

HOPING IN THE GOD OF JACOB

PSALM 46

FCF: Given the fallen condition of our lives, it is difficult to maintain hope.

Proposition: Knowing that God has identified Himself as the God of Jacob gives us reason to hope in the Lord.

Objective: To encourage God's people of live in hope.

Introduction:

Life is not easy in this world. Even when you are attempting to do what is right, you can be confronted with terrible adversity. This Psalm may have come from just such an experience. The faithful king of Judah Hezekiah was doing his best to be faithful to the Lord, and to guide his people into the paths of righteousness. Then the powerful king of Assyria came marching into his land. On his military march toward Judah, every city had quickly surrendered to his assault. Now he is on the outskirts of Jerusalem breathing out threats against the king and the city.

Hezekiah with the encouragement of Isaiah the prophet chose to trust in the Lord when confronted with this threat. He refused to give up hope. He determined to make the Lord his refuge regardless of what the powerful king of Assyria said.

It is not my plan to deal with the whole Psalm, but rather to focus only one verse, probably more accurately to focus only on one expression in that one verse. It is actually a statement of confession about the God of Judah. The Psalmist calls Him the “God of Jacob”. That probably does not grab you at first. But look at the statement again! He is not confessed to be the God of Israel, but the God of Jacob. This is reference to Jacob the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. Are you familiar with what we learn about Jacob in the book of Genesis? He was not the kind of person you would expect God to be associated with. This is a reference to God that has been a great encouragement to me across the years, and one that has kept hope alive in my heart. If you understand that God is the God of Jacob, you may be able to finish the journey in faith.

I. THE GOD OF JACOB TAKES THE INITIATIVE IN SEEKING A RELATIONSHIP WITH US.

We learn an important lesson from Jacob—having a godly parent or grandparents does not automatically make you a person of faith. You must come to know God for yourself. How does a person come to know the invisible, eternal God of this universe? He doesn’t until God takes the initiative. He is the God of Jacob.

1. He takes the initiative in revealing Himself.

Do you remember how Jacob came to know God? It caught Jacob totally by surprise. It happened at a time when he was not seeking to know God.

Rather he was actually running for his life. With the blessing of his father and mother he was headed for a foreign country to escape the wrath of his twin brother. By deceit he had received the blessing from Isaac that rightly belonged to Esau, since he was the firstborn. This infuriated Esau and caused him to vow to kill Jacob.

As he is fleeing, he stops at a place that will later be called Bethel to spend the night. He is sleeping on the ground, using a stone for a pillow, when it happens. During the night the Lord of the Covenant reveals Himself to Jacob in a dream. Jacob sees a ladder that ascends into the heavens, and angels are ascending and descending on the ladder. God renews the covenant with Jacob that He had made with Abraham and Isaac. That night it became clear to Jacob that the Eternal is the God of the covenant. He is one who makes promises and keeps them.(Genesis 28:16-22)

When did God first make himself known to you? When did your first begin to know that God is more than just a religious word? It was surely because He made the first approach.

2. He takes the initiative in drawing us to Himself.

The second time God took such a step toward Jacob was about twenty years later. This time he is fleeing from his father-in-law, Laban, and facing the fearful possibility of facing his brother Esau the next day. He has in place an elaborate plan to impress Esau that his intentions are good, but he is still afraid.

Jacob separated himself from the rest of this party for the night, but the Lord showed up to surprise him. He wrestled with Jacob through the night, but finally had to cripple Jacob to get him to trust and surrender. It was that dark night that God changed Jacob's name to Israel. (Genesis 32:24-32) The God of the covenant is bringing Jacob into an even more profound relationship with Himself so that Jacob will be useful in the fulfillment of His purposes. Again, it is at God's initiative! It always is! He is the One who pursues us and draws us to Himself. Knowing this about Him surely does encourage you to take your refuge in Him, and to keep on hoping.

II. THE GOD OF JACOB WORKS PATIENTLY WITH OUR IMPERFECTIONS.

The God of Jacob is a God of great patience. The shortcomings of Jacob were many and costly, but the Lord God never gave up on Him.

1. We come short on what God expects in every area of life.

All you have to do in order to be impressed with the shortcomings of his life is to begin a brief survey of the relationships of his life. What a list!

As a son he deceived his father and created division in the family.

As a brother he so offended his brother that it put his life in danger.

As a husband he had two wives but neglected one of them and pampered the other one.

As a father he showed favoritism and did not give moral or spiritual guidance to his sons. He fathered a house full of rebels.

As a son in law he had a nasty relationship with his father in law.

As a child of God he came short of all of God's expectations. It would be hard to overstate the shortcomings of this man. He is no hero in any way for most of his life.

How aware are you of your shortcomings? Fortunately for you God has not published a list of them like he did the shortcomings of Jacob.

2. God does not abandon us when we fail.

But God is so longsuffering, so patient! He does not abandon Jacob. He does not withdraw the call that He has placed on the life of this son of Isaac.

Rather He keeps working through the circumstances that surround the life of Jacob to form in him godly character. Are you not grateful that God has not abandoned you? He is the God of Jacob.

The God of Jacob comes to him in his darkest hour—his beloved daughter has been humiliated by a Canaanite prince, and two of his sons have slain the innocent with the guilty and brought reproach on the whole family—then God comes to him and calls him to return to Bethel.

3. God finishes what He has begun.

What started in the life of Jacob the night he left the land of Canaan reached a climax when he entered Egypt as an old man. He has been invited to come to Egypt by his long lost son Joseph. When he arrives in Egypt, he is ushered into the presence of the Pharaoh of Egypt by Joseph who is the most trusted person in the court of the king. Do remember what happened? Instead of Pharaoh pronouncing some type of blessing on Jacob, the humble, aged shepherd from Canaan pronounces a blessing on Pharaoh in the name of the God of Abraham.

The last scene in the life of Jacob is a most impressive one. He has indeed become a prince before God and can rightly use the name Israel. His twelve sons appear before him one by one to have a blessing pronounced over them. The two sons of Joseph also make an appearance to receive a blessing from the old shepherd. He has become a mature man of faith and godliness. God has finished what He had begun. He has molded the life of Jacob into the life of Israel.

Does that not encourage you to keep on hoping in the Lord? Do not despair! He is not through with you yet. He is the God of Jacob—one who patiently continues to work in our lives in spite of our obvious shortcomings.

III. THE GOD OF JACOB OVERRULES OUR CIRCUMSTANCES FOR GOOD.

It takes a long look, and often the passage of many years, to really appreciate what the Lord God is doing in our lives. Of this we can be sure—the God of Jacob is at work in our circumstances for our good.

1. We often create our circumstances by our failures.

Consider this—most of the terrible circumstances of life are created by our own sinful blunders. This was obviously true in the life of Jacob. Because of his parental blunders, he encouraged the breach that developed between Joseph and his brothers. The eleven sons of Jacob deceived him about the death of Joseph just as he had deceived his aged father Isaac. He lived with the grief of thinking that Joseph was dead for many years. But that is not the whole story!

2. God overrules for our good.

Actually God used the despicable deed of the sons of Jacob to place Joseph in a place where he could later bless the whole family. Joseph would comfort his brother by saying to them, “You meant it for evil, but God

meant it for good.” This is the God of Jacob. He is the God of Romans 8:28,
“For we know that all things work together for good to those who love God,
who are the called according to His purpose.”