

I. INTRODUCTION

I hope and trust you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving this past week. Whether it was enjoying turkey, ham, pumpkin pie, or watching a football game or just spending time with family and friends, I hope it was a time of joy and also reflection on the goodness of God and all for which we can be thankful to him.

About 400 years ago, in 1621, the very first Thanksgiving was celebrated in New England. I remember growing in Boston hearing much about the *Mayflower* ship and the journey of the Protestants who came to America seeking religious freedom from persecution in England. I also remember seeing Plymouth Rock, where they landed, and learning about the arduous 65-day sea voyage from Europe where many died and suffered. But, with the help of the Native Americans, with whom they shared a harvest feast that became the first Thanksgiving, they survived and would form the first permanent settlement of Europeans in New England. These settlers, explorers – these Puritans as their opponents labeled them – came to be known as “Pilgrims,” because they left their homeland in search of a better country, freedom, and belief in God’s providence and leading.

Today’s text is about a pilgrimage of sorts. We will trace Jacob’s journey from Canaan into Egypt. We will also witness how Jacob, who though endured years of suffering and sorrow, has now come to fully trust in and worship his promise-keeping God. And **we too are in a land of sojourn**, for our true home is in heaven. Scripture describes Christians as strangers, aliens, exiles, and to that, I would add we’re also pilgrims and sojourners. But, we often find it a hard and fearful experience to sojourn. And not only can the sojourn itself be arduous, we can grow attached to this world and forget that Christ has prepared a place for us in heaven where we will dwell forever with him and all the saints in ever increasing glory and joy. So, I am eager to share with you this morning how through this episode of Jacob’s life, we learn what it means **to be a sojourner led and assured by God**.

So, my main exhortation is this: We need not be afraid while we are sojourners in this life because like Jacob, we belong to God as his people, and he is our God who preserves us and keeps his promises. I want to unpack this exhortation by looking at the text, starting from the end of this passage and working our way back to the beginning in three steps. I am doing this in reverse order, because I think each section is built upon the one preceding it with increasing importance.

First, we will see that in Egypt, this land of sojourn, Jacob need not be afraid because **God preserves** him and his entourage of 70. When we zoom out to see Jacob’s journey from Canaan to Egypt, we see secondly how he need not fear because this group of 70 is the beginning of Israel, **God’s people**. Finally, from there, we zoom out one more time and see how God assures a worried Jacob by reiterating **the promise he made** to his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham; a promise to bless the families of the earth through them and make their descendants numerous. So, in short, the order we will follow, moving backwards in our text, is God’s preservation, then God’s people, and finally God’s promise.

II. IN A LAND OF SOJOURN: GOD'S PRESERVATION (46:28-34)

Before delving in though, let's put this chapter in its proper context. Last week, Pastor Jason preached on the long-awaited reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers. With a high view of God's sovereignty, Joseph was able to forgive and reconcile with his brothers who so callously betrayed and abandoned him over 20 years earlier. Pharaoh is pleased to hear of the joyful reunion of his prime minister with his brothers and generously sends them back with wagons and provisions to go back to Canaan and bring Jacob and his extended family to Egypt. At the end of chapter 45, Jacob's sons tell him that Joseph is alive. Initially Jacob doubted, but then he became persuaded by what he heard and saw and says in verse 28, "It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."

Verses 28 to 34 in chapter 46 are about Jacob's imminent arrival and his reunion with Joseph. This brings us to our first point about why Jacob should not be afraid about going to Egypt. The reason is that **God will preserve and grow a distinctive people for himself there.**

To set the stage, we see in verse 29 Joseph rushing to meet his father, like the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, rushing out and running to see his lost son. Upon seeing Jacob, Joseph poignantly weeps on his neck a good while. But unlike when he wept upon his brother Benjamin's neck and Benjamin did the same (Gen 45:14), Jacob unexpectedly does not reciprocate Joseph's weeping. But, if you consider how his 20+ year separation from Joseph left him with incredible, indelible grief, perhaps it's not surprising he had no more tears to weep.

In verses 31 to 34, Joseph then tells his family how he will secure land in Goshen for them. Goshen was one of the most fertile regions in Egypt in the Nile delta. It is in the northeastern part of Egypt, which kept Israel close to the border and made it easier to leave when the time of the exodus would come. Joseph is careful in making his request to Pharaoh to settle in this land. He did not want to alarm Pharaoh or have him think his family would grow to become a threat. By bringing their own livestock and focusing on shepherding, "an abomination to the Egyptians," Jacob's family would not be an economic burden to Pharaoh. Goshen was also at the edges of Egypt, so the Israelites would not socially interfere or bother the Egyptians.

Yet, Joseph also had his eye to the "future of Israel's descendants who would one day return to their father's land."¹ Being at the fringes of Egyptian life and doing that which was an "abomination to the Egyptians," was not only beneficial to Egypt, but also Israel because they could **preserve their distinctiveness as a people and grow in peace.** God arranged Jacob to be settled in Egypt in this way so he could preserve and prosper his people. Thus, Jacob need not be afraid of moving there.

Application: Like the Israelites, we are to also to use the space and time afforded us as sojourners, especially with the freedoms we enjoy in the U.S., to grow in influence while never losing our identity as God's people. Like Jacob's family, **our lives are to be distinctive for God.** As pilgrims, let us never forget that our lasting citizenship is in heaven. So, do not be conformed then to the

¹ Mathew, 843.

patterns of this world, but be salt and light of Christ so that others are drawn to him through how you speak, act, and live.

Joseph could have settled his brothers *anywhere in Egypt*. It could have been in a great city where personal comforts, opportunities and profits would abound. But he chose a backwater location in Egypt so that they would not be Egyptianized and could become the nation of God through which he would bear witness about his holiness and power to all other nations. We too, whether on the fringes of society or in the upper echelons of it, are not to assimilate the culture, ways and values of this world. Do not love the things of this world nor lay up treasures on earth. We are to bear witnesses of Christ to society. We can do this without fear because God wants us to preserve our distinctiveness as Christians and he will preserve us as we do so.

III. IN A LAND OF SOJOURN: GOD'S PEOPLE (VV 5-27)

And being God's people is the focus of the second part of my message. We just saw in the last portion of chapter 46 how Jacob should not be afraid because God preserves his people. But, **who exactly are his people going into the land of sojourn? It is Jacob's extended family, a diverse people of God.** Let us go to verses 5 to 27 and zoom out a bit from Goshen to the area encompassing Jacob's journey from Canaan to Egypt. This section gives us a detailed glimpse of the 70 individuals who made this journey and would eventually grow into a vast people of over a million by the time Moses leads them out of Egypt 400 years later (Ex 12:37).

After learning in verses 5 to 7 that Jacob and all his offspring are headed down to Egypt in the wagons provided by Pharaoh, we get an extended genealogy in verses 8 to 25 of who exactly came down with Jacob into Egypt. It is tempting to gloss our eyes over these mostly unknown names, many of which are hard to pronounce. Our impulse is to skip ahead. But, take time to read through it and **marvel at how God is beginning to fulfill his promise to Abraham** to make him into a great nation and his descendants as numerous as the stars.² This genealogy is organized by birth mother and structured by the children of each of Jacob's 12 sons, which anticipates the division of Israel into 12 tribes.³ It encapsulates the **nation of Israel in miniature**.

In the last two verses of this genealogy, we come to a puzzling mention of the numbers 66 and 70. Long-standing difficulties remain between the calculation of the 66 and 70 individuals and the identity of the 4 individuals pushing it from 66 to 70. Some scholars think 70 is symbolic, but others take it literally. I don't take a strong stand either way. I do think a link between the 70 individuals to the 70 nations in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 is plausible and worth highlighting. Seen in this light, Jacob's family is a representative nation of the world whom the Lord will bless, and a

² Gen 12:2; 15:5; 17:6, 16; 18:18; 22:17; 26:4, 24; 28:14; 32:12; 35:11; 46:3; 48:4, 19.

³ The very beginning of Exodus opens up with the 12 sons of "of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household" (Ex 1:1-4). It is a division that heavily influences the very identity of the nation and people of God and reappears several times throughout the Old Testament.

microcosm of the larger people of God of all times and places who will one day worship the Lamb of God together in heaven.⁴

But, honestly, I don't think we should press the number 70 too much. The main point is that it is a number **signifying totality**, the multiple of two perfect numbers in the Bible (7 and 10). And this totality of God's people is diverse, including the well-known (e.g., Judah), but also obscure. It includes notorious sinners like Simeon, Levi and Reuben, but also faithful servants like Joseph. Again, this embryonic group of 70 teaches Jacob not to be afraid because it points both to the incredible faithfulness of God and the **incredible diversity of his people**. And when the many diverse members of God's people grow and witness as one body, the fears of being an individual melt away.

About a week ago, I had the honor and privilege of being part of the ACTS Musical, "A Miracle in Two Worlds." What a wonder and joy it was to behold brothers and sisters of all ages from different congregations, with different gifts (e.g., set and costume design, A/V, acting, singing, videography, choreography, direction, etc.), different passions, personalities, and struggles working as one to fulfill the mission of ACTS: "to share God's love, to bring joy to the audience and inspire them with compelling music and life-changing stories."⁵ I was quite nervous and fearful about being a new member, not having any acting background, and being asked to play the role of Jesus! Yet, what comfort and confidence I derived from being a part of this diverse yet unified cast and crew, imperfect yet knit together in love. And together, as one, we helped each other put on this production.

Application: Likewise in this church, let us remember that regardless of your background, checkered past, or struggles, **you are all part of the one body of Christ here at HCC**. Do not be afraid about facing the future, a new situation, or a specific challenge, because you do not do so alone. Each of you are a unique, valuable member of the body of Christ. Each of you has grace-empowered gifts, strengths, and experiences to build one another up in love and share Christ's love with those around you. See beyond your fear or hardships as individual sojourners, and know that God has placed you within this diverse yet unified church body, imperfect yet knit together in love, committed to carrying out our mission of making God-loving and compassionate disciples of Jesus Christ among all nations.

IV. IN A LAND OF SOJOURN: GOD'S PROMISE

That God desires to bless the nations through magnifying his Son is the subject matter of the last and most important point this morning. Finally, we've tracked our way back to the most important part of this chapter, which are the first four verses. As a refresher, we saw how God worked through Joseph to preserve Jacob's family in Goshen as his distinctive people. This led us to zoom out and look at the 70 individuals comprising Jacob's extended family, who represent the beginnings of God's diverse people. Now, we zoom out one more time from the Middle East to see things from God's point of view, because **when Jacob is ready to go to Egypt, he first seeks God**. Why? **He is afraid**

⁴ Mathews, 836.

⁵ <https://actsperform.org/about-us/>

about going to this land of sojourn. How does God reassure nervous Jacob? By his divine promise and devoted presence.

First, look at verses 1 and 2 with me. Jacob is referred to as “Israel” twice, which puts emphasis on his family that will become the nation of Israel after moving to Egypt. Recall that Jacob’s birth name, Jacob, means “supplanter, deceiver.” True to his name, Jacob grew up to be a deceiving rascal, and he even connived against his brother Esau to obtain his birthright. But, over time, hard lessons, and an unforgettable wrestling match with God, the “heel-catcher” became Israel, which means “one who struggles with God.”

And here in verse 1, while at Beersheba, he offers sacrifices to God. Beersheba was the southernmost habitable place in Canaan, a natural exit point from the Promised Land headed towards Egypt.⁶ It was the place of Abraham’s and Isaac’s wells (Gen 21:25-34; 26:23-33). Both of them worshipped God there (Gen 21:33; 26:25). Jacob also worships God there. The text says he “offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.” It was a voluntary act of worship, with no prompting by God. Jacob realizes he needs spiritual preparation and assurance before going to Egypt, so he sacrifices to God, seeking his face.

And gracious God speaks, addressing him not as “Israel” but rather “Jacob,” because he is in a more vulnerable, fearful state. Verse 2 reads: “And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, ‘Jacob, Jacob.’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’” The doubling of his name, “Jacob, Jacob,” indicates importance or urgency, similar to how God called “Abraham, Abraham!” when he was about to slay his son, Isaac at Mount Moriah (Gen 22:11). Or, “Moses, Moses!” from the burning bush before he reveals his name to him (Ex 3:4).

Like Abraham and Moses, Jacob replies to God’s calling with “Here I am,” which is a reply of obedience and willingness to listen to God.⁷ What a difference God’s grace has wrought in Jacob’s life! In his earlier years, Jacob tried to take things into his own hands whether it was stealing Esau’s blessing (Gen 27), having children through Rachel’s servant Bilhah (Gen 30:1-8), or preparing for the worst when meeting his older brother (Gen 33). But now, when addressed as fearful Jacob, he simply says, “Here I am.” *Oh that we would do the same, beloved, when God calls us to follow him!*

God calls to Jacob in verse 3: “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.” “**Do not be afraid**” is in the imperative form. It is just one of 3 commands God gives to Jacob in his life (Gen 31:3 and 35:1 are the other two). Jacob had **good reason to be afraid of going to Egypt**. First, God had told his grandfather, Abraham, that he would give Canaan to his offspring (Gen 12:7). So, why would he leave it, to go to,

⁶ The proverbial phrase “from Dan to Beersheba” is used nine times in the Old Testament to describe whole of the Promised Land—Dan being in the north, and Beersheba in the south (Judges 20:1; 1 Samuel 3:20; 2 Samuel 3:10; 17:11; 24:2, 15; 1 Kings 4:25; 1 Chronicles 21:2; 2 Chronicles 30:5).

⁷ The reply “Here I am” is used in the OT and NT by: Abraham (Gen 22:1, 11); Isaac (Gen 27:1); Jacob (Gen 31:11); Joseph (Gen 37:13); Moses (Ex 3:4); Samuel (1 Sam 3:4); Isaiah (Is 6:8); Ananias (Acts 9:10).

of all places, Egypt? Abraham had also gone down to Egypt during a famine, with near catastrophic outcomes (Gen 12:10-20). During another famine, God told Isaac **not** to go down to Egypt (Gen 26:2).

So, now during yet another famine, Jacob was perhaps wondering if he really should go down. Further, he may have been thinking of Gen 15:13, where God said to Abraham, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.” Jacob was not unreasonable to suspect the “land that is not theirs” was Egypt. Finally, Jacob has also spent 20 years in the land of Canaan, so leaving such a familiar place would understandably be hard. Canaan after all was what one commentator put it, “his native land by nature and his true home by promise.”⁸

When Stacy and I moved to Beijing very early in our marriage, I was both excited but also afraid. Even though we could speak Chinese, could we truly communicate well with the locals? How would we figure out where to live or pay utilities or connect with a local church or...the questions kept coming. Any of you who have lived in a foreign land knows that initial feeling of fear because you simply don’t know what to expect or how things will go.

But, as similar worries about being a foreigner may have been flooding Jacob’s mind, **God lovingly reassures him that he is with him through it all**. The first time he left Canaan, fleeing from Esau to go to Haran to live with his Uncle Laban, God told him: “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go” (Gen 28:15). And just as God was with him there and in Canaan (Gen 31:3; 35:3), he will be with him in Egypt, the land of sojourn. *Beloved, when we face fearful circumstances, remember that God’s presence with us is all that we need.*

And not only does God say he will be with Jacob as he goes down to Egypt, he tells him “I will also bring you up again.” This probably alludes to the exodus that would happen 400 years later (as predicted in Gen 15:13-14), and not to Jacob’s own life, since God says Joseph will close his eyes in Egypt. But still, what comfort this would have brought the grief-hardened patriarch. God reassures him that Joseph would close Jacob’s eyes, meaning he would not die in solitude, but the one he loved most would be at his side as he passed into glory.⁹

Perhaps this is why upon seeing Joseph, his first words to him in verse 30 are: “Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive.” Yes, Jacob knowing his precious son is alive and well, allows him to leave the earth in peace. But, I think another reason why **Jacob is ready to die is that his fears have been assuaged by what God tells him in verses 3 and 4**. Upon seeing Joseph and all his splendor, he knows God’s promise of future deliverance and countless descendants will indeed come to pass. In this way, he foreshadows Simeon in Luke 2:29-31, who

⁸ Delitzsch, quoted in Kenneth Mathews, 827.

⁹ Jacob had originally feared he would go down to Sheol (place of the dead) in mourning (37:35), as he wept for Joseph. Yes, God will bring him up out of Egypt, though in a coffin, yet by his beloved son, as the first to make the journey from Egypt back to the Promised Land where he would be buried in the family tomb (50:4-13).

upon seeing the infant Jesus said he was ready to “depart in peace...for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples[.]”

Indeed, the salvation of God was to flow through Jacob’s sojourning in Egypt. Who would have ever thought that God would carry out his divine promise in this fashion. Yet, God’s promises are true and truly kept. God **is telling Jacob to trust him and his promises**. He speaks to Jacob like he did to his father and grandfather to reassure him that he is with him and he need not be afraid.¹⁰ His promise originally made to Abraham, reiterated to Isaac, is the same one made to Jacob. He is the same, faithful, unchanging God of his forefathers.

Application: And he is the same God we know and worship. We too need not fear while we are sojourning on this earth. For, we are God’s people, true sons of Abraham by faith (Gal 3:7, cf Rom 4). We are the inheritors of the promise that God made to him, Isaac and Jacob, *the promise of salvation ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ*. This Jesus, the Word become flesh, is the embodiment of God telling Jacob “I myself will go down with you.” He is Immanuel, God with us (Mt 1:23). This Jesus is also the ultimate blessing to the nations mentioned in God’s promises to the patriarchs.

In verses 6 and 7, the word “**offspring**,” is mentioned twice. This word has a rich history and association with God’s promise and salvation. Remember that the very first mention of the gospel (the message of salvation) was announced in the Garden of Eden when God cursed the serpent. There he said the offspring of the woman will crush the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15). Then, God promises Abraham that he will make him into a great nation and that in his offspring, the nations will be blessed (Gen 12:1-3; 22:18). He reiterates this same promise to Isaac (Gen 26:4) and Jacob (Gen 28:14).

So, it’s clear that blessing, salvation and offspring are all linked together in God’s plan of salvation. Across the millennia, God gradually unfolds this plan until in the fullness of time, **God sends his Son to consummate this plan** (Gal 4:4). Paul says in Galatians chapter 3, verse 8, that God’s promise to bless the nations was actually the gospel! And in verses 13 and 14, he goes on to say that Christ became a curse for us (by dying on a tree (the cross)), so that in him “the blessing of Abraham (salvation) might come to the Gentiles,” which included “the promised Spirit through faith.” And in verse 16, he then says “the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring...who is Christ.” So, when God said it is in Abraham’s offspring that the nations will be blessed, what he means is that **it is being in Christ, having the Spirit, that the nations of the earth shall be saved!** Though Jacob could not have fully grasped all this, that is ultimately what God was promising as he worshipped him at Beersheba.

¹⁰ God uses the exact same verbiage “make you into a great nation” as he did when making his promise to Abraham in Gen 12:2. He also mirrors closely what he said to Isaac in 26:24: “I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake.”

V. CONCLUSION

Putting it all together then, we need not fear as we sojourn on earth, because we sojourn in Christ, as God's redeemed people. We need not fear because God will preserve his Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail over her. We need not fear because Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises and presence. God has saved you to be a blessing and witness to the nations of the wondrous love and salvation found in Jesus Christ alone.

Gospel Call: If any of you this morning do not know this wondrous love, let me invite you to place your trust in Christ. For, you, along with each person here today, have sinned greatly against a holy God. Sin is failing to obey God or conform to his moral character. The penalty of sin is eternal death. But God's Son, Jesus Christ, paid that penalty by dying on the cross, and defeated death by rising up from the dead three days later. If you believe Christ to be your Lord and Savior, you will be saved! Nothing else can save you; not your good works, your achievements, or your efforts to be a good person. Only Christ can save, so confess your sins and trust in him today.

For the rest of you who know Christ already, know that your chief purpose is to proclaim his gospel as the message of salvation, and to bless others with the blessing you've received from God. This blessing is knowing, even as "strangers and exiles on the earth," we are used by God to bring others to Christ (Heb 11:13). This gospel changes us to be like those of faith who "desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Heb 11:16).

William Bradford, one of the Pilgrims who came to Plymouth, wrote in his journal about the 102 people boarding the *Mayflower* to leave their homes toward a new land: "The time having come when they must depart...they left that good and pleasant city, which had been their resting place for nearly twelve years; but they knew they were pilgrims, and lifted up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits."

Beloved, as sojourners and pilgrims, quiet your anxious spirits and do not be afraid, but lift your eyes to the heavens, where the promise-keeping God of Jacob dwells and trust in him!