

Exiled but blessed

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[0 : 00] The first reading can be found on page 47 of your church Bibles, and it's Genesis chapter 45, verse 25, to chapter 46, verse 7.

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. 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 I am. 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.

[1 : 37] I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again. And Joseph's hand shall close your eyes. Then Jacob set out 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' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters. All his offspring he brought with him into Egypt.

The second reading this morning is taken from Genesis 47, starting at verse 11, and we'll read up to 28, and that can be found on page 48 of the Bibles and the Chairs.

That's Genesis 47, starting at verse 11. Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Ramesses, as Pharaoh had commanded.

And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents. Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe.

[3 : 11] So the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished by reason of the famine. And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought.

And Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. And when the money was all spent in the land of Egypt, in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, Give us food.

Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone. And Joseph answered, Give your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock if your money is gone.

So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. He supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year.

And when that year was ended, they came to him the following year and said to him, We will not hide from my Lord that our money is all spent. The herds of the livestock are my Lord's.

[4 : 19] 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. On the land of the priests he did not buy, for the priests had a fixed alliance from Pharaoh, and lived on the alliance that Pharaoh gave them.

Therefore, they did not sell their land. Then Joseph said to the people, Behold, I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh.

Now here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. And at the harvest 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.

[5 : 35] And they said, You have saved our lives. May it please my Lord, we will be servants to the 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.

They 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.

Good morning, everyone. My name is Andy. I'm the acting lead pastor here. It's great to see you. Let's pray before we start. Father God, please be with us now as we look at your word.

[6 : 36] Please speak to us through it to learn more of your glorious character. Amen. Amen. Amen. There's an outline on the back of the service sheet to follow on where we're going this morning.

It's party conference season. Yeah. The Lib Dems, the Conservatives and Labour have theirs this week. Perhaps like me, you've been glued to something else.

Though I saw Keir Starmer, covered in glitter, going for the David Bowie look. But all of people have been making promises to various degrees.

Life is full of people making promises, isn't it? They're part and parcel of a politician's career. Companies promise by association, buy our product, use our services, and your life will be better. And yet we live in a world of broken promises, don't we? Trust in politicians is quite low. And institutions fail to deliver.

[7 : 43] However, the tagline for Disneyland is the happiest place on earth. Really? There's plenty of parents in a long queue with their young children who probably won't agree with that.

Well, we come to the penultimate Sunday in our story of Joseph and his family. We're on the home straight, as it were. We're going beyond Lloyd Webber's musical today, but Genesis has still got lots to teach us.

And we left off with a family reunion. But why is this family such a big deal? Why give 14 chapters and nearly 30% of the book of Genesis to this story?

Well, because this story shows just how committed God is to his promises that he has made. A little recap. God made foundational promises to Abraham back in Genesis 12.

He promised him a land where he would dwell with his people. He promised them he would turn them into a great nation. Later saying there'll be as multiple as stars in the sky.

[8 : 53] And as God promises blessing that they would live under his favor. And then through him, all the world will be blessed. Those promises get repeated seven times throughout Genesis.

First to Abraham, then his son Isaac, and then finally to his son Jacob. And essentially they say the same thing. And that helps us to understand what is going on in this part of the story.

But can God really deliver on his promises? That's a big question. Can he really deliver? Because the shock in this bit here is that Jacob and his family now pack up their tents and they are exiting the promised land.

What do we call that? Brexit or something like that. But God told Abraham back in Genesis 15 that even this would happen. That things are going according to plan.

All this helps us to see that when things look up in the air, like it did for Jacob, when the unexpected happens, God can be trusted. And that's really where we're heading this morning.

[10 : 01] And all because God is at work. That's the tagline we've been using all the way through. God is at work. And firstly, we see here that God is at work growing his people. He's at work growing his people.

This section starts, if you flick back to chapter 45, where we started. It starts with Pharaoh making a gracious promise that Joseph's brothers are going to go back to Canaan and fetch Jacob.

And in verse 18 of chapter 45, they are to live in the best of the land of Egypt. And so the brothers, they go home with Pharaoh's wagons and tell Jacob that Joseph is still alive.

And he's now prime minister of Egypt. Jacob doesn't believe them. Why would he? But verse 26, then he sees the wagons pull up outside the house.

I don't know if they're Bentley or Rolls Royce wagons. But they certainly got to him. And he believed. He then prepares to move his whole family to Egypt to exit the promised land.

[11:07] But he stops at Beersheba. Look down at chapter 46, verse 1. 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.

Now, Beersheba, as far as you could go in Canaan before leaving it, he was about to cross the border and he was going to exit the promised land. Now, we might think it was easy for Jacob to leave famine blighted Canaan, but we'd be wrong.

It seems that Jacob must have hesitated because God said, verse 3, don't be afraid. And then God reassures him of his promises. At three times, God says, I will.

So do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, verse 3. 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.

[12:19] And Joseph's hand shall close your eyes. And notice how the promise is going to work. I will make you a great nation there in Egypt.

It's like God is saying, it may look like I'm rowing back on the promises coming out of the land. I'm not. I will make you a great nation there. I will go with you. I will look after you and I'll bring you back as a great nation.

And God reminds Jacob of his promises. And Jacob trusts God with all that he has. So verse 5. Then Jacob set out from Beersheba.

The sons of Israel carried Jacob, their father, the little ones and their wives in the wagons. So that Pharaoh, that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. And so verse 6 and 7, they all head off of everything they've got.

They're in, they're all in here, lock, stock and barrel. Now, down to Egypt. And verse 8 onwards, we get a register of the 12 sons of Jacob and their various children.

[13:23] And we're not going to go through that, although there's some cracking names in there, if you're looking at. And then verse 26 is the summary. All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own descendants, not including Jacob's son's wives, were 66 persons in all.

And the sons of Joseph who were born to him in Egypt were two. All the persons of his house of Jacob who came into Egypt were 70. Last October, we planted some crocuses in our backyard. The kids were so eager for them to grow that they would check their progress daily. They were a bit disheartened and frustrated. It was taken a while.

It's been three days. Nothing's happened. But three months later, imagine their excitement as the first shoots came out of the ground. Well, they didn't look like that. But the first shoots came out of the ground.

And not long after that, the first flowering of the springtime buds. Well, here in Genesis 46, we see the first flowering of God's people.

[14:32] Like planting seeds. For a long time in Genesis, it didn't look like anything was happening. But this list of people, God is saying, these are my people. These are the springtime buds shooting out of the ground.

And they don't stop. If you scan on to chapter 47, verse 27, where we left near the end. Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen, and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly.

That last bit is familiar language through Genesis. The language of God's promises, first spoken in the Garden of Eden. And now it is happening.

This is why everything has been ordered the way it has. To make the conditions just right for God's people to multiply. In fact, there's going to be 2.5 million of them after 400 years.

That is incredible growth. God is at work. This part of Genesis is saying, God is at work growing his people. He's keeping his promises. And secondly, God is at work blessing his people.

[15 : 43] We're shown just how God's people experience God's blessing by way of contrast with the Egyptians in this section. And so firstly, we read of Joseph reunited with his father after 22 years.

But then there's a question of where they're going to live. And so Joseph sets up a meeting and he does some interview prep with his brothers.

So if you look at verse 31. Verse 31. Of chapter 46. I will go up and tell Pharaoh and 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 you may dwell in the land of Goshen.

[16 : 54] For every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians. Joseph is trying to make sure that Pharaoh will follow through on his offer. Now that's exactly what happens in the next verses.

He gets to the brothers in 47 verses 1 and 2. The brothers say their lines. We're shepherds, etc, etc. And then verse 5. 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.

Now when you drive into a town or a city, there's often a tagline, a welcome sign. There's a lot of historic market towns in this country, if you knew that. It seems to be quite popular.

But when you drive into my beloved Norwich, the sign reads, welcome to Norwich, a fine city. I like that. It means it's not the best. It's not the worst.

[17 : 58] It's fine. Well, when you drove your chariot into Goshen, the sign said, the sign said, the best of the land. And it was.

It was at the Nile Delta where it had plenty of water. And that tagline of verse 6 is repeated in verse 11, if you look down. Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Ramesses.

That's another name for Goshen. And there they're provided for, verse 12. And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

Refugees seeking A don't normally get special treatment. They're normally bottom of the pile. But these guys go straight to the top. They are living in the best of the land with all the food they need in a famine.

This is God blessing his people. Well, then the camera pans across and we see what's going on for the rest of the Egyptians. Then the very next verse, verse 13.

[19 : 10] Now there was no food in all the land. For the famine was very severe. Verse 12. Joseph provided food as much as they needed. Verse 13.

There is no food anywhere else. God is indeed blessing his people and providing for their needs. It's like we could describe Egypt as the incubator for God's people.

The protected infants. The protected plants in the greenhouse. God is giving them, his people, the perfect conditions to grow. The best lands. Separation from the Egyptians.

Because they don't like shepherds. God is at work fulfilling his promises. He is growing his people and he is blessing his people. And then his blessing spills over.

As lastly, God is at work bringing blessing to the world. So after sorting out his brothers and their families, Joseph sets up a meeting between Jacob and Pharaoh.

[20 : 12] Jacob stood before Pharaoh. And what would you expect to happen? Jacob, 130 years old, propped up on his Zimmer frame, facing the most powerful man in the known world who has welcomed him and his family into his country in Egypt.

We might expect Jacob to be grateful. Bowing the knee, kissing the ring, perhaps. But end of verse 7, it says, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

And just in case we miss it, it's repeated in verse 10. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Now here is Jacob to one whom God has given the promise of becoming a great nation.

He's meeting the Lord of all Egypt, the absolute ruler of the greatest nation of the earth at the time. Yet here is stateless, landless Jacob, who at a human level is entirely dependent on Pharaoh,

blessing him twice.

Well, what does it mean for Pharaoh to be blessed? Well, verses 13 to 26 explain how Joseph gradually buys up the land for Pharaoh.

[21 : 26] The people of Egypt go to buy food from Joseph. Firstly, they gave their money. When that ran out, they gave their livestock. When that all ran out, they exchanged all their land for grain.

There was a 20% tax rate, which apparently was quite low at the time. That might sound quite harsh reading through these verses.

But Joseph's actions are bringing blessing. They're bringing blessing to Pharaoh. And they're bringing blessing to the known world and the Egyptians. Because in verse 25, they say, you have saved our lives.

May it please, my Lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh. So these verses aren't meant to be a commentary on how to run the economy. But that God is working out his promises in blessing the world.

First here, Pharaoh. And then the Egyptians, whose lives are saved. God is at work keeping his promises. And all of this happens through God's risen ruler.

[22 : 35] To appreciate this, we need to start back again in chapter 45 and step into Jacob's shoes. He's back in Canaan. And ever since he was handed Joseph's multicolored robe covered in blood, he's been assuming his son is dead.

But when he heard the words of testimony from Joseph's brothers and he saw the wagons for himself, he believed. Joseph is alive. From Jacob's perspective, Joseph is risen from the dead. And he now reigns over the most powerful nation. From the very first book of the Bible, God is training his people to think about resurrection.

To think about life after death. It is the pattern of how God fulfills his promises. Through his risen ruler. And that is exactly what we see in the Lord Jesus.

When Jesus' disciples were told that Jesus was alive again, they didn't believe. But then they met the risen Lord Jesus. Now ascended to the right hand. Not of Pharaoh, but of someone even greater.

[23 : 42] God himself. And so all the hassle of these last ten chapters. Why? To preserve this family. To make sure this family survives.

Because this is the family of God's promises. These are the ones who are going to bring blessing to the world. Their lives were on the line in a famine. And they were a bunch of rogues.

And so God's promises were on the line. Yet God shows how committed he is to his promises. In raising up Joseph. Being behind everything. To get him to the position.

Where he can save people. And bring God's blessing to the world. And now in Jesus. Through Jesus. God is growing a people for himself. As people come to him for eternal life.

Through Jesus, the risen ruler. God is blessing his people. We have got lots to give thanks for. And how God has blessed us in this life.

[24 : 46] James chapter 1 verse 17 says. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above. Coming down from the Father. We have got a lot of stuff we can give thanks for.

In this life. That God has blessed us with. Yet like God's people back then. Life will be up and down. God is very clear. That his people are going to suffer.

Before he brings them back. And our life here too. Is mixed isn't it? Both joy. And suffering. But God's people now.

Do have amazing spiritual blessings. To hold on to as well. The blessing of forgiveness of sin. Of reconciliation with God. And through Jesus. God blesses the world.

By making those realities available. To all those who will come to him. Just as the Egyptians. And the known world. Came to Joseph for physical life.

[25 : 42] Their message of the Bible. Is that everyone can come to Jesus. For everlasting life. That is life. Reconciled to God. All this means then.

That we can trust this God. This is what's the main message. Of Genesis really. We can trust this God. In a world of broken promises. In a world of uncertainty.

Of ups and downs. This God who we meet. In the pages of scripture. Can be trusted. Even with the very raw materials. Of Jacob and his family.

God's promises. Stand. George MacDonald. Was C.S. Lewis's mentor. And he said this. Few delights can equal the presence.

Of one whom we trust. Utterly. All through Genesis. God wants his people. To trust him. And when God says.

[26 : 38] He will do something. We can trust him. Utterly. This week. I came across. An American political. Promise tracking website.

Called PolitiFact. It states the promises. Of Joe Biden. And updates them. Every so often. On whether they've happened. Some yes. Some no. At least not yet.

Well Genesis. Is essentially. A book. Tracking God's promises. And towards the end. We have an update. God will grow his people.

Yes that's happening. God will bless his people. And the world. Yes that's happening. A land. Well not yet. But even the move to Egypt.

Was promised. God was setting up. The perfect conditions. To grow his people. So as the first book. Of the Bible is closing. God's promises.

[27 : 34] Are on track. Again. This is important for us. Because the backdrop. For this life. In this world. Will be ups and downs. As it was.

For God's people back then. Uncertainty. Facing death. As we heard this morning. And yet through it all. We can track. God's. God's promises.

We can see his track record. In the Bible. That ultimately led up. To the birth. Death. Resurrection. And ascension of Jesus. And know for sure. We can trust this God.

God can be trusted so much. That we shape our lives. Around God's promises. God's promises. Are so watertight. And robust. That his people can.

And should. Not just believe them. But align up. Our lives. Behind them. We see that. Even here. In Jacob. And Joseph's brothers.

[28 : 32] And how they describe themselves. So when the brothers. Meet Pharaoh. In chapter 47. They say. Verse 4. We have come to sojourn. In the land. And when Jacob meets Pharaoh.

He says. Verse 9. The days of my sojourning. Are 130 years. They're living in their best postcode. In Egypt.

Yet they see themselves. As sojourners. Sojourners. Expats. Essentially. Temporary visas. Just passing. Passing. Through. They are now.

Aligned. Behind God's promises. That they live in Egypt. But Egypt. Is not home. They're just passing through. They're not bamboozled.

By the prosperity. Around them. In Egypt. Because they look forward. To a place to come. That they would call. Home. We'll see more of that.

[29 : 29] Next week. In the closing. Chapters of Genesis. But for now. We are to see. That they don't lose focus. Living in a wealthy area. Their lives.

Are shaped around. God's promises. Now each of us. Will need to think through. What that means for us. To shape our lives. Around God's promises. In how we serve God.

Here. And further afield. What we give our time. And energy. And money to. Do as we thought about earlier. Often. We're. We're too invested.

In this life. Living our best life now. What we want for our children. But like God's people. Then. We are to be people. Who hold on to God's.

Certain. Promises. And when we shape our lives. Not around living in the best postcode. But around God's promises. We can be assured. That is not a waste of time.

[30 : 27] Very few of us. Will shape our lives. Around the promises of politicians. But in a world. Of broken promises. God's promises. Are totally secure. So even when the unexpected.

Happens. Even when things are up in the air. God is at work. He is at work. Growing his people. Blessing his people. And the world.

All through his risen. Ruler. And so we can trust this God. Completely. And shape our lives. Around his promises. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father. We give you. Great thanks and praise. That you are a promise keeping God. As we. See through your words. That time and time again. You say something.

And you do it. Please help us. To trust you this week. With our lives. Please help us. To trust your promises. More this week.

[31 : 32] Through the ups and downs. And the uncertainties of life. Amen. You say, rätt It.

Absolutely. I love this week. I hope it's running.