

55. Strangers in a Strange Land (2007)

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[0 : 00] Well, we turn now to our Bible reading this morning, and we're back in Genesis, and at chapter 46. You'll find that on page 40 if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles.

And we pick up our reading where we left off last week at Genesis 46, at verse 28, and reading right through to the end of chapter 47. We read last week of how Jacob and all his extended family set off to emigrate to the land of Egypt.

Jacob, verse 28, had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to show the way before him in Goshen, and they came into the land of Goshen.

Then Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to meet Israel, his father, in Goshen. He presented himself to him and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while.

And Israel said to Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive. Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, I will go up and tell Pharaoh and will say to him, My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me.

[1 : 25] The men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock and they have brought their flocks and their herds and all that they have. When Pharaoh calls you and says, What is your occupation? You shall say, Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth, even until now, both we and our fathers.

In order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen. For every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians. So Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, My father and my brothers with their flocks and herds and all that they possess have come from the land of Canaan.

They are now in the land of Goshen. And from among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to his brothers, What is your occupation? And they said to Pharaoh, Your servants are shepherds, as our fathers were.

They said to Pharaoh, We have come to sojourn in the land. For there is no pasture for your servants' flocks. For the famine is severe in the land of Canaan.

And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you. Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land.

[2 : 38] Let them settle in the land of Goshen. And if you know any able men among them, put them in charge of my livestock. Then Joseph brought in Jacob, his father, and stood him before Pharaoh.

And Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Jacob, How many are the days of the years of your life? And Jacob said to Pharaoh, The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years.

Few and evil, or few and bad or distressed, have been the days of the years of my life. And they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.

And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. Then Jacob settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Ramesses, as Pharaoh had commanded.

Ramesses is the later name, the contemporary name for Goshen. And Joseph provided his father and his brothers and all of his father's household with food according to the number of their dependents.

[3 : 54] But there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished by reason of the famine. And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan in exchange for the grain that they bought.

And Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. And when the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, Give us food. Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone. And Joseph answered, Give your livestock. And I will give you food in exchange for your livestock if your money is gone. So they brought their livestock to Joseph.

And Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. He supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year. And when that year was ended, they came to him the following year and said to him, We will not hide from my Lord that our money is all spent.

The herds of livestock are my Lord's. There's nothing left in the sight of my Lord but our bodies and our land. Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food. [5 : 05] We with our land will be servants to Pharaoh and give us seed that we may live and not die and that the land may not be desolate. So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh.

For all the Egyptians sold their fields because the famine was severe on them. The land became Pharaoh's. As for the people, he made servants of them from one end of Egypt to the other. Only the land of the priests he did not buy. For the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them. Therefore, they did not sell their land. Then Joseph said to the people, Behold, I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh.

Now here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. At the harvest you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four fifths shall be your own, a seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households and as food for your little ones.

And they said, You have saved our lives. May it please, my Lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh. So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day that Pharaoh should have the fifth.

[6 : 17] The land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's. Thus, Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen, and they gained possessions in it, and they were fruitful and multiplied greatly.

And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were one hundred and forty-seven years.

And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, If now I find favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt. But when I sleep with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place.

He answered, I will do as you have said. And he said, Swear to me. And he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed, or as I think we should read it with a footnote, bowed himself on the head of his staff.

[7 : 31] Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, turn with me, if you would, to the passage that we read together.

Genesis 46 at the end and 47. Recently I was dipping into the book of pastoral letters written during the ministry of my father's great friend, Tom Swanson, during his years in Inverness.

I warmly recommend it to you, by the way. It's full of spiritual insight, full of pastoral wisdom. And its title is called this, A Stranger in a Strange Land.

It's called that because often in these letters he's speaking about his sense of feeling like an alien and a foreigner in this world, a sojourner in exile in a place that he doesn't truly belong.

And that title came to mind as I was reading our passage today, because it is a passage all about God's people who in every age find themselves as aliens and strangers in a world that's not their own.

[8 : 44] We're all just sojourners. We're on a pilgrimage to our lasting home. And that's certainly true of Israel's time in Egypt.

They knew that. You see the key word there in chapter 47, verse 4. We have come, they say, to sojourn in this land. That's what God had promised to Abraham way back in Genesis 15.

Your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not their own. And indeed God foretold the many struggles and afflictions that that would bring. But now God commands Jacob with his family to go down to Egypt, but with the assurance that this sojourn will serve a great purpose, to make them into a great nation.

And armed also with a great promise from God, I will be with you and will bring you up again to the promised land. He'll be with them in their sojourn, and he will bring them back at last to their true home.

And yet, you know, this passage also makes clear to us that there's a much deeper sense in which God's people here are sojourners. Look at chapter 47, verse 9.

[10:09] Jacob calls the whole of his life a sojourning, just as the lives of his fathers had been in the land of Canaan. Indeed, Canaan was often called the land of their sojournings.

You'll see that if you go back to chapter 37, verse 1. At the beginning of this story, Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings in the land of Canaan. So even the land of Canaan was not their permanent home.

And they knew that. And the New Testament makes that explicit, of course. All these patriarchs, Hebrews 11 tells us, acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

They were all men who were seeking a homeland in a better country, in a heavenly one. And that's why God was not ashamed to be called their God.

And of course, the New Testament is just as plain about the people of God today. Just read Peter's first letter that we quoted at the beginning of the service. It's all about our lives as elect exiles.

[11:17] And about how we're to live as sojourners and exiles until that permanent home is revealed at last, the coming of Jesus. It's hard, isn't it?

Being strangers in a strange land. Being sojourners in a place that we don't truly belong. It's hard being followers of Jesus in a hostile and alien culture today that we live in, isn't it?

It always has been, of course. And that's why Peter wrote those letters. And that is why Moses wrote these chapters before us, too. So that every subsequent generation of God's people would not lose heart and would say, yes, it is hard, but it's not impossible.

Because God is with his people, always, as he promised to be. And as he proved to be here with Jacob's family in Egypt way back then, in such a very wonderful way.

He was present to bless his people all along the way and to bless through his people in the world in which they lived.

[12:29] The Apostle Paul says, you see, of the Old Testament that all these things are written for our encouragement. So that in the midst of our feelings sometimes of isolation and loneliness and struggle and sojourning, so that we might have hope, he says.

Hope that will lead us, as it led Jacob, to bow in worship and in glad thanksgiving as we look back on our lives and our lifetime and as we look to our future in the hands of a good and gracious God in whose hands we are forever.

So let's look at how God's provision and God's protection keeps his precious people through their sojournings as strangers in a strange land. Let's see if we're not encouraged as we see a persistent pattern for this God who has promised us likewise to give us all that we need for life and godliness through our exile and sojourning until, as Peter says, the day dawns and the glorious star arises in our hearts and we greet our eternal home.

Now this passage, it's structured rather like one of those jumbo sandwiches, those ones, you know, that have two fillings with bread in the middle as well on the outside.

They're specially made to pack a punch, or pack a punch rather, to your punch. Certainly. It begins and ends, if you like, the bread, and right in the middle with Jacob and Joseph talking about life and death and especially about the future beyond this earthly life.

[14:08] That's there right in the very middle as well in verses 7 to 9 where Jacob also is talking about his life of sojourning. And on either side of that, you've got a big section of meat, if you like, that focuses on the present life of God's people Israel in Egypt in the time of their sojourning.

So we'll look at the meat first and then the bread that holds it all together under three headings.

First of all, the separated people in exile and then the saving purpose of that exile and then finally the sworn promise beyond exile.

In each case, we see Joseph as the savior that God has sent before his people to protect them and to provide for them and to bring about all that he's promised for that family and through that family.

So look first at verses 28 of chapter 46 down to chapter 47 verse 11. The text here is wanting us to see very clearly one thing, a separated people.

The emphasis is all on Joseph's protection for Israel's holiness. I don't know about you, but what struck me as I read through these verses was how little attention is given to the great reunion

between Jacob and Joseph.

[15:32] Did you feel that? At the end of chapter 45, the last thing Jacob is saying is, my son Joseph is alive. I'm going to go down to Egypt and see him before I die.

Seeing Joseph is the one thing that makes this journey meaningful for Jacob. But that just isn't the focus in these verses, is it?

First detail we're given in verse 28 is that Judah was the leader and he's sent ahead. He's assumed the leadership of the family in the next generation and his task, we're told, was to lead them in Goshen.

And they came, verse 28, to the land of Goshen. Yes, Joseph rides out to meet Jacob. And yes, there is a great reunion. And Jacob's hopeless lament at last, as one writer says, is turned into a *tranquil nunc dimittis*.

Now let me depart in peace. But there's just one and a half verses of that. That's all. Compare that to the long and the involved accounts of the great reunions with Joseph brothers.

[16:41] Quite different. Now you see, the focus is all on something else. Can you see it? I tried to emphasize as I was reading. Go through the text with a highlighter, as I did, and mark up all the references to the land of Goshen.

Do you see? Three times there. Verses 28 and 29. Then again, verse 34. And in chapter 45, verse 1, verse 4, and verse 5.

And then again, called Ramesses in verse 11. That's the later name known in Moses' day. Eight times in all, the land of Goshen. And Joseph seems fixated on it, doesn't he?

In verses 31 to 34, he's coaching his brothers what they have to say to Pharaoh to ensure that they'll be able to go and live in the land of Goshen. Goshen was up there in the East Nile Delta, quite some distance from Memphis and the other cities where the pharaohs ruled from.

And look at verse 34. Don't you think it sounds extremely odd? Tell Pharaoh your shepherds and herdsmen when he asks. Ah, will that impress Pharaoh Joseph?

[17:53] Will that make a good impression on him of us? No, he says, herdsmen are an abomination to all Egyptians. What? What on earth would make you introduce your family to Pharaoh and then say, but you don't want to get too closely involved with these folk because they're really rather an infradig bunch?

It's most peculiar, isn't it? Well, you see, Joseph is doing that precisely so that so that Pharaoh will say, well, yes, it's lovely to meet your family, but I'm sure Joseph is right and it really ought to be off with the country for you lot to live, off to the countryside.

Let's not really go into that urban multicultural experiment after all. That's what the whole thing is designed to do and that's exactly what happens.

They go to Pharaoh, as we're told. They say exactly what Joseph had told them. Joseph drops the hint in verse 1. Oh, by the way, Pharaoh, they're already in Goshen. And verse 6, the brothers say their peace.

And Pharaoh issues his command. And so, verse 11, the whole Israelite clan is settled together in the land of Ramesses in Goshen, just as Pharaoh had commanded.

[19:09] You have to hand it to Joseph. He's quite a smart operator, isn't he? He knows how to handle his boss. And by the way, that's just another little incident here that shows us that somebody who really understands the sovereign purposes of God is not slow to take decisive action himself to pursue godly plans and ambitions.

If you go back to chapter 45, verses 5 to 7, you'll see that Joseph knows full well about God's sovereignty. He knows that God is at work in all of this. And that's why he, therefore, is hard at work in all of this to do all that he can to further God's clear purposes.

When you understand truly the sovereignty of God, it never leads to indolence. It leads to industry. When God is at work, we're at work. But why is Joseph so keen to settle his family in the land of Goshen?

Well, because he is determined to protect them by a degree of separation. Separation from the pagan culture and religion of the Egyptians.

Because he knows that God's people must be a separated people. Think back all the way through the story of the patriarchs. It's been one great battle, hasn't it, against the repeated threats to God's promise, to his covenant, to his promised seed.

[20 : 36] Now, sometimes those threats have been the threat of annihilation. Physical threats from outside, from enemies, from things like famine, from barrenness, things that would destroy the people of God.

But very often, also, it's been a much more subtle, but just as deadly threat, not of annihilation, but of assimilation. Assimilation into the culture roundabout that would end up utterly destroying the distinctiveness of God's people.

So they totally lose their identity and just become like the rest of the world. Remember the Shechemites back in chapter 34? Come, marry with us, they said. Trade with us.

Become one people with us. Remember chapter 38 with Judah, who virtually became a pagan Canaanite himself. That's why God had to so brutally rescue him.

Go back through Genesis and you'll see it was a perennial threat to the promise. Abraham was determined that he would not succumb to that.

[21 : 46] Remember chapter 24 when he was old? Don't take my son back to that pagan land, he said. Don't ever let my son Isaac marry one of those pagan Canaanites.

And that's what Joseph is expressing here too. He knows that God had sent him ahead of his people to preserve a remnant of God's people on earth.

A remnant, by the way, doesn't mean a small number. It never means that in the Bible. Jacob is very clear. Joseph is clear. It's for the saving of many lives. It's a great number. Not a small people, but it is and must be a distinct people.

God had called his people to inherit a holy place. And he called them to be a holy people.

A people set apart. That's what holiness is. Distinctiveness. Distinctly set apart because of their calling to a holy God. And so even in Egypt, they needed a temporary home that reflects the distinctiveness of their permanent home.

[22 : 57] That's true for all sojourning people, isn't it? God's people are to remain distinctive. Then their lives must be protected by a certain set of partners.

A certain holiness. Moses knew that. The first people to have read or heard these words were Moses' people about to reenter Canaan, a land full of pagan Canaanites.

That's why he constantly reminded them who they were and whose they were. They were a holy people set apart for God. God had said to Abraham in Genesis 17, walk before me and be blameless.

And so Moses constantly was saying to his people, you shall be holy for I, the Lord, your God, am holy. Let's read Leviticus 19, for example.

And Jesus knew that. He called and he still calls his people to follow him and to join a distinct people. A people marked out from the rest of the world by baptism and set apart from that world for holiness.

[24 : 08] Not less holiness than the ancient people of God, but even greater distinctiveness. I didn't come, says Jesus, to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them.

And so in the same way, let your light shine in the world. Let your bright light of holiness be seen. You be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Just read Matthew chapter 5. And you see, Joseph is determined to protect his people's holiness, that they should not be assimilated, not conformed to the world around, so that the salt of the earth would be no good for anything, but its light would just be utterly extinguished.

and in just the same way, the Lord Jesus is protective of his church's distinctiveness. He's determined that it will be separated from every influence of falsehood and of idolatry, that it'll never be unequally yoked with unbelief.

Read 2 Corinthians 6. We'll come to it soon, no doubt, in our evening studies. Paul couldn't be clearer. He's not saying, of course, he's not saying that the church is to be coming right out of the world, as though there could be a total physical separation from any mixing, of course not.

[25 : 32] Paul's absolutely explicit about that. 1 Corinthians 5, for example, he's very plain. And sometimes Christians have got confused, they've thought that, and they've sought a wrong kind of exclusivity, utterly separate from the world.

Of course, that's the road to cultism. Now, he's not saying that, but what he is saying is that God's people must be distinctive. They must be holy in all their thinking, in all their behavior, in all their practice.

And it must guard that holiness, that wholesomeness, or else it'll soon just become indistinguishable from the world. But strangers, sojourners in this world can't be suitors of this world.

Now, Peter's concern is just the same in his letters. As he who called you is holy, he says, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it's written, you be holy for I am holy.

Beloved, he says, I urge you as sojourners and exiles, abstain from the passions of the flesh. Or Paul, walk as children of light, he says in Ephesians 5, take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness.

[26 : 53] Do you see? Joseph was protective of the covenant people's holiness. He knew they had to remain a separated people. And so he fought for them to have the land of Goshen.

Still in Egypt, not utterly apart, and yet separate enough to continue to be God's distinctive witnesses on earth.

And you know, he didn't care if that meant that the Egyptians rather looked down their noses at God's people and disdained them as something of an abomination or reproach.

What does Hebrews chapter 13 say? that we Christians are called to go to Jesus outside the camp bearing the reproach he endured.

Why? For here we have no lasting city. We're sojourners. We can't assimilate. I wonder if we think enough in the church today, in our Christian lives today, about this Goshen principle.

[28 : 07] Are we so fiercely protective of the church's real distinctiveness, of our own real distinctiveness? Well, we need to be just as Joseph was, just as Jesus is.

But separation does not mean isolation or isolationism. That's clear from verses 12 to 27 which are all about a saving purpose.

a saving purpose for God's people during Israel's exile in Egypt. And the emphasis here is all on Joseph's provision for Israel's health.

God's purposes for the family of Israel in Egypt was not their harm but their health and their blessing. And also so that they would bring health and blessing to the Egyptians through their being there.

That's what's so clearly shown in these verses. First, if you look at verse 12 and verse 27, they bracket this whole section. And they show, don't they, how God was with his people in their time of exile to bless them and to prosper them just as he had promised.

[29 : 21] All their needs were provided for through Joseph, says verse 12, enough for the whole clan and all their dependents, even in the midst of famine. Look at verse 27. They gained possessions, they were fruitful, they multiplied greatly.

Your offspring will be like the dust of the earth. That was God's promise, wasn't it, to Jacob all those years ago at Bethel. And here it is being fulfilled now most wonderfully in Egypt of all places, just as God had reaffirmed to Jacob in verse 3 of chapter 46, as he made that journey down in fear and intrepidity.

What looked like it must be surely a huge setback for the people of God, forced out of the promised land. In fact, it becomes the very means of great and abundant blessing.

But we're getting used to that pattern in the Bible, aren't we? Remember Acts chapter 8? Begins, doesn't it, with a great scattering of persecution of the infant church from Jerusalem, with Paul, Saul, then, breathing out fire and brimstone.

Yet the very next chapter of Acts 9 ends with these words, so the church throughout all Judea and Samaria was built up and multiplied. Or later on when Paul was imprisoned, and yet it turns out, says Paul, for the furtherance of the gospel, even the whole imperial guard in Rome have heard the gospel because I've been imprisoned.

[31 : 01] The pattern, you see, in God's hands, every trial, every frustration, every exile, may seem a terrible hindrance in our eyes.

It has a saving purpose, not for our harm, but for our spiritual health, for our blessing. I wonder if we really believe that.

It's so hard, isn't it, to see that sort of thing clearly when we're in the midst of it. But read Peter's letters again. Yes, he says, we're grieved by many trials, we feel like exiles, like strangers, but we're being guarded, he says, just as Israel was guarded in Egypt.

We're being guarded, kept for a great salvation, and the result of it will be praise and honor and glory of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

It's for our blessing. And Peter says, it's for the growth of Christ's church. Remember in his second letter, we're saying, how long, oh Lord, till you end all this, until you come?

[32 : 06] And Peter says, he's not, he's not slow, as you think. He's patient. He's leaving time for many to repent.

He's multiplying his church, his people, and doing it throughout our exile. As people come to faith in Jesus Christ all over this whole world.

I wonder how often we really think about the struggles of our earthly sojourning in that way. Seeing God's purpose being fulfilled through it all for our blessing and for the blessing of others.

That's what's so clearly being demonstrated here. in these verses. Look at verses 13 to 26. The presence of Israel's family in Egypt was an almighty blessing to Pharaoh and to all the population of that land.

In your offspring, God had said to Abraham, will all the families of the earth be blessed? That was what God said also to Jacob. And now it's happening.

[33 : 15] Look at Pharaoh. Pharaoh. We're told in verses 8 and verse 10 that he receives the specific blessing of God from Jacob.

Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Now that is no empty gesture. Jacob is God's anointed prophet and priest on the earth. He is the promised seed of blessing.

And when he blesses, the recipient is blessed. And the result is very clear in all these verses that follow. We read it. All the money in Egypt and Canaan, verse 14, comes to Pharaoh through Joseph.

Then verse 17, all the livestock and all the land, verse 20, and alas, all the people become his servants. God's blessing is upon him because he has blessed God's people.

I will bless those who bless you, was the promise God gave to the patriarchs. And God is putting power here and concentrating it into the hands of a ruler who is the protector of his people.

[34 : 28] That's something we should all as Christians be praying for always, isn't it? That God would put power into the hands of rulers who will protect his people, who will protect his covenant purpose in the world, who will get peace so that the gospel of Christ can be proclaimed in this world.

That's what Paul tells us to pray for in 1 Timothy 2, doesn't it? So Pharaoh is blessed, but also the people of Egypt are blessed. Do you see? It's true, they pay a heavy price in their goods and their lands and their labor, but the emphasis is not on misfortune coming to them.

The emphasis is all that this is good fortune. It's their health, it's their well-being that's being preserved by Joseph. After all, they had seven years also in which they could have saved up to provide for the famine as Joseph had.

They too could have put aside their corn as he did. John Calvin is right point out to say that they paid just penalty for their negligence and now they needed a bailout.

Very contemporary, isn't it? The whole world today needs bailouts. But unlike many today, actually, they're very grateful for their bailout. They're not on the streets rioting. Look at verse 25.

[35 : 45] You have saved our lives. And in fact, if you look at verse 23, they really got quite a generous and compassionate deal.

Joseph gives them all free grain, free seed to sow. Thereafter, he demands only 20% of their produce, all the rest they can keep.

So they're hardly slaves, certainly not communism. It's really more like a start-up grant for business followed by a flat tax of just 20%, a great stimulus to the whole economy.

I would have thought perhaps George Osborne ought to read this. He certainly needs some help.

Or Mr. Balls. Although I guess probably Mr. Balls would want the 80-20 split the other way around. But regardless of these details, the main point is clear, isn't it?

The Egyptians are being blessed, blessed abundantly, king and people by this family being in their midst.

[36 : 47] And you see, it's when God's people are in the right place and they're distinctive, not forgetting who they are, when they're focused above all on the furtherance of God's covenant purpose, the gospel purpose of God in the world, it's then that they prove to be the greatest blessing to the world.

In all sorts of ways, including blessing the world with all kind of temporal and material blessings. You just need to read the history of our own nation here.

Go back to the 17th and the 18th century. You will see that it was the great evangelical awakening of those times that led to the influence of men like Wilberforce, the Clapham sect, the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, and plenty, plenty others that led to great social reforms, great medical discoveries, and many, many other blessings which we still benefit from today.

And that's what we see here in God's saving purpose for Israel's exile, a people who are blessed themselves and a people who are blessing the world in which they live.

And when you look, you see, at the bookends and the center of the passage, the bread, as I've called it, that holds it all together, when you look at Jacob's words, both his words to Joseph and to Pharaoh, we can see that indeed it was certainly the great concerns of God's covenant and its future, and indeed the concerns of eternity that very much were at the heart of everything that's going on here.

[38 : 30] It's not merely temporal things. That's made so clear in this final scene, verses 29 to 31, which centers on this sworn promise, Joseph's promise for Israel's hope beyond exile.

These last few verses are really describing the high point of Jacob's whole life and pilgrimage, his personal sojourn on the earth. death. That's certainly how the New Testament views it.

In Hebrews 11 verse 21, it's just one verse that covers the whole of Jacob's life, and it focuses on his life's end, when he blessed his sons and when he blessed his God, bowing in worship on the head of his staff, as it says.

That's almost certainly how we should translate it here. See, all through this passage, Jacob's words are focused on death and on the transience of his earthly sojourning.

Indeed, since the end of chapter 37, all he's ever spoken of seems to be about death. But after the great turning point in chapter 45, his bitterness and his sorrow has given way to words of fulfillment, words of hope.

[39 : 47] You see it in chapter 46 and verse 30 in his nunc demittis, if you like. Now let me die, since I've seen your face and know that you're still alive, he says to Joseph.

We could almost borrow Peter's words, couldn't we, and say that old Jacob was born again into a living hope by the resurrection of Joseph from the dead. See, he doesn't fear death any longer or want to stave it off.

He's got no need any longer to cling, as it were, to his earthly life. He's satisfied because because he's seen Joseph and because through that experience, his hope in God's great covenant promise to him has been restored.

a wonderful thing, isn't it, when you see aged saints who are ready, ready to go to be with the Lord. They're not desperately clinging on to earthly life as though that's all it is, the way secular people do. A friend of mine in the States was telling me recently that his father at the age of 97 has employed a full-time fitness and life coach professional who trains an American football team to train him and keep him fit and keep him going because he's so desperate to cling on to his life and not to die.

[41 : 16] You see, Jacob, in his old age, has got a living hope. But his hope is not in his own life or in the quality of his own life or its length or its circumstances.

Not at all. That's absolutely clear, isn't it, from the words he says to Pharaoh. You see verse 9? Pharaoh's very interested in Joseph's great age. The Egyptians were desperately trying to cling on to life and prolong life and even preserve life after death by mummification and all that sort of thing. Just like rich people today get into cryopreservation and self-cloning and all sorts of other ridiculous things. So he's interested in this old, old man. But Jacob is blunt.

No, he says, few and evil have been the days of my life. Hard, distressing, pained, grief-stricken. Well, we've seen it, haven't we? It was a life punctuated by great and marvelous experiences of God. And yet it was marked in the main temptation by trouble and struggle and strife.

[42 : 30] Not so very unfamiliar to many of us, is it? And yet despite this, Jacob is the bearer of great blessing, even to this mighty king Pharaoh.

He recognizes there's nothing in himself to bring blessing or to give hope, either now or in the future. fear. So where does this hope spring from? It can give him such peace at the end of his life, such self-forgetfulness so that he could be a blessing giver now, not a blessing stealer as he once was.

Where does it come from? Well, it's so clear, isn't it, just in these last verses, 28 to 31. Jacob's hope is all, all in the promise of God.

Notice, by the way, that little detail in verse 28. Jacob lived on in Egypt 17 years, the same number of years he'd lived with his beloved son Joseph before he was taken away from him. What kindness there is there, God restoring to him the years, the locusts had eaten. It's worth remembering, isn't it? God doesn't lose interest in you when you're over 130, never mind when you're over 70.

[43 : 44] Isn't that encouraging? He's a kind God. He loves to bless and to honor his aged saints, and so should we, by the way, those who are younger.

Did you see verse 29? Put your hand under my thigh, he says. It's a deliberate imitation of his grandfather Abraham in his old age when he made his servant do exactly the same thing and swear to him.

His concern also was for the future of the covenant promise. In that case, it was an oath about a wife for his son. But here it's just the same. Jacob's concern is for his place in God's covenant. Don't bury me in Egypt when I die. Take me back to the promised land where I belong. And he makes his son swear. He's got to be sure. See, Jacob's action shows, doesn't it, that he believed God's promise to him, that he would take him back to the place where he belonged.

All his hope was in God's promise for his future. And not only a future beyond Israel's earthly exile in Egypt, but a future beyond his own exile on earth as a sojourner.

[44 : 59] And nothing, but nothing, would cause him to give up his stake in the permanent real estate of which the land of Canaan was but a down payment, but a deposit for that better country, for that city with foundations that God had promised to his people forever.

He knew, you see, he knew that the time was coming when he would no longer be a sojourner, but when he would live bodily with his God forever.

He knew, as Abraham knew, that his God was able to keep that promise to him, even if it meant having to raise him from his grave.

So, you see, Jacob's sworn promise is all about Jacob's hope and Israel's hope beyond exile, beyond every exile, for bodily life in the presence of their God.

Jacob shows here the true stature of a man of faith. he's asserting his identity, saying, I'm just a sojourner, I'm frail, I'm dying, I'm a stranger in exile here.

[46 : 14] But as Hebrews 11 says, people who speak like that make it clear that they're seeking a homeland. And Jacob wanted his own funeral to testify to all his family and to all Egypt, to testify to the God to whom his life belonged, and with whom his future was going to be bound up forever and ever.

It's a great challenge to us, I think, in that. Will your funeral and my funeral give such clear testimony to that, to what has really been of overriding importance in our life, in our earthly sojourn? Not just the things of our earthly sojourn, the things that we've acquired, the things that we've achieved, those will all fade away into dust just like our bones will. But the faith and the trust and the promise of God that kept our eyes always on the place that is our true home, ensuring our stake in that glorious future.

Is that what our funeral will focus on? Your funeral, you know, will be one of your greatest opportunities for witness, because it'll be your whole life speaking and everyone will know it. Showing where the heart of your life always really was. Won't be any faking it then. John Calvin says of Jacob, it's a proof of great courage that none of the wealth or the pleasures of Egypt could so allure him as to prevent him from sighing for the land of Canaan, in which he'd always passed a painful and laborious life.

[47 : 58] Why so? Because as Hebrews 11 says, all these men were looking for the reward for the city without foundations. And he was determined that even when he died, his funeral would preach that gospel to all.

people. What message will my funeral, your funeral, proclaim? It's a thought worth keeping in our minds, isn't it?

Because it'll help us to keep clear through our earthly sojourn where our hope really is. is it? Is it in the days of our sojournings, their length and their circumstances?

Or is it in the promise of God who raises the dead? It's a challenge, but it's also a great comfort to old Jacob nearing his end. But even a lifetime lived in difficulty, many sorrows and struggles, so that its days seemed few and evil, that it can be so redeemed by God's grace that it reaches its zenith, its greatest display of faith, even nearing its end.

By faith, Jacob, when he was dying, bowed in worship over the head of his staff. It's never too late. Never too late for those who will have faith and bow their head and their heart and their life to the God of covenant mercy made known in Christ.

[49 : 30] Never too late. And that's where our chapter ends. Jacob bowing his head in prayer to the God who had been present with him to protect him, to provide for all his earthly pilgrimage, and whose promise had given him hope to the end, hope of a future.

I don't know what Jacob prayed there in the silence. On my guess is, it was something like this. Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father. There is no shadow of turning with thee. Thou changest not. Thy compassions, they fail not.

As thou hast been, thou forever will be. Great is thy faithfulness. It's hard sometimes, isn't it, being a follower of Jesus.

We do feel like strangers in a strange land. But we too have a hope. We have a sworn promise. Indeed, we have a better hope and a better promise for a certain permanent home in the Father's house, better even than Jacob had.

[50 : 54] A sworn promise sealed not in Joseph's words, but sealed in Jesus' blood. Isn't that the message of the table that we're about to gather around now?

So as we come, let's join Jacob in worship. as we think of our life and God's faithfulness in the past and his promise still for the future.

And let's sing together the words of number 258. Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father. God's faithfulness, O inertia, O God, and Lord, and honourable trueness in Hebrew.

Christ is your Holy dobry ■ Xiang ■ ■