

Son of Man E5 Final

The Beastly King

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Jon: Hey, this is Jon at The Bible Project. We're on Episode 5 of a conversation about a character in the Bible called the Son of Man. It's an important character that Jesus himself identifies with. And while the apostles call Jesus by the title the Christ...

Tim: ...an odd fact in the Gospel accounts is Jesus almost never uses that title to describe himself. Instead, he very often uses the phrase "the Son of Man." This is a phrase that he got from Daniel 7, and it's clear that Jesus saw Daniel 7 as a symbolic portrait in miniature of his entire destiny calling vocation - his identity.

Jon: In Daniel 7, there's a dream. In the dream, we meet this character, the Son of Man. He rides up on a cloud, sits at God's right hand and is worshiped alongside him. This is the human we've been waiting for since page 3 of the Bible when God promised that a seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent.

Tim: But the Son of Man is in Daniel 7, which is the culmination of Daniel 1 through 6. So we need to take in Daniel 1 through 6.

Jon: So that's what we're going to talk about today. 6th century BC, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, took over Jerusalem, loots their temple, and recruit men to serve him in Babylon. One of these men is Daniel. We'll look at how he is connected to the Son of Man. All that and more, in this episode. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

This is the part you've been waiting for.

Tim: Yes. In the Son of Man conversations, everything's been setting up for this. This is where the good stuff is.

Jon: Really?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: I felt like the conversation has been good.

Tim: Oh, it's been awesome. But it's all been preparatory to come back to where we started and to read Daniel 7, I think with fresh set of lenses, and then to let that help us reread the Gospel accounts of Jesus.

Jon: Yeah, we've never done it this way. Start in the middle of the story, go to Jesus, go back to the beginning of story, and then come back.

Tim: Here's the recap. This is preparatory conversations for the Son of Man video we're going to make. We started with the fact. Jesus, the most common title in the New Testament is Messiah or Christ, people using it to describe him. However, an odd fact in the Gospel accounts is Jesus almost never uses that title to describe himself. Instead, he very often uses the phrase "Son of Man."

This is a phrase that you got from Daniel 7. And it's clear that Jesus saw Daniel 7 as a symbolic portrait in miniature of his entire destiny, calling, vocation.

Jon: His identity.

Tim: His identity. Then what we did was go back too. Daniel 7 is itself the whole story of the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: Daniel 7 didn't just pop up out of nowhere.

Tim: No.

Jon: It wasn't just some random dream. It's a culminating vision of an idea that's been generating since the first two pages of the Bible.

Tim: Literally. Yeah, since the very beginning. So Daniel 7 is the whole Hebrew Bible told in one chapter of dense symbolism and in dream imagery.

Jon: The whole Hebrew Bible?

Tim: Yes. And almost every key character, every key mediator or deliverer figure, human, contributes to the portrait. Actually, think of this figure we're going to see in Daniel 7, the Son of Man, as this photo mosaics. You know, big pictures that are made of thousands of little tiny pictures. Daniel 7 is like that.

The Son of Man figure rising up above the defeated beast and being enthroned beside God, that figure is, if you zoom in, you'll see a million little pictures of Adam, and Joseph, and Moses, and Joshua, and the high priest. And we're going to see Daniel himself. And you realize all of their stories have been miniature versions of this story. There's just one storyline at work in all these different...

There's one meta-story being told over and over and over again through the mini stories of all the different episodes and characters of the Hebrew Bible. And it's the story in the early chapters of Genesis.

Jon: So the character the Son of Man in Daniel 7 is like an amalgamation of all of these other stories.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: And what you realize when you get there is that we haven't been telling all these separate stories, all these separate individuals. It's all been one story, one meta-story.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: By the time you get to this, you probably already kind of picked that up.

Tim: You're supposed to have been trained already to know that's what's going on.

Jon: That seems so significant. And then this is what Jesus calls himself.

Tim: Right. Then it's why the gospel authors have woven into every episode of the Gospels design patterns keyword hyperlinks back to stories in the Hebrew Bible to depict Jesus as a new Adam, a new Joseph, a new Moses, a new Elijah, a new

David. They'll tell stories of Jesus doing something, but then he'll say something that's a little hyperlink or quote from something Moses said, or something David did.

Jon: Because the Gospel they just don't like to just straight out just go, "I want you to understand Jesus is a new Moses."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. They do it the way the Hebrew Bible does it.

Jon: By having him do something you're like, "Wait, that's something Moses would do." Or use a phrase of like, "That's a phrase from the story of Moses."

Tim: "That's something Moses did. That's something David did." This is the weave of biblical literature. Biblical authors advance their claims and arguments and what they want to communicate to you, the message, but through narrative patterning, to create overlapping characters. And so, the Son of Man is the greatest example of that. But the Son of Man is in Daniel 7, which is the culmination of Daniel 1 through 6. So we need to take in Daniel 1 through 6. Real quick. A few minutes and then it will set us up.

Jon: Okay, story of Daniel.

[00:06:55]

Tim: First sentences of Daniel. Let's just take this in. "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it."

Jon: Nebuchadnezzar.

Tim: Nebuchadnezzar.

Jon: How do you pronounce it?

Tim: Nebuchadnezzar. Actually, that's a Hebrew pronunciation.

Jon: Of a Babylonian name?

Tim: Yeah. The Babylonian name is Nebuchadrezzar with an r instead of an n. Not "nezzar" but "rezzar." Nebuchadrezzar. Nebu is one of the names—

Jon: It's a god?

Tim: It's a deity in the book of Jeremiah. A couple of times in the Hebrew Bible, the spelling Nebuchadrezzar is retained even in Hebrew, but most time it's Nebuchadnezzar, and it's just the pronunciation variant. Like tomato tomato, potato potato.

Jon: Yeah, but those all have the same letters.

Tim: Oh, yeah. What's another one then?

Jon: What I always found really interesting is how a British put kind of an r sound behind words that end with an a.

Tim: Oh, okay.

Jon: Like agenda or banana?

Tim: Yeah, yeah, that's right. That's a good example.

Jon: It's just like this really soft r. In American English, you keep the a really strong and you end with that. Banana.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. I have a friend staying with me because he's about to move to Scotland, and he made dinner last night at our house. It was awesome. But he used something like Worcester sauce.

Jon: Oh, yeah. Oh, man.

Tim: It's spelled Worcestershire in English, but he's saying in Scotland they just say, "Wurster."

Jon: Wurster.

Tim: So Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadrezzar. Anyway. So his name means: Nabu is the name of Babylonian god. I think it's a synonym for Marduk. In the Babylonian it's Nabu-kudur-uzur. Nabu-kudur-uzur. Nabu, "has protected the son who will inherit" is apparently what it means.

Jon: That's what the name means. Now, it doesn't really matter so much, but what do you know about this guy? Like how did he come to power and what's the whole Babylonian story?

Tim: He's a king of what's called the Neo Babylonian Empire. So it's arising from the ashes. Actually, before Israel was ever on the scene, Babylon had an ancient powerful empire over the Mesopotamian region, king Hammurabi. Kind of the famous king Hammurabi. This big ancient stone where he inscribed the law code that was given to him by the gods.

Then the Assyrian kingdom which was capital and Nineveh, which was up by the Tigris, a bit north gained power and then it was just Assyria all the way for centuries.

Jon: But Assyria they took over the northern kingdom.

Tim: They took out the northern kingdom and they besieged Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah. That story is told in the Bible multiple times. So Nebuchadnezzar essentially was the architect of a renewal of the Babylonian Empire. He was able to exploit a succession of lots of kings in a row in the Assyrian Empire. It was economically weak. It had spent way too much money taking over the world where it overextended itself. Anyway, he was able to take advantage of a bunch of things. There's lots of details I'm forgetting right now. But anyway.

Jon: He rallied Babylon.

Tim: This is happening in like around 600 BC. The golden days of Babylon were in like 1800 BC. So over 1,000 years ago. So over 1,000 years, Babylon's been dormant under the shadow of Assyria, and now he was the one who—

Jon: What was Israel up to when Babylon heads first heyday?

Tim: They were Abraham's ancestors in that very land - in the land of Mesopotamia.

Jon: Pre-Abraham?

Tim: Correct. All that to say Babylon is ancient but it's a Neo Babylonian era.

Jon: It's a Neo Babylon.

Tim: And so Nebuchadnezzar essentially stormed West, and was asserting his dominance over what used to be the territory of the Assyrian Empire. This Neo Babylonian era didn't last even a century. I mean, it just overextended itself just like Assyria.

The Persians who came next, the Persian Empire they learned from Assyria and Babylon. What they did was let all the people that Nebuchadnezzar had exiled and taken prisoner into foreign lands, he let these people go back.

Jon: And this is why Israel was able to go back to Jerusalem.

Tim: Yeah. After Ezra, Nehemiah's and Zerubbabel's period - books of the Bible about this - but Ezra, Nehemiah and that whole crew going back to Jerusalem, that was a part of many people groups getting to go back to their homelands after having been taken into exile by Nebuchadnezzar.

Jon: But that was just normal. You're like, "We're going to be the power brokers here in this world, and so you're going to all be under my authority. I'm going to march in, and now you're going to—

Tim: That's right. However, what Nebuchadnezzar did first is he asserted dominance over Jerusalem. He besieged it. That's how the book of Daniel opens. And as we're going to see, he took a whole layer of the elite power economic brokers and he took them to Babylon, but he left the majority of the population and he set up a puppet king.

Then it's the puppet king, Zedekiah who rebels and then Nebuchadnezzar comes back like you guys are done before.

Jon: Like, I give you your shot.

Tim: So there were actually multiple waves of Nebuchadnezzar coming and taking people into exile.

Jon: So he didn't just come in and just take over. I mean, he did, but he came in and he was like, "I'm going to let you guys keep this."

Tim: "Keep this. You'll just be under foreign occupation, and the guy ruling is under my thumb." That's right. So Daniel is a part of this first wave of exiles. All of that is told in the book of 2 Kings. Daniel opens with a hyperlink essentially back to 2 Kings.

"In the third year of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and besieged it."

Jon: Jehoiakim being?

Tim: He was the current line of David.

Jon: He was the puppet ruler?

Tim: No. No. He was the guy reigning when Nebuchadnezzar showed up the first time. Verse 2. "The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand. Just like Jeremiah said, just like the prophet said, 'Rebel sons of David, don't get to rule in Jerusalem for very long. Yahweh won't allow you.'"

So here's what happened. The Lord gave the king of Judah, the son of David into this guy's hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God. So he looted the temple, took all the gold, lampstand, the table of showbread.

Jon: Like if you try and make friends with Israelites, it's not good thing.

Tim: No, he doesn't care about being friends. He's asserting dominance.

Jon: It's very Machiavellian rule or whatever?

Tim: Totally. Then look what he does. He empties the temple of all of its ritual furniture and then he brought them to the land of Shinar - and that's a hyperlink. It means Babylon. It's a regional name for Babylon.

Jon: NIV says Babylonia.

Tim: Oh, wow. It's the land of Shinar.

Jon: Shinar, yeah. Hebrew Shinar.

Tim: It's a glowing blue hyperlink. Because this is where the tower and the city of Babylon built in Genesis 11, it's called the land of Shinar.

Jon: That's where the Tower of Babel was built?

Tim: It's a rare ancient name for the region of Babylon. We encountered it first in Genesis 11, and it's used just a few times in the whole Hebrew Bible.

Jon: Oh, interesting.

Tim: And they are always meant to be hyperlinks back. Remember what was Genesis 11 about. What's that Tower of Babylon that has its head up in the heavens? It's a temple structure.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: And so, he's taking them back to the Babylonian cosmic mountain and he's taking what used to be in the temple in Jerusalem, and he's putting it in the temple to his god.

Jon: Devastating.

Tim: Devastating. Yeah. He's throwing his weight around. Verse 3: "Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to take some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal seed." Literally, the seed of the kingdom. And by now the word "seed"—

Jon: Yeah, is loaded—

Tim: Yeah, the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, seed of David, part of the Messianic portrait is the royal seed.

Jon: Within the seed is the future hope of the—

Tim: Snake crusher of the one who will bring God's kingdom and bring blessing to the nations, the seed of Abraham. All that.

Jon: That's interesting. It's like this detail of taking the royal seed, first, he takes all of these like, the really important artifacts... All the temple worship stuff. It's like going in and robbing God's house. But even more than that, the most valuable thing...

Tim: Yeah, the future of their kingdom.

Jon: ...is the future of the kingdom symbolized in the seed, the promise that God would use. And he's taken that.

Tim: Taken that to Babylon too. Let's think about this royal seed. There use in whom there was no blemish.

Jon: Like their priests.

Tim: Ah, like their priests and like the sacrificial animals. It's a phrase used to describe like the Passover - take a young yearling with no blemish. Or the sacrifices in Leviticus - take an animal with no blemishes. Why are they being described as if they're sacrificial animals?

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: Animals get consumed by the flames on the altar.

Jon: But it also is a description of a priest, right?

Tim: Correct. The priests were to have no blemish and also the animals. Correct. They were also good of sight.

Jon: They are good on the eyes.

Tim: Good on the eyes. Which is what was said of both David and of Joseph, the same phrase, and also it's what that forbidden fruit looked like to the woman.

Jon: Oh, really? It's the same phrase?

Tim: Good of sight.

Jon: Good of sight. Oh, wow, interesting. NIV just says handsome.

Tim: Okay. Handsome. You know what else is interesting? They had knowledge in every kind of wisdom. "Endowed with understanding discernment and knowledge to serve in the king's court." So we have the royal seed going into the heart of Babylon and they are described in the language of priests and sacrificial animals and they have wisdom and they look good, which is just like that fruit in the garden that would bring wisdom if you take it. Remember?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Woman saw that the fruit was good of sight and desirable for gaining knowledge - to become wise.

Jon: So you think that's all in here?

Tim: Oh, absolutely.

Jon: Really?

Tim: Absolutely. Totally. Totally.

Jon: That's a lot.

Tim: Oh, yeah. Yeah. But by this point in the Hebrew Bible, it's already pre-programmed specifically from the Joseph story. This is all language from the Joseph's story where Joseph is the forbidden fruit that Potiphar's wife sees and desires and takes.

Jon: So these guys are now the fruit that Nebuchadnezzar is taking?

Tim: Yeah. Nebuchadnezzar's just taken the...

Jon: That's why they're described this way?

Tim: ...the forbidden fruit of the chosen royal seed, and it's going to come back to bite him in a major way.

Jon: All right.

Tim: Here's what happens. By now in the Hebrew Bible, these authors are very creative, and they'll be using imagery and language from earlier stories, but in new

combinations. They're not beholden to the earlier stories. They use them as treasure troves of imagery to make the point that needs to be made here in Daniel.

Here's what happens is that the king appoints that these guys eat from the king's choice food and from his wine, and to get schooled in Babylonian astronomy and math and language for three years before they entered the service.

Jon: Not a bad gig.

Tim: Among them were four sons of Judah for the royal seed: Daniel, Hanania, Mishael, and Azaria. Daniel means God is my judge, the one who judges on my behalf, Hanania means Yahweh shows mercy, Mishael who was like el, who is like God, and Azaria is Yahweh is help.

Jon: They all have really great Hebrew names.

Tim: They all have awesome Hebrew names. And what he does is they get assigned new Babylonian names. Belteshazzar...

Jon: ...for Daniel.

Tim: Yeah. Daniel goes from "God is my judge" to Balatzuutzur - May the king's life be protected.

Jon: Oh, wow.

Tim: So his name goes from "God as my protector and judge" to "may the life of the king of Babylon be protected." Isn't that interesting?

Jon: It is interesting.

Tim: It has cool stuff like this. Here's the thing. Daniel's got a new diet and a new educational track in front of him.

Jon: Yeah, a new name.

Tim: But here's the thing. He already has wisdom. Doesn't he?

Jon: That's right.

Tim: Verse 8. "Daniel made up his mind, 'I'm not going to define myself with this Babylonian food or the wine.'"

Jon: And for him, because it's not kosher, right?

Tim: Almost certainly. That's what's going on. That's right. We have a figure here. So the king of Babylon he's treating these royal seed like they're the forbidden fruit that he's taken.

Jon: He's going to plump them up.

Tim: Yeah, totally. But from another perspective, here's Daniel as the royal seed, a human being taken and planted in Babylon, and he won't eat food that's forbidden to him. So it's this contrast. The king of Babylon will take what doesn't belong to him, like the humans on page 1 taking the fruit and they're described like the fruit. But Daniel won't eat the forbidden food. He becomes a reversal of Adam figure.

Jon: Yeah, this is the Adam we're looking for.

Tim: Yeah, totally. Nebuchadnezzar becomes...Oh, we know humans.

Jon: We know the story.

Tim: We know humans who desire and take what they want for themselves. That's what he's doing all over. But Daniel, all of a sudden, we're like, "Oh, this guy, he doesn't take what is forbidden to him." His life is at stake. All of a sudden, the king gets angry that he and his friends won't eat the royal food.

So Daniel says, "Wait, okay. You can kill me if you want, but just give us some time, 10 days, and if we're more healthy, and our brains are working better than anybody else's here after 10 days of only eating seeds..." He says, "Give us 10 days. I think it's—

Jon: Which is what God wanted Adam and Eve to eat in the garden.

Tim: Yes, dude. Yeah, exactly. So Daniel says, "I don't want the king's food." Then he strikes a deal down here. In verse 12, he says, "Test your servants for 10 days. Let us be given some vegetables." That's how it gets translated. The word is zero'im, a plural of the Hebrew word zera.

Jon: Which is seed?

Tim: Which is seed. So here's the royal seed who's asking to eat only seed. And this was the diet given to the humans in Genesis 1. The seed-bearing plants. So he says, "Let us..."

Jon: Daniel's a vegan.

Tim: Totally. We're like, "He is a new Adam." It's awesome.

Jon: This is the new...Oh, cool.

Tim: He won't eat the forbidden food, instead he'll eat what God's assigned him, which is the seed-bearing plant. Then after 10 days—

Jon: But he's not in the Garden of Eden.

Tim: No. He's in anti-Eden.

Jon: He's in the anti-Eden.

Tim: He's in Babylon, which in Genesis 3 to 11 is where the expulsion from Eden landed humanity was in the plains of Shinar. It's all connected, dude. So awesome how these stories work. Ten days passed, and their bodies are healthy, they're smarter. Verse 17: "God gave them knowledge, intelligence. And Daniel even understood all kinds of vision and dreams. And then they enter into the king service." That's Daniel 1.

We're already set up to see Daniel as a royal Son of David who's a new Adam. He passed this test. The royal priest on Genesis 1, Adam and Eve, they failed the test.

Jon: And they had everything going for them, right?

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: They are in the garden, everything's awesome, they're walking with God, the temple garden, they're living there, and they screw it up. Yet, Daniel, he's pulled out of...the temple's destroyed in Jerusalem, or ransacked.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: He's pulled into the anti-Eden. He's now essentially the slave of a guy who thinks he's god, his name's been changed and he's got to protect this guy now.

Tim: And a test is put before him regarding the forbidden food.

Jon: The kosher diet is so important to the storyline, and even in Acts with how—

Tim: The forbidden food.

Jon: It's such an important part in like when the Jerusalem Christians told the Gentile Christians like, "Just do whatever. Just these two things."

Tim: Here it's what sets Daniel apart as faithful to God.

Jon: And they say, "Just don't eat food sacrificed" ... What did they say?

Tim: Sacrificed to idols.

Jon: And with blood in it, right?

Tim: Correct. That's been strangled.

Jon: That's been strangled. They still cared about the diet.

Tim: Yeah, they did.

Jon: That was really still important to them. It was such a symbol.

Tim: Huge. Huge.

[00:26:18]

Tim: Daniel, the new Adam passed this test, and now he's super smart, super wise. And then we're told he can understand the visions and dreams. Behold, what is Daniel 2 all about?

Jon: A dream.

Tim: A dream that the king of Babylon has. He has this dream of a great statue, made up of multiple kinds of metals. But it's a big statue representing the empires and kingdoms of the world, and it gets struck by a meteor. Then, he wakes up and he's freaked out. He calls all his wizards and dream interpreters, and no one could figure it out. So he says, "I'm going to kill you all. I'm going to kill all my staff and hire new people."

Jon: Sheesh.

Tim: Can you imagine?

Jon: No.

Tim: It's good to let that sink in for a second. This is human nature right here.

Jon: We live in such a unique time in history because that seems outlandish to us, but probably most times in human history that was par for the course.

Tim: Yeah, heads are going to roll.

Jon: Growing up, I remember watching this movie about this city that had all this gold, and there's this one scene and... It is very old movie. There's one scene in it, the like ruler was just mad at this guy, so he just dropped them in this boiling cauldron of gold. And then the guy is dead. I remember as a kid just watching and being like, "That is so gnarly. He just killed that dude in his pot of gold." And for whatever reason, that's kind of the same feeling I'm getting of like Nebuchadnezzar is being like, "You guys can't do it? You're all dead. Bring me a new crew." "Put them in a pot of gold."

Tim: Human beings, man, we're animals. That's what this video is going to be about - the animal nature unleashed in humans when we don't submit to the definition of good and evil greater than my definition. So Daniel asked for a couple of days to pray to his God because he's like, "I know I can come up with the interpretation of the dream." And so he does.

He goes to Nebuchadnezzar and he says, "Listen, the statue that you saw are the kingdoms of this world. Those four layers is succession of four kingdoms, you and the ones coming after you. What you should do is you should honor the God of all nations and be a good ruler. Be a good king."

Jon: By the way, if Daniel was being smart, he wouldn't have brought that interpretation, right?

Tim: Oh, yeah, sure. In other words, to say that your kingdom is eventually going to fall. That's right.

Jon: It's like getting summoned by—

Tim: Totally. That's right. Eventually, the whole chain of kingdoms is going to collapse. God's kingdom comes, the meteor comes, strikes.

Jon: You're not bringing good news is what I'm saying.

Tim: Totally. The images of a great statue reaching up into the sky, its head is up in the sky, so to speak, just like the tower of Babel, let's build a tower with its head...

Jon: This is the dream that Nebuchadnezzar has.

Tim: Then the meteor comes - it's a rock that represents God's kingdom, is how he interprets it. Then, all of a sudden, that rock grows into a cosmic mountain. That's what he says. A mountain. So in place of the human mountain, so to speak with an image that goes up to the sky—

Jon: The anti-Eden becoming Eden again.

Tim: The anti-Eden is destroyed in God's cosmic mountain.

Jon: Which is not what happens when a meteor hits the earth. You get a crater.

Tim: I know. Isn't that interesting?

Jon: You don't get a mountain.

Tim: That's a good point. Again, it's a dream. It's all symbolic meteors can become mountains in your dreams. So it's very important. The King's response to Daniel is in Daniel 2:46. "Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face." New American Standard has "did homage to Daniel." Are you looking at NIV translation?

Jon: Paid him honor.

Tim: Paid him honor and gave orders to present him an offering and sweet incense. Fragrant incense.

Jon: This went well for Daniel.

Tim: This went well for Daniel. But just stop. The king of the nations who just plundered you and your people is now on his face before Daniel. Paying honors is the word for worship.

Jon: Oh, that phrase "and paid him honor," the Hebrew there is "worshiped."

Tim: Yeah. So the king who just had a dream about a statue representing the empires, when he realizes that Daniel can interpret the dream, he prostrates himself, and he worships Daniel and offers sacrifices to him. Before him. Do you see this?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: To present him and offering, an incense, this is the language of worship in the book of Leviticus.

Jon: This is what you do at a temple.

Tim: You kill an animal, you burn it before the altar, before the Holy of holies and you offer incense as an act of worship.

Jon: He's treating Daniel like a king.

Tim: The king who thinks he's a god is bowing and worshipping Daniel as if he's God. What? This is crazy. This is total inversion of the storyline. You're also a little scandalized. I mean, you're like, "He's a pagan, he's a Babylonian. He was all these kinds of thing." But you know, in biblical imagery, this very stark.

The king says to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods, the Elohim of Elohim, the Lord of lords, the reveal of mysteries." So you're like, "Wait." So he's worshipping Daniel but then the one he's also honoring? His worship to Daniel is form of worship to Daniel's God. But the text is very clear. He laid down prostrate before Daniel and presented to him—

Jon: For Nebuchadnezzar, something special about Daniel and knows that behind Daniel is Daniel's God. But we also know from the biblical narrative that Daniel's God has anointed humans as His image. And we've been presented already as Daniel as kind of this true human character.

Tim: True human image. A true image of God who passed the test.

Jon: Yeah, he passed the test.

Tim: And then here are the representative of the nation's bowing before the faithful image of God and offering him worship. I'm just saying.

Jon: What are you saying?

Tim: Remember Daniel 7 is the culmination of both the whole biblical story and also of the lead up of Daniel—

Jon: This is a Son of Man picture.

Tim: Yeah. Here's the son of Adam who's passed the test and the nations are bowing before him. The next chapter is Daniel 3. This is one of the most famous stories in the Bible and it's an inversion of what just happened. It begins: "Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, the height of which was 60 cubits - the cubits were 18, about a foot and a half."

Jon: Ninety feet high by ninety wide. That's a Statue of Liberty sized ...how big is the Statue of Liberty? 305 feet tall.

Tim: Oh, got it.

Jon: So it's a third.

Tim: A third. It's still really big.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Nebuchadnezzar just fell down and worshiped the God of Israel by worshipping his image represented by Daniel. The next story is Nebuchadnezzar making in reality what he just had a dream about an image. These stories are just—

Jon: Old habits die hard.

Tim: Old habits die hard. He's like, "I had a dream about this really cool image."

Jon: "Let's see if God can really knock the head off."

Tim: "I was the head of gold so I'll just make the whole thing gold."

Jon: When you have that much gold to your name, I mean, why not make a statue yourself?

Tim: I guess. Remember Solomon's throne with the lions on the steps?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You were enjoying that throne when we talked about it.

Jon: Totally.

Tim: You're like, I would make like...

Jon: Oh, man.

Tim: So Nebuchadnezzar makes this image and he also passes an edict through the land. In verse 4, he says, "To you, the command is given all you peoples and nations and languages." He summons them all before the image. Actually, now we're in the Aramaic section, but it's salma. Same three letters. In Hebrew it tzelem.

He says, "At the moment, you hear the sound of all these instruments, the horn, the flute - they have a whole symphony orchestra pit in front of the statue - what you are to do is to fall down and worship the image of gold." This is an inversion of what just happened at the end of chapter 2.

Jon: Yeah, Nebuchadnezzar worshipped Daniel as the image of God.

Tim: It's exactly the same vocabulary. So after the dream about the image—

Jon: Why is it translated worship in NIV here and not in the last chapter?

Tim: I know. I think because it's describing Daniel as the object of the verb. I think our translators think like, "We can't translate that as worship. He's not worshipping Daniel."

Jon: So what is he supposed to be doing?

Tim: But he is. At the end of the dream about the statue, he straight up, says it. He worshiped Daniel and offered sacrifices to him. Straight up. Actually here, I'm going off the work of a couple of scholars here who thoroughly studied this out here and it's totally what's happening.

I love how Daniel 2 and 3 are inversions of each other. Daniel 2, the king has a dream about an image of his empire, and then he worships Daniel as the image of God for interpreting the dream. Now, the king of the nations is summoning the nation to worship an image of him. In the same vocabulary is what he did to Daniel. But he says, "Anybody who doesn't fall down and worships the image like he did to Daniel will be thrown into the blazing fire. Then you're like, "Oh, no."

This is a famous story that hyperlinks from chapter 1, of Daniel and his friends described as people in whom there is no defect or no blemish. You are like, "Oh, yeah, they are sacrificial lambs after all being burned before the image, so to speak, for not worshipping the false image."

Jon: I see where it is going.

Tim: Yeah, totally. There you go. The story happens, the three friends they don't worship the image. They are offered as a sacrifice before the altar of Babylon, so to speak. Then all of a sudden, a fourth person that looks like a son of the gods appears next to the friends in the furnace. This is verse 25.

Verse 24 and 25 says, "Nebuchadnezzar was astounded that fire was burning but they were not incinerated. And an official says to him in verse 24, "Wasn't it three humans we bound and cast into the fire?" "Yes, yes. Okay." "Well, I see four humans walking around in fire not being harmed. And you know what that fourth look like? He looks like a son of Elohim.

Jon: Which that phrase can refer to a human, right? Son of Elohim

Tim: Oh, got it. Got it. The king, the son of David is adopted as a son of God. That's what these guys are. They're part of the royal seed of David. And also Israel as a whole, like in the Exodus story can be called the Son of God.

Jon: But it's a royal title?

Tim: It's a royal title, yeah. And spiritual beings who are the delegated authority over the nations.

Jon: So here he's saying that there's a spirit being in there.

Tim: Yeah, there's a supernatural being in there with them. So that's significant, obviously. But then when he invites them to come out, only three come out. Not even their hair smells like smoke, and nothing's damaged. It's amazing.

So what he does is he says, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who sent his angel, his mal'akh, his messenger - so he interprets that as an angelic supernatural being - who saved his servants, who put their faith in him. They violated the king's command and gave up their bodies to not bow down and worship anyone except their own God."

So he says, "I make a decree that anybody who says anything bad about the God of these guys will be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heaps." All right. There's that story. Daniel 4.

Jon: Another dream.

Tim: The king, he says, Daniel 4:1, "You know, I was at ease in my house, flourishing in my palace and I had a dream and it freaked me out. Here's what it was." He has this dream about a tree, huge tree, and it's beautiful, it has all this fruit, and all of the beasts of the field, and the birds of the sky and the living creatures come and they eat the fruit and they have shelter shade. It's awesome.

But then, verse 13, "A watcher, a holy one descended from the heavens." Verse 13, watcher.

Jon: A watcher.

Tim: A watcher.

Jon: I have a little note here. NIV is "messenger." And then it says, "Or watchman." A watcher. That name has very creepy connotations in modern English. Like the watchers. I feel like in different stories they're always a little...

Tim: Watchers?

Jon: Watchers, yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: There was this kind of like X Files reboot kind of thing called - what was it called? Fringe, or something. And the whole storyline of these "watchers" characters, they were just like exact same kind of characters. They just observe. They come in to make sure certain things don't go awry, but there's these... weird kind of characters.

Tim: Okay. That's part of the heritage of the biblical watchers in the biblical tradition. That idea of these super beings who represent the eye of the heavens on the events of humanity in the universe and so on. That's all heritage from the biblical watchers.

This is the only time that this word is used to describe these creatures in the Hebrew Bible. However, in a work temporary with Daniel, in its final shape, and its final

shape of the Hebrew Bible in the book of 1 Enoch, the watchers is the name of the sons of Elohim from Genesis 6.

Jon: Okay. So the angels are the watchers?

Tim: Well, again, the sons of Elohim, the spiritual beings that God appointed to rule over the heavens, who violated the boundary, and came down—

Jon: You don't want me to use word angel?

Tim: Not yet. Even though angel is what they will come to be called, but that's a later blurring of an original distinction.

Jon: Blurring?

Tim: Yeah. Essentially, in the Hebrew Bible, the sons of Elohim, here, one of them called a watcher represents the spiritual beings that God delegated to rule on His behalf over the heavens. That's distinct from the category of spiritual beings called mal'akh or angelos. Angels. Those can be spiritual or human. That's a human or spiritual being role. They are errand people. They run errands.

Jon: Angel is a way to describe what someone's doing more than what they are?

Tim: Correct. So what happens though in post-biblical literature, Jewish literature, is that —

Jon: They stop calling sons of God or?

Tim: Actually they keep doing it, but the word angel developed its meaning to cover both categories. And so, by the New Testament, you get Michael or Gabriel showing up to somebody—

Jon: And he's called an angel.

Tim: And he's called an angelos. This is all back to scattering Babylon and Deuteronomy 32, those sons of Elohim—

Jon: We talked about this in our God series conversation.

Tim: Correct. The dream here is essentially that the watcher right comes down. He's called a holy one. He descends and he shouts, "Chop down the trees, cut off the branches, strip all the leaves, scatters the fruit. All the beasts and birds need to flee and just leave that stump in the ground. And then put a big iron bronze prison shackle around the stump."

Jon: Sheesh. This guy doesn't like this tree.

Tim: Yeah, totally. And in the new grass, it'll grow up after the chopping down. "Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven." You're like, "Who is the him?" Apparently, this chop down a tree has morphed into the human. And that's what it is. It's going to be Nebuchadnezzar.

Jon: The tree represents Nebuchadnezzar?

Tim: He's having dreams about himself. Represented as a tree. But the moment he's cut down and falls on the ground, he becomes a human laying in the wet grass.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: "Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven and let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let him eat grass. Let his heart be changed from that of a human and let the heart of a beast be given to him."

Jon: Heart?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That means his mind.

Tim: Right. Remember, there's no word for brain or mind in Hebrew. It's heart.

Jon: Oh, okay. I see.

Tim: In his dream, King Nebuchadnezzar represented as the tree of life to all the world but he's going to be chopped down and then that tree is going to morph into a naked human playing in the wet grass. And then the naked human becomes a beast.

Jon: That's the image.

Tim: That's the dream.

Jon: Wow.

Tim: We're told that this is a sentence decreed by the watchers. And the watchers they are God's delegate. So this is God's decision, but that He passed on and let the watchers make to let Babylon fall. "It's the decision of the holy ones so that all the living may know that the most high above who commissioned watchers that he is the ruler over the realm of humans. He bestows rule on whom he wishes and he loves to set rule over the lowliest of humans. This is the dream that I, Nebuchadnezzar saw." Then he gets Daniel and Daniel interprets the dream.

Jon: It sounds like he just interpreted his own dream.

Tim: He just recounted the dream. Daniel is going to go on to say, "You are the tree."

Jon: But what was the whole thing? I lost you when you were reading about God likes to...the verse was something about—

Tim: It's chapter four, verse 17. "This is the decree of the watchers so that all the living may know that the Most High rules over the realm of humans, and He bestows rule on whomever he wishes, and he sets it over or on the lowliest of humans." It's the last line of verse 17.

Jon: What is he talking about?

Tim: He just brought down the arrogant and proud, Babylon, and God is the one who assigns kingdoms rising and falling. And you know, what God takes, particularly, delight in is chopping down big, arrogant kingdoms that think they're awesome. And He loves to set the opportunity to rule on the humble of no names.

Jon: The upside down kingdom.

Tim: Totally. This is all from Abraham, no name Abraham is given a name. David, the eighth one out...

Jon: The weak become strong.

Tim: ...out with the sheep. Hannah, the one who has no children being exalted over Peninah and give birth to Samuel. It's a major motif. When humans exalt themselves, they activate the inner animal and become beasts, that God will chop them down, exile them to the wilderness to be with the beast that they act like, and he loves then to replace them by exalting the humble, no name, to rule in place of kingdoms. So good, dude.

Jon: So interesting. I mean, we talked about this a lot. It's upside down kingdom stuff. Jesus, I mean, he's all about this.

Tim: All about this.

Jon: When it starts to get very practical, you just don't see any self-help type books. They're like, "Hey, look, just be weak. God wants to like..."

Tim: Or the true way to honor God with whatever privilege or authority influence that you have, is to give that influence and authority away to others and include them and exalt them in some way. There's different ways that embody that ethic but it's the upside-down ethic.

Jon: And if you're going to keep it all to yourself, he's going to chop you down.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But this tree in the dream is a pretty rad tree.

Tim: Yeah. Let's talk about this. It's the tree of life. It's an image of Eden and the tree of life. So it's as if Babylon could, if it wanted to, it could become an expression of God's rule over the nations.

Jon: It reminded me of when God told Adam and said, "Hey, they know good and evil. Now they're like us."

Tim: "They're going to send out their hand and take from the tree of life."

Jon: It's kind of this sense of like, we're capable of so much, but if we do it on our own terms, it's going to get really ugly.

Tim: Totally. That's right.

Jon: But it might even look really beautiful.

Tim: It might look beautiful. Just like the hanging gardens of Babylon little Edens. I'm sure it looks beautiful. But underneath it was—

Jon: Babylon from one perspective look like the tree of life.

Tim: Correct. It has the possibility to just like every human life has the possibility to...

Jon: At every human institution.

Tim: ...be truly human. And every human institution made up of lots of humans has a chance to represent the reign and rule of God. But it all is about who gets to define the knowledge of good and evil, and whether the tree will bear fruit that really just benefits everybody else.

Tim: That's the idea.

Jon: But this tree is benefiting. It's benefiting everyone else in the vision. Right? The birds and the animals...

Tim: Yeah. So the point is whether the tree represents Babylon as it was or Babylon as it could be. Because the point is, is here's a tree and then it's chopped down.

Jon: I guess the question is, like, what's wrong with this tree? Why not just let the tree go and just prune it as you need to? Why come and chop it down? And it's not true because Nebuchadnezzar is out there throwing people in fiery furnaces and stuff. Right?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So there's some gnarly stuff happening under the shade of this tree. But in the dream, is it because—

Tim: Actually, here. The tree represents what Babylon could become based on what Nebuchadnezzar does in response to this dream.

Jon: Oh, interesting.

Tim: Because look, after he gets Daniel in the room, tells him the dream, Daniel interprets the dream and he says, "Listen, the tree is you and—

Jon: It's a future him.

Tim: Correct. He says, "The trees going to be chopped down and you're - this is chapter four, verse 25 - you're going to be driven away, exiled, just like Adam and Eve, and you're going to live with the beast and eat grass." This is so cool.

Jon: Yeah, this is what the animals were given there in Genesis 1.

Tim: So Daniel, refuses to eat the forbidden food of Nebuchadnezzar and he eats the food assigned to the humans in Genesis 1. Nebuchadnezzar now because he's going to be a rebel Adam figure is going to be exiled with the beast and eat the diet of the animals like the animal that he is.

But then the ultimatum comes in verse 27. He says, "Now, therefore, may my advice be pleasing to you. Break away from your sins. Do righteousness. Break away from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor so that there may be a prolonging of your abundance." So that's the idea.

Jon: God can use this kingdom for good.

Tim: He could use it. It's almost this becomes Nebuchadnezzar's test in the garden. I have not quite put it that way to myself. But that's exactly his dreams about the Garden of Eden, about how he could become—

Jon: This is his garden of Gethsemane moment in a way?

Tim: Oh, yeah. Interesting.

Jon: Not my will but your will kind of thing.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Like this is the task at hand. How are you going to handle it?

Tim: Will you let your life and the kingdom you rule bear fruit for the nations? Which here is equated by showing mercy to the poor. He just says it. And that's Amos and Micah ringing in our ears. The true worship.

Jon: When this all gets practical it's about taking care of other humans that need it.

Tim: That's right. Yeah. You know, an institution that apparently represents God's way of ruling the world when it takes care of and gives itself away for the wellbeing of others, especially people who don't usually get access to the goods. He says, "You have a chance."

Jon: Pretty different than just throwing people in boiling pots of gold.

Tim: It's the opposite.

Jon: It's the exact opposite.

Tim: It's exalting people to opportunities. Yeah, that's right. Okay. The story goes on. Verse 29: "Twelve months later, Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the roof of his royal palace in Babylon. Then the king answered and said, 'Isn't this Babylon, the Great which I myself has built as a royal residence for the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?'"

Jon: It's getting to his head.

Tim: There you go. This is his Adam and Eve moment. "While the word was in the mouth, his mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, your sovereignty is removed. You're driven away, exiled from humankind...'"

Jon: Wait. He's just impressed with himself for a moment.

Tim: But come on. Come on. Clearly this is—

Jon: Never done that? You never walked through your room, and you're just like, "Look at this. This is nice. I got some nice stuff."

Tim: Sure.

Jon: But this is the culminating moment.

Tim: Yeah. I mean, it's the test. It's the moment of the test.

Jon: What do you mean it's a test?

Tim: Well, he just had the dream, and he just—

Jon: What are you going to do?

Tim: What are you going to do?

Jon: How are you going to rule?

Tim: The next story is about who's going on saying, "It's all mine. It's all mine. It's for my power and my majesty and my glory."

Jon: But it is interesting how, in one sense, that should ring as like this. "Ah, what? He did it. He blew it." But another sense it's like, "Who hasn't done that?"

Tim: Of course. He's a human.

Jon: He is human.

Tim: And so the dream comes to pass. He goes crazy, wanders out into the dewy grass, eats the diet of the animals from Genesis 1 for seven periods of time. Then we're told in verse 33, his body was drenched with dew until his hair grew like that of an eagle's.

Jon: Sounds like awesome hair.

Tim: Eagle hair?

Jon: Eagle hair.

Tim: Those are feathers. And his fingernails were like that of a bird. So weird. He's becoming a beast out there. He's growing feather fur and claws. Something's

happening here. In the narrative portrait, he's becoming a mutant. He's depicted as a human become animal mutant. Again, it's all leading us up to Daniel 7.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: All right. That's enough. We could do Daniel 5 and 6, but it just be the same things going forward. Daniel 5 is Nebuchadnezzar son has the same test before him. He fails. Daniel 6 is another test for Daniel, whether he's going to pray to the king of the Mead's as if he's a God. He's he doesn't and he's thrown into a pit of beasts who usually crushed bones, but instead, they just sit there peacefully with Daniel.

Jon: Peace with the animals.

Tim: Daniel 6 is our new our Adam sitting in a pit at peace with the animals. At peace with the violent beasts. Come on.

Jon: Come on.

Tim: What do you want? Then we walk into the mighty chapter. We haven't talked about the literary design. And literary design of Daniel 7—

Jon: Yeah, it's a big.

Tim: Totally. It's the center point of the whole book. Everything leads up to it, and the rest of the book flows out of it. This was the most important chapter for Jesus in understanding his identity and his vocation. It's where he got the phrase "Son of Man."

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. If you've been enjoying this series and you have questions, we'd love to hear them. Feel free to send it to us at info@jointhebibleproject.com. We'll compile these questions for an upcoming question and response episode that we'll do at the tail end of the series. Again, that's info@jointhebibleproject.com.

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