

**Acts 7: 11-14; “God’s Providence and Jacob’s Hope”, Sermon #28 in the series –  
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall  
on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015, in the Morning Worship Service.**

This morning I want to speak to you about God’s providence in relation to Jacob and Joseph and you. The providence of God, according to the Shorter Catechism is God’s most holy and wise preserving and governing of all His creatures and all of their actions. I want you to understand that God, by means of His providence, will accomplish everything that He has purposed to do in relation to the building of Christ’s Church during this present evil age. But there is another truth which I would have you to grasp from this text as well. It is, that you would realize that since you are a part of His great plan to help in the building of Christ’s Church, that you would be filled with the sure and certain hope that the gospel will someday conquer in all the earth. I am aware of the fact that only God can bring this great thing about; that Christ’s kingdom would come and His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. This is what we pray for in the Lord’s prayer. But I want to convince you of this great truth based upon what God did for the patriarchs in that day, and then apply it to what we hope that He will do for His Church in our own day and in future generations. In this message I want to specifically speak to you about what God did for Jacob, Joseph, and his brothers, and have that truth bring us hope in relation to the future of the Church. I am hoping that what God did in His providence for them will help you to see just how much you need to trust Him in His holy and wise governing of your life in all of its particulars.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – It was God’s providence that watched over Joseph when he was envied by His brothers.** (verses 9 and 10)

Verse 9 says – “And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt.” “But God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.” You will notice here, that there was an a very definite order in God’s providential dealings with Joseph. It was first, what would appear to us to be, the very unfortunate experience of his being envied by his brothers. Now, God is not the author of sin; He did not order Joseph’s brothers to envy him. But let us know of a certainty, that God does take notice of all the sinful tendencies in people’s lives; He knows where they will lead, according to that person’s sinful will, and He will let them have their way in sin for a time. For God is so great that He can actually use the actions of sinful men to accomplish His purpose, as we shall see in a few moments when we consider the death of Christ. What is pertinent to our study is to see that God has great plans to teach all of His people His ways, so that they will learn the things of righteousness which He would have them to learn. The sins of other people against us certainly cannot be justified. But they will, by His good providential ordering and grace, convey to our minds and hearts, what He wants us to learn. He wants us to learn about what is right and wrong, and how to live to His glory in the midst of confusing circumstances, when we do not see why He would permit them.

How does a Christian react rightly when they are sinned against, by people who are their close relatives, or by those brethren who they think should certainly know better? Under these sins, Joseph certainly suffered great mental anxieties and fears. But let us understand that God had great purposes behind the obvious evil which came to Joseph, and which may sometimes come to you. Because he was one of God’s elect people, God was with him. All during this time of his afflictions, God was with him, watching over him most carefully; even during the time of his brothers sinning against him. He was wisely ordering these things for his good, and even though Joseph could not see it. God’s providence so ordered these events that Joseph’s life would be spared, and mercy would be shown to him in the midst of it. God was bounding all of these evil actions of his brothers, so that Joseph would not die but live, and declare the works of the Lord.

God did ordain that Joseph was going to feel and experience the awful effects of his brothers sins of envy and hatred. On the human level, he was envied by his own brothers for a couple of reasons. First, it says in Genesis 37: 3 that his father Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age.” “And also he had made him a coat of many colors; a regal garment that sort of set him apart as a princely young man, and a special person. His brother did not at all like this kind of favoritism that Jacob showed to Joseph. They envied the special relationship that Joseph had with their father. Then secondly, he was envied by his brothers because they perceived that God had given him prophetic dreams. It was God who providentially ordered that Joseph would have these special gifts; both natural and spiritual. And this was because there was a very great purpose in the mind of God in relation to Joseph’s future usefulness to His kingdom; that is why He gave him these gifts. Along with God’s grace teaching him, a whole nation of people would be preserved and established as being the nation from which Christ, the Savior of the World, would come. We are told in Genesis 37: 5 – “Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers’ and they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.”

The sin of envy will often lead to the sin of hatred. Joseph was excited about these dreams and what they might mean for his whole family. He had received these dreams from God, but he unwisely, in his excitement, came to his brothers, and related them to them. In Genesis 37: 6, it says: “So he said to them, ‘Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field.’” “Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.” “And His brothers said to him, ‘Shall you indeed reign over us?’” “Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?” “So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.” This foolish telling of his dreams led to his being mistreated by them; all because he told them this dream which related to the future. But even this was the providence of God. And God was overruling it for his good. But according to His wise purpose, He gave Joseph into their hands for a time. So the brothers bound Joseph and threw him into a pit. They thought that they would kill him, but God put mercy into Reuben’s heart for the boy. “Let us not kill him.” “Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit. So they stripped him of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him. Then they sat down to eat, and a caravan of Midianite traders rode up. They were on their way to Egypt. Judah says, ‘What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?’” “Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh.” “And his brothers listened.” You see, this was the providence of God.

All these things were ordered by God, who is not the author of sin, but the One who is sovereign over all men who commit it. And the reason that He ordered them was not simply for the advance of His kingdom then, but for the advance of Christ’s kingdom now. Joseph’s life was so providentially superintended by God that he would become a type of the Lord Jesus Christ in His life, His sufferings, and the triumph of His kingdom. God was instructing these Jews, through Stephen’s preaching, that they were more wicked than Joseph’s brothers. The Lord Jesus was hated by His brethren, the Jews of His day. They envied His special relationship that He said that He had with His Father. And hated Him for His words of prophecy when He said that He would someday reign over them. They too, like Joseph’s brothers, plotted against him. And Judas sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Joseph was sold by his brothers for 20 shekels of silver. Both Joseph and Jesus suffered according to the purpose and providential ordering of God. Listen to Acts Chapter 4 and verses 27 and 28. “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.”

Let us understand that God in His providence was watching over Joseph in his sufferings and disappointments. And God in the fullness of time, in His providence, was watching over the Lord Jesus in His sufferings on Joseph’s behalf, when He went to the cross and was delivered into the hands of wicked men. God would providentially order Christ’s sufferings at the right time and His

resurrection at the right time. And, dear Christian, God was looking very carefully at the sufferings of the Lord Jesus on your behalf as well. He was looking to see that His justice would be satisfied, to see that the purchase of your redemption was made. If you will believe in the Lord Jesus, you will not only be forgiven of all of your sins, but He will be with you during the times of your greatest difficulties and greatest sufferings at the hands of those who are not doing the right thing. He was with Stephen. The Jews were very unkind to him, they were very unloving and hateful. They finally even stoned him to death. But the Lord was causing all things to work together for good to Stephen. Because He was called of God, he loved God, and God was working these things together in a mighty way for his good, at that awful time of his death. He will do the same for you in the times of your deepest distress.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – It was God’s Providence which was leading Jacob to the place where he could hope in the Lord again.** (verses 10-12)

Verse 10 says: “God delivered Joseph out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.” “Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance.” “But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.” I hope that you can see that it was God’s express purpose to deliver not only Joseph out of all his troubles, but also to use him to deliver Jacob out of all of his. And since that was the case with him, it is also God’s purpose to deliver each and every Christian out of all of their trials, even by means of His providential ordering of all things in your life. The reason that God does this for you is because of what He has accomplished through the sufferings, death, and resurrection of His dear Son. Even as God delivered Joseph out of all of his troubles, even so God delivered our Lord Jesus from all of His. After He suffered and died at the cross, it says in Acts Chapter 2, death could not hold Him. Verses 23 and 24 say: “Christ being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, was taken by lawless hands, crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.” And this became the basis of our everlasting consolation and good hope by the grace. Listen to 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2, verses 15-17 – “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.” “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.” Everlasting consolation and good hope come only by the grace of Christ. They come on the basis of what Christ has done for us; what He has purchased for us at the cross.

The reason that I bring these verses up here, is because Jacob had come to the place in his life where he had lost hope in God. When his sons came back to him after their great sin of having sold their brother into slavery in Egypt, they covered it up with a lie. They did this by taking Joseph’s tunic, and having killed a kid of the goats, they dipping it in the blood. They then brought it to their father and they said, ‘We have found this.’ “Do you know whether it is your son’s tunic or not?” “And he recognized it and said, “It is my son’s tunic.” “A wild beast has devoured him.” “Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces.” You can see why Jacob would think this way. The evidence all appeared to point to that conclusion. But was it the truth? No, his sons had deceived him, but he didn’t know it. This lie did something to Jacob. It took away his hope in God for many years to come. Let us understand that God sees what a man cannot see in the hearts of people around him. There are people in the world who will lie to you to cover up their own sin. You may even be deceived into thinking that a lie is the truth for a time, but during that time, indeed at all times, it will be very important that your faith and your hope be continually in God. Psalm 71, verse 14 – “But I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more.”

The things that bring distress to your soul; the disappointments in other people, the death or loss of a loved one; these are meant in the providence of God to draw you nearer to Him. They are opportunities to exercise the grace of hope. In chapter 37, verse 35, it says – “And all of Jacob’s

sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, 'For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.' "Thus his father wept for him." Matthew Henry says: "We must never say, "We will go to our grave mourning," because we know not what joyful days Providence may yet reserve for us, and it is our wisdom and duty to accommodate ourselves to Providence." "We often perplex ourselves with imaginary troubles." "We fancy things worse than they are, and then afflict ourselves more than we need." "Sometimes there needs no more to comfort us than to undeceive us: it is good to hope the best." (end of quote) Jacob, we must remember was deceived at this point. He thought that his Joseph was dead, but he was not. Sometimes we too can be deceived into thinking that Christ is no longer with us, because many circumstances are against us. Let us remember that precious promise of Hebrews 13: 5 – "I will never leave you nor forsake you." "So that we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear." "What can man do to me?" God has a purpose to accomplish in your life, dear Christian, and that is building Christian character in you. He knows that it will be better for you if you will learn to trust Him, and learn to hope in Him continually.

But I would have you to think about this with me a little longer. I think that this is where we must learn to admire, and trust in, the providence of God; that He does all things well, at the very point in which we are most disappointed. It was because God waited to deliver Joseph out of all of his troubles, that he was able to deliver Jacob out of all of his troubles later on. In God's providence Joseph must wait and suffer on. And in this, he is a type of Christ. When God was intending to bring Joseph out of prison, where he had been so unrighteously placed, He began his good work, of the interpretation of the dreams, for a chief butler and a chief baker. Joseph interpreted their prophetic dreams; the chief butler's meant that he would be restored to his position and find favor with Pharaoh again. The chief baker's meant that he, being found guilty of his crimes, would lose his head to the executioner. Joseph interpreted the dream favorably for the chief butler, and only asked that he would remember him to Pharaoh as he wanted to be released from prison, as he had done nothing wrong to merit being put in there. But as providence would have it, when the chief butler was restored he forgot to tell the Pharaoh about Joseph.

Why did this happen? Something which should have easily been remembered by the chief butler, out of gratitude for his own release from death, he forgets entirely. But this was the way that God had purposed it for Joseph. This was God's providence. For as it says in Psalm 105, verses 16-20, God had a purpose to fulfill. It says there: "Moreover He called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread." "He sent a man before them – Joseph – who was sold as a slave." "They hurt his feet with fetters, he was laid in irons, until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him." (end of quote) You see, there were things for Joseph to learn, even there in prison, and so he must patiently wait and hope in God. Psalm 40, verse 11 says: "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" "And why are you disquieted within me?" "Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God." Even so, Christ endured the sufferings of the cross, and He could not be released until He had died paying for the faults and sins of all of God's elect. Let us understand that it is Christ's death that is the basis of our hope. Remembering what Christ has done for us will keep us in this good hope of grace, both now and all through our life.

Matthew Henry says again: "Some observe the resemblance between Joseph and Christ in this story." "Joseph's fellow-sufferers were like the two thieves that were crucified with Christ – the one saved, the other condemned." (It is Dr. Lightfoot's remark, from Mr. Broughton.) "One of these, when Joseph said to him, "Remember me when it shall be well with thee", forget him; but one of those, when he said to Christ, "Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom", was not forgotten." "We justly blame the chief butler's ingratitude to Joseph, yet we conduct ourselves much more disingenuously towards the Lord Jesus." "Joseph had but foretold the chief butler's enlargement, but Christ wrought out ours, mediated with the King of kings for us; yet we forget Him, though often reminded of Him, though we have promised never to forget him: thus ill do we

requite him, like foolish people and unwise.” (end of quote) I would say that it is very important that we will think upon Christ’s death for the forgiveness of our sins and think upon His resurrection from the dead so that we will be filled with hope.

**3rd – It is God’s providence that would give Jacob hope for his descendants throughout all the generations of world.** (verses 13 and 14)

It says in verse 13 – “And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph’s family became known to the Pharaoh.” “Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people.” If you will notice, God’s timing in bringing Joseph out of prison was perfectly coordinated with Pharaoh’s dream needing to be interpreted. And thus, as it says in verse 10 of Acts 7: “God delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.” This set the stage for Joseph’s giving help to Jacob according to the providence of God. Joseph had interpreted Pharaoh’s dream for him; the dream of the seven cows coming up out of the river Nile, looking fine and fat; and seven other cows coming up after them which were poor and ugly and gaunt. In this dream Pharaoh also saw seven heads coming up on one stalk, full and good, and also seven heads which were withered and blighted by the east wind. So Joseph said to Pharaoh, “God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do: the seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads are seven years; the dreams are one.” Joseph advised the Pharaoh to “select a discerning and wise man over the land of Egypt, and then he would appoint officers over the land to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years.” (verse 34 of Genesis 41). Then there would be a food reserve in the land during the seven lean years. Pharaoh took Joseph up on this and appointed him to the work. He said in Genesis 41: 41 – “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” “Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck.” And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, Bow the knee!” “So he set him over all the land of Egypt.”

In this also Joseph became a type of Christ. In verse 44 it says – “Pharaoh also said to Joseph, ‘I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.’” “And Pharaoh called Joseph’s name Zaphnath-Paaneah.” “And he gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On.” “So Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.” “Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt.” What a great type of Christ Joseph is; for what great things were given to him, were given in an infinitely greater way in Christ. All power and authority in heaven and earth were given to Christ by the Father when He was raised from the dead. The Pharaoh as the supreme ruler of Egypt is a type of God the Father who is the Supreme Ruler of the World. The Father has given Christ this great power to rule and reign over all men and all things in this fallen world; Egypt being a type of the world. The Father has appointed Christ to be the only Savior and Lord of all people. No person may lift their hand or foot to do anything to accomplish anything for His kingdom without His saying it will be so. Jesus says, “Without Me, you can do nothing.”

But in accordance with the prophecies of the Scripture, (the dreams given to the Heavenly Joseph) our Lord Jesus Christ, in His ministry, became the only Mediator between God and man. And according to the purpose of the Father, during this present age, He is taking a Bride for Himself; pictured here first as the Gentile Bride – Asenath. She was given to Joseph by Pharaoh. And Christ’s Bride has been given to Him by His Father. This marriage of Joseph to this Egyptian woman is a picture of the calling of the Gentiles into the Church. And it was begun in Acts Chapter 10 in the calling of Cornelius and his family. And those times continue to this very day. But the day of the calling of the Jews, Christ’s brethren, to be restored to the Church is yet to come; and this is pictured for us in typical form in Genesis 42 by Jacob sending His sons down to Egypt, during the time of the famine, to buy bread. In this was the providence of God. I wish that I had time to relate all of the interactions between Joseph and his brethren when they came down to buy

bread. I do not have that time at present. And so ask you to bear with me as I summarize to make my point, and then perhaps I will speak of it again in the next sermon. It must suffice for now to say, as our text says: "And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh." In this there is also a type of Christ and His Church. For how estranged Joseph's brothers were from him after they sold him down to Egypt. They never expected to see him again. And yet years later, God in His providence brought them down to Egypt seeking grain to make bread.

When they first came down to Egypt and came to the place where Joseph was, overseeing the selling of grain, it says in Genesis 42: 6 – "Now Joseph was governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land." "And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the earth." "Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them." "Then he said to them, "Where do you come from?" "And they said, 'From the land of Canaan to buy food.'" "So Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him." (This is the way that it is even today with regard to the Jews.) "Then Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them." Let us remember in closing that Christ does remember the dreams that His Father gave Him in the counsels of eternity, in the Covenant of Redemption. He remembers that God His Father has given Him authority over all flesh, that as many as the Father has given Him, He should give eternal life to. This is all of God's elect people. But God's elect people, the Bride of Christ are not simply the Gentiles who are saved from the times of the Early Church until the end of the World. His Bride is also made up of Jews from every generation until the end of the world. The number of Jews saved since Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D. has been relatively small; a remnant of the larger body which have lived and died thus far. But this sad fact shall one day change. God still has a greater purpose for them as an ethnic people and a nation in the future. His purpose is to someday save them as a nation, through Christ, and give them eternal and everlasting hope.

This will take Christ's revealing Himself to them, even as Joseph revealed Himself to his brothers. Stephen could not reveal this great truth to them in all its fullness at that time, for it was not God's purpose to do so. But he could hint at it. It was the second time that Joseph's brothers came down looking for grain that Joseph revealed himself to them. I believe that the day is coming that God's ancient people the Jews shall long for the bread of the word of God, and their heavenly Joseph shall give it to them without money or price. Genesis 45: 1 – "Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" "And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it." "Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph; does my father still live?' But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence." This event of Joseph revealing himself to his brothers is the type of what will happen someday in the conversion of the Jews as a nation to Christ. May we believe in the types and the promises, and long for its coming, for it will give hope to many in this fallen world; the revealing of the heavenly Joseph, our Lord Jesus Christ to His kinsmen according to the flesh, the Jews. Listen to Ezekiel 37: 11 – "Then He said to me, 'Son of Man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.'" "They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!'" "Therefore prophesy and say to them, "Thus say the Lord God" Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel." "Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves." "I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land." "Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it, says the Lord." This is not describing a physical resurrection, but a spiritual resurrection. Israel after the flesh shall someday become spiritual Israel with all of the saved Gentiles in the Church of God. "O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is lovingkindness, and with Him is abundant redemption, for He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities" – Psalm 130, verse 8. This is intended by God to give hope to all of His people.

