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Q&A#137 Jesus: A New Nebuchadnezzar?

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Today's question: "There are numerous typological dimensions of Old Testament echoes at play in each of the Gospel accounts of Christ's baptism (Creation, Noah's dove coming to rest, Israel's Red Sea and Jordan crossings, Levitical priestly washing, Day of Atonement, David's anointing as King, Elijah's anointing of Elijah, etc.) Another possible dimension I've recently noticed in Mark's account of this incident, particularly Christ's subsequent time in the wilderness, is its parallels with Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation described in Daniel 4. Mark 1:12 says that "the Spirit immediately drove [Jesus] out into the wilderness." Daniel 4:33 says that Nebuchadnezzar was "immediately . . . driven from among men." Mark 4:13 says that Jesus "was with the wild animals." Daniel 4:32 says that Nebuchadnezzar is made to dwell "with the beasts of the field." Jesus comes back from the wilderness proclaiming the Gospel of God's Kingdom. (Mark 1:14-15). So does Nebuchadnezzar. (Daniel 4:34). A more tenuous connection may be in the angels who ministered to Jesus and the "watchers" mentioned in Nebuchadnezzar's dream earlier in Daniel 4. Is this connection between Christ and Nebuchadnezzar meaningful? If so, what are we to make of it?"

Within this video, I mention James Jordan's commentary on the book of Daniel, 'The Handwriting on the Wall': <https://amzn.to/30x9ZAB>.

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Transcript

Welcome back. It's been a while since I've produced one of these videos. I'm currently in the US and thought that I would take the time to answer one particular question that's been left on my Curious Cat account.

The question is a response in part to one of my earlier answers on the subject of why Jesus was baptized. And the question reads as follows. There are numerous typological dimensions of Old Testament echoes at play in each of the Gospel accounts of Christ's baptism.

Creation, Noah's ark coming to rest, Israel's Red Sea and Jordan crossings, Levitical priestly washing, Day of Atonement, David's anointing as king, Elijah's anointing of Elisha, etc. Another possible dimension I've recently noticed in Mark's account of this incident, particularly Christ's subsequent time in the wilderness, is its parallels with Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation described in Daniel chapter 4. Mark 1 verse 12 says that the spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness. Daniel 4.33 says that Nebuchadnezzar was immediately driven out from among men.

Mark 4.13 says that Jesus was with the wild animals. Daniel 4.32 says that Nebuchadnezzar is made to dwell with the beasts of the field. Jesus comes back from the wilderness proclaiming the Gospel of God's kingdom.

Mark 1.14-15. So does Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4.34. A more tenuous connection may be in the angels who ministered to Jesus and the watchers mentioned in Nebuchadnezzar's dream earlier in Daniel 4. Is this connection between Christ and Nebuchadnezzar meaningful? If so, what are we to make of it? I think this is a legitimate connection. It's a brilliant one. I've never seen this before.

But I think it can be filled out in a number of ways beyond that which the person asking this question has mentioned. First of all, as we look through the Gospels, the synoptic Gospels, we can see a general pattern where each of them focuses upon certain themes or a particular aspect of the ministry of Christ. If we look in Matthew, Matthew very much accents Christ against the background of the Pentateuch.

Christ as a new Moses, Christ as a priestly figure, Christ connected with the law, these sorts of things. In the story of the baptism of Christ in Matthew, then, Jesus is led up by the Spirit into the wilderness. That's the language that we find in the Exodus.

Led up by the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire into the wilderness and led towards the

promised land. Whereas in Luke, Jesus is filled with the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit, he's led in the Spirit into the wilderness. That's the language that we find in something like the book of Ezekiel.

The hand of the Lord was upon me and I was led in the Spirit to the valley of dry bones or whatever. He's led to the valley of dry bones. He's led to the high mountain and then he's led to various extremities of the temple, which is the same order as we see in the temptations in Luke.

Now, that helps us to understand what's going on. There's a particular background that's being foregrounded within that account. Now, you can think that background is at play in the other Gospels, but it's very much something that is not accented.

Whereas in Luke's account, it's that background in Ezekiel and elsewhere, the prophetic background that is pretty, it's the primary emphasis. And as you go through Luke's Gospel, you'll see that more generally. Christ is cast in the mould of the prophets.

Christ is the great prophet who will fulfil the mission of all the previous prophets. He will go to Jerusalem and he will complete their mission. Whereas in Matthew, Jesus is the one who completes the Exodus.

He's the one who completes the ministry of Moses. In Mark, Jesus is the king. He's the one who does things with power.

He's the one who does things straightway, immediately. He's the one who's moving around all the time and doing things suddenly and demonstrating the rule. Now, Mark's account of Christ's temptation in the wilderness is one that emphasises him being driven out.

Now, they're all describing the same event. Matthew, Jesus is led up by the spirit into the wilderness. Mark, Jesus is driven out by the spirit into the wilderness.

And Luke, Jesus being filled with the spirit, is led in the spirit into the wilderness. These all describe the same event but in very different ways and ways that accent different dimensions of the biblical background. Now, that background in Mark is a curious one.

Where exactly is this drawing from? Is it drawing upon the story of David being driven from Saul's court? Or is this David fighting with the wild beast of Goliath who stands against Israel for 40 days after his anointing by Samuel? It could be one of those things. It could also be a reference to exile more generally. But what this suggests is a further background for that possible reference, for that reference, a possible reference then to the story of Nebuchadnezzar.

And as we unpack that, I think we'll see a bit more that this does not mention. So, first of all, it mentioned, the questioner mentions a possible connection between the watchers

and the angels that minister to Christ. I don't think that that is the connection we should notice.

Rather, Nebuchadnezzar sees a holy one coming down out of heaven who is the one who initiates the process of driving him out. Jesus sees the spirit descending from heaven in the form of a dove and the spirit is the one that drives him out. So I think those two things are the things to be connected in those accounts, not the watchers and the angels ministering to him.

There are other connections that we could think about when we draw it in, consider it in the background of the other synoptic gospels, where in the ministry of John the Baptist immediately beforehand, he speaks about the axe being laid to the root of the trees. Now, that's part of the prophecy or the dream concerning Nebuchadnezzar's fate, that this axe will be laid at the root of this great tree that provides shade and shelter and branches upon which the birds can rest. And the axe is laid at the root of the tree.

It's broken down. It's made into just a stump. And that is the fate of Israel.

The axe is laid at the root of the trees. The rulers of Israel are about to be brought down and anyone who is not prepared, who is not bearing good fruit will be removed. Now, Christ is in this account, then he was the axe being he's the tree being cut down.

He's the one who is like the great tree among Israel. And he's the one that's being cut down, that's being driven out into the wilderness, that's living with the wild beasts for that period. And that might help us to see that John the Baptist ministry does not include an explicit reference to the axe being laid to the root of the tree in Mark's gospel.

It includes it in Luke and it includes it in Matthew. But if this background is at play, it is implicitly present that Christ is the tree that is being cut down. Now, how does this picture fill out? What is the meaning of this? Well, in Matthew, we see Christ taking the vocation of Israel upon himself.

In Matthew chapter 2, verse 15, out of Egypt I have called my son. Christ represents Israel. Christ is the one who sums up Israel in himself.

And Christ, as he goes into the wilderness and he's tested by Satan, he is the one who succeeds where Israel has failed. He's the one who lives out Israel's vocation, who recapitulates Israel's vocation. In Mark, Jesus is the one who confessing with all the people confessing all of Israel coming forward.

He is the one who takes the fate of the trees that are about to be cut down upon himself. He takes the fate of the Davidic and the Davidic dynasty, the judgment upon it. He is cut down and then he goes into the wilderness, dwells among the beasts, and then he's raised up again.

And the kingdom message that we find at the end of the judgment of Nebuchadnezzar is very reminiscent of the sort of statements that we have concerning the kingdom of Christ. And likewise, the parable of the mustard seed is again something that might remind us of that particular story. Christ is going to establish a kingdom, an empire that will be similar to the empire and kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar.

He is cut down for the sake of the Davidic kingdom, the Davidic dynasty, and he will be raised up again. He is the tree cut down and then there's a resurrection. And these themes of resurrection are things that we see in the story of Isaiah, for instance, where there are a lot of references to the cutting down of the tree of Israel.

Just the stump being left and then this coming of the new root or shoot out of Jesse. It's as if the Davidic kingdom has died completely and it has to go back to before its root. It's not just rising out of David, it's rising out of Jesse.

And then in chapter 53, we see the Messiah as a root out of dry ground. Christ is the one who brings new life where the whole Davidic kingdom seems to have died. So Christ is the one who is like this great tree, this Davidic kingdom that established shade for all the beasts of the earth and shelter and a place for the birds of the air to rest.

It's been cut down. It's been judged. But yet out of the dry earth, out of the broken down tree and the stump that's been closed off, new life emerges.

And it's Christ who has come forth. Now, in the story of Nebuchadnezzar, we see that he is judged for a week as it were. The week passes over him.

And there may even be creation imagery in the series of the events described in the judgment. Removal of the light, this great tree, this great tree that can be seen from all the earth. This is a light type image.

Then you might see the shelter that it provides as a firmament and the food that it provides is connected with day three. And then it's been cut down and from its rule as being connected with day four and the rulers in the heavens. This is a rule of being removed from the heavens and then connections with the birds and the beasts and day five and six.

And then in day seven, when seven years have passed, seven times have passed, he will be restored. So there's maybe a week type pattern at play here. James Jordan has suggested this in his commentary, the handwriting on the wall.

As we look through this, then there is the breaking down and the restoration of this great tree of Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom. And Christ plays out a similar pattern. Christ is the one who takes upon himself the fate of the Davidic dynasty.

And he's the one who rises up again as the ruler, the Messiah, the son of David, who will

restore that. In the story of Nebuchadnezzar, there's another detail that might be worth paying attention to. And that's the emphasis on the Jew of heaven, the Jew of heaven that's going to fall upon Nebuchadnezzar seven times.

It's a baptismal imagery, I believe. And that baptismal imagery connects the beginning of what happens to Christ with the fate of Nebuchadnezzar. Christ is the one who has the spirit coming upon him like baptismal rain out of his baptism from the water.

There is this coming down of the spirit from above in this sort of baptismal rain, in this dove that alights upon him. And he is going to be the one who brings life and restoration. And in the same way, Nebuchadnezzar is restored through seven cycles of the Jew of heaven coming upon him.

There is a baptismal restoration. And Christ is the one who, through his baptism, through being cut down, and through his passage through the wilderness, living with the wild beasts and then being restored, he is the one who's going to rise up as the Davidic Messiah, the one who restores the reign of David, the reign of David that has been lost. Thank you very much for listening.

If you have any questions, please leave them on my Curious Cat account. If you'd like to support this and other podcasts like it, please do so using my Patreon or PayPal accounts. Thank you very much for listening.

And Lord willing, I'll return with something else in the not too distant future. God bless.