

WCCC 2024

Brother Ted Peng

Desiring a better country, a heavenly one (1)

Good afternoon brothers and sisters. It is very hot outside, but inside here it is very comfortable. May the Lord give us a restful heart.

And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.
Joshua 24:2 (NKJV)

And he said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.'
Acts 7:2-3 (NKJV)

Here Stephen points out this great thing that happens to Abraham - that the God of glory appeared to him and showed him where He will show him.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.
Hebrews 11:8-10 (NKJV)

In verse 10 it says that while he was in Canaan, Abraham waited for a city with a foundation whose builder and maker is God. The story about Abraham is not just about Abraham, and not only about Isaac or Jacob. It is about a city. A city which has foundations.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.
Hebrews 11:13-16 (NKJV)

Lord we thank you and praise you that you have put this story of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob before us. Lord, we thank you so much that after so many centuries, this story is so familiar to your

people. Lord, we pray that today, it may be an encouragement to us as well. They sought a homeland that is in heaven, and you are not ashamed to call them your own people. You have prepared for them a city. Thank you, Lord. In the name of the Lord Jesus' we pray, Amen

Those verses we just read had to do with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and even Joseph. Not only them, but also Sarah. There are a couple of other verses I want to read for you that are related to this, but they are a perspective from many years later.

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."
John 8:56 (NKJV)

Remember, that Abraham was 2,000 years before Christ. But the Lord Jesus said, "your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.". So in our Lord's word, Abraham, 2,000 years ago, in all the experiences he had, he saw the Lord Jesus.

Now let me read you another verse. It is again the perspective of our Lord Jesus.

But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him."
Luke 20:37-38 (NKJV)

Our Lord Jesus is basically saying this - that the Lord Jehovah introduces Himself to Moses, "I am the God of Abraham, I am the God of Isaac, I am the God of Jacob." So in the mind of the Lord Jehovah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are living.

Dear brothers, remember that the way the Lord sees the dead and living is different from the way you and I look at the dead and the living. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are living to the Lord God.

The last verse I want to read for you is what our brother Timothy used twice yesterday evening and this morning.

"For yet a little while,
And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.
Now my just one shall live by faith;
Hebrews 10:37-38 (NKJV)

Some versions say that "my righteous one shall live by faith".

Dear brothers and sisters, the Lord is coming. He will not tarry. But here it says that "my just one will live by faith." See, the Lord is coming, but "my just one shall live by faith." So this is almost the last verse of chapter 10. All these wonderful people in chapter 11 are examples of these righteous ones. So in chapter 10, at the end the Lord says, "my just one will live by faith", and in chapter 11 you see all these people. They are who the Lord calls "my just one"s.

The brothers have assigned me to share on this matter of the better homeland, which is in heaven. When we read those verses, the God of glory appeared to Abraham and called him out

of his own country. That country is actually the land of idols. Thank the Lord Abraham listened and just came out. His journey was actually a heavenly way.

Abraham considered himself a sojourner in the land of Canaan. Throughout his life he realized more and more that this is not his homeland. Not just him, but his wife, his son and grandson. It is truly wonderful. It is not easy. The life is hard. The lesson is hard. But it is a wonder that they have never complained. It is the Lord God who saved them out of their home country.

For three of four generations, they did not have a piece of land in Canaan. But the wonder is that they have never complained. In their hearts there is a homeland - a home country - in heaven. The Lord willing, I want to share their story with you.

Abraham is waiting for this city with a foundation. At the end of their story, it is said that God is not ashamed to be called their God, and he has prepared for them a city. So their story is not just their own story. Their story, the Lord said, is about a city. So today, I just want to share with you, brothers and sisters, their own story.

Tomorrow, I would like to share with you what that city really means.

- What is the center of the city? It is the house of God.
- What is the house of God, and how is that related to us?

So tomorrow, I would like to share this matter of living stones and the spiritual house. This is in the second chapter of 1 Peter.

For the third session, I would also like to share with you from the second chapter of 1 Peter. It has to do with those people who have gone through being living stones and the spiritual house. They can proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called them out of darkness and into His marvelous light. In essence, this is their testimony.

So may the Lord be with us.

When we were reading the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, it says that Abraham and his son, and his grandson were in the land of Canaan. Verse 13 is very interesting:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Hebrews 11:13 (NKJV)

This is very interesting because all their lives they have been living on earth, in the land of Canaan. But it says here they were assured of a homeland, and they embraced those promises. So it tells us that when we are living on earth, we could actually be assured of the promises that God has given us. This encourages us that although we have to live on the earth - take care of the kids, go to school or go to work - we can actually see these promises from heaven and be assured of them. It means that God really has promised something, and that is so real.

Not only that, the verse also tells us to embrace the promises. To embrace means this: we go to school, we take care of kids, we do all these things. Then we discover something, that this

promise is from heaven, this promise from God is precious. It is so precious that I want to embrace it.

So brothers and sisters, this is what the author of Hebrews was describing when it came to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It says that while we live on earth, our eyes and hope can be in heaven. We can embrace it. It is so close to us. This is how the writer of the Hebrews wrote this.

We thank the Lord that when we look at their story, it is not very easy. When we think about Abraham, we see that how at 75 years he entered Canaan. It is not easy to enter a foreign country. He had no brothers or sisters. But he went. The first thing he did was to go south. Remember that he is not alone. There is him, his wife, his nephew, and quite a few servants. Suddenly there was a famine, so he decided to go down to Egypt.

While in Egypt he did something very horrible. He was so afraid because Sarai was very good-looking. He was afraid that the Egyptians would take Sarai and kill him. So he told Sarai to say she was his sister.

The Egyptians took Sarai to Pharaoh. The Lord Jehovah appeared to Pharaoh and told him not to do this stupid thing. That Sarai has a husband, and Pharaoh needs to return her to her husband.

Thank the Lord that Pharaoh did that. So Abraham brought his wife and all his servants back to his homeland. The first thing he did when he came to this place called Bethel, he built an altar and called on the name of the Lord. The first thing he did there was to call on the name of the Lord. The Bible did not say what he said, but I believe that he is telling the Lord, "Lord, I am really sorry. I did such a wrong thing. I actually sinned." So I thank the Lord that the first thing he did when he came back to Canaan was that he repented.

Brothers and sisters, repentance is very important. If he did not repent to the Lord, he really did not come back to the Lord. But he repented, so there is no separation between him and the Lord.

After that, he went north with Lot. They had a lot of servants and livestock, and their servants started to fight. Abraham told Lot that they should not fight.

"Look at the land. If you want to go left, I will go right. If you want to go this direction, I will go the opposite direction."

Lot saw that there was fertile land and a city. Abraham would go the opposite direction. Once they separated, God immediately told Abraham. "Look in front. This whole land. If you go through the land, all the land is yours."

So brothers and sisters, the first thing is that God lifted Abraham to a higher ground once he repented. Here the Lord lifts Abraham to an even higher ground. That is, don't go to the world, go with God. Be separated from the world.

Thank the Lord that Abraham did exactly that. This is the second higher ground that the Lord has led him. Now after that, there were local kings who were fighting. Lot was taken captive. Abraham brought his servants to fight with the local kings, and he delivered Lot from them. It

was scary, because Abraham was just a foreigner there. Now, he had become an enemy of the local kings. Thank the Lord for the victory. Now he took Lot back.

When Abraham was so afraid, he saw a high priest by the name of Melchizedek. Melchizedek told him, "Abraham, do you know who gave you victory? It is the Most High God who gave you the victory."

Thank the Lord that Abraham listened to that. So when the local king told him, "you can get all the money, just give all the people back to me.", Abraham said, "I don't want any of your money. I don't want any thread off your sandals. Because it is the Most High God that has given me the victory."

So the Lord has led him to the 3rd high ground. He knew now that victory came from the Lord. He was actually quite afraid. The Lord appeared to him and said, "Abraham, I will be your shield, and I will be your reward."

Now Abraham said to the Lord, "Look, I don't know how you are going to reward me. I have no sons. I don't have a son who will inherit the good things with which you are going to reward me." This is understandable, brothers and sisters. Abraham is about 85 years old at this time. He didn't see a chance of having a son. So when the Lord says, "I will be your reward", Abraham was very puzzled.

That night, when the Lord brought Abraham out of the tent and said, "Do you see the stars in the heavens? Can you count them? Thousand upon thousands, millions upon millions. If you can count them, your descendants will be like that."

This is Genesis 15:5.

Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."
Genesis 15:5 (NKJV)

Sometimes I feel that if I were Abraham, there was no way I could believe that. First of all, I don't have a son. And there are millions and millions of stars. How is it possible? Then in verse 6,

And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.
Genesis 15:6 (NKJV)

This verse caused me to think deeply. We know today that there are billions and billions of visible stars. I don't believe that Abraham would look at that many stars and think "my descendants are going to be so many." I don't think he can believe that.

But the beautiful thing is that here it records that he believed. He is not believing the number of stars, he is believing the One that tells him. And that is exactly what verse 6 says. "He believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

Dear brothers and sisters, it is important for us to realize that there are a lot of things that may happen to us. The Bible may tell us many things. These things are hard to believe. But the Person that tells me is believable. That is what happened to Abraham.

I think over the past 10 years, he has gone through so many things. Had he not gone through these things, if he had failed at just one thing, I think at this point he would not have this close relationship with God to say "I believe". Just imagine if he hid his failure in Egypt from the Lord. Or when he had to choose a place, he chose the fertile land and city of Sodom. Or when he was fighting with the local kings and at the end he said, "look, how great I am!".

Brothers and sisters, in all these things, he followed the Lord. God led him in all these things to a higher and higher ground. So at this point he is assured that God is right. So thank the Lord for that.

I thought about a story about Enoch who walked with the Lord 300 years.

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.
Hebrews 11:5 (NKJV)

Then immediately it says,

whoever comes to God must believe that He is,
Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV)

The Chinese translation goes "must believe there is a God.", but in reality it should say, "must believe that God is". We have to believe that God is God. We have to believe that God is always right. We have to believe that God is always faithful. This is what Abraham believed. He couldn't believe the number of stars, but he believed in the God that told him.

This is Abraham's story.

This account of stars tells us something deeper. Although there are millions and millions of stars, God actually said, "your seed will be like that." In the book of Hebrews, the word "seed" is a singular word. So there are thousands of seed coming from that one seed. Every single star will come from that one seed.

The apostle Paul gave us that revelation.

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.
Galatians 3:16 (NKJV)

Paul is saying that the seed is singular. So this is apostle Paul's explanation of that seed. All these stars in the heavens came from that Seed. And the last thing God wanted Abraham to believe was that all the stars would come from one Seed. These are not just scattered stars. That night, when the Lord showed Abraham, it was not just one star. But that the million and millions of stars would come from one seed. And this is what Abraham believed. He might not have believed it in that one moment, but as time goes on and the more he thinks about it, he realizes that this is true. This is really wonderful.

You and I can make a choice. Remember that the Bible encourages us to be conformed in the image of Christ. But this takes our willingness to do. Romans 8, if we are not willing to be led by

the Holy Spirit to be His sons, to suffer with Christ, there is no way we can be conformed to His image. But if we are willing, we gradually will be conformed to His image. That is our choice.

So brothers and sisters, you and I can choose to be conformed to Christ's image. Or we can choose to forget about it and follow the world. If we choose to follow the world and not the Lord, like Lot, there is no chance you and I can become conformed to the image of Christ. Then the next time Abraham looks to the stars, he will not see me or you.

However, if we are serious about following the Lord, the next time Abraham lifts his head, he will see you and me. This is what Abraham believed that day. Thank the Lord.

This is when he was 85 years old.

I want to tell you a story from the time he was 100 to 120 years old.

When he was 100 years old, the Lord told him "I want Sarah to give you a son. You have to name him Isaac. My covenant will be with him. You already have a son by the name of Ishmael. I will take good care of him, don't worry about him. But my covenant will only be with Isaac."

This moment, Isaac was not born yet, but the Lord said "my covenant will be with Isaac." Dear brothers and sisters, the covenant has nothing to do with the land. The covenant has nothing to do with property. The covenant has to do with spiritual things. The Lord says, "My covenant is only with Isaac."

Thank the Lord, as time went on, 20 years later, Isaac grew. It is about 20 years and the Lord said, "Abraham, this is your beloved son. I want you to offer him to me as a burnt offering."

This was extremely difficult for Abraham. He had Ishmael and the Lord said, "That's not it." And the Lord gave him and his wife the resurrection power so that Isaac could be born. And Abraham loved the kid. God loved the kid and gave His covenant with him. And the Lord now tells Abraham to offer him as a burnt offering to him. This is so hard for Abraham.

Remember that God has promised him this all along. Remember so many years ago that the God of glory appeared to him, asking him to come out of the country and go to a place He would give him. "My promise will be with you. My inheritance is yours." Now if Isaac is offered as a burnt offering, all these things will evaporate. But I thank the Lord that in the Bible's record, Abraham did not say anything. He brought his son to Mount Moriah. They walked 3 days, and Abraham did not say anything. On the 3rd day when they came to the mountain, the kid said, "my father, the wood is here. The fire is here. Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

Now Abraham said, "My son, God will prepare the burnt offering." He didn't say anything else. So he brought the kid, bound him, and just as he was about to kill him, a voice from heaven said, "Stop, Abraham! I know that you are obedient to me." So the Lord gave Isaac back to Abraham. As Abraham turned around, there was a lamb in the thicket. He killed it and offered it as a burnt offering.

Brothers and sisters, this was extremely hard for him. If I was Abraham, I wouldn't know what I had to do. For 3 days he did not say a thing. He was thinking: God must have had a purpose. God must have had a meaning. He has been with me so many years. He led me to this point.

He did this. He must have a meaning and a purpose. Of course brothers and sisters, God has prepared for the burnt offering. The replacement will be there.

Brothers and sisters, to us this is something we can never forget. Every Sunday, we break bread to remember the Lord. He is our replacement. He has taken all our sins and transgressions. He is the burnt offering. We will never forget that.

Abraham and Isaac will never forget that. It is of course true. But I think there is something deeper. God has a purpose for doing this, and Abraham is curious to learn about this. Because Abraham knew that God could resurrect Isaac. This is what Hebrews says. But even more so, after all the Lord told Abraham, all the nations in the world will be blessed by your seed.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is again not singular. This is a point Paul kept emphasizing. All the nations in the world will be blessed by Isaac's seed. That is really deep, brothers and sisters. We are so familiar with the story.

Just think about Abraham. All through 3 days, he said, "God must have a purpose." I believe that when God finally gave him Isaac back and told him about this single seed, and how all the nations of the world will be blessed by this single seed, Abraham understood.

I believe that when God asked Abraham to offer Isaac, Abraham in effect offered himself. He loved his son so much. None of us would be willing to offer up our son. So I believe that Abraham offered himself.

I thank the Lord. In Romans 12:1-2,

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV)

I don't know if this is how the apostle Paul interpreted that matter, but here he wrote to offer up your body as a living sacrifice. I believe this is exactly what Abraham did. Not only did he offer his son. He offered himself too.

Abraham was thinking all along why God was doing this thing. He believed that God must have had a purpose. Romans 12 says this, that we offer up our bodies as a living sacrifice. And as a result of that, our minds are transformed. We no longer just think about ourselves. We no longer think about our benefits. Our minds will be transformed. Then the big change will happen.

This change is our attitude about God's will. "That you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." If we refuse to offer ourselves a living sacrifice, we cannot prove this thing. If we offer our bodies a living sacrifice we can prove one thing. What do you prove? You prove that God's will is acceptable, good, pleasing and perfect.

Dear brothers and sisters, of course we know that God thinks of His own will as good, pleasing and perfect. But what about you and me? Do we feel that God's will is good, pleasing and perfect?

Here the Word of God says that if we offer ourselves a living sacrifice, our minds will be transformed, and our attitude toward God's will will be different. We will consider it to be good. We will consider it to be pleasing. Not pleasing only to God, but pleasing to me. That God's will is wonderful. God's will is good to me. It is precious and good.

Brothers and sisters, this is what apostle Paul tells us. I also believe this is what happened to Abraham. After he offered Isaac and God returned Isaac to him, God's will for him is now, to him, always good, pleasing and perfect.

This is when Isaac was around 20 years old. When Isaac was around 40, it was time for his father to find him a wife. Abraham asked his old servant to go back to their home country to find Isaac a wife.

That old servant was very wise. "What if I find a good girl, but she is not willing to come here? Should I bring Isaac there?" Abraham said, "No you cannot do that! You have to swear you won't do that. Because God's covenant is with Isaac. And God's covenant is with this land. Isaac cannot leave."

So dear brothers and sisters, I believe this is the last record in Genesis about Abraham's word to God concerning his own life. Isaac can never leave Canaan. Because God's covenant is with him. And God's covenant is in this land.

I want to tell you something about Jacob. I will probably just mention 2 things because we don't have much time.

Jacob did something tricky to his brother. As a result of that, he has to leave his homeland. His mother sent him to his uncle. So Jacob left home and made his way to his uncle's house. It was a long distance, like walking from Los Angeles to north of San Francisco. The trip was around 400 miles. He doesn't have a car and has to walk.

The first night Jacob comes to this place. He has a dream of a ladder that goes up to heaven. Angels of the Lord are moving up and down the ladder. The Lord is on the top of the ladder, and the Lord tells him "I will take care of you. I will bless you. I will take care of you, give you things to eat and things to wear. I will keep you safe. And finally I will bring you back."

Jacob woke up. He was so scared. 2 things - he said that "this is the gate of heaven, the house of God.", and the other thing he said is "Lord, if you protect me, I will give you a tenth of my salary."

Jacob was always a bargainer. He never loses. He always gains. But 2 things - this is the gate of heaven and the house of God. The stories we read about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have never mentioned anything about the "house of God."

In Abraham's story God shows him something larger than himself. Millions and millions of stars in the sky. In Jacob's story, the minute he left home, God gave him the concept of the "house of God".

Brothers and sisters, do you see what is in the mind of God? In Abraham's case there are millions and millions of stars. In Jacob's case it is the gate of heaven, the house of God. Another thing he would not understand until later was how God would bring him back.

This word “I will bring you back”, would be something Jacob would hear again and again. Indeed finally the Lord brought him back to Bethel. So Bethel means a lot in God's heart. The house of God means a lot in God's heart. There is no way Jacob could immediately understand that. But it is something that God will put in Jacob's mind and life, through all his experiences.

“House of God”. Come back to Bethel.

Anyway, after that night Jacob went to his uncle and stayed there 20 years. His uncle is like Jacob and was very smart. His uncle took advantage of him, and he took advantage of his uncle. This went on for 20 years. Isaac ended up with 2 wives, 2 concubines, and 11 sons and 1 daughter, and countless livestock. But with all these things, living there, his heart was so empty. The voice from heaven told him, “Jacob, go back to Bethel.”

So Jacob told his wife and his whole family that they would go back to Bethel. They left the uncle and ran away. Jacob needed to cross the river to the other side, together with the whole family and the livestock.

As he was crossing the river, someone told him that Jacob's brother was on the other side of the river, waiting for him with 400 men. Jacob was so scared, but again he was so smart. He sent his family across the river and then finally that night, at the bank of the river Jabbok, a man came to wrestle with him.

Jacob realized that this is different. They wrestled from night until morning. The Bible records that Jacob seemed to win, but in fact he didn't really win. The man he was fighting with wished that Jacob could humble himself, but Jacob does not yield. He refuses to admit that he is weaker. Finally Jacob named the place Peniel.

The meaning of Peniel is “I met God and my life was spared”. Jacob realized that he didn't really win. His opponent did not let him lose. Halfway while they were wrestling, the man touched the hollow of Isaac's thigh and crippled him. It was daybreak and the man had to leave, and Jacob refused to let him leave without first blessing him. The Bible records in other places, saying that Jacob was actually crying, telling the man not to leave him.

Dear brothers and sisters, remember that Jacob was so empty in his life. All these years, especially the recent years, everything was so empty and meaningless. He was able to win and win again, but the whole thing was empty. He wanted God. So he grabbed hold of God and begged God not to let him go. “If you leave me, then my life will continue to be empty. The whole 20 years have been horrible. If you leave me, my future will also be horrible, so you cannot leave me.” This is what he was telling that man.

That man asked him, “what is your name?”

“My name is Jacob.”

“Your name is no longer Jacob. Your name is now Israel.”

What does “Israel” mean? It means “prince of God”. This was totally foreign to Jacob. He never thought about this. What does being a prince of God mean? It means that he now represents God. He has to take care of the inheritance given to him. The duty and responsibility was now

given to him. This is what was in God's heart. "Jacob, you will now represent me. You will not take care of my inheritance."

These 3 things:

1. He is crippled
2. "God, you cannot leave me."
3. His name was changed to Israel

If you read the Bible, there is nowhere else that mentions that Jacob is crippled. Being crippled is not easy. You need to bring a cane to walk, and are constantly in pain. But the wonder of it is that the Bible never mentions it.

To Jacob, at the moment and later, it is not a big deal. The important thing was "you cannot leave me."

Brothers and sisters, have we come to a point we are so desperate and call out to the Lord, "you cannot leave me"? We need to be desperate. We need to call out to the Lord and tell him "You cannot leave me".

Then there is this thing about Israel. I am totally unqualified and never even heard of this thing, but Lord, lead me on, that I can truly be an Israel.

After that, Jacob crossed the river, and the sun rose. And he was crippled. This is very picturesque. As Jacob crossed the river, all the things that are in the back stayed in the back. As he crossed the river the sun rose. The heavens open. And the third thing: he now is Israel.

In the past, he never thought about the house of God that much. Now he had to think about the house of God. The long and short of it is that from that point on, Jacob wasn't that smart anymore. He wasn't that shrewd anymore. From that point on, he became a blessing to everybody around him. And the Lord called him back to Bethel.

Finally, he had to go down to Egypt. His son Joseph was there. Joseph was sold by his brothers when he was 17. 20 years later, when Joseph became the Prime Minister of Egypt, there was a famine all over the world. Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to get food.

When they went to Egypt, they met Joseph, not knowing who he was. But Joseph knew who they were. Those chapters are so moving. On one hand Joseph was reminded of all the suffering he had to go through. God was with him.

On the other hand he saw that his brothers were in such a pitiful condition. They finally opened up. Not only that, Joseph got his brothers to bring his father over to avoid the famine. Finally the whole family settled in Egypt.

Joseph is another wonderful story of this family. When he was sold to Egypt, his father thought he had been eaten by a wolf, because this was what his brothers reported to their father. For all of 20 years, the whole family has been in darkness. The father didn't know his son was sold to Egypt. And when you read the story, you will see that the other sons are not bad sons. For 20 years they were unable to tell their father the truth. For 20 years, the family relationship was in darkness. All these brothers sinned against their father because they had lied to him, and they had sinned against God.

When you read the stories you will find that they are good brothers. But they were bound by sin. Than the Lord that Joseph told them that although he suffered, the Lord sent him early to Egypt to prepare, that their lives would be preserved.

More importantly, their family life is now normal. Now the sons are able to tell their father the truth. These 20 years, Joseph did not live only for himself. He lived for the whole family. He lived to provide food for the whole world. Thank the Lord for that.

Another thing brothers and sisters, Jacob, when he was about to die, he made Joseph promise not to let him die in Egypt, but to bring his remains back to Bethel, and to Hebron. There his grandfather and father are also buried. Because that is the place his ancestors fellowshiped with God. He wanted to be connected to His Lord forever. When Joseph was about to die, he instructed them not to leave his bones in Egypt, but to bury him in Canaan.

400 years later, when the Lord Jehovah introduced Himself to Moses, He said, "I am the God of Abraham. I am the God of Isaac. I am the God of Jacob." God remembered them. We thank the Lord for them.

Our Lord Jesus said, "it means they are living before God, because God is not God of the dead, but of the living."

My dear brothers and sisters, what does this mean to you and to me? One of these days, suppose we follow the Lord faithfully, although sometimes we will make mistakes like Abraham and Jacob made mistakes. Even though we make mistakes, we come back and follow the Lord. Where I need to repent, I repent. Where I need to be separated from the world, I separate myself from the world. I believe that all the victories come from the Lord. I remember that God wants me to go back to Bethel. I remember that God calls me to be Israel. It is for the benefit of His kingdom. I remember that the Lord allows me to take care of my brothers.

Brothers and sisters, if that is the case, the Lord Jesus said, "God is not the God of the dead, but God of the living." You and I will be living before God. That is our choice, and that is the Lord's expectation.

Let us bow our heads in prayer.

Lord, we thank you so much. When we look over the generations and how you have loved them, how they have been precious in your own eyes, and how you have guided them, and how you have been so patient with their errors and their faults, how you always have hope on them; how you always give them strength, Lord we thank you and we praise you. We pray that we will honestly follow you, and let you be our Lord and our God. And not allow you to leave us, even in our worst times. Let us always remember to come back to Bethel.

Lord, we thank you and praise you. Your expectation and hope for us is so great. Lord, we want to follow you. In the name of the Lord Jesus we pray, Amen.