

Strangers in a Strange Land

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Date: 23 February 2025

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[0 : 00] But let's turn now to our Bible reading for this evening, and Willie is continuing his series in Genesis. We do have plenty of visitor Bibles available.

If you don't have a Bible with you, please do grab one of those at the side or at the back. And turn with me to Genesis and chapter 46, page 40, if you have one of the visitor Bibles.

And we're picking up the reading towards the end of chapter 46, verse 28. So Genesis 46, I'm reading 28.

He 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.

[1 : 14] Israel said to Joseph, now let me die, since I've 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.

And 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 we 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.

[2 : 29] They said to Pharaoh, we have come to sojourn in the land, for there's 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.

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 as 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 my years of my sojourning are 130 years.

Few and evil 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 and the days of their sojourning. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh.

[3 : 37] Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, of the land of Ramesses, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's house with food, according to the number of their dependents.

Now 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 had brought.

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? 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.

[4 : 51] 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 is 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.

And 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.

[5 : 58] Now here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. And at the harvests, you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh. And four fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field, and as food for yourselves and your household, 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 a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day that Pharaoh should have the fifth.

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 possession in it, and were fruitful, and multiplied greatly.

And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt 17 years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 years.

And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh, and promise to deal kindly and truly with me.

[7 : 06] Do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie 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 staff.

Well, may God bless his word to us this evening. We'll turn there to Genesis, the end of chapter 46 and chapter 47.

My title this evening comes from that of a book of pastoral letters by the late Tom Swanson of Inverness.

It's called A Stranger in a Strange Land. And it was called that because it speaks very eloquently of the common experience, which is that of God's people in every age, of feeling that we live as aliens, as exiles in a world that's not our own.

[8 : 10] Tom, by the way, was a wonderful preacher. He was a great musician. We sing some of his hymn tunes sometimes. He was a massive personality. But he lived with terrible rheumatoid disease, and he died very prematurely of some of those horrible complications.

But I do recommend that book. I recommend any of his recordings you can find. He was a great preacher, great to listen to. But what the title of that book expresses is a great biblical truth.

I believe that we are all but sojourners, pilgrims, and we're on the way to our true and lasting home.

But this is not our home. And certainly that's what Israel's time in Egypt was to be, a time of sojourning. And they knew it. You can see the key word there in verse 4 of chapter 47.

We've come to sojourn in the land. God had promised long ago to Abraham back in Genesis 15, your offspring will be sojourners in a land not their own.

[9 : 11] And he foretold the affliction, the struggles that that would bring. And now God has commanded Jacob 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 remember with that great promise, I will be with you and I will bring you up again into the land of promise. He'll be with them in their sojourn, and he will bring them back at last to their true home.

And yet this very passage also makes clear that there's a much deeper sense in which God's people are sojourners. Look at chapter 47, verse 9. Jacob there calls the whole of his life a sojourning on the earth, just as the lives of his fathers had been sojourning, even in the land of Canaan.

So indeed Canaan itself was often called the land of their sojournings. You see it in chapter 37, verse 1, the very beginning of this whole story. Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.

So even in the land of Canaan, that was not their permanent home. And they knew that. And the New Testament makes that very explicit. The patriarchs acknowledge that they were strangers and exiles on this earth.

[10 : 28] That's what Hebrews 11, verse 13 says. They were all men who were seeking a true homeland in a better country, a heavenly one. And that is 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. It just reads Peter's first letter. It's all about our lives as elect exiles. It's about how we're to live as sojourners and exiles on earth until that permanent home is revealed at last.

He says, in the last time. But 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 to be followers of Jesus today, very often in hostile cultures, in alien cultures. But it always has been. And that's why Peter wrote his letters.

That's why Moses wrote these chapters too. So that each subsequent generation of God's people will not lose heart. Yes, they'll see it's hard, but it's not impossible. Because God is with his people.

[11 : 36] Always. As he promised to be. As he proved to be with Jacob's family in Egypt. Way back then. In such a wonderful way. He was present to bless his people all along the way. And to bring blessing through his people to the world along the way.

And these things, the Apostle Paul says, are written therefore for our encouragement. So that we also, in the midst of, well, the feelings of isolation and loneliness and strugglings in our sojourning, so that we also might have hope.

Hope that will lead us, like Jacob, to bow in worship and glad thanksgiving. As we look back on our lifetime and as we look forward to our future in the hands of a good and gracious God, who is our hope, just as he was for Jacob.

So let's look at how God's provision and protection keeps his precious people through their sojournings as strangers in a strange land. And see if we're not encouraged when we see the persistent pattern of the God who has promised to give us all that we need for our life and for our godliness until the very day dawns, until the last star of glory arises in our heart, as Peter says.

And we too will greet our eternal home. Now look at the passage. It's structured. Phil Copeland will like this. Great to see you here tonight, Phil. This is structured rather like a jumbo sandwich.

[12 : 57] So it's got two fillings. It's got bread right in the middle and on either side. So it begins and ends with Jacob and Joseph talking about life and about death and especially about the future beyond this earthly life.

And then right in the middle, verses 7 to 9 of chapter 47, Jacob also is talking about his life, his sojourning in that way. And then on either side, there's a section of meat that focuses on the present life of God's people in exile in Egypt in their time of sojourning.

So we'll look at the meat first, then we'll look at the bread that holds it all together. We've got three headings. First of all, the separated people in exile, then the saving purpose of their exile, and then the sworn promise beyond exile.

And in each case, we see Joseph as the Savior that God has set before his people to protect them, to provide for them. So as to bring about everything that he's promised for this family and through this family, for the world.

So first of all, look at chapter 46, verse 28 down to chapter 47, verse 11. And the text here is very clearly wanting us to see a separated people.

[14 : 07] The emphasis here is on Joseph's protection for Israel's holiness. Now I don't know about you, but what struck me as we read these verses was just how little attention is given to the great reunion between Jacob and Joseph.

The last verse of chapter 45 had Jacob saying, Joseph, my son is alive. I will go down and see him before I die. So seeing Joseph is the main thing in his mind.

It's the whole reason for his journey. But that just isn't the focus of the writer here. First detail we're given there, by the way, is in verse 28, that Judah was now the leader of the exposition because he's now assumed leadership of this family.

And his task was to show the way to Goshen. And verse 28, they came to the land of Goshen. And yes, Joseph rides out to meet Jacob. There is a great reunion.

And Jacob's hopeless laments at last, says one commentator, are turned into a tranquil nunc dimittis. But there's only a verse and a half about that, do you see?

[15 : 13] Compare that to all the long and involved accounts that we had of Joseph's reunion with his brothers. But all the focus here is on something else. Can you see? You go through with a highlighter as I've done.

If you mark up all the references to the land of Goshen, you'll see it. You see, three times there in verses 28 and verse 29. And again in verse 34. And then in chapter 47, verse 1, verse 4, and verse 5.

And then again in verse 11 where it's called Rameses. That's the later name of Goshen. And Moses, there's eight times in all the land of Goshen. And Joseph seems very fixated on it, doesn't he?

Verses 31 to 34, he coaches his brothers about what to say to Pharaoh to ensure that they'll get to go and live there in Goshen. It's a way up on the eastern Nile Delta.

It's a long way north of Memphis and the great cities where the Pharaohs lived and where they ruled from. And don't you think verse 34 there sounds really odd?

[16 : 12] Tell Pharaoh your shepherds, your herdsmen. Ah, will Pharaoh be very impressed with that, Joseph? Will that make a very good impression on him? No, herdsmen are an abomination to Egyptians.

What? Why would we want to tell your family that then? Why would you want to tell Pharaoh that they're all an abomination? That you don't want to get too closely involved with this crowd because they're a pretty inferior smelly bunch.

Well, precisely so that Pharaoh will say, yes, lovely to meet you, but I'm sure Joseph's right, and off to the land of Goshen, off to the country with you.

Let's not try this urban multicultural experiment at all. Goodbye. That's what he wants and that is exactly what happens. Off they go. Then they go to Pharaoh, Joseph drops his hint there in verse 1.

He says, they're in Goshen already. And then the brothers say their peace. And then verse 6, the Pharaoh takes his bait and he issues his command. And so we end up in verse 11 with the whole Israelite clan settled together in the land of Rameses, in Goshen, just as Pharaoh has commanded.

[17 : 29] Now you have to hand it to Joseph, don't you? He's quite a shrewd operator. He knows how to handle his boss, the king. And by the way, this is just another instance, isn't it, that shows us that a man who really understands that God is sovereign isn't going to be slow to take decisive action himself to pursue godly plans and ambition.

If you go back and read chapter 45 verses 5 to 7 again, you'd see that Joseph knows full well that God is at work in all of this, but that's therefore why he is at work confidently with all his might to do what he can do to further God's clear purposes.

God's sovereignty and understanding God's sovereignty never, ever leads to indolence. It leads to industry among his people. But here's the question, why is Joseph so concerned to settle his people in Goshen, in Goshen, in Goshen?

Well, it's because he's determined to protect them by a degree of separation from the pagan Egyptian culture, from their religions, because he knows that God's people must be a separated people.

Remember that all the way through the story of the patriarchs, there's been a battle, hasn't it, against repeated threats to the covenant people, repeated threats to the promised seed. Sometimes the threat's been that of annihilation, of physical threats from without, from enemies, or like famine here, or barrenness, or whatever.

[18 : 58] But sometimes, and often, in fact, the threat has been much more subtle. It's been a deadly threat of assimilation. Assimilation into the culture round about that would end up utterly destroying anything distinctive about God's people.

So they just become part of the world around them, indistinguishable. Remember back in chapter 34, the Shechemites, what did they say? Come and marry with us, trade with us, become one with us.

Remember, Judah, back in chapter 38, how he virtually had become one with the Canaanites. And God had to brutally rescue him from there. Go back through Genesis, and you will see that was a perennial threat to God's promise.

Abraham, remember, was determined it would not be so back in chapter 24. Don't take my son back to that pagan land. Don't ever marry my son to a pagan Canaanite.

And that is exactly what Joseph is ensuring here. He knows that God has sent him ahead of his family to preserve, do you remember, a remnant on earth of the people of God.

[20 : 06] A remnant never means a small number, by the way, in the Bible. Joseph is very clear, it's for the saving of many, a multitude of lives. But it does mean always a very distinct people.

And God has called his people to inherit a holy place. And so he's called them to be a holy people. A people who are set apart.

That's what holiness is, being set apart, distinctive, set apart to God for a holy calling. And so even in Egypt, they needed a temporary home there that reflects the distinctiveness of their true home.

And that's true for all sojourning people still. Because people are to remain distinctive, then their lives have to be protected, don't they, by a certain set apartness.

That is by holiness. Moses knew that. The people who first heard these words read to them were about to re-enter Canaan. And it was a land then full of pagan Canaanites.

[21 : 12] That's why he reminded them who they were. You are a holy people. Just as God had said to Abraham back in Genesis 17, walk before me and be blameless. And so Moses said to them again and again, you shall be holy because the Lord your God is holy.

Moses knew that. Jesus knew that. He called, and he still calls his people to follow him, to join a distinct people, a people marked out as separate by baptism, set apart from the world for holiness.

Not less holiness now than the ancient people of Israel, but far greater distinctiveness. I didn't come to abolish the law and the prophets said Jesus, but to fulfill them.

So, in the same way, let your light shine in the world. Let your light be a bright light of holiness. You be perfect, even as your heavenly father is perfect.

see, Joseph was determined to protect Israel's holiness so that they wouldn't be assimilated, so they wouldn't be conformed to the world around, so that the salt of the earth wouldn't become no good for anything, so the light of the world wouldn't become exterminated.

[22 : 30] And in just exactly the same way, Jesus is protective of his church's distinctiveness. He's determined that it will be separated from every influence of falsehood, of idolatry, that it will never be unequally yoked with unbelief.

Read Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 6, for example, he could not be clearer. Not saying, of course, that the church has to come totally out of the world, total physical separation from any mixing at all in the world, of course not.

Paul's just as clear about that elsewhere, for example, in 1 Corinthians 5. Sometimes Christians have thought of that, haven't they? They've chased the wrong kind of exclusivity, totally.

And that often is the road to cultism. That's not what he's saying, but what he is saying is that God's people must be distinctive, they must be holy in all their thinking, in their behavior, and in their practice.

And it must guard, the church must guard that holiness, that true wholesomeness. Because if it doesn't, very soon it will be just utterly indistinguishable from the world.

[23 : 38] Strangers, sojourners in this world cannot be suitors of the world. Peter, the apostle's concern, is exactly the same in his letters.

As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, just as it's written, you shall be holy, for I am holy. Beloved, I urge you, he says, as sojourners, exiles, abstain from the passions of the flesh.

Paul, the apostle, is the same, walk as children of light, take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, and on, and on, and on. So you see, Joseph was protective of the covenant people's holiness.

He knew that they had to remain a separated people, and that's why he fought for them to have the land of Goshen, still in Egypt, not utterly apart, and yet separate enough to be God's distinctive witness on earth.

And, notice, he didn't care if that meant the Egyptians looked down their noses at them, disdained them as something of an abomination, a reproach.

[24 : 49] What does Hebrews chapter 13 say? that we as Christians are called to go to Jesus. We're outside the camp, bearing the reproach that he endured, for here, we have no enduring city.

We cannot assimilate to this world. I wonder if we think about that enough in the church today, in our Christian lives today.

But it's a biblical principle, this Goshen principle. And we need to be fiercely protective of the church's real distinctiveness, of our own real distinctiveness in the world.

We need to be, don't we, as Joseph was, and as Jesus is. But notice, separation doesn't mean isolation or isolationism. And that's clear, I think, from verses 12 to 27, which are all about a saving purpose.

A saving purpose during their exile in Egypt. And the emphasis you see here is all on Joseph's provision for Israel's health. God's purpose for the family of Israel in Egypt wasn't their harm, but it was their health, it was their blessing, and it was to bring health and blessing to the Egyptians through them.

[26 : 07] them. And that's so clearly shown, I think, in these verses. Look at verse 11 and 12 and verse 27. They're the brackets around this whole section and they show how God was with His people in their time of exile in Egypt to bless them and to prosper them just as He had promised.

Verse 12, all their needs were provided for through Joseph. Do you see? Enough food for the whole clan, all its dependents. And look at verse 27. They gained possessions.

They were fruitful. They multiplied greatly. Your offspring, says the Lord, will be like the dust of the earth.

That was God's promise, wasn't it, to Jacob all those years ago in Bethel. And here it is being fulfilled most wonderfully in Egypt of all places. But God had reaffirmed that to him, hadn't he, in chapter 46, verse 3, as he made his journey towards Egypt in fear, in trepidation.

And what looked like, it must be a huge setback for the people of God, forced out of the land of Canaan in famine, in fact, becomes the very means of their great blessing.

[27 : 22] But we're getting used to that pattern, aren't we? I mentioned Acts 8 the other week, remember? The great persecution of the church, the early church, scattered the church out of Jerusalem.

pursued by the zeal of Saul of Tarsus and others. And yet, the very next chapter of Acts tells us so, the church throughout all Judea and Samaria was built up and multiplied.

Later on in his mission, remember, Paul imprisoned, and yet what happened? It all turned out, he said, for the furtherance of the gospel, even among the imperial guard in the palatine room.

you see, in God's hands, every trial, every frustration, every exile, every hindrance in our eyes has a saving purpose.

It's not for our harm, but it's for our spiritual health, it's for our blessing. And again, it's so hard for us to believe that sometimes, isn't it?

[28 : 24] It's so hard to see clearly when we're in the midst of these struggles. But read Peter's letters again. They're full of them. Yes, he says, we're grieved by trials.

We do feel like exiles, like strangers. But the truth is, he says, we are being guarded, just as Israel was in Egypt, guarded for a great salvation.

And the result of all such trials, he says, will be praise and honor and glory at the revelation of the Lord Jesus. It's for our blessing. And, Peter says, it's for the growth of Christ's church.

Because we cry out and say, how long, O Lord? When will all of this end? But the apostle says, God's not slow, but he's patient. He's leaving time for many to repent.

He is multiplying people greatly for salvation through our exile. As people come in from the very ends of the earth to find salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[29 : 27] We want the Lord to come and end all the struggles. But as we're struggling and sojourning on, he is multiplying his church in numbers we cannot imagine.

I wonder how often we think about the struggles of our earthly sojourning in that way. Seeing that marvelous sovereign purpose of God in it for our blessing and for the blessing of others for the world.

for the world which is made far more healthy and blessed by the presence of the people of God in the midst. And that's what's so clearly demonstrated here.

Look at verses 13 to 26. It's the presence of Israel's family that is an almighty blessing to Pharaoh and indeed all of the Egyptians. What was the promise? In you and your offspring will all the families of the earth be blessed.

That was God's promise to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob at Bethel. Well, here it is happening again. Pharaoh is the recipient of God's specific blessing here through the patriarch Jacob.

[30 : 35] Do you see? Verse 8 and again verse 10. Twice we're told Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Now, that is not an empty gesture because Jacob is God's chosen anointed prophet, his anointed priest.

He is the promised seed of blessing. And whom he blesses is blessed by God. And we see the result clearly in the verses that follow. Verse 14.

All the money in Egypt and Canaan came to him, Pharaoh, through Joseph. And verse 17, all the livestock. And then all the land, verse 20.

And at last all the people, verse 21, become his servants. You see, God's blessing is upon him because he has blessed God's people. I will bless those who bless you, says the Lord.

And God is putting power into the hands of this ruler because he is a protector of God's people. Now, surely that is something that God's people should always pray for, isn't it?

[31 : 42] That God will put power into the hands of rulers who will protect his people, who will protect his purposes. In fact, Paul urges and commands that we pray exactly that thing for rulers in this world in 1 Timothy chapter 2, so that there will be peace for the gospel to flourish and to spread.

Well, we should thank God, shouldn't we, when God does that? And when rulers, well, we may not like the rulers, but when they protect God's people and protect God's ways, it's an answer to prayers of God's people.

But notice the people of Egypt are also blessed through Joseph's administration. True, they pay a heavy price in goods and lands and in their own labor.

They become servants of Pharaoh, but the emphasis all the way through here is not on that being misfortune, but being good fortune. It's their health, it's their well-being that is being preserved by Joseph.

After all, they'd had seven years, they could have saved up and provided for the famine as Joseph had. They too could have put aside corn, couldn't they? John Calvin notes they paid the just penalty for their negligence.

[32 : 50] Well, they ended up needing a bailout, like most of the world seems to want today. But unlike many today, here's the difference, the Egyptians are very grateful for their bailout. Verse 25, look, you have saved our lives.

And actually, they get a pretty generous and compassionate deal. Look at verse 23, Joseph gives them all free grain, free seed to sow, and thereafter, he demands only a 20% levy of their produce, so they're hardly slaves.

This is not communism, it's actually a healthy start-up grant, isn't it, followed by a flat tax of just 20%, which I think a lot of people would be very happy with today. A very great stimulus to the economy, I would think.

Maybe Rachel Reeves should be reading this, she certainly needs some ideas, although I think the 80-20 split she would prefer to have the other way around. But you see, regardless of these details, the main point is absolutely clear, the Egyptians were blessed, they were blessed abundantly, the king and the people, by having the family of Israel in the midst.

And you see, when God's people are in the right place, when they are distinctive, when they are not forgetting who they are, and when they're focused above all on the furtherance of the covenant purpose and plan of God, that is the gospel purposes of God in this world, it is then that they are the greatest blessing to the world, in all sorts of ways, including blessing the world with many temporal and material things.

[34 : 28] We can see that just in the history of our own nation. Go back a couple of hundred years to the evangelical great awakenings of the 18th century. The huge Christian influence that filtered into public life was absolutely unmistakable through people like William Wilberforce, the Clapham sect, the Earl of Shaftesbury, countless Christians that led to so many great social reforms, so many medical advances, so many things besides.

And that is exactly what we see here, you see, in God's saving purpose for Israel's exile. Here is a people blessed and blessing in the world. And when you come to look at the bookends, verses 28 to 30 of chapter 46, the beginning there, and verses 29 to 31 of chapter 47 at the end, and also the center of the passage in verses 7 to 10 in chapter 47, the bread if you like that holds it all together, Jacob's words both to Joseph and to Pharaoh, then we see that it was, it was the great concerns of the covenant of the future, indeed of eternity, that is at the very heart of everything here, not merely temporal things at all.

It's perhaps encapsulated most clearly in the final scene in verses 29 to 31, which centers on a sworn promise. You see, Joseph's promise for Israel's hope beyond exile.

And these last few verses here, they describe for us the high points of Jacob's whole life, his whole pilgrimage, his own sojourn here on the earth. That is certainly how the New Testament views it.

In Hebrews 11, there is just one verse, one verse devoted to Jacob's life, and it's this, his life's end, when he blesses his sons and blesses his God, bowing in worship on the head of his staff, as the footnote puts it.

[36 : 28] I think that's how we should translate it, that's how it's translated in the Greek New Testament and in Hebrews. All through this passage here, do you see how Jacob's words are focused on death, on the transience of his earthly sojourning?

In fact, since the end of chapter 37, everything he's talked about has been death, and his own death. But after that great turning point in chapter 45, when his bitterness, his sorrow gives way to great fulfillment and hope, everything changes.

And you see it in chapter 46, verse 30 there, now let me die since I've seen your face and I know that you're still alive. And he could have borrowed Peter's words in 1 Peter 1, where he could say that it's as if Jacob was born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Joseph from the dead to him.

He no longer fears death now, does he? He doesn't need to cling to his earthly life anymore. He's satisfied utterly because he's seen Joseph.

And through that experience, you see, his hope has been restored in the promise of God. It's wonderful, I think, when we see in our midst aged saints who are ready to go and be with the Lord, who are not desperately clinging on to earthly life.

[37 : 51] So many secular people are desperately clinging on, aren't they? A friend of mine in America, his father was 97. He employed a full-time personal trainer to try and keep him alive.

He was so desperate to be staving off death. This week, I was with Dick Lucas, 99 and a half, who kept saying to me, I'm in the departure line, brother. I don't know why I'm still here. He wants to go.

Because like Jacob, you see, these people have living hope. But his hope is not in his own life. It's not in the quality. It's not in the length or circumstances of his earthly life.

That's so clear, isn't it? In his words to Pharaoh, in verse 9 of chapter 47, Pharaoh's very interested in Jacob's great age. The Egyptians desperately clung to life. They tried to preserve it.

They tried to prolong it by mummification and all of these things. Like all these mega rich people today trying to cryo-preserve themselves and clone themselves and all these other ridiculous things.

[38 : 52] But notice how Jacob is so blunt. No, he says, few and evil have been the days of my life. Few and hard and distressing and pained and grief stricken.

And Jacob's life was a life punctuated, wasn't it, with great experiences of God. And yet it was marked in the main by great struggle, by strife, by grief. And that's not so unfamiliar to us, is it?

And yet, despite all of this, Jacob is a bearer of great blessing, even to this mighty king. He recognizes there's nothing in himself to bring blessing, to give hope, either now or in the future.

So where does his hope spring from? This hope that can give him such peace here at his life's end, such self-forgetfulness, so that he's a blessing giver now, even to kings.

He's not a blessing stealer. That's what he was once, remember? Well, it's so very clear. Look at these last verses, 28 to 31. Jacob's hope is all in the promise of God.

[40 : 03] By the way, notice the lovely little detail in verse 28 there. Jacob lived on in Egypt 17 years. Isn't that interesting? 17 years. The same number of years that he'd had Joseph living with him as a boy in Canaan until he'd lost him.

And God gave him another 17 years, restoring all those years that the locusts had eaten. He's so kind, isn't he, the God of Jacob?

It's a lovely verse that, because it reminds us that God doesn't lose interest in you, even when you're 130 years old, never mind when you're 75 years old. He's kind.

He loves to bless and honor the hoary head. And so should we. But look at verse 29, put your hand under my thigh and promise, he says to Joseph.

It's a deliberate imitation of Abraham. Do you remember in his old age when he made his servants swear just like that? Abraham's concern was all then about the covenant, about the promise, about the future.

[41 : 06] In his case, it was about a wife for Isaac, the chosen seed. And here it's just the same. You see, Jacob's great concern is for his place in that covenant. Don't bring me here, don't leave me here and bury me in Egypt when I die, he says.

Bury me with my fathers where I belong in the land of promise. And he makes Jacob swear, I've got to be absolutely sure. You see, Jacob's action shows that he believed God's promise to him back in chapter 46, verse 4, that God would bring him up again, remember?

Into the land. And all his hope is in the promise of that God for a future, not only a future beyond Israel's exile in Egypt, but a future beyond his own exile as a sojourner here on earth.

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

He knew, didn't he, that a time would come when he would no longer be just a sojourner, but he would live bodily before his God forever. He knew, just as Abraham knew, that his God was able to keep that promise, even if he must raise him up from the dead.

[42 : 38] And so Jacob's command to Joseph to swear, to promise, is all about his hope. It's all about Israel's hope beyond exile, beyond every exile, for bodily life in the presence of this God.

You see, Jacob shows his true statue here as a man of faith. He asserts his true identity. He says, I'm just a sojourner, I'm frail, I'm dying, I'm a stranger in exile here, but, as Hebrews 11 says, people who speak thus make clear that they are seeking a homeland, a permanent place.

And Jacob's saying here that he wants his funeral to testify to that, to his family, to all of Egypt, to testify to the God to whom his life belonged and with whom his future was bound up forever.

I think there's a great challenge to all of us there. We need to ask ourselves, will your funeral, will my funeral, will it give such a clear testimony as to what really was the thing of overriding importance in our life.

Not eulogies about the acquisitions we made, the achievements we made, all the things that we had or did in this earthly sojourn. Because all of that is going to fade to dust just like our bones will fade to dust.

[44 : 08] Isn't that so? But rather faith and trust in the promise of God that kept our eyes all always on the place that is our true home, always ensuring our stake in that glorious future at the expense of everything else.

Will that be the message of my funeral and yours? You know, our funerals will be one of the greatest opportunities for witness we will ever have in our life because it will be our whole life speaking.

It will be speaking most tellingly. It will be showing everybody where our true hope really was. We will not be able to fake 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 such a painful and laborious life.

Why so? Well, because as Hebrews 11 says, all these men of faith were looking to the reward, looking to the city of foundations. And he was determined that even when he died, his funeral was going to preach that gospel to all, his family and everybody else.

What message will your funeral proclaim? It's worth keeping in mind, I think, because it will help you to keep clear on where your hope really is, even now.

[45 : 39] is it in the days of your sojournings and their length and their circumstances? Or is it in the promise of the God who raises the dead to challenge?

But it is also a great comfort, isn't it, seeing old Jacob nearing his end? That even a lifetime lived in difficulty, with many sorrows, many struggles, so that days to him of his life seem just few and evil.

Nevertheless, that that life can be so redeemed by God's grace as to reach its zenith, its greatest display of faith, right at its very end. By faith, says Hebrews, Jacob, when he was dying, bowed in worship on the head of his staff.

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 ultimately forever to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's never too late. And that's where our chapter ends. Jacob's head bowed in prayer on his staff, on the symbol of his sojourning. And it is a sojourner's prayer, isn't it, to God who's been present with him, present with his family, to protect, to provide for them, all through his earthly pilgrimage.

[47 : 09] And his promise gave him hope right to the end. I don't know what Jacob prayed there in the silence, but my guess is it would have been something like this.

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father. There is no shadow of turning with thee. Thy change is not. Thy compassions, they fail not.

As thou hast been, thou forever will be. Great is thy faithfulness. It is hard. It is hard sometimes.

Being a follower of Jesus, we feel, and we will feel, friends, to the end, like strangers in a strange land. But we too have a hope. We too have a sworn promise.

Indeed, we have a better hope, and we have better promises of a certain permanent home in the Father's house, better even than Jacob had, because our sworn promise is sealed not in the words of Joseph, the son of Jacob, but it's sealed in the blood of Jesus, the Son of God.

[48 : 27] And great is his faithfulness. Let's pray. Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armor of light now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility, thee, that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen. Amen.