying his voice. Holding fast to him. For he is your life. That's what Jacob experiences here. He discovers what every believer finds when they submit themselves to the command of God on their lives.

And he's met, isn't he, by a great assurance of that grace. Verses 9 to 15 tell of God's promise being renewed to him through a fresh pledge to Jacob about his future.

All God's short-term promises to Jacob have been fulfilled, haven't they? He's been with him wherever he went. He's brought him back to the promised land. He's given him progeny, many sons.

And now he reaffirms to Jacob these long-term promises that are yet to be fulfilled. His new name is reaffirmed. Israel, verse 10. With all that destiny that that name contains.

Verse 11. A multiplying of his offspring. Not just one nation, but a whole company of nations. And kings from his own body, he's promised. God's own mouth here confirms the blessings that Isaac conferred upon Jacob.

[24 : 37] Way back in Genesis chapter 28. It's as though God is saying, The God who has done all this already, Jacob, will do all that is yet to be.

And he can do it. Do you see verse 11? Because his name is God Almighty. El Shaddai. The all-sufficient God. The name that God revealed to Abraham back in Genesis chapter 17 when he confirmed his covenant with him.

What I've begun, Jacob, I will bring to completion because I am God Almighty. All-sufficient to do these things. When it comes to your pension fund manager, the caveat is always this, isn't it? Past performance is no guarantee of future returns. But when it comes to God Almighty, it is precisely past performance that is the guarantee of all future promises.

The Bible reminds us of that again and again and again. He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ, says Paul to the Philippians.

[25 : 48] And that's what God says to Jacob here. That's what God says to us, friends. Because he is all-sufficient. Not because we're all-sufficient, but he is.

Because our God is El Shaddai. Because our hope is the hope of Israel. So easy, isn't it, on the hard road of life, the perplexing paths that we walk.

It's so easy to forget that. Especially when disasters of our own making, perhaps, have floored us or nearly crushed us. But that's why, isn't it, the Lord brings us together week by week.

To bring us back together to the place of covenant renewal. To remind us that what he has already done for us is the guarantee of everything that he promises in the future.

He brings us here to the place of renewal. And he reminds us of his call of grace upon our lives. As we gather under his word.

[26 : 48] He teaches us again the way of obedient faith. And in his command, through his word, comes to us the grace that enables us to heed him afresh.

The assurance of real faith as we remember his covenant and we remember his promises afreshly. If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who spared his own son, but, didn't spare his own son, but gave him up for us. Will he not also with him graciously give us all things in the future?

All that he's promised to those who love him? It's always the revelation of God's covenant word, the reminder of his gospel that gives us the grace to respond with real faith afresh, isn't it?

It's always the reminders of his covenant grace that evokes real worship in obedient lives. That's what we see here in verse 14.

[27 : 51] Jacob's wholehearted response. He pours himself out on the altar. Literally, he pours out his substance to God in a costly act of sacrifice. It's a wonderful climax to the story of Jacob's troubled journeyings.

This is how it should be. Here's a man in total submission to his God, pouring everything out on the altar before him. In a very real way, it's the high point of the story of Jacob.

He ascends at last to his destiny as the father of this great nation. And yet, of course, Jacob's newfound consecration to God doesn't remove the struggle and strife from his path.

Far from it, indeed. We'll see the chapters that follow are full of sorrow and of tragedy and real heartbreak for Jacob in all the dramas that are going to unfold.

And that's something of a problem, especially for those people who see that all Jacob's problems in chapter 34, perhaps some previously, were because Jacob had stopped short of that full consecration to God.

[29 : 07] Because he hadn't yet reached Bethel. No, the fact is that at the time Jacob is most consecrated to God, the greatest sorrows in his life begin to come upon him.

That's also something that the writer wants us to see here very clearly. Something that explains, actually, the rest of what's in this chapter. Because Jacob's story is not over and God's story of salvation is far from over.

In fact, it's only just begun. And although we're near the end of the story of Jacob, he shows us here not only the gracious renewal of God's covenant of salvation, but also, very clearly, we're given a grim reminder, aren't we?

A grim reminder of the curse of sin. And that's what verses 16 to 29 are full of. First of all, to look at verse 8, you might just wonder what on earth that verse is doing in the middle of this section.

Clearly separates these two accounts, doesn't it, of Jacob's return to Bethel and then God's renewed revelation at Bethel. But why on earth are we told here about the death of Deborah, the nurse of Jacob's mother, Rebecca?

[30 : 25] Haven't heard of her since right back in chapter 24. Did she go with Jacob to Haran to look after him, perhaps? Or did she come to find Jacob when she heard that he had come back to the land?

We don't know. But what we are told is that she died on the way to Bethel. And so despite the joy of this covenant renewal, the place of worship became also the place of weeping.

Bethel, the house of God, is also called Alon-Bakuth, the oak of weeping. And so this verse really, in a way, trails what we see in the second half of the chapter.

Because from verse 16 onwards, we're overshadowed, aren't we, by the grim reminders of the curse of sin and of its ultimate wage, death itself.

Death's dark shadow is everywhere. It's not yet been put to flight. And so we see, don't we, that despite being a renewed people with a renewed promise, they're still real people.

[31 : 33] They still face the real problems of our present earthly pilgrimage where sin and death overshadow life at every turn. See how the text is shouting that out to us here.

Every step of this journey is overshadowed by sin and death, by the curse. Verse 5, they journeyed to Bethel under God's gracious protection.

Yes, and the joy of God's presence is real and is wonderful. And yet, worship turns to weeping for Jacob. And no doubt, Deborah's death was a reminder to Jacob of his own mother who it seems had already died during his years away in Paddan Aram.

He would never see again. In verse 16, they journeyed from Bethel towards Ephrath, towards Bethlehem. And there, the joy of birth is overshadowed immediately by the pain of bereavement

and the tragic death of Rachel, his favorite wife.

There's irony there, isn't there? Do you remember Rachel's prayer? Give me children or I die, she said. And here she is, dying in childbirth.

[32 : 46] And yet, there's tenderness to, verse 17. Her prayer is answered and she's given that assurance that she does have a son even as she's dying. And there's faith in the midst of grief as Jacob refuses to call the boy Ben-Oni, the son of sorrow, but calls him instead Benjamin, the son of his right hand, the son of his strength.

That's faith, isn't it, in the midst of sorrow, looking to the future, looking to God's promise. But it's very striking, isn't it, how quickly the spiritual elation of Bethel becomes the family tragedy of Bethlehem.

The beauty of Bethel bounded by the bitterness of Bethlehem and its gravestone. But that is the real world, isn't it?

That's the real life of faith. That's the real Christian life. This is the house of God where we celebrate births, where we celebrate the joy of marriages together. It's also the place we come to mourn and weep at funerals, isn't it?

You see, the Bible doesn't play let's pretend. The Bible doesn't hide or ask us to hide from reality. It's quite the opposite.

[34 : 05] It forces us to face up to the reality of the world that is under the curse of sin still. Verse 21, Israel journeyed on.

Another stage in the pilgrimage. And verses 21 to 26, tell of the wonderful fulfillment of God's promises to Jacob in the completeness of his progeny.

Twelve sons, the heads of what will become the twelve tribes of Israel. A complete people of God. Wonderful grace according to promise. And yet, look at verse 22.

Even the blessing of sons is tinged, tainted by the bitterness of shame. Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, we're told in verse 23.

His rightful heir. But he is the one who commits incest with his stepmother. Whatever the reason, whether it was lust or probably also more likely a deliberate rebellion against his father's authority.

[35 : 07] Just like Absalom's, remember. Sleeping with David's concubines. But whatever it was, it was a terrible perversion. Full of shame. As any one of Moses' readers would know very well.

Just read Leviticus 20 or other places. Another grim reminder, isn't it, of the persistence of the all-pervasive nature of sin that lies so deep in the human heart, even in the people of God.

And few reminders of the curse are so bitter, so painful. Few things cut so deep as pain that comes and intrudes into our family life like that.

And even verse 27, Jacob journeys on to his father's camp at Mamre. But the family reunion that we're told about is a reunion around a grave.

Verse 29, Isaac breathed his last and he died. You see, it's like a placard, isn't it, over the whole of this chapter. Remember the curse.

[36 : 17] Remember the curse of sin and death. It's still here. It's still alive. Yes, Jacob can look back over so much fulfillment of God's promises and his protection and his presence with him wherever he's gone and in his progeny, his sons, and in the place that God has given him, his return to the land of Canaan.

God's promise is certainly being fulfilled. And yet only in part, sin and death still reign all too savagely.

And there's a stark tension, isn't there, between what is a present reality in his life and the future that God has promised of a permanent life, of peace and prosperity beyond the curse of sin.

Where darkness is defeated and Eden is restored as we sang, when at last death's dark shadow is finally put to flight. And you see what Moses is saying to his people all those years later after the Exodus.

He's saying to them, remember, the story isn't yet over. God's promise is being fulfilled. Your very existence as the twelve tribes is testimony to that. God's promise is being fulfilled.

[37 : 36] But even now, there's more, much more to unfold. Even when you enter the promised land, there will be sorrow as well as joy because the curse remains. And you will still struggle with sin.

And death will still stalk your lives. But don't give up trusting in the God of Israel because God's promise is being fulfilled and it will be fulfilled just as God has said it will be.

What he has begun, he will bring to completion when the seed of the woman, the seed of Israel, will at last crush the serpent and reverse the curse of sin and death forever.

In this hope we are redeemed. That was Moses' message. And when he comes, he will wipe away all tears.

And sin and the curse will be no more. And darkness and death will flee away. So keep looking forward. Keep trusting in God's promised salvation.

[38 : 44] El Shaddai, the almighty God, he will do it. that's what Moses is saying to his people. You think that's far-fetched?

Well, not according to the New Testament. Jesus himself said, that's what Moses was doing. He was speaking of me and pointing his people to me as the Savior who at last would come to the true seed and the true hope of Israel.

And that is where Jacob's hope lay. That's where Israel's hope lay. Friends, that is where our hope is also, in the coming of Christ the Savior. I want you to see, just as we draw to a close today, I want you to see how even here, amid the grim reminders of the curse of sin, we also see like a jewel sparkling against the dark background, we also see a glimmering revelation, a glimmering revelation of Christ the Savior.

Three glimmering hints in this ancient text that together give us a glimpse, even way back then, of that far greater fulfillment to come. The great fulfillment that brings an end to sin and death forever. And it's in just three things that are mentioned here about a promise, about a person and about a place. First of all, do you notice in verse 11 the promise of a king? Kings will come from Jacob's loins.

[40 : 10] That's a new promise to Jacob that God has never given him before. Although God did say that to Abraham, Jacob's line will be a royal line, says God. But which of these twelve sons will begin that royal line, will carry the seed of promise?

Reuben was his firstborn, his heir. This verse 23 makes absolutely sure we don't miss. But right here we see Reuben's conduct disqualifying him.

Just as we saw in the last chapter of his second and his third sons, Simeon and Levi being disqualified by their dreadful actions. Moses' heroes knew that. They read to the end of Genesis. They know Genesis 49 wherein Jacob's promises for his son's future, he forfeits Reuben and Simeon and Levi of their place in God's great purpose for the latter days.

But they also knew that the fourth son had inherited that royal promise, Judah. Listen to Jacob's blessing on Judah in Genesis 49.

[41 : 22] The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he comes to whom it belongs and to him will be the obedience of the peoples.

A promise of kings. And a promise of Judah's royal line. But when and where and how would all these things be fulfilled?

Well, as we'll see in Genesis chapter 36 in Esau's genealogy, we're told that there were kings in Edom in Esau's line long before there were kings in Israel. And when you begin to read on in the story of Israel into Joshua and Judges, you come across that forlorn refrain again and again. There was no king in Israel and chaos and sin and disaster reigned. But then after the book of Judges, you come to the little insignificant book of Ruth, a wonderful love story between Boaz, the Ephrathite, and Ruth.

And the Lord brings so wonderfully providentially together and gave them a son called Obed, born in a place called Bethlehem. The last verse of that strange little book says, Obed fathered Jesse and Jesse fathered David.

[42 : 45] David, the great king, the Lord's anointed ruler, the savior of his people. And Bethlehem, the place of Israel's great grief here in Genesis 35 became the place of Israel's great glory in the birth of David, the king.

And yet you read on in the story as we've been reading with Bob in 1 and 2 Samuel and we find that even David couldn't save his people. Not from sin, certainly not from death.

Even he who did follow the Lord wholeheartedly, he was a mere man, a mere sinner. He was a great king, but he wasn't an all-sufficient savior. And after him you read on and you find that all the kings and the people failed worse and worse and worse so that ultimately so bad did things become that God ejected the whole of his people of Israel out of the land of promise again into exile.

The prophet Jeremiah, Jeremiah chapter 31, recalls the weeping of Genesis 35 here in a picture of Rachel weeping from her grave as the people of Israel are marched past Bethlehem into captivity. And it seems like the end. And yet even there in that same chapter there is hope because the weeping prophet Jeremiah says again, restrain your eyes from weeping because there is hope for the future.

[44 : 18] I will comfort them. I will give them gladness for sorrow, says the Lord. The story is not over yet, says Jeremiah. And the people of faith waited and watched, yearning for the promised consolation of Israel, waiting for the great redemption promised by God until at last you turn over to the very first page of the New Testament in Matthew's Gospel.

And you begin to read another account that sounds just like the ten accounts of Genesis. These are the generations, the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

And Matthew 2 records Rachel, here in Genesis 35 and the weeping, as Jesus is born in a world that is overshadowed by sin and by death.

I mean, it's the tragedy of weeping mothers in Bethlehem. Where the little ones are massacred by Herod in a desperate attempt to kill the holy child. But that child, the offspring of Jacob, was God himself.

El Shaddai, come at last in the flesh as man to accomplish what no mere man, not Jacob, not David, no one could ever do to bear away forever the penalty of sin and to destroy the power of sin over man and to disperse forever the gloomy clouds of night and put death's dark shadows to flight forever.

[46 : 07] He was delivered up for our transgressions and he was raised for our justification so that we therefore hope in the glory of God, so that we know that we shall be saved from the wrath that is to come on the great day of judgment, so that we know that we will be saved in his life when he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies.

You see, friends, the story is not over even yet. There's still more to come. This, as we know it in our Christian lives, this is not as good as it gets.

No, the best, by far the best, is yet to be. And so we also stand in hope, just as Jacob did. The same hope, but a better hope, much better, because Christ the Savior has come.

We don't just look forward, as Jacob did, to a promise of his coming. We also have the joy of looking back to everything that God has accomplished through what Christ has done on the cross. We can look back and trace the story of a wonderful salvation from these first glimmerings way back here in Genesis, right through to the fullest glory in the pages of the Gospels of the New Testament.

[47 : 29] That's why we have a hope that is sure and certain, because past performance is the absolute guarantee of everything that is yet to come.

the story is not over yet, but the final chapter has been written. It was written long before Jacob was born. Indeed, it was written before even the world was born.

And nothing will ever stand in the way of the completion of that wonderful plan of God. Not anything, not Jacob's sin and folly, not his families, not his people Israel, not yours, not mine, not the devil who would love to pluck you out of his hand because he is El Shaddai, God Almighty, and none shall ever pluck his own out of his hand.

Friends, we will face, and we do face, many struggles and sorrows in our journey, just like Jacob. And we also will know beauty as well as bereavement.

And we also will often find ourselves worshipping amidst great weeping. Weeping at the remainders of sin in our lives.

[48 : 52] And weeping at the misery of death and its very real horror. But soon, soon a day is coming when this chapter of the story will at last be over.

And then and as C.S. Lewis puts it so wonderfully in the last sentence of the last battle, then we'll begin chapter one of the great story, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before.

In this hope, in the hope of Israel, we are saved and we're safe. Amen.

Let's pray together. O Lord, the hope of Israel, the fountain of living water, heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed.

Save us and we shall be saved, for you are our praise. Keep us according to your promise until that great day and strengthen us with this great hope of Israel, fulfilled in Jesus Christ our Lord.

[50 : 10] Amen.