

# OpenTheo

## February 20th: Genesis 50 & Matthew 8:1-17

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The burial of Jacob and the death of Joseph. Jesus performs healings.

Some passages referenced:

Genesis 47:11 (given possession within Egypt); Hebrews 11:22, Exodus 13:19, Joshua 24:32 (the bones of Joseph); Joshua 24:29 (Joshua dies at 110).

Matthew 8:18-22, 9:9-13, 9:35-10:42 (calls to discipleship).

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

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## Transcript

Genesis chapter 50. As well as all the household of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's household. Only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the land of Goshen.

And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen. It was a very great company. When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and grievous lamentation.

And he made a mourning for his father seven days. When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, they said, this is a grievous mourning by the Egyptians. Therefore the place was named Abel Mizraim.

It is beyond the Jordan. Thus his sons did for him as he had commanded them. For his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite, to possess as a burying place.

After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father. When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, it may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him. So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, your father gave this command before he died.

Say to Joseph, please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you. And now please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father. Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, behold, we are your servants. But Joseph said to them, do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear, I will provide for you and your little ones.

Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. So Joseph remained in Egypt, he in his father's house. Joseph lived 110 years.

And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. The children also of Manasseh, the son of Manasseh, were counted as Joseph's own. And Joseph said to his brothers, I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this place to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.

Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, God will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here. So Joseph died being 110 years old. They embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

In Genesis chapter 50, the stories of Jacob and Joseph finally reached their end. And the book is concluded. Joseph has two father figures in his life.

He has his father Jacob and he has Pharaoh. He spent the first 17 years of his life with his father Jacob and then the last 17 years of his father's life with him. But in the interim period he was separated from his father.

He didn't know if his father was involved in sending him down to Egypt. He was raised to new authority by Pharaoh. Pharaoh gave him a new job, a new name and even a wife.

And so there are these two father figures whose interests compete and the question is who will ultimately have his loyalty? After Jacob dies, he's embalmed. The embalming process takes about 40 days and then there's a period of mourning for about 70 days. Quite likely the embalming period is within that 70 days.

This was a huge event. This is the father of the saviour of the nation and he is being mourned like a royal figure. And as such a figure he's going to be embalmed, he's going to be placed in the casket and he's going to be buried in a very magnificent tomb.

But yet there's a twist in the tale. Joseph speaks to the people of the household of Pharaoh, not Pharaoh directly but indirectly, and says that he was made to swear by his father that he'll be buried in the land of Canaan. Now what's the purpose of the embalming? It seems to this point that it's the typical preparation for the Egyptian afterlife.

Here is a body being prepared for an Egyptian funeral and burial. But yet for Joseph the preparation is so that the body can be transported to somewhere different entirely. That it might be taken out of Egypt and brought to the cave of Machpelah and buried there.

This is quite a startling request that he makes of Pharaoh. Here is the saviour of the people who was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers and yet has risen to the highest heights of authority in Egypt. He's someone with influence and power second only to Pharaoh himself.

His family has been given this vast land that they can occupy. They have great riches and wealth and influence. They have high authority and positions of power.

And now the patriarch of this people has requested to be buried in the land of Canaan. Don't they recognise that Egypt is their new home? You can imagine why Joseph approaches this request rather gingerly. They've just had 70 days of mourning for this guy.

This guy is treated as Egyptian royalty and now Joseph is asking for that body to be buried elsewhere. Something seems to be ungrateful about this request. But Joseph does have a benefit in the fact that he was made to swear by his father to bury his body in the land of Canaan.

This means it's not just his choice. He is bound by filial responsibility to his father and that gives him some leverage in the conversation with Pharaoh and his household. While Pharaoh is not probably very pleased about this request, he accepts it and Joseph goes up to bury his father.

But he is not alone. He is accompanied by all the servants of Pharaoh. The elders of his household, the elders of the land of Egypt and all the household of Joseph.

His brothers, his father's household and just the children and the flocks are left behind. Far from just grudgingly accepting this, the Egyptians are fully involved. They provide an honour guard for the funeral procession to the land of Canaan.

And they take the long way round. They go beyond the far side of the Jordan rather than straight up to Hebron. And they wait some days on the far side of the Jordan and then Joseph and his brothers cross and bury their father.

And why do they take this particular route? Well I think in part because it's the same route as they later take in the Exodus. Their father Israel is the one who bears the name of the people and he's buried in the land. He represents the destiny of his sons that his sons will one day follow him back.

And perhaps one of the most interesting features of this particular narrative is the suggestion that the Egyptians could have played a role in that story too if things had been otherwise. In this story Pharaoh is being presented with a difficult request concerning a son that had to prefer loyalty to his true father over loyalty to him. See similarities may be between Moses and Joseph.

Moses is taken into the royal family but ultimately identifies with Israel. Israel is God's first born son. It's not God's only son but it is God's first born son.

And God says to Pharaoh, let my people go. That demand is not dissimilar from the demand that Jacob makes upon Pharaoh. Let my son go that he may serve me, that he may bring me to the land and bury me in the land.

Recognise that he is my son ultimately, not your son. And while he may rule wisely in your kingdom and in your name, ultimately he belongs to a different father. He is not yours.

Let my first born son go. And that possibility that Pharaoh would have let Israel go is one that is held out within this chapter. If Pharaoh had submitted to the will of this father in the same way as the earlier Pharaoh submitted to the will of Jacob concerning his son Joseph, then things could have been very different.

Rather than chariots pursuing to be destroyed in the Red Sea, chariots could have gone up with Israel as an honour guard. Recognising again that Israel is God's first born son but not his only son. Egypt can be seen as a son of God too.

Egypt can enter into the blessing that Israel has. Instead of a pursuing party, they could have been an honour guard. After all of this takes place, after the death of Jacob, there is another crisis that arises.

The question of whether Joseph has truly forgiven the brothers or whether merely for the sake of his father he delayed his vengeance upon them. Think back to the story of Esau

who said that he would, when his father died, that he would kill Jacob. In a similar manner, perhaps Joseph is just delaying his wrath until Jacob dies.

And so the brothers deal with Joseph indirectly through messengers in a similar way to the way that Joseph deals with Pharaoh's household. They relay a message that Jacob supposedly gave concerning the brothers before he died. Now I think it's unlikely that Jacob actually gave that message.

Rather they're trying to save themselves using the authority of their father as leverage. It is interesting to observe the way that they speak of God in this context. They speak of the God of your father.

Your father, not our father. And the God of your father. As if Joseph had a closer relationship not just with Jacob but also with God.

Their relationship both with Jacob and also to an extent with God is mediated by Joseph's relationship with them. But Joseph's peaceful response emphasises God's sovereignty in history. God is in control of the course of events, not ultimately human will.

In a famous statement Joseph says to them, As for me you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today. This echoes the statements of chapter 45. Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. And then later on, God has made me lord of all Egypt.

Joseph's recognition of God's hand in the control of the events of history allows him to forgive his brothers, to recognise that their agency is not the ultimate decider of events, but God's purpose. And in light of that, to be able to show mercy and grace to people who had sought his harm. Joseph dies at the age of 110 years.

And as we've gone through the stories to these points, we've noticed the pattern to be observed in the age of the patriarchs. Abraham being 175 years old, 7 times 5 squared. Isaac being 180 years old, 5 times 6 squared.

Jacob being 147 years old, 3 times 7 squared. And now Joseph, 1 times 5 squared plus 6 squared plus 7 squared. There's a progression from 7, 5, 3, 1, and then ascending squares.

5 squared, 6 squared, 7 squared, and then 5 squared plus 6 squared plus 7 squared. This progression is an interesting mathematical feature of the text, but I think there's a deeper theological significance here. The destiny of the family of Abraham is played out through the various lines of that family.

The destiny of each character is developed in the next. And we've seen this in the emphasis upon the way that the characters pass things on to the next generation through blessings. And also the role of the next generation in burying their fathers and the loyalty to their fathers as they continue their legacy.

Also in the way that God is named in reference to the father. The God of your father Abraham to Isaac. The fear of Isaac to Jacob.

The God of your father to Joseph. In each of these cases we're seeing a developing line of blessing. A developing line of God's covenant commitment to his people through history.

It's a cumulative story. Joseph makes the sons of Israel swear that they will bring up his bones from the land of Egypt. Now he's not getting them to bring his bones up immediately, as in the case of Jacob.

Rather he's anticipating a later departure from the land. That his bones are held as a guarantee that that will in fact take place. And as they are left in the land of Egypt the promise is that they will go up at one point in the future.

Usually when we read about a character's death and being put in a tomb it's the end of the story. But this is the end of the book of Genesis but it's not the end of the story of Joseph's body. Joseph's bones are the beginning of a later story.

They set things up for the story of the Exodus. The deliverance of those bones from the land of Egypt and the burial of those bones within the land of Canaan. Now the fate of Joseph's bones frames the whole story of the Exodus.

In Exodus chapter 13 verse 19 in the context of the description of Israel leaving the land of Egypt. We read, And the end of the book of Joshua has a number of echoes of the end of the book of Genesis. It ends with the story of Joshua's death and his burial.

And then it mentions the bones of Joseph. And that is at the very end of the story of the conquest of the land. So at the very beginning of them leaving Egypt and at the very end of the conquest of the land the bones of Joseph turn up.

Joseph's statement concerning his bones is not just something tagged on at the end of a book as the narrative energy dies down. Rather it sets things up for what's going to happen in the future. And once again the author of Hebrews appreciated this.

By faith Joseph at the end of his life made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones. The fate of Joseph's bones and the fate of Israel are bound together. So the faith of Jacob is seen in sending his body ahead of Israel.

And the faith of Joseph is seen in the promise that they will one day go up with his body,

with his bones. The story of Joseph is the story of the lost son, of the son that goes down into Egypt. A story like the story of Ishmael and the story of the exodus is the story of bringing back the lost son.

That son that has been abandoned in Egypt is now being returned to the land. And at the very end of the story of the exodus, when things have reached their rest, when the land has been settled in the book of Joshua, we see Joseph's bones turn up again. This is no accident.

This is what is set up at the end of the book of Genesis. And it completes so many of the themes that we have seen in the book to this point. A question to consider.

One feature of the end of Joshua that might be interesting is the fact that Joshua dies at 110 years old, the same age that Joseph dies at. Is there some parallel between those two characters? It's a question worth asking. We might also think of parallels between Joseph and other characters such as David.

We have also discussed the parallels between Joseph and Jesus at various points. What can we see in the character of Joseph that is played out in future characters in biblical history? Matthew 8 verses 1 to 17. When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.

And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, Lord, if you will, you can make me clean. And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, I will be clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

And Jesus said to him, see that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a proof to them. When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly. And he said to him, I will come and heal him.

The centurion replied, Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority with soldiers under me. And I say to one, go.

And he goes and to another come. And he comes and to my servant, do this. And he does it.

When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, Truly I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And to the centurion, Jesus said, go, let it be done for you as you have believed. And the servant was healed at that very moment. When Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever.

He touched her hand and the fever left her. And she rose and began to serve him. That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick.

This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah. He took our illnesses and bore our diseases. Matthew 8 begins with Jesus descending the mountain.

This descent from the mountain bookends the entire Sermon on the Mount. It began with Jesus ascending the mountain and now he descends. And perhaps it's also important for framing what happens next.

It begins a series of 10 actions in chapters 8 and 9. Cleansing a leper, healing the centurion's servant, healing the fever of Peter's mother-in-law, calming the storm, casting out two demons, healing a paralytic, raising the dead girl of a ruler, healing a woman with the issue of blood, giving two blind men sight and casting out a demon from a dumb man. Peter Lighthouse has suggested that there is a rhythm to the stories with three sections, each containing explanations of Jesus' ministry, punctuated by reflections on or calls to discipleship. We can see those calls to discipleship in verses 18 to 22 of chapter 8, verses 9 to 13 of chapter 9, and verses 35 of chapter 9 to 42 of chapter 10.

And as we go through this series of events, there's also a movement towards greater opposition. These are signs of the new life of the kingdom. Outsiders and those excluded are coming into the kingdom.

Lepers, Gentiles, demon-possessed people, the woman with the issue of blood. Jesus is overcoming death and disease, these causes of exclusion from fellowship. And as he heals these people, he is bringing them into fellowship once more.

He's bringing people who would have been outsiders into the enjoyment of the benefits of the kingdom, Gentiles in that case, and restoring faculties to those who lack them. These are all things that are spoken of in the Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom. This series of events begins with the healing of the leper.

And the fact that Jesus touches the leper is a matter of importance. We can think also of the presence of touch in the healing of the woman with the issue of blood. This is probably not what we think of as leprosy.

It's a different sort of skin ailment. It is, however, something that would have excluded the sufferer from the enjoyment of full fellowship with the rest of the people of Israel. And so healing a person from this condition would allow them to once more enter the fellowship and community of Israel.



Jesus touches this man, but he does not contract defilement. Rather, he communicates health and life. This is a reversal of the usual direction of movement, where usually if you touched a leper or someone who is unclean, you would become unclean.

Jesus does not become unclean. Rather, he communicates life, a life that is stronger than defilement. And this is a secret sign.

It's one that the leper is not supposed to spread the word concerning. Rather, it's like the turning of the water into wine. There are only a few people who know about this, and the people who know, it is a sign to them.

For everyone else, they don't recognise what's taking place. The next healing is the healing of the paralysed servant of the centurion. And the centurion is possibly the highest military officer in Jesus's base town of Capernaum.

He's an important figure. He has power and influence and authority. And Jesus is asked to perform a healing from a distance, a healing that will demonstrate the authority of his word.

This isn't magic tricks. This isn't something that can be done using sleight of hand. Jesus is healing from a great distance.

It's similar to Jesus's second sign in the book of John in chapter 4, where Jesus heals the official's son. Once again, he's demonstrating his authority at a distance. And the centurion recognises this.

Jesus is someone who has authority like he does. He can say, go, and someone goes. He can say, come, and they come.

In the same way, Christ can speak with authority into the world. And the nature of his authority is that of the authorised servant. It's the authority of his word that he can use to heal the servant of the centurion.

And once again, this is a sign of the future of the kingdom, a sign of bringing in someone who is an outsider, of blessing someone who's a gentile, not a Jew. Verse 7 is translated here as, I will come and heal him. But it could also be read as a question.

You want me to come and heal him? A challenge to the faith of the centurion, to which he responds with a recognition that he's not worthy for Christ to come into his house, but Christ's word alone is enough to perform the great act. And Christ's discussion of the faith of the centurion would seem to give weight to this particular reading. He declares that the faith of the centurion exceeds that which he has encountered in Israel itself.

Indeed, people like the centurion will find their way into the messianic feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. And yet, those who would seem to

be the heirs will find themselves cast out into outer darkness with wailing and gnashing of teeth. This speaks of the later gentile mission, for instance.

Numerous sons of the kingdom finding themselves outside and the people who would not seem to be the true sons finding themselves within. The faith of the centurion is seen in this practical request for healing, a recognition in the power of Christ's word that he is one with authority. And on the basis of that, Christ can declare that he is one who is of the type that belongs to the kingdom.

He's not just going to enjoy the crumbs, he is going to recline at the table. The third act in this chapter is the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. Peter's house and Capernaum may have been the base from which the disciples were working at this time.

Once again, Jesus proves his power to heal, this time the mother-in-law of Peter, with a single touch. And that evening, many more come who are healed with a word. Once again, the power of Christ's speech is underlined here.

In the previous chapter, we were told that he spoke with authority and not as the scribes, and now we're told that he is one who can cast out demons with a word, who can heal with a word. And in these respects, he's fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.

In the context of Isaiah chapter 53, many have seen these things as referring to the cross. But yet, Matthew presents Jesus' life and ministry fulfilling this prophecy also. Jesus, perhaps, should be seen as taking these things upon himself.

He is not just removing it, he's taking it upon himself. The death of the world, the sickness of the world, the demonic possession of the world, he's taking it upon himself, all in preparation to deal with it finally at the cross. A question to consider.

Where else in the New Testament are we alerted to the fact that Peter has a wife?