

# OpenTheo

## February 14th: Genesis 44 & Matthew 4

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### Alastair Roberts

Judah intercedes for Benjamin. Jesus tempted in the wilderness; the call of the first disciples.

Some passages referenced:

Genesis 31 (the pursuit of Jacob by Laban); Genesis 38 (Judah and Tamar)

Mark 1, Luke 4 (parallel accounts of the temptations); Genesis 3 (temptation in Eden); 1 Samuel 16-17 (David's anointing and facing Goliath); Ezekiel 1 (Ezekiel's vision); Daniel 4 (Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation); Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 9:9 (forty days and forty nights for Moses); Matthew 26:63, 27:40, 27:43 (Jesus tempted three times at the cross); Deuteronomy 8 (teaching concerning manna); Psalm 91:4 (the protective 'wing'); Numbers 14 (premature attempt to enter the land); Deuteronomy 34 (Mount Nebo); Isaiah 9:1-2 (Jesus in Naphtali and Zebulun); 1 Kings 19:19-21 (the call of Elisha); Jeremiah 16:16 (fishing as judgment); Isaiah 40:9-11, 52:7-10 (the 'gospel' in Isaiah).

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

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## Transcript

Genesis chapter 44 Then he commanded the steward of his house, Fill the men's sacks with food as much as they can carry. And put each man's money in the mouth of his sack, And put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain. And he did as Joseph told him.

As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. They had only gone a short distance from the city. Now Joseph said to his steward, Up, follow after the men, and when you overtake them, say to them, Why have you repaid evil for good? Is it not from this that my Lord drinks, and by this that he practices divination? You have done evil in doing this.

When he overtook them, he spoke to them these words. They said to him, Why does my Lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing. Behold the money that we found in the mouths of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan.

How then could we steal silver or gold from your Lord's house? Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will be my Lord's servants. He said, Let it be as you say, He who is found with it shall be my servant, and the rest of you shall be innocent. Each man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack.

And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground. Joseph said to them, What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination? And Judah said, What shall we say to my Lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants.

Behold we are my Lord's servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found. But he said, Far be it from me that I should do so. Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant.

But as for you, go up in peace to your father. Then Judah went up to him and said, O my Lord, please let your servants speak a word in my Lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself. My Lord asked his servants, saying, Have you a father or a brother? And we said to my Lord, We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age.

His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him. Then you said to your servants, Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.

We said to my Lord, The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.

Then you said to your servants, Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again. When we went back to your servant, my father, we told him the words of my Lord. And when our father said, Go again, buy us a little food, we said, We cannot go down.

If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down, for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us. Then your servant, my father, said to us, You know that my wife bore me two sons. One left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces, and I have never seen him since.

If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my grey hairs and evil to Sheol. Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant, my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the grey hairs of your servant, our father, with sorrow to Sheol. For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.

Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father. In Genesis 44, several themes of the story come together.

We've already seen a story like this before, a story where Laban pursues Jacob and Rachel looking for the terror theme. He searches from the oldest to the youngest. There's a death sentence declared over the person in whose possession the terror theme was found.

That story was recalled in Genesis chapter 37, as camels came from Mount Gilead, the place where the death sentence had been cast over Rachel concerning the terror theme. And they take the son of Rachel down into captivity in Egypt. And now we see a similar pattern of events playing out again.

It seems like the story of the terror theme might be coming to its ugly end. The death of Rachel, the seeming death of Joseph, and now the death of Benjamin too. The brothers, as they're going back to the land of Canaan, are buoyant.

Their mission has seemed to be a success. But yet, there's this turn of events, this turn of events that they were not prepared for. They're pursued, and they're pursued as those who have stolen something from Joseph.

Now, what they're accused of stealing is a silver cup. It's important that it is a silver cup.

Once again, it was silver for which Joseph was sold into Egypt.

And now he's sent them back previously with silver in their bags. Now he's given them a silver cup. And this cup isn't just any cup.

It's a cup that represents Joseph himself. It's his cup. It's the cup that he does divination supposedly with.

We should note the similarity between this and the terror theme. The terror theme was supposedly used for divination too. And so we have the association of the cup with the silver for which Joseph was sold, with Joseph himself as it is Joseph's cup.

They've stolen the cup. They stole Joseph at one point too. And it's also connected with the means of divination, the terror theme, and that earlier part of the story, and the tragic destiny of Rachel and her children.

Joseph is the provider of bread to Egypt. And here we see he's also the cup bearer. In chapter 40, there was a crisis with the chief cup bearer and the chief baker.

And since then, Joseph has been the one who provides bread to the land of Egypt and to the surrounding nations. But now we see he's also the one who has a cup. He is associated with both bread and wine.

And the silver is also associated with bread and the wine. The silver of the cup that he drinks from, and also the silver that was given for the bread. The reference to divination is important here.

It gives the brothers that fear that he knows something about them, that he has some sort of occult insight into their guilt. And their sense of their guilt has been an important part of their reaction to these events, the events of their first visit and then subsequently. The hidden knowledge of this Egyptian ruler brings their guilt back to them.

He has exhibited his knowledge of them already by seating them in a particular order. And now they are searched in a particular order, from the oldest to the youngest. In the same way as there was this search in beginning at Leah, and then the handmaid's tents, and then in Rachel's tent.

We should also consider this against the background of the previous chapter. Joseph has shown favouritism to Benjamin. He has given him five portions rather than the one portion that was given to each of the other brothers.

That favouritism recalls the way that Jacob treated Joseph and favoured him above the other brothers. Maybe Benjamin wants to set himself up as a diviner, someone above his brothers. His older brother had dreams of high status, of achieving some position over

his brothers, had delusions of grandeur.

Maybe his younger brother has these dreams too. Maybe he stole this Egyptian official's cup as a means of divination for himself, as a means of gaining power within his house. And so you can see that Joseph has set this up quite masterfully.

He has put them in a position where they are tempted to be mistrustful of Benjamin. He has brought to mind the old tensions and raised some of those hackles perhaps that they have against Rachel's side of the family. But their response is very different.

On this occasion they all tear their clothes, united in grief with Benjamin and with their father. And this contrasts with chapter 37 where there are two people who tear their clothes, Reuben and Jacob. A tearing that in Jacob's case occurs when he believes that his son himself has been torn.

But here they are united in their grief and their concern. They are described as Judah and his brothers. Judah is the effective leader of the brothers at this point.

He is the one who can reunite the brothers. But it requires him to confess, to be one who stands up and takes action at this point. Think about the meaning of his name which is connected with praise but also with confession.

This threat to Benjamin is a threat to their father too. The threat that their father would go down to Sheol in grief. Reuben has already rebelled against the father.

They have tried to put away the favoured son of their father. But now they seem to be acting very differently. Now they don't just bow down to Joseph but offer to become his slaves.

But Joseph gives them an out. Only the person in whose possession the cup was found will be his slave. And everyone else can go home.

This will be difficult for their father of course. He will see it as this tragedy from which he may never recover. But they will be okay.

They won't have to serve as slaves. But what they do instead is show solidarity with their brother, with their father and with their whole family. Judah admits the problem of the family.

He recounts the speech of Jacob in a way that acknowledges the fact that he was not a child of the favoured wife. My wife bore me two sons. My wife.

What about Leah, Judah's mother? Once again there is a struggle between favoured and unfavoured sons. People who have been shown favour and those who have not been shown favour. And how they feel these tensions with each other.

One tempted to vaunt themselves over the others. And the other tempted to violent envy against the other. We see this in the story of Cain and Abel.

In the story of Esau and Jacob. And now in the story of Joseph and Judah. How should favour be used? Joseph has learned that favour should be used for the sake of the unfavoured.

And how should a lack of favour be responded to? This is what we see Judah doing here. They have the opportunity to leave Benjamin as a slave in Egypt. But they do not take it.

This is the precise inverse of what happened in chapter 37. This is a situation where they are prepared to go down into slavery in Egypt in order to have solidarity with their brother. This relationship between Benjamin and Judah is important too.

And it plays out in the rest of scripture in various ways. You can see it in the story of David and Saul. In the story of Esther and Mordecai.

Benjamites who intercede for the Jews. The Judahites. Judah is a type of Christ too in some ways.

He is someone who gives himself up for his brother. On his brothers. He offers himself for the brother.

And in the same way Christ is one who gives himself up for us all. Judah was like Judas in the previous story. The one who betrayed.

The one who sold this person into captivity. But now he plays a very different part. There is a redemption of Judah in this story.

A question to consider. Note the boundaries of the nation of Judah in the later history of the Old Testament. Judah includes Benjamin, Judah and within its territory much of the tribe of Simeon.

How might this understanding of later history help us better to read the story of Genesis? Matthew chapter 4 But he answered, Then Jesus said to him, Again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, Then Jesus said to him, Then the devil left him, Then the devil left him, And behold, angels came and were ministering to him. Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.

And leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled. The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light. And for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. While walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. And he called them.

Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures and paralytics, and he healed them.

And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. In Matthew chapter 4 we read of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness. Each of the synoptics have an account of the temptations of Christ, but each introduce it differently.

In Matthew, Jesus is led up by the Spirit into the wilderness. In Mark, Jesus is cast out by the Spirit into the wilderness. And in Luke, Jesus being filled with the Spirit, is led in the Spirit into the wilderness.

Now these are the same events, but they're being recounted in very different ways. And the differences between the ways that they are recounted suggest that there are different aspects of Old Testament narrative that are being brought to the forefront. Matthew wants us to hear particular echoes.

Luke wants us to hear different ones. And we should think about the Old Testament background that is being summoned here. There are several Old Testament stories that would seem to have some comparisons with this story of Jesus, his baptism and his temptation.

You can think about Adam and Eve in the garden being tested in that context by the serpent. The story of Israel in the wilderness, 40 years wandering in the wilderness. We might think of the story of David and Goliath.

David is anointed and then in the next chapter he faces off against Goliath, who has stood against Israel for 40 days. His struggle with Saul as well has similarities. The story of Ezekiel might also come to mind.

The heavens are opened in the 30th year when he is by the river Chebar with the captives and he sees visions of God. Later on he is taken in the spirit to various

locations, different extremities of the temple, the high mountain and to the wilderness, the valley of dry bones. We might also think of the story of Nebuchadnezzar, the tree that is cut down, the great tree that is felled by the axe, the Holy One coming down from heaven, driving him out from among men so that he dwells with the beasts.

Now here the particular background that seems to be most emphasised is that of the exodus. Jesus is led up by the spirit. That's the language that's often used of the exodus.

Israel is led up out of Egypt by God in the pillar of cloud and fire. He's led into temptation and he's tested in the wilderness. This is a similar thing again to Israel's experience where Israel was tested ten times or they tested God ten times in the wilderness.

He's there for 40 days and nights. This is similar to Moses in Exodus 34, 28 and in Deuteronomy 9, 9. The order of the temptations in Matthew differs from that in Luke. In Luke the order is that of turning the stone into bread followed by going up into the high mountain and seeing the kingdoms of the world although it's not mentioned as a mountain in Luke and then the third one is the pinnacle of the temple.

And so the differences here are noteworthy. The different order again helps to bring to mind different aspects of Old Testament background. In Matthew there's a temptation concerning forbidden food, a temptation to move beyond the protected realm and then a temptation to claim authority before it's time.

Maybe we compare this to the movement from seeing something as good for food, something as a delight to the eyes and then something as desirable to make one wise. The devil uses the words of God to try and trip Christ up. The temptation that he is bringing to Christ is for Christ to abandon his mission and more particularly the way of the cross.

The devil comes to him at his weakest point. At that point where he's hungry and where he feels weak and alone perhaps and at that point he's tested. Satan is coming on the scene in person too.

This is a preparation for a greater conflict of spiritual powers. He knows who Jesus is and his challenge is to Jesus' identity. If you are the son of God Jesus is a new king but he's also an Adamic figure.

Adam was the son of God and Jesus is also a son of God like David and Solomon were described as the sons of God. The temptation in the garden was that if they eat of the tree they would be like God or the gods knowing good and evil. That they would have this status.

Now Satan is offering a very similar temptation here that if he wants to enjoy all these privileges of power and rule all he needs to do is reach out and take what is perfectly within his grasp. Now there are three temptations. Jesus withdraws from his disciples



three times in chapter 26 when he's being tested there.

Peter is tested three times and he fails three times. We should also note the recurrence of these questions at the cross followed by the confirmation at the end truly this was the son of God. Matthew structures his gospel carefully.

He wants us to recognise symmetries between different parts. So the questions are in chapter 26 verse 63 Tell us if you are the Christ, the son of God and it's the choice to accept the cup or not to bear witness to who he is or not. Then there is a temple reference You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days save yourself.

If you are the son of God come down from the cross. It's a similar thing. It brings to mind the temple and also that temptation to cast oneself down from the temple to abandon the mission, to leave the people behind.

And then the final temptation is echoed again. He saved others. He cannot save himself.

He is the king of Israel. Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him. He trusts in God.

Let God deliver him now if he desires him for he said I am the son of God. So he is tempted and tested in chapter 4 and then he is tested again at the cross. Note that this is coming straight after the events of the baptism where the voice has come from heaven saying this is my beloved son in him I am well pleased.

And now he is being tested. If you are truly the son of God if your father truly loves you then do these things. Then take this route.

Why would you have to go the way of the cross? Why would you have to take that difficult route? Where you could just claim all these things as your own. Note the fact that heavenly figures are testifying to Jesus' identity here. The father, the devil and then later on demons.

Jesus' identity is at stake. The question of who he is and that is recognised by the centurion at the end who says truly this was the son of God. But he has proved that through his suffering through his faithfulness through sticking to the course that his father set.

His sonship is not seen in great acts of power but in a loving work of faithfulness to his father's mission. That is where his sonship is most clearly seen. Jesus could perhaps be compared to Moses here.

Moses was in the wilderness cut off from bread. The bread of Egypt. They had to leave behind the bread of Egypt not least through the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread but they also were cut off from the bread of the land.

They could not fully enter into that. They were weaned off these things and they had to eat manna for many years. And he would hunger to enter into the land.

There's also the temptation to move beyond the mission that God had prepared for him. To go out ahead to leave the wings of God. Now the word for the pinnacle of the temple is the wings of the temple.

This is language that's taken from among other places Psalm 91. The temptation in Moses' case was to go straight into the land. Rather than to wait for God to lead them to the land in due time.

And finally Moses had to die. He could not enter into the land. And so he was brought onto a high mountain and he saw the land from a distance.

But he had to die. In the same way Christ has to die. Perhaps you can imagine Moses on that Nebo looking out of the land and just wanting to go ahead and enter into it.

He had wandered for 80 years of his life And now the promised land is tantalisingly near to his grasp and he's told that he can't enter into it. Jesus' response to the temptation to turn the stones into bread draws our mind back to Deuteronomy from which he quotes. In chapter 8 there is the quotation concerning the manna.

He says, You shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness that he might humble you testing you to know what was in your heart whether you would keep his commandments or not and he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. This weaning has to occur before they can enter into the land and they're told that in that land they will eat bread without scarcity in which you will lack nothing a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. So they're going to come into a land from which stones they'll find life and strength and in which they'll eat bread abundantly but for the time being they're cut off from those things.

Moses turns stone into water striking the rock but then there's a further occasion where he strikes the rock when he should not have done and here he's judged it's one of the reasons why he does not get to enter into the land bread is promised but submission to God's will is primary and we can also think maybe of deeper themes the dead stones of the law are turned into the bread of the word Jesus has the words of life had Jesus listened to the devil it would have been like fallen Adam eating from the tree of life taking life but a life that's cut off from fellowship with God The next temptation is to cast himself down from the wing of the temple again this refers back to Psalm 91 verse 4 and elsewhere the temple is sanctuary and refuge and the wing of it is God's wing that's placed over people Jesus also talks about himself as a sanctuary later on talking about

gathering Jerusalem's children under his wings and in Numbers chapter 14 the people try and escape God's wing they want to go on ahead of God God has told them not to enter into the land as a result of their sin but they try and have this premature attempt to get into the land and in Numbers 14 they're badly beaten as a result for Christ the temptation would be not to have to suffer the cross not to have to take that route to go away from the route that God had prepared for him to go out from God's sheltering wings knowing that God will protect him and the final temptation is the high mountain Moses was brought up onto Mount Nebo in Deuteronomy 34 and here Christ is brought up onto a high mountain Moses was shown the promised land the land that he was leading the people to Christ is shown all the kingdoms of the world all the kingdoms that will be given to him this is his promised land but as in the case of Moses death must intervene before he gets there mountains are visionary points in places like Ezekiel and Revelation also in the story of Abram as he's placed on this mountain told to look out over the land and says all of this will be yours in the same way Christ stands on that mountain and he's told by the devil all of this can be yours all you have to do is bow down to me you don't actually have to go through all this work of the cross the three temptations for Moses then is a desire for bread on human terms a temptation to abandon the people it's a further thing that we see in Christ temptation to cast himself down from the temple he could cast himself down he could cast himself down from the cross he would be protected but he would be abandoning the people in that way Moses has a similar temptation God says to him let me destroy this people and I'll make a great nation of you but yet Moses insists on staying faithful to the people of not letting go of them and in a similar way Jesus' refusal to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple from the wing of the temple is a refusal to let the people go and then finally there's that temptation to enter the land prematurely to enter into the land without passing through death and Jesus' temptation is similar Jesus' answers to the temptations are taken from scripture and they work back through Deuteronomy to the declaration of God the Shema in chapter 6 Richard Hayes has pointed this out that they work back from chapter 8 and then back to the beginning of chapter 6 the angels minister to him much as they do in chapter 26 when he wrestles in agony in the garden of Gethsemane after the temptations are over the arrest of John the Baptist presents a time to transition back to Galilee Jesus leaves Nazareth for Capernaum we see this in Luke chapter 4 Jesus speaks in the synagogue in Nazareth and was rejected and they try and cast him down and he goes his own way and here he goes to Capernaum Matthew once again stresses that things are being fulfilled here Isaiah chapter 9 verse 1 to 2 has a messianic prophecy the first regions that were taken captive into Babylon are the first to see the light of the Messiah Galilee was an area with some Hellenistic cities it was an important trade route and it was associated with Gentiles and it anticipates the later mission to the Gentiles bear in mind all the Gentile themes that we've seen up to this point and there's a message of repentance and the kingdom that's presented at this point repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand he then calls two sets of brothers Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John the sons of Zebedee these are two paralleled accounts with both

encounters playing much the same pattern out the way that Jesus calls his disciples is similar to the call that we see in the case of Elijah and the distinctive way he calls them is more like that of a prophet than a rabbi he calls them in their everyday livelihood and calls them to make a break from it and there's symbolism here in 1st Kings chapter 19 verses 19 following we read Elisha's call so he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat who was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him and he was with the twelve Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him and he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said let me kiss my father and my mother and then I'll follow you and he said to him go back again for what have I done to you and he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people and they ate then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him in a similar way Jesus calls his disciples in the act of fishing and he calls them to make that movement from being fishers to being fishers of men, it's a calling into mission Elisha was called while he was with the twelve oxen twelve oxen that represent Israel here the disciples are called while they are working in fishing and fishing in Jeremiah chapter 16 verse 16 is associated with judgment but it could also be associated with bringing things in from the Gentiles making them fishers of men is interesting because in the Old Testament the people are generally led by shepherds and now it's a focus upon the sea and fish this suggests again a movement out into the Gentile realm Jesus' early mission is focused around the sea of Galilee now we could talk about the lake of Gennesaret but it's called the sea of Galilee and that is symbolically important, Jesus' mission is going out to the Gentiles, to those who are outside and this movement into a sea based mission from a mission based upon the land and pastoral ministry is an important part of this now Jesus probably already knew both sets of brothers James and John putting together pieces from the gospels as we see the women at the cross and the way that they're described were probably Jesus' first cousins, Peter and Andrew were likely people he knew too people he would be seeing on a fairly regular basis, maybe some more distant relations or at least friends, Jesus is not speaking to complete strangers here his mission involves going throughout Galilee at this point going from place to place, teaching in synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, this language of the gospel comes from Isaiah chapter 40 from Isaiah 52 and other places, it's the good news that God is King, that God is coming to reign, that God is returning to his people, that a new exodus is about to occur and he demonstrates the power of this kingdom through healing, through exorcism and through other great acts of power and he's followed by large crowds from places that are not just within Jewish regions but Gentile areas with significant Jewish populations too, places like Syria and Decapolis, a question to consider, might there be any significance in the different acts that James and John and Simon and Andrew are doing when Jesus calls them.