

54. The God of Hope and Help (2007)

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, we turn now to our Bible reading this morning, to the Scriptures, and back to the book of Genesis. And we're reading this morning in Genesis 45, from the middle of the chapter, verse 16, down to verse 27 of Genesis chapter 46.
- In the Church Visitors Bibles, I think it's page 39. Otherwise, it's very near the beginning of whatever Bible you happen to have. We pick up the story after Joseph has, at last, through all the tests and the trials of his brothers, has revealed himself to them for who he is.
- Not only the grand vizier of Egypt, but their long-lost brother, whom once they had sold into slavery. And chapter 45, verse 16, we're told, When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, Joseph's brothers have come.
- It pleased Pharaoh and his servants. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, Say to your brothers, Do this, lord your beasts, and go back to the land of Canaan, and take your father and your households, and come to me.
- And I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat the fat of the land. And you, Joseph, are commanded to say, Do this, take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come.
- [1 : 3 3] Have no concern for your goods, for the best things of all the land of Egypt are yours. So the sons of Israel did so. And Joseph gave them wagons, according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey.
- To each and all of them he gave a change of clothes. But to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five changes of clothes. To his father he sent as follows, ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provisions for his father on the journey.
- Then he sent his brothers away. And as they departed, he said to them, Do not quarrel on the way, or perhaps do not be stirred up, or do not be agitated on the way.
- So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan, to their father Jacob. And they told him, Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.
- And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.
- [2 : 5 7] And Israel said, It is enough. Joseph, my son, is still alive. I will go and see him before I die. So, Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.
- And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. Then he said, I am God, the God of your father.
- Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again.

And Joseph's hand shall close your own eyes. Then Jacob rose up from Beersheba. The sons of Israel carried Jacob, their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him.

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

[4 : 22] All his offspring he brought with him into Egypt. Now these are the names of the descendants of Israel who came into Egypt. Jacob and his sons, Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and the sons of Reuben, Hanach, Palu, Hezron, and Carmi.

The sons of Simeon, Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jechin, Johar, and Shal, the son of a Canaanite woman. The sons of Levi, Gershon, Kohath, and Mereri. The sons of Judah, Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah.

But Aaron, Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. The sons of Isaac, Tola, Puva, Job, and Shimon. The sons of Zebulun, Sered, Elon, and Jalil.

These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan Aram, together with his daughter Dinah. All together, his sons and his daughters numbered 33. The sons of Gad, Ziphion, Hagi, Shuni, Esbon, Eri, Aradi, and Erel.

The sons of Asher, Imna, Isfah, Ishvi, Beriah, with Sarah their sister and their sons of Beriah, Heber and Malkiel. These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah, his daughter.

[5 : 41] These she bore to Jacob, sixteen persons. The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife, Joseph, and Benjamin. And to Joseph in the land of Egypt, were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphar, the priest of On, bore to him.

And the sons of Benjamin, Bela, Beshar, Ashbel, Gerah, Naaman, Ahi, Rosh, Mupim, Hupim, and Ard. These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob, fourteen persons in all.

The sons of Dan, Hushim, the sons of Naphtali, Jaziel, Guni, Jezer, and Shalem. These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel, his daughter.

And these she bore to Jacob, seven persons in all. All the persons belonging to Jacob, who came into Egypt, who were his own descendants, not including Jacob's son's wives, were sixty-six persons in all.

And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two. If you add on Jacob himself and Joseph, all the persons of the house of Jacob, who came into Egypt, were seventy.

[6 : 56] Amen. May God bless to us. This is his word. Well, will you turn with me to the passage we read there in Genesis 45 and 46?

A passage which is all about the God of help and hope. The first scene of this act of the story, which opened in chapter 42, was full of famine and fracture.

Famished family was facing starvation and death in Canaan. And it was full of fractured relationships, right across the whole clan, father and sons, estranged brothers at enmity.

And Jacob, the great patriarch, was a broken man, a disillusioned man, facing death. Go and buy grain in Egypt, he said, so that we might live and not die.

What a sad and sorry state for this chosen family of God. His line of promise that he has chosen to bless the whole world. And yet here we are, now at the end of the act, the end of deep, harrowing, and also very humbling experiences of the brothers.

[8 : 29] And everything has been utterly transformed. The picture is one of feasting, and of fellowship, and of marvelous fulfillment. By God's extraordinary mercy, and through his extravagant grace, shown in Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers, and of course also in Judah's self-giving for his brother Benjamin, real reconciliation has been brought to this family.

Despite all its dysfunction, and its disaster, and its new self-destruction. Real reconciliation, and restoration, and rescue.

Not only, of course, from the life-threatening famine, which would have destroyed them from without, but also, and far more importantly, from the soul-threatening sin, that would have destroyed them from within.

And the measure of the turnaround in the whole situation is neatly summed up in Jacob's words in chapter 45 and verse 28. It's enough.

My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die. So from fear of death by starvation, through the laments about going down to the grave in misery and in grief, Jacob is liberated at last into satisfaction, and into real joy.

[9 : 57] He's a man at peace with his own mortality, and he's a man at peace with his God. Now, of course, we mustn't miss the big picture of the story here.

This passage marks an extraordinary turning point in the whole of the unfolding story of God's promise of salvation. It tells us how the covenant people move en masse out of Canaan and down into the land of Egypt, as God had told Abraham all those years ago that they would do for 400 years.

You can read about it in chapter 15. And it's what explains the whole exodus under Moses and everything that follows for hundreds of years in the great story that only comes to its fulfillment at last, of course, in the offspring of Abraham and of Jacob and of Judah and the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Now, that is the big story that Moses is unfolding here. First for his people, the generation of the Exodus, but also, of course, preserved for us so that we might know our God's extraordinary faithfulness and commitment to his covenant promise, the promise in which we share in the gospel of Jesus.

So it's that big story that is being laid out for us here. And yet, as we've seen time and again through reading this great story, the individual people in the story are never merely pawns in God's hand, never merely functionaries who do God's bidding and move on that great story for a little while in the age they live in.

[11 : 40] No. In every age of history, God's deep care for his covenant is manifested in his deep and marvelous care for his children, for his beloved church.

That we see here in embryo in the covenant family of Israel. What we see is the unchanging pattern of the Lord our God and the wonderful display of his grace among those that he's calling to be his own despite the mess and the chaos and all the baggage of their sin as he brings reconciliation and restoration and renewal to their lives.

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

And what we see in this family story is what it means to have this God, the God of Jacob, as our God also. On Wednesday evening at the prayer meeting, we were looking at Psalm 146.

And verse 5 of that Psalm says this, Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God. And friends, that's what this passage is here today to teach us.

[13 : 13] Because our only hope for the future, for eternity, and indeed our only help today and every day is exactly there in this same God, in him alone.

it's the God of Jacob who is our help and our hope. And blessed indeed are we to have him.

Why? Well, let's look at what this scripture just teaches us about the Lord, this God of Jacob. First of all, look at verses 16 to 24 of chapter 45, which show us so clearly the abundance of God's provision.

All the focus here is on the lavish generosity of the Lord our God to an undeserving and an unlikely people through both Pharaoh and through Joseph himself as instruments of blessing.

First of all, there's Pharaoh's provision. Verse 2 of the chapter told us that the whole of Egypt had heard about Joseph's great reunion with his brothers. And in verse 16, we're told that Pharaoh was very pleased at this turn of events.

[14 : 23] He's glad for his great prime minister's sake. I wonder also, though, if perhaps he was a little bit worried that now Jacob's family had come, Joseph would suddenly start to have hankerings for home.

And he said he didn't want to lose this vital ruler to the land of Egypt. Maybe that's why he was so quick to extend hospitality to all Joseph's family. He wanted them to come down to Joseph rather than Joseph to go back to them.

But at any rate, what he offers is lavish indeed. Look at verse 18. The very best of the agricultural land, the fat of the land. In verse 20, the very best things of the land, implying homes and possessions and all sorts of things.

See, the Lord our God is not short of resources. And when he chooses, he will use even great kings and rulers to be instruments of blessing for his people. And this is an extraordinary lavish provision when you think that it comes in the midst of a worldwide recession, a worldwide famine.

We do need to remember, don't we, that God is in control of all rulers and powers. God is working through them for the blessing and for the good of his precious people.

[15 : 44] It's not always so obvious, of course. Read on into the book of Exodus and you'll find another Pharaoh apparently, apparently, doing the very opposite and yet, he too was actually an instrument in the hands of God for the blessing of his people, even in his defiance and hatred of God's people.

What does Paul say in Romans 9, verse 17? That Pharaoh was raised up for the very purpose, for the very purpose, that God might display his power through him and that God's name might be proclaimed in the earth.

Well, just so here. But happily, this Pharaoh was blessed himself because he consciously blessed the people of God with extraordinary generosity and all for the sake of Joseph.

But he's an instrument of abundant provision for this utterly undeserving covenant family. Isn't that amazing? And then, of course, added to Pharaoh's provision is Joseph's own abundant provision in verses 21 to 24.

Wagons and provisions and changes of clothing which were special marks of esteem giving you tunics and beasts and food and all sorts of things.

[17 : 04] Once, these brothers had torn the tunic off Joseph's back and sold him into slavery. And yet, here, we have a scene of reconciliation by tunics, if you like.

New cloaks all round for everyone. And do you see verse 22? Five times as much for Benjamin. But now, there doesn't seem to be a hint anymore of any jealousy among the brothers, does there?

It's a mark, isn't it, of people who have been humbled truly by God's grace who know that none of us, none of us deserve any of God's good gifts.

It's a mark of people truly humbled who can rejoice in God's special gifts to others and not resent them because we're just so floored by God's generosity to us and so thrilled by God's abundant grace that we couldn't feel resentment.

But what a wonderful picture all of this is, don't you think, of God's redeeming work in the lives of his people and the purpose of it all and the fruit of it all? Listen to these comments of William Still.

[18 : 15] From Joseph's revelation of himself onwards, there's a quite exhilarating pace and grace in the narrative. This is no mere artistic effusion, but a pouring out of that grace of God which attends wrongs that have been righted and almost impatiently wants to unleash its floods of joy on souls reconciled to each other.

Having seen the humbling and repentance of his wicked brothers and the painful past wiped out, there were worlds of human pleasure to be savored and a family life to be established and enjoyed which Jacob and his wives and children had never known.

It was Joseph in Egypt who now points the way to a new and happy family life based on a mutual trust and affection. salvation. How hardly are such earthly delights come by.

It takes a world of woe and crucifixion to call them into being, but it is abundantly worth the cost, for its fruits are heavenly sweet.

The abundance of God's provision for this family, not only does his grace rescue us from a bitter and disastrous past, but his grace restores and rebuilds abundantly a present and a future, a future of abundant joy and satisfaction.

[19 : 43] perfection. It's almost too good to be true, isn't it? I'm sure that's what accounts for Joseph's word of farewell there in verse 24, which in our version says, don't quarrel on the way, but the word more literally says, don't tremble or don't be agitated on the way.

It's generally translated that way to mean don't be fearful, don't be disturbed, don't panic. You see it that way in Exodus 15, verse 14, for example, where it talks about trembling associated with fear and with dismay.

And if that is what Joseph is really saying here, what he's saying is fear not. Don't doubt that all of this is too good to be true.

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

That they feared perhaps that once they'd come down and brought Jacob to Joseph, then Joseph would at last unleash his real vengeance on the brothers.

[20 : 58] You go to chapter 50 of the story, when Jacob dies, you find that that fear is still very much alive in their minds. But Joseph says, don't fear, don't be disturbed.

This grace that you've experienced is real and it's lasting. Don't doubt the abundance of God's provision, even to the most undeserving of people.

We can very easily do that, can't we? Doubt God's grace to us and harbor fears that it is all just too good to be true.

And that one day, one day God will turn on us and we'll get what we really deserve. Don't you fear that sometimes? But no, the God of Jacob is an abundant provider.

He lavishes his grace, even on the most undeserving. And he assures us, don't be disturbed, don't be agitated, don't fear on the way as you walk with him in your new life.

[22 : 09] His grace is real, it's not an illusion, it's not going to suddenly fail and disappear. Never. That was surely a message that Moses' people needed to hear, wasn't it, as they traveled back to Canaan those 400 years later?

It's still a message God's people need to hear today, isn't it? Our God is an abundant provider. There's no need for us to tremble on the way.

Well, they arrive back in Canaan, and verses 25 to 28 tell of the astonishment of God's patriarch. Jacob is astonished, and in fact, we're astonished at the wonderful goodness of God to this man, the goodness of God to those who throw themselves holy upon his mercy.

What a wonderful contrast this return is to all the previous returns of Jacob's sons to him, which, if you remember, occasioned such mourning and such grief.

Chapter 37, the terrible grief at Joseph's fate. And then in chapter 42, when he thought he'd lost Simeon also, and there was a threat even to Benjamin's life.

[23 : 31] Remember there, his words were all about going down to the grave in grief. But what are his words about here? About going down to see Joseph, his son, before he dies at peace.

Verse 26 describes the moment, and the sons blurt out the news. Not only is Joseph alive, he's the ruler of all Egypt. And Jacob was stunned.

His heart became numb, for he didn't believe them. What did he think? That these sons of his were playing another horrible, cruel trick on him?

Or was it just another thing that just seemed far, far too good to be true? What on earth would you think? If you'd had a young child stolen from a holiday apartment, say, 20 years ago, and all of a sudden somebody turns up and says to you, not only are they alive, but they're the president of the United States or something.

This is extraordinary. No wonder Jacob was stunned. The very thing he'd spent years and years desperately, desperately hoping to hear one day, and yet knowing ever more surely as time passed that it was something he would never hear.

[24 : 55] That very thing has suddenly been told him. And he couldn't believe it. And yet verse 27 tells us there was hard evidence.

The words of Joseph and the facts of the treasure laden wagons. And so just like, just like the stunned disciples that heard the words of Jesus and saw him and touched him after his resurrection, he revived and he believed the evidence.

And his whole life was just transformed in that moment. It is enough. Joseph, my son, is alive. It's extraordinary, isn't it, how Jacob's experience mirrors the experience of his grandfather Abraham.

Like Abraham, he too, as it were, receives his son back from the dead. And yet, poor Jacob had to wait such a long time. Perhaps it took all that time for grief to do its gracious work in his soul.

For God to bring this complex man, full of so many contradictions, to bring him to the place of utter abandonment to God's sovereign will.

[26 : 17] To the place where, like Abraham, he really was willing to surrender all that was most precious to him. And to entrust everything about his life and future into the hands of the covenant God.

You see, the real turning point in Jacob's earthly sorrow, the real thing that began to turn that sorrow into joy was back in chapter 43 in verse 19, where he did, willingly at last surrender up Benjamin, where he uttered that marvelous prayer of faith to El Shaddai, to the covenant God, committing himself and his family into his hands and into his mercy.

May this God have mercy upon you and upon all of us. And now you see, now and only now, at last, the last deception in the life of this great deceiver is brought to an end, and the years and the pain and the agony and the grief with it.

Having learned at last that in the deepest way possible, the way of life is death, the way of gain is the way of abandonment and trust and submission to the God of sovereign control.

now at last Jacob is utterly astounded by the goodness of his God, of his wonderful satisfaction and fulfillment that he brings to him.

[27 : 55] It is enough, he says. Here's a man at last who is satisfied, who's fulfilled in his life, who's ready to face death, who's ready to die well, at peace with his God, and at peace with himself, at peace with the world.

Do you see what Moses is teaching his people? He's just illustrating, isn't he, in Jacob's experience, what his gospel was constantly teaching his people and constantly teaches us.

That Jacob's sorrow at last turned to joy when he stepped out in faith, when he cast himself wholly on God's mercy, when he surrendered everything to him, when he trusted, therefore when he obeyed the sovereign will of God, when he submitted himself wholeheartedly to God's will and to God's ways.

That's what Moses calls choosing life in Deuteronomy chapter 30, loving the Lord, obeying his voice, holding fast to him, for he is your life and he is your length of days.

He's saying he is the way and the only way to peace and joy forever and to peace and joy and a satisfied and a fulfilled life even now.

[29 : 22] But he used the words of the Lord Jesus, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things will be added to you. And the God of Jacob's astonished his patriarch here with his goodness and grace.

He gave him a measure of satisfaction and of fulfillment and of peace that Jacob thought never would be his on this earth. And he had last given over everything into his hands.

And friends, our God will still astonish those who entrust themselves wholeheartedly into his hands with their lives and with their loves.

Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it, said the Lord Jesus. Every cherished love given over to the Lord for his sake will redound a hundredfold for his glory, says Jesus, and for our own great blessing.

Do you believe that? Of course, not all of us here will have every sorrow reversed in this life.

[30 : 43] No. Few, if any of us, will receive back dead loved ones or those suffering from a terminal illness or a lost son like Jacob did, just as it was the few, not the many, even in Jesus' own ministry who were received back from the dead and who were cured of their illnesses.

But each of those was a token. And this reunion in this story was a token of the great reunion that is to come on the great day of resurrection when every tear, when every sorrow, when every grief will be wiped away forever.

And like Jacob, we have evidence. We have compelling evidence in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord. it is enough. That means that our beloved ones in the Lord are still alive and we shall see them again.

It means that a day is coming for every one of us who loves the Lord when every disappointment, when every heartache, when every privation, every grief, everything in our torturous and sometimes very tormented lives will be swallowed up in the oil of joy and the garment of praise.

It's his promise. And we too, every one of us, will be astounded at the goodness of God because we too have a hope based on solid evidence.

[32 : 21] And that means that we also can trust him now with our lives. We can put our lives wholly into his merciful hands. It's important to see though that I think Jacob's joy was not simply the natural joy of receiving back a son that he thought was dead.

It was that, but it was more than that. It was also the significance of it. It was the reassurance to Jacob that God's covenant promise was not dead or forgotten for this family.

We've said before that Jacob, I'm sure, believed that the promised line was to be through Rachel's sons, through Joseph, his firstborn, and then failing him at least through Benjamin.

Jacob was wrong in that. And yet in his mind, Joseph's loss and Benjamin's peril were a threat to the whole destiny of the covenant family.

So now what a reassurance to him that the promise of God was alive and was real in his life and in his family's life, the seed is safe. But what about the land of promise?

[33 : 38] How can Jacob leave the land that God has said was to be for him and for his seed forever? Well, that's, you see, what explains verses 1 to 4 of chapter 46, which gives so clearly the assurance of God's presence.

See, the Lord speaks to Jacob to assure him that he will be present with him even in Egypt and that he will not fail his people there, but rather he'll bless them there for the furtherance of his purposes of grace, both for them and for the world.

You were told, verse 1, Jacob came to Beersheba, that's the southernmost border of the land of Canaan. And it's a place, don't forget, rich, rich in covenant memories.

It was Beersheba where the Lord appeared to Hagar in her distress way back in Genesis 21 and said, fear not. And then in the same chapter, he appeared to Abraham, likewise, in the face of potentially hostile enemy threats from the Philistine king, and he appeared to reassure him and told him that he was with him, the everlasting God, the forever God.

And then later, Isaac, Jacob's own father, in just the same way in his lifetime, met God there at Beersheba, when he faced exactly the same threat in life, threat to his life and threat to the promise.

[35 : 08] And God came to him at Beersheba and said, fear not, I am with you. And so here you see the implication is that Jacob was fearful.

Fearful, no doubt, of leaving the land that God had called him to. Fearful, perhaps, of the ominous example from Abraham's life when Abraham had disastrously gone to Egypt, and it was such a catastrophe, that God had said to Isaac, his father don't go to the land of Egypt.

Maybe Jacob even was thinking about the promise of God to Abraham, way back in Genesis 15, when God told him that they would go to Egypt, but the terrible things that would happen there, 400 years of slavery.

And so he fears and he seeks assurance from the Lord. Notice verse 1, from God, the God of his father Isaac.

He offers sacrifices on the altar his own father had built right there at Beersheba. Don't miss the powerful symbolism in that, nor the statement of faith that Jacob is making by that action.

[36 : 20] He's calling on the God that he's known not only in his own life, but through the manifest blessing and faithfulness that he had seen in the life of his own father.

He's saying, Lord, as Isaac, my father, trusted you, I'm trusting you. Help me and bless me as you helped him and you blessed him without fail. It's powerfully personal what he's doing here.

Sometimes people have asked me, why do I kneel down and pray before I stand up to preach? There's several reasons for that, really.

One is to remind myself that I need God's help. Another is to remind you that I need God's help. Most important perhaps is to remind God that I need his help and that we all need his help if we're to hear and heed his word.

But it's more than that for me, because from my earliest memories, I grew up watching my father kneel down in his pulpit to pray week by week, every time before he started to preach.

[37 : 32] And when I kneel down to pray, before I preach, it's my way of saying, I'm calling on you, Lord, the God of my father. I need what you gave him.

Help me as you helped him all his life. It's very personal. And that's what Jacob's doing here. And God answers him, do you see, in his weakness and his dependence.

This great patriarch who's called Israel in verse 1, God, in verse 2, calls out Jacob, Jacob, the weak man of flesh.

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

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

[38 : 45] But now God is saying to Jacob that it's going to be in Egypt, in Egypt, that he will make that great nation. Egypt is going to be the womb of that great nation's birth.

It'll be in that strange exile that God does his wonderful work. God's presence, of course, doesn't mean that there won't be hardship or pain, but it does mean that his protection will be with his people until every purpose of his will be accomplished.

Fear not. He will not fail to be the fulfiller of his promised covenant. But he says even more than that to Jacob, do you see?

His words to Jacob show that this God will never fail either to be a father to his precious children. not only does he promise that Israel will become a great nation and he will bring them back again into the promised land, but he promises, you see, he promises Jacob himself that Joseph, his beloved son, will close his own eyes in death, that he'll know the peace of a good death, surrounded by the love of the son that he thought was lost and now is found.

this God, you see, the God of Jacob is a God of extraordinary tenacity. He'll never forget or abandon his plan and purpose, however dark the days may be.

[40 : 36] But he's also a God of extraordinary tenderness. He'll never abandon his people or forget the deep needs of our human hearts. He knows our frame, he remembers, that we're dust, says the psalmist.

And as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord shows his tender compassion to those who fear him. He is the great hope for our future heavenly bodies of glory.

But he is the great helper today in the weakness and in the frailty of our earthly frame. blessed is he whose God is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God and our God.

That's why the words of Jesus to Mary on resurrection morning are so very wonderful. Go to my brothers, he said, and tell them, I am ascending to my father and your father, to my God and your God.

our God, the assurance of God's presence furthering his promise but also fathering his people.

[41 : 53] It's the God of Jacob who's made so wonderfully and fully known forever in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's he who is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.

He'll never fail us. Nor will he ever fail in his purpose to do for us ultimately what he has promised in his covenant of grace, which can never fail.

However, perplexingly, God may seem to deviate from what we assume his plan and path of progress ought to be. And that's surely the clear message in this last section, in this long list of names from verse 5 to 27.

What it proclaims loud and clear to us is the accomplishment of God's purpose. Jacob set out, verse 5, and he rose up. His heart was no doubt strengthened by this great personal assurance of God's presence.

And note, verse 6, with all his offspring, the whole family and all he had set off. And verse 7, all his offspring are brought down to Egypt.

[43 : 10] It follows, verses 8 to 28, the genealogy, which underscores that fact. All the named descendants in order of the first wife and concubine and then second wife, Rachel, and her concubine.

And surely the chief point of all of this list is to emphasize the completeness and the perfection of God's ordering and execution of his purposes despite everything.

His promise of seed and of a great nation is being perfectly formed. See verse 27, 70 named individuals reach Egypt, 70, the number of biblical perfection.

66 sons and grandsons and so on, verse 26. Even though Benjamin's sons most likely were born later in Egypt, he's reckoned to have the sons in his own loins, as Hebrews 7 puts it.

You add Ephraim and Manasseh and Joseph and Jacob, 70. You see what God is saying? Despite this family's failure and sin, despite everything that has happened, they enter Egypt exactly according to God's perfectly ordered plan and purpose.

[44 : 35] You see what Joseph had already long understood that God had sent him ahead to preserve and to prepare for this people. God is giving evidence of here in this own generation, just as the previous genealogies had done.

God is working his purpose out as year succeeds the year. Already, he's grown from one man to a large clan. But then also, if you look back from Moses' generation, looking back after the Exodus, what a testimony to what God has done since.

Seventy individuals entered Egypt, but hundreds of thousands came out of Egypt under the Exodus, marching to the promised land. Had the sojourn in Egypt been a mistake?

Had God abandoned his people to slavery and to suffering? Had he forgotten them as they thought he had done? No. God's purpose was being fulfilled all along perfectly, as he had promised, despite the suffering.

Despite the exile from the land, indeed through it all, God was working the salvation and destiny of his beloved people. Do you see the message? God knows what he is doing and is doing what he has promised to do, even when we think he doesn't know what he's doing, even when we think he's got it all wrong and has failed.

[46 : 09] Is that a message some of us, all of us, need to have dimmed into our heads again and again? I think it is, isn't it?

When it may look to us that God is taking the opposite direction to what we assume the way of blessing must surely be, in our personal life perhaps, when we think the way of blessing must be in this job or this career or this relationship or this property or whatever it is, or in church life, when we think the way of blessing must depend on this strategy or that calling or this particular location.

God seems to do the opposite, as though he's got it all wrong. Listen to my good friend and helper, John Calvin, again.

Humanly speaking, he says, it was by no means a likely method of propagating the church, that Abraham should live childless even to his old age, that after the death of Isaac, Jacob alone should remain, that he, being increased with a moderate family, should be shut up in a corner of Egypt, and there an incredible number of people should spring up from this dry fountain.

Would you have planned things that way? Do you see, perhaps we're beginning to recognize the pattern of the God of Jacob, the God who has promised to fill the heavens and the earth with offspring in the image of his son and to fit them for everlasting glory.

[47 : 53] It is through the human disaster of man's rebellion and fall and humanity's exile from Eden, and in the midst of the curse of sin that God is doing this, multiplying his family, chosen before the foundation of the world, that they should be to the praise of his glorious grace.

It was in the human disaster of this family's strife and their exile into Egypt that he preserved a remnant, not a minority, but a multitude to come back to the land. It's through the human disaster of his own people, Israel's rejection of their own Christ, that God is bringing their reconciliation to the whole world, extending his remnant far, far greater to a multitude that no man can number from every tribe and nation.

It was through the human disaster of the scattering of the early church by ferocious persecution that we see the church in Acts grow and advance and multiply and spread throughout the whole world.

the pattern of the God of Jacob, covenant God, our God. It's always been like that, out of the consequences of sin and in the midst of the crucibles of suffering.

God himself is present to accomplish his purpose according to his gracious promise, promise that reaches its zenith in the very nadir of human sin and terrible suffering and the cross at Calvary, where at last that great cry rang out, it is accomplished, finished.

[49 : 45] So here it was to be cast out of the land in the exile of Egypt that God's purposes for that generation were to be accomplished, that his people might multiply without number.

So friends, in every generation, we must not be blind to God's working. We mustn't fail to see his pattern. Isn't that encouraging? Isn't that encouraging? Especially at a very time when we, as a covenant family, find ourselves away from our place that we thought was to be the place of blessing for us in this time.

Could God have moved us as a means of multiplying us far greater for his greater glory? I can't claim that for sure, but we can certainly pray that it shall be so.

But I can say this for sure, wherever we go, the God of our fathers, the God of Jacob, our God, will be with us.

He'll never leave us nor forsake us. He has said, Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

[51 : 08] And so we can all say with the psalmist, Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.

Amen. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, how we thank you. That your ways are marvelous and beyond our understanding, but that as you teach us from your word, our eyes and our hearts are open to your grace and to your glory.

So, Lord, help us humbly, like Jacob, to hand our lives, our present, our past, and our future to the hands of you, the covenant God, the God of our fathers.

And may we, in resting in your mercy, have our eyes opened and our lips opened to rejoice with joy in all your goodness in our lives.

We ask it for his great name's sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.