

# OpenTheo

## February 13th: Genesis 43 & Matthew 3

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The brothers return to Egypt. John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus.

Some passages referenced:

Isaiah 40 (the voice in the wilderness); 2 Kings 1:8 (dressing like Elijah); Luke 1:14ff., Matthew 17:10ff. (John the Baptist the promised Elijah to come); Malachi 4 (the promise of Elijah's coming); Isaiah 51:1-2 (stones from Abraham); Malachi (God coming to purge his Temple); 2 Samuel 24 (the Temple on the threshing floor); Isaiah 42:1, Psalm 2:7 (the declaration of the voice from heaven)

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Genesis 43. Now the famine was severe in the land. And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, Go again, buy us a little food.

But Judah said to him, The man solemnly warned us, saying, You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you. If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and

buy you food. But if you will not send him, we will not go down.

For the man said to us, You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you. Israel said, Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother? They replied, The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother? What we told him was an answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, Bring your brother down? And Judah said to Israel his father, Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you, and also our little ones.

I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.

If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice. Then their father Israel said to them, If it must be so, then do this. Take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm, and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds.

Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight.

Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man. May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.

So the men took this present, and they took double the money with them, and Benjamin. They arose and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph. When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal, and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon.

The man did as Joseph told him, and brought the men to Joseph's house. And the men were afraid, because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, It is because of the money, which was replaced in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may assault us and fall upon us to make us his servants, and seize our donkeys. So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house, and spoke with him at the door of the house, and said, Oh my lord, we came down the first time to buy food, and when we came to the lodging place, we opened our sacks, and there was each man's money in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight.

So we have brought it again with us, and we have brought other money down with us to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks. He replied, Peace to you, do not be afraid, your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you, I received your money.

Then he brought Simeon out to them. And when the man had brought the men into

Joseph's house, and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys fodder, they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they should eat bread there. When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present that they had with them, and bowed down to him to the ground.

And he inquired about their welfare, and said, Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke, is he still alive? They said, Your servant our father is well, he is still alive. And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves. And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son.

Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out.

And controlling himself, he said, Serve the food. They served him by himself, and then by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth.

And the men looked at one another in amazement. Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him.

In Genesis chapter 43, there's a slowing down of the pace of the narrative of the book. We've seen this already in chapter 17 and 18, where about 13 years intervene between the end of chapter 16 and chapter 17. And then there's a whole rush of events up to chapter 21 in the period of just over a year.

Here again, we see a very brief window of time with long extended speeches. The pace of the narrative is really slowed down. And the pace of the narrative more generally is important.

When he has to, the author of Genesis can recount details very briefly and succinctly. But sometimes he goes into extreme, almost novelistic detail, as we see in this passage. So it's worth considering why is he slowing things down at particular points.

Sometimes we'll see this even in a single narrative, such as in the story of Judah and Tamar, where a period of anything of up to 40 years is passed over in a few verses. And then the text slows down to a crawl after the encounter with Tamar. The severity of the famine is mentioned at this point, perhaps drawing our mind back to chapter 41 and the dreams of Joseph.

The need for food drives Jacob to tell his sons to go down into Egypt again. But Judah reminds Jacob of the problem. The Egyptian ruler has called for them to bring back Benjamin with them.

Jacob is annoyed and wonders why they would ever have told him that there was another brother. But yet clearly he'd been looking for that information from them. And they'd given him the information without thinking that he would ever require that they bring that son there.

Reuben utterly failed to persuade Jacob to allow him to bring Benjamin with him at the end of the previous chapter. But Judah persuades. Ironically it was Reuben who tried to protect Joseph from the other brothers, and Judah that was instigating the plot to sell him and then to cover up his disappearance.

This is another story of sacrificing the beloved son. We've seen several of these in the book of Genesis so far. Lot has to be let go by Abram.

Abram presumes, I think, early on, that Lot will be his heir, that Lot will carry on his name, that he will be the seed, as it were, this son of his dead brother. But that's not to be the case. Again he presumes that Ishmael will be the one to continue his name.

Again, it is not Ishmael. And then Isaac, he is called to sacrifice Isaac in chapter 22. The story of Jacob contains similar themes too.

His mother and father have to leave him, depart, and to go away from them in order for him to be safe. Joseph is sent down into Egypt. Simeon is sent down into Egypt and does not come back.

He's imprisoned. And now Benjamin, that one son that remains to him, has to be sent too. In the story of Judah and Tamar, there are two sons who die at the beginning.

And it seems, to Judah at least, that Tamar is responsible for this. Tamar married Ur, and then Ur died, and then Tamar had relations with Onan, and Onan died. And so it seems natural that she's a woman who's causing all sorts of deaths in his family.

He's not going to give his son Shelah to her. But yet, until he gives the kid to Tamar, his family is not going to be restored from death. When he actually sends the third, the two sons are restored to him in Perez and Zerah.

And we're seeing a similar thing here. Until Benjamin is sent, Simeon and Joseph will not be restored. There are binding of Isaac themes then.

Themes of sacrificing the beloved son. Judah's willingness to act as surety for Benjamin is setting the scene for his turning away from the pattern of his previous actions. And the situation being redeemed.

He's now offering himself for the younger brother of Joseph, Rachel's youngest son. He covered up the death of Joseph. Now he's offering himself as surety.

They're sent with a sevenfold gift. Different riches of the land. Like the caravan that went down to Egypt in chapter 37 that took Joseph with it.

They are bringing balm, gum and myrrh. They're also bringing honey, pistachio, nuts and almonds. This is a replaying in some ways of the caravan of chapter 37.

And with it, they are bringing down double money. They're bringing back the silver that was in their sacks. Now that double money may make us think of the firstborn portion.

They're bringing that back with Joseph. Silver was taken from the sale of Joseph. Now silver is being sent back as restitution.

Double portion. Seeing Benjamin from a distance changes the situation for Joseph. Benjamin's not dead.

The other sons of Jacob have not destroyed his mother's son. The only thing left to him of Rachel. Now he lifts up his eyes and sees Benjamin.

In a number of significant encounters within the book of Genesis, it's described in this way. For Abraham lifting up his eyes and seeing the place where he's going to sacrifice Isaac. Lifting up his eyes and seeing the ram caught in the thicket.

And Isaac and Rebecca lifting up their eyes and seeing each other. Here again we're seeing that language used. A key moment is occurring.

The fact that they did not come with Benjamin the first time led him to fear the worst. That they had done away with Benjamin. Now he sees Benjamin and he has the assurance that Benjamin is not dead.

And that there is hope. Benjamin is spoken of as his brother Benjamin. His mother's son.

This is his strongest family attachment. It's the one brother he knows is innocent. But also gives him some assurance of Jacob's part in the matter.

He might have feared that his father sent him on a dangerous mission in order to get rid of him. He might have wondered whether Jacob was so angry after he had told him the dream. That he just wanted to get rid of him.

But now the fact that he held Benjamin back from harm. And then only sent him on at this later point. Suggests to Joseph that actually his father was not involved.

Perhaps that's something that's going on here. He disguises his true emotions at this point but he weeps. His anguish was hidden from his brothers earlier.

When he was in the pit. And now his emotion is hidden from them again. There are key occasions of weeping in the story of Joseph.

And in the story of Genesis more generally. If we read the story of Jacob there are three key occasions of weeping. Esau weeps when he finds that he has lost the blessing.

Jacob weeps when he first meets Rachel. And then the two brothers weep together when they encounter each other at the beginning of chapter 33. These different occasions of weeping.

First divided and then joined together are significant. And likewise with the story of Joseph. This gives us a sense of the power of the emotions that he's feeling.

But also connects with previous things that happened. He was once weeping alone away from his brothers when his brothers were eating at a distance. They did not see his weeping then.

They do not see it now. They eat bread at a distance once again. These are not just novelistic details.

They do give us a sense of the fuller picture of what's taking place. And the emotional force. But it's replaying something that's happened before.

Joseph orders them by age. And they might wonder whether he has the power of divination. Which comes into play later on in the next chapter.

But the natural thing to do having arranged them in order of age. Would be either to treat them all the same. Or to distinguish the first born for special treatment.

But he singles out Benjamin instead. Note how Joseph is setting things up to test whether they are still characterized by envy. He, although a younger brother, was favored above his brothers by his father.

Now he's favoring the youngest brother above the other brothers again. And this favoring of Benjamin puts them in a situation once again. Where they are tested in how they will act towards the favored brother of the other mother.

A question to consider. Can you see any significance in the many details that are given to us concerning the actions of the steward. And the various ways that they move and Joseph moves within the house.

Matthew chapter 3 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his path

straight.

Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist. And his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him.

And they were baptized by him in the river Jordan confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism he said to them. You brood of vipers.

Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance.

That he who is coming after me is mightier than I. Whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand and he will clear his threshing floor.

And gather his wheat into the barn. But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by him.

John would have prevented him saying, I need to be baptized by you. And do you come to me? But Jesus answered him, let it be so now. For thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.

Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water. And behold, the heavens were opened to him.

And he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him. And behold, a voice from heaven said, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. In Matthew chapter 3 we are introduced to the character of John the Baptist.

John the Baptist is very important in each one of the gospels. And in the book of Acts we see that to be an apostle you had to be a witness of Christ's ministry beginning from John the Baptist to the resurrection. John the Baptist is not just mentioned in the New Testament.

We also see him in the works of Josephus. His practice of baptism also seems to be related to Jewish ritual washings for purity. It's not something conjured up out of nothing.

The community associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls also seems to have practiced similar sorts of baptisms. In the book of John there are people who come to John and ask him about his practice of baptism and seem to be discussing it according to the lines of

ritual purity more generally. So it's not an unprecedented movement.

It draws upon earlier covenant and natural symbolism. Water has a natural symbolism. Washing, cleansing, union, blessing, all these sorts of things.

And John is drawing upon that in his practice. But he's also drawing upon existing practices of washing. He's drawing upon the symbolism of a particular place.

The crossing of the Jordan was where they entered into the land. By baptising people in the wilderness on the far side of the Jordan he's preparing people symbolically to enter into the land again. And he's calling people to join in this new exodus movement.

It's distinct from later Christian baptism. And it's not self-baptism either. So there are important things to notice about that that distinguish it both from some of the baptisms that we find in places like the book of Leviticus but also the baptisms that we encounter later on in the New Testament.

John declares the Kingdom of Heaven. And the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God are largely interchangeable expressions. This is central to John the Baptist's ministry and announcement.

It's also central to what Christ declares as he comes on the scene. The words of John the Baptist draw our minds back to Isaiah chapter 40 where there is this prophecy of a new exodus that's going to happen. Israel has been forgiven of its sins, its warfare has ended and God is going to come to reign among them.

That promise of the reign of God or the Kingdom of Heaven is in its original context a prophecy of the return from Babylon. God is coming to rule. And John the Baptist characterises himself as the one bearing this message.

This frames our understanding of Christ's ministry when it comes. Note how little the Bible gives attention to appearance of characters, to scenic features and details of diet. But yet it describes John the Baptist.

He's dressed in a garment of camel's hair, he has a leather belt around his waist and his food is locusts and wild honey. Now why on earth does it matter what he eats for his breakfast? Why does it matter how he dresses when he goes out on the day? Well it matters because it connects us with various other things that help us to understand what type of character he is. Most particularly it brings our mind back to 2 Kings chapter 1 verse 8 where the character of Elijah is described.

He wore a garment of hair with a belt of leather around his waist. He said, it is Elijah the Tishbite. The very last prophecy of the Old Testament promises that Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes and he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers



lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

The final verse of chapter 4 of the book of Malachi, the final verse of the Old Testament in our typical ordering. And now we see this character on the scene who dresses in the same way as Elijah. He is the Elijah to come and later on in Matthew chapter 17 verse 10 following he is described as the Elijah that was to come.

In Luke chapter 1 verses 14 following he is described as one who will come in the spirit and the power of Elijah. And so this reminds us of Old Testament prophecy. It characterises John the Baptist, helps us to see who he is and what prophecies he is fulfilling.

He eats locusts and wild honey. He is detached from the society. These aren't cultivated foods.

They are wild foods. He is connected with the poor. The locusts may be connected with enemies of Israel.

Honey with the sustenance of the land. Wild and uncultivated. It is a return to the state of exodus like eating quail and manna.

And his location is important. He is in the wilderness. This brings up themes of exile, fulfilment of prophecy.

He goes outside of society, a place where there are the fugitives and the outcasts. And John's baptism is connected with a certain exclusion from society. You are stepping away from society to be baptised.

You are going outside of the main area of the land. You have to re-enter again through this washing. Pagans who wanted to join Israel would have repented and been baptised.

Israel is being treated in the same way, subject to proselyte baptism. This is in keeping with John's message that Jewish ancestry was no guarantee of safety as God came near to his people. It also sets the terms for much of the rest of the New Testament message about Jews and Gentiles and keeps with the themes of Matthew at this point.

Many might assume that the merit of Abraham will protect them, but John attacks that notion. He speaks of them as brood of vipers, the seed of the serpent. And this may also be an allusion to the idea that vipers killed their mothers.

They were set against their ancestors and not walking in their ways. What really matters is that they need to bear the fruits of repentance. So this theme of trees and fruits, it's the characteristic of the righteous man, a tree that bears its fruits in season, and they need to bear the fruit of repentance.

There's also this play on children and stones. You can see that in both Aramaic and

Hebrew. And it reminds us of the idea of Israel being taken, hewn from the stone of Abraham.

That if they're going to be the true sons of Abraham, they have to be hewn from this. The axe is laid to the root of the tree. This is the language of Isaiah.

Isaiah often uses this language of trees being cut down or of things growing up from a stump or a root out of dry ground. The axe is laid to the root of the trees. The leaders of Israel are about to be cut down.

The heads of the people. And this great forest is about to be felled. God is going to come near, he's going to judge, and they need to be prepared.

See a similar thing in Daniel where it describes the story of Nebuchadnezzar. This great tree in which people took refuge and beneath its shade and its branches, it's going to be chopped down. He is humiliated.

And then it will be built up again. Now, this is a need for a general repentance. It's not just a subset of the wicked.

This is an event of national, not merely private, import. John is calling the whole nation to enter into this repentance. It's a collective return to God.

And he uses the language of God coming to the threshing floor. This is, again, it's language from Malachi. He uses the language of the threshing floor, but Malachi speaks of the temple.

Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight. Behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.

But who can adjure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them like gold and silver. And they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.

It is important to remember here that the temple was built on the site of the threshing floor, and drew upon its symbolism. The threshing floor is the place where the wheat is prepared, where things are tested, where God judges his people. It's the place where the oxen of the priesthood tread out the grain, preparing Israel for God's bread, as it were.

John describes his baptism as anticipatory of a greater baptism, the baptism of the Spirit. Jesus is anointed with the Spirit himself, but he will go on to anoint others. We might ask why Jesus needed to be baptised.

John the Baptist makes the objection to it. But Jesus says this should be done to fulfil all

righteousness. Maybe it's referring to God's establishment of his saving righteousness, this fulfilment of prophecy.

Jesus is identifying with his people. He's also symbolically identifying with Israel. He crosses the water, and later he'll be tested in the wilderness.

And so he's leading the people on this new Exodus movement. There's a handing on of the baton here as well. Jesus continues from the last great prophet.

And this is the baton that has been passed to John himself. John is the Elijah that was to come, the great prophet that was promised. And now he passes on the baton to Christ.

Note in the Old Testament the number of transitions that we see at the Jordan. We have Moses transitioning to Joshua. We have Elijah transitioning to Elisha.

And in those cases what we see is a movement from a desert prophet to a land prophet. And in both the case of Joshua and Elisha, there are similarities with Jesus' name. Joshua and Jesus are the same name.

And Elisha and Jesus are also closely associated. God saves or Yahweh saves, these are very similar names. Now Christ is taking over from the desert prophet and bringing things into the land.

John is also a witness. Throughout the book of Matthew, and particularly John's Gospel, John's witness is set forth as something that is very important. John the Baptist bears witness to Christ.

He is the Baptist, but he recognises Jesus as the great baptiser, the one who was baptised with the Spirit. And his identification of Jesus is an important part of the witness to Christ. Along with the resurrection, this is why it was important for apostles to be aware of John the Baptist's ministry.

He comes up out of the water and he is anointed by the Spirit, the Spirit descending in the form of a dove upon him. He sees this happening. It's not necessarily something that would have been seen by everyone in the situation.

In the same way as Elijah ascending into heaven was not necessarily a sight that anyone would have seen. Rather your eyes need to be open to see this. John the Baptist saw this, Jesus saw this.

And this is an anointing of Jesus by the Spirit for his mission. The heavens are open, the dove descends and the voice declares his status. This is a multifaceted witness to Christ.

He is marked out as the Son at this point. This is also a deeply Trinitarian event. The Father speaking from heaven, the Spirit descending upon him and Christ in the waters.

We might also reflect upon the different voices represented here. The voice of Scripture as a witness to Christ. The prophetic voice of John the Baptist as a witness to Christ.

And then also the heavenly voice as a witness to Christ. All of these join together in a unified witness to who Christ is. The Spirit descends in the form of a dove.

You can think back to the story of Noah where the dove is what descends upon the earth as it first comes out of the water. This is like the Spirit on the original waters as well. It's associated with themes of love.

Doves come out from eyes to express the love between persons in the poetry of something like Song of Songs. And so this is expressing the belovedness of the Son. It's marking out the Son as it were as the new creation that's just emerged from the waters.

And heaven and earth are united at this point. This is a descent of the Spirit upon the Son who's standing in the waters. And all the different aspects of creation are joined together at this point.

The heavens, the waters beneath, the earth and there's as it were communication between heaven and earth. This is a Jacob's Ladder type theme. And that voice coming from heaven declares that he is the beloved Son.

This is the language of Isaiah chapter 42 verse 1 for instance. Where we read, Or of Psalm 2 verse 7. A question to consider. Later on in the Gospel of Matthew as in the other synoptic Gospels we read of the Transfiguration which has a number of similar themes to the Baptism of Christ.

What similarities do you see and why might these two events be similar?