

The end of the beginning

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[0:00] Jacob has appeared in that story. You'll be aware of the pain Jacob had when Joseph he thought was dead.

! We've dealt with where he picked up and gone through most of his life.

But we didn't know so much, I think, about Jacob. And I wanted to start by doing a bit of a quick recap on the life of Jacob, so that as we approach his death, it means something to you.

So, a quick recap on the life of Jacob, and then we'll go through this passage, the death of Jacob, burial of Jacob, Joseph's reaction to the fear of his brothers, the death of Joseph, and some lessons to draw from it.

And my wife has been saying, can we have a timeline? Because she doesn't know where all these people fit in. I'll show you this again a bit later, but I just thought, even if you just see the coloured bits at the side, you'll see roughly when.

[1:13] There are some dates in the left-hand column, BC, going down to 1806 BC, chapters in Genesis on the right. But you see that Jacob was born in 2006 BC, and he is near, Jacob and Joseph die quite near each other.

Jacob first and then Joseph. But that gives you some idea of this timeline. We'll just come back to that. So, Jacob is born, and you might want to find Genesis 25, because I'm skimming through Genesis 25 through to 49, little bits I want to pick on.

And you'll notice in 25, 26, that he's born clutching the heel of Esau. And the suggestion is that really he's trying to get out first.

There is some Hebrew around this. The name Ya'akov means he grasps the heel or he clutched. This other Hebrew word, Ya'akov, he clutched, could be a possible pun in the original language, with God protects. And there's also somewhere in this, the idea of grasping the heel, the idea of a deceiver.

[2:30] But even in his name, which often was very significant in the Old Testament, as he starts his life, he is grasping for things, trying to get ahead of where he is.

But nevertheless, perhaps a pun, and very appropriate to Jacob's life, as we'll see, God protects. You will know very well the story of Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau, and how Jacob took advantage of the hunger of Esau, giving him a bowl of broth, wasn't it, so that he could have his birthright. And he goes in and deceives Isaac and receives the primary blessing. Now, most of you will know, but if you didn't, it was very significant in these Old Testament families with a patriarch that the firstborn received a primary blessing.

And when, in this case, Jacob had gone, sorry, Isaac had gone, Jacob would take that primary blessing and become head of the family.

Would have been Esau, but Jacob obtained the birthright of the oldest son, Esau. And interesting, you could look in verse 23 of chapter 25, that during her pregnancy, Rebecca was told by God, by an angel, two nations are in your womb and two peoples from within you will be separated.

[4:02] One people will be stronger than the other and the older will serve the younger. So some of this goings-on was foreknown. There are also echoes, if you remember what Aaron was dealing with last week, echoes, although there was a bit more order to this and Jacob was taking the initiative.

But you remember, as Aaron led us through, Ephraim and Manasseh being brought before Jacob and he was trying to get Jacob's right hand onto Manasseh, the firstborn.

So he brings him up that way, but Jacob does this. Do you remember? Ephraim gets the blessing appropriate to the older one. And in Genesis 28, and verse 2 onwards, you'll find that Isaac sends Jacob to Rebecca.

It's interesting, approximately, I'll go back to that age thing later, but Jacob is around 76-ish when this business about, he's not married yet, when he is sent off by Jacob after the birthright thing. And you can imagine, when Esau finds out, there's a lot of fear and nervousness about what Esau might want to do to Jacob. Isaac sends Jacob to Rebecca's parents in Paddan Aram and blesses him.

[5:37] Actually, in verses 2-4, let's just read some of this because in the early life of Jacob, I don't want to skim over this, 28, in verses 2-4, apart from encouraging him to take a wife, halfway through verse 2, take a wife from there, May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples.

May he give you and your descendants the blessings given to Abraham so that you may take the possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham.

Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way. Now, there's a map Jacob is, oops, wrong one, Jacob is born somewhere down here.

It might be this place, Bielaharoi, somewhere down here and he is now sent off on a journey.

Paddan Haran is all the way up there. That's a long way if you don't have buses and cars, hundreds of miles.

But the initial thing, we'll come back to this a couple of times just to see where we get to. After about a night of travel, he gets to Bethel at the time known as Luz.

[7:03] He flees from Esau and the first night, a well-known dream he has of a stairway to heaven. And this is in Genesis 28 and verses 12 to 15.

And there are some key promises that are given here. The angels descending and ascending and the Lord speaks and let's just read some of these.

This is 28 verses 12 to 15. There above it, I'm in verse 13, stood the Lord and he said, I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.

I will give you your descendants, you and your descendants, the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth and you will spread out to the west, to the east, to the north and to the south.

All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go.

[8:07] So I just want to pick out these blessings that he will have many descendants. His descendants will have the land of Canaan. Other nations will be blessed through them.

I am with you. And at the end of this episode, it starts as a dream in his head that when he wakes up, surely, this is a little later in the verses, just a few verses further down, surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it.

How awesome is this place? Jacob's reaction to the fact that he has been visited by what he knows full well this is God speaking and he called the place Bethel, which means house of God and that used to be Luz.

So there he is. Nervous, frightened, Esau might be after him. He's perhaps got a day start but what a blessing on his first night that he is just given this vision and encouragement from God in a dream at Bethel.

This will become one of two or three, I mean, there will be many things happening in his life but there are two or three times when God is speaking very strongly and he wouldn't forget this. Then he has an onward travel up to his uncle at the top there, Rebecca's brother Laban, his uncle Laban in Haran, where he works, you'll know this story or if you don't you can get the headlines here.

[9:32] He works for seven years because he doesn't got lots of money to pay a dowry or whatever. He agrees to work for seven years to marry Rachel who is the girl he wants but then through some local custom that Laban was sneaky about he gets given Leah which is not what he wanted but after another week he gets given Rachel but he has to work another seven years and if you didn't know what sort of work Jacob did he was a shepherd and a very good shepherd at that and we hear of his time if you

add up all those years you're getting to 20 20 odd years doing a lot of good shepherding and towards the end of this time it is getting somewhere to Jacob's advantage that he's building up a stock of animals and sheep but nevertheless it was a tough tough period where he didn't have a lot of joy he just had to stay there because of these commitments and I thought I'd just throw this map in because it gets complicated we've we've seen all these children here are the children in blue of Jacob and it just gives you a bit of a clue the ones from

Jacob and Leah are these Zebulah and Issach Judah Levi Reuben and Simeon from Rachel you'll know quite well it's Joseph and Benjamin Rachel's maid servant was given to Jacob that's Bilhar and that's where Dan and Naphtali come Leah's maid servant Zilpah was given to Jacob and that's where Gad and Asher came so it was quite frequent in those days that that's how it worked but this is that's what you'd like to see where those people fit in and you'll notice because beyond just you trace it down to the bottom right here the bottom left and this is where a little further down the line when we get to the Exodus Moses comes in so after 20 years at Paddan Aram and if you want to flick on to Genesis 31 you'll find another episode when an angel appears to Jacob because he's probably a bit nervous about when he can get away from Laban 31 and verses 11 to 13 the angel of God said to me in the dream

Jacob I answered here I am and he said look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked speckled or spotted for I have seen all that Laban has been doing I am the god of Bethel etc etc then just a couple of lines down now leave this land at once because there was a little bit of a game going on about streaked sheep and which ones Jacob could have but he says now leave this land at once go back to your native land and because I think Laban was doing something else he gets a couple of days start on Laban and starts the journey back south and just before we leave that slide I just want you to notice because the next episode of Jacob having an encounter with God really can you see this place here Peniel and let's just move on chapter 32 verses 24 to 31 Jacob had sent most of his family and others with him across the stream ahead and so Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him he thought it was a man at first until daybreak when the man saw that he could not overpower him he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man then the man said let me go for it is daybreak but Jacob replied I will not let you go unless you bless me and the man asked what is your name Jacob he answered then the man said your name will no longer be Jacob but Israel because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome so let me just recap what's in that there's this wrestling

Jacob is humbled by the man not using brute strength but this being this man touched his hip and it was enough to wrench it and that lovely conversation let me go not unless you bless me says Jacob but you will no longer be called Jacob but Israel which means struggles God struggles with God Jacob referred to that place he thought about it called it Peniel because it has that meaning of being struggling with God but he thought to himself this is another I mean compared to the other encounter all night wrestling with someone you eventually realise is God and your hip is put out of joints so you're limping the next day this was a very special time I think for Jacob a thing he would remember I saw God face to face and my life was spared the sun rose and Jacob was limping because of his hip and then back on the story we see

[15:14] Jacob carrying on and soon after this Esau is coming towards him now you remember the story at the start he's nervous about how this is going to go is Esau going to be furious perhaps it's not the best tactic he puts all the women and children up the front so that if Esau's angry maybe they'll get it first and so he has a chance to run away anyway it's not quite that simple I'm sure he's trusting God he's being politic he's putting gifts and the best of his team up the front Jacob is anxious but all goes okay so he's being protected isn't he as we go back to remember what he was named in the start and then this is only a very quick recap we've done but then you will remember the last few weeks when we've been building from Genesis 37 onwards the story of Joseph Joseph was Jacob's favourite how he was sold into slavery but Jacob thought he was dead and we've been through all that and Jacob where we pick up the story again

the famine has come

Jacob and his family are with Joseph in Egypt and we can get to our story so I'll put that up again you can see some of those headings and I think I said at the back there just at the last line there that Jacob is 140 he has about 17 years in Egypt and he is 147 years old as he starts to realise his time for dying is soon so then we're looking at flick on to where we've read in 49 and verse 29 onwards notice notice that the most important thing to Jacob 49 verse 29 he gave these instructions I am about to be gathered to my people bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre in Canaan which Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittites now Jacob is remembering those promises we've skimmed through that God is going to give his people that land the land of Canaan it might not look like it at the moment because from what I understand the land of Goshen was very lush fertile life was good but God had said no that isn't your future your future is in Canaan Jacob remembered this he wasn't going to say this is all looking great I'll forget that and he says no I want to be buried back in Canaan not just that it makes particular significance where his bones are buried but he wants his people to make that journey he wants them to put that on the map that in the future

God is going to take them there so when the time drew near he called for his son do not bury me in Egypt when I rest with my fathers I want to be buried where they are buried so that's very significant as a witness to his faith in God that that would be coming but the other rather lovely thing he does and Aaron dealt with most of this last week he blesses his sons and there's something we won't go into the detail of all of that again but there is something very prophetic in how it's not a random I think in our day and age when we get near death we think if I've got four children just give them all equal shares and we're thinking about the material stuff anything else and we'd have arguments after we've gone and we wouldn't want any of that but there is something very prophetic about how some are favoured above others and blessed and you'll recall that Manasseh and Ephraim took pride of place before Reuben who was the eldest as the primary blessing to head up what was going on in the future but just 48 verses this verse here

God almighty appeared to me this is 48 verse 3 do I mean that towards the end of 48 I think no I am right 48 verse 3 God almighty and that actually is the word El Shaddai we're going to sing something on that later appeared to me at Luz Bethel in the land of Canaan and there he blessed me now if he was in any unclear when we touched on that he saw this man appearing and towards he knew it was some sort of it was God but here he's talking about God almighty appeared to me and so he was very aware of these blessings you're going to have the land you're going to be fruitful etc etc he had felt blessed and now he wanted to bless his sons and Aaron did touch on this but I just want to draw attention to the three fold blessing for Joseph and Ephraim because this blessing came if you look in verses 15 and 16 of 48 it came from the

[20:55] God of my fathers this is Jacob speaking from the God of my fathers Abraham and Isaac so he was going back to these key patriarchs and these are the ones that the land was promised to the God of our fathers may he bless you from the God who has been my shepherd is the other gist in these verses and when you put that together with Jacob himself having been a shepherd and a very good one he knew a lot about what shepherds would do protecting guiding and that's just how he felt God had been with him and from the angel who delivered me from all harm towards the end of those verses 15 and 16 and how what we've touched on he knew that protection so the next thing I want to pick up is that Jacob knew death wasn't the end have you noticed these rather quaint to us quaint expressions resting with his fathers that was in 47 verse 30 and in the passage we read 49 verse 29

I am about to be gathered to my people and just notice this simple sequence that he breathes his last then he's gathered to his people and then he's buried but he was just aware I just want to pick up the point that he was aware that although his physical life was ending he knew there was something else and he was going to all these other people who had died before he's going to meet them all especially the people who were trusting and walking with God he wanted to be gathered with them he knew that wasn't the end the other thing I want you to notice about Jacob here is that he seemed very ready to die this is a lovely verse it's quoted in Hebrews 11 but we can find it in 47 31 it says by faith Jacob when he was dying blessed each of Joseph's sons and worshipped as he

leaned on the top of his staff and it is just worth in this hall of fame if you like in Hebrews 11 that is perhaps the single thing picked up about Jacob that at the end of his life as he looked back he didn't quite have the strength to get down on his knees bowing fully down but he just leant on the top of his staff but at the end of his life he was worshipping God so he was ready to die we'll come to some of the application I think we'll bring it together at the end and when Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons he drew his feet up into his bed breathed his last and was gathered to his people remarkably in control you'd have to say near the end of his life we hear of so many people dying and sometimes it's rather sudden rather unexpected but dear Jacob had opportunity to get ready to pass things on it's interesting when we think my father just going back to the point before last talking about death not being the end my father who didn't think he was a Christian perhaps after he died I think there were reasons I think he might have been but he was asked a humorist do you believe in life after death and he would respond because he's very interesting to the Italians he loved the Italian culture and way of life and when he said do you believe in life after death he would respond most English people don't believe in life before death because we're so dull and things like this but a cardinal John Henry Newman he said fear not that life shall come to an end but rather fear that it shall never have a beginning just keep that in mind as we see encouragement from Jacob looking on into life beyond death so he's ready to die and beautifully 50 verse 1 can you see the emotion and the instantaneous nature of Joseph throwing himself on his father and weeping and kissing him literally on his father's face and that is the end of Jacob but the end of his physical life but look what happens next I don't think many of us have imagined a funeral procession quite like this one coming up but let's get there slowly the first thing is that because Joseph is such an important person and therefore his father would have been regarded as very important in Egypt the embalming process is Joseph instructs this this is the preserving of the body in the Egyptian way of thinking this was to do with giving them more chance in the afterlife but it had a practical point that wasn't the ways of the God of Israel that wasn't what the people of Israel thought but it had the advantage that if they were going to take this body quite a few days journey or quite a few weeks journey if the body was preserved that made that episode a little bit more practical but 40 days it went to go through the process won't bore you with too much detail they would have removed parts that were especially perishable put chemicals in that helped to preserve the body 40 days that took and it was another 30 days in

[26:48] Egypt and for a pharaoh it would have been a maximum of 72 so Jacob was given 70 days in Egypt and then Joseph asked to go bury his father in Canaan he didn't ask directly it might have just been because he was unclean he went to Pharaoh's court and got the message on to him but Pharaoh agrees and the journey to Canaan and the burial grand procession children and animals are the only people that don't!

I think I would almost say the whole of the rest of Egypt but certainly all the other important people in Egypt and I found this picture I don't know how accurate it is but you get a sense of the grandeur of a procession that is heading heading towards Canaan to bury Jacob then just after they cross near the Jordan they come to a place called Atad this is the whole party so this is Jacob's all of his sons and their group the Egyptians and there's another week of mourning this small little humble place Atad and this big company arrive and they're wailing and lamenting for a week so the people locally they've never seen anything like it in this place so they renamed their place Abel Misrae this is in verses 2-14 they renamed it the mourning of the Egyptians they've never seen anything like it and from there Jacob it looks very much like Jacob's sons go on to the specific cave of Machpelah near Mamre which is not far from Hebron which is probably the name Jacob's home is most known just a little north of Hebron is Mamre Jacob goes on and buries him and then they all return now you could say now I think there could be a couple of reasons for this I think because Jacob was the father of such an important person that was one reason there was this big throng going down this big group but it also probably made it a bit more difficult for Joseph to slip away if he wanted to stay in Canaan it made it a little bit more difficult but then he wouldn't have wanted to do that because most of his family was back in Egypt anyway they all get back to Egypt so the burial has happened and now we're getting to 50 verse 15 let's just read this again this little section so they dealt with that back in Egypt now Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead and they said what if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him so they sent word to Joseph

saying your father left these instructions before he died this is what you are to say to Joseph I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father and when their message came to him Joseph wept his brothers then came and threw!

themselves down before him we are your did you notice unusually in the way this message came it wasn't our father says it was Joseph your father says but there is an irony here when you remember the dream of the sheaves bowing down to the sheaves right at the start of Joseph's story here they are prostrate bowing down we are your slaves they had completely misread Joseph as we go on to see we find his first reaction is weeping and he says these lovely words don't be afraid am I in the place of God you intended to harm me but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done the saving of many lives that we'll come back to when we're trying to learn from this because that is perhaps the most the strongest example of forgiveness in the

[31:23] Old Testament this episode from Joseph and he provides for them how does it finish there so then don't be afraid I will provide for you and your children and he reassured them and spoke kindly to them literally spoke to their heart now we don't get much here as to how the brothers responded to this I get the impression they were quite a rough crew and it wasn't like it was all happily ever after but nevertheless they were provided for and had they responded warmly to Joseph has forgiven them and he spoke kindly to them spoke to their heart so we move on to the death of Joseph I'll just read this and then we'll go through some of the points that come out here Joseph stayed in Egypt along with all his father's family he lived 110 years that's 37 years less than

Jacob and he saw the third generation of Ephraim's children also the children of Machia son of Manasseh he became one of the more important tribes in Manasseh the children of Machia son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph's knees and then Joseph said to his brothers I'm about to die but God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land so he'd remembered what Jacob had said take him to the land that he promised an oath to Abraham Isaac and Jacob and Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said God will surely come to your aid and then you must carry my bones up from this place so Joseph died at the age of 110 and was placed in a coffin so this is a little further along the line after Jacob but the joys of grandchildren!

and great grandchildren is what Joseph was enjoying and this very prophetic passing on of the message God will come to you and he will take you up out of this land is passed on to his people but then you must pledge to carry my bones with you Joseph died aged 110 years and that's the end of his story so just remembering our six or seven weeks whatever it is on Joseph first 30 years pretty tough time remember at the age of 17 he was sold into slavery and whatever but the last 80 years of his life as a ruler second only to Pharaoh himself and to finish and tie off the loose end there if you want to look ahead to Exodus 13 verse 19 you'll find that

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him when they did the exodus because Joseph had made the Israelites swear an oath so I think we've been through the passage I want to quickly just draw some lessons one of the obvious things to pick up of course is that the title of the talk was the end of the beginning and although this was the end of Jacob and Joseph it was the start of the nation of Israel God's special people they weren't yet in the promised land they would have to wait 400 years for that but thinking about the special people why did God choose them Deuteronomy 7 7 the Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples for you were the fewest of all peoples but it was because the Lord loved you and kept an oath which he promised to

Abraham etc because the Lord loved you Jacob knew that death wasn't the end we touched on that didn't we he was at the end of his life he knew he was going to be gathered to his people he was looking ahead we might think of various verses in the New Testament Jesus saying I'm going to prepare a place for you in my house there are many rooms and I'm going to prepare a place and I'm going to come back for you Philippians 3 and verse 20 our citizenship is in heaven we eagerly await a savior from there who will transform our lowly bodies so that they will become like his glorious body so Jacob knew death wasn't the end where is our focus can we take something from the example of Jacob who was satisfied at the end of his life and was looking on looking forward to the next part he was satisfied we just repeating what we touched on earlier beautiful words about him

worshipping as he leaned on his staff at the end of his life and it makes me think when [36:46] I'm near the end of my life I would love to his going on yes I know my time is short but I know that God has been with me and I'm worshipping him will we be worshipping just three or four more points here Jacob had these encounters that's why I wanted to do the overview of Jacob so many of these very special encounters with God and he received protection and promises for the future he wasn't going to forget any of that and he as a spiritual father he passed this on to his generation now there is something very unique isn't there about the patriarchs Abraham Isaac and Jacob they have a particular role in the birth of this nation and it is difficult in some ways to make a comparison but nevertheless as we get near the end of our life and we have children do we not want to pass on something if we've been walking with God ourselves we want to pass on something to them

I just want to make us think how we need spiritual fathers and I think in the sense of updating it to now this is not just the men spiritual mothers who others will look up to and who can pass things on of walking with God the other thing I just thought would be worth pulling out is I mean there were 70 days of mourning plus a week in Canaan mourning and grieving was given quite a lot of time now some of that might because he was the father of a pretty important person in that culture but in our culture when people die isn't it the case that we want to be rather quick and move on if you are arranging a funeral whether it's a crematorium don't they cram in about three per hour something like that it's very short and maybe some people don't have any other celebration of the life and you have this very short meeting and then it's all over and maybe you get a day off or something short and it's back to work back to whatever we don't think that exploring or lingering in a place of pain is good but how healthy it's not to rush the process of mourning and grieving

I could I won't take time now but I remember even when my father died a small example I was getting ready for a funeral after a cremation we had a room this sort of size people were coming and he was an eccentric man!

I got lots of things from his home and spread them around it was painful in those days just after he had gone grabbing these things but I wanted to celebrate the things and put them on you know and it helped me might have been painful but it helped me to go through the process of grieving and then we come back to Joseph's response to his brothers and how we could do well to think of people who have harmed us maybe it's a long time ago maybe it's some very serious harm and you need to forgive need to take the example of Joseph and how things have moved on he could see he had the particular joy of seeing how God had worked this out for good we don't always see exactly how it's working for good but what an example of forgiveness and are we ready to forgive! this and my last point there not exactly in our passage but I couldn't help but think the power of imagining that wrestling between God and Jacob and Jacob clutching on I will not let you go unless you bless me and when you're just thinking of your prayer life to have some of that I will not let you go until you bless me so amen and we'll come back and we'll finish this part by singing El Shaddai ending