

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 386

Messiah Son of Joseph

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Episode Summary

Christians know Jesus as the messianic son of David. The fact that the messiah is referred to by other titles and terms (e.g., Servant, Branch, Root) is also well known. But there is one title or trajectory about the Jewish messiah that is relatively unknown, save to a handful of rabbinic teachers who intentionally do not want attention paid to it. That trajectory is the Messiah son of Joseph. In this episode we discuss this topic with Dr. David Mitchell, perhaps the solitary scholar who has brought all the relevant ancient “Josephite Messiah” material together into one book. Dr. Mitchell writes extensively of how Jewish sources such as the Talmud speak of a figure called Messiah ben Joseph, who comes forth from Galilee to die, pierced by his enemies at the gate of Jerusalem, whose death confounds Satan, atones for sin, and abolishes death itself.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 386: Messiah Son of Joseph with Dr. David Mitchell. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! What's going on?

MH: Well, again, I don't have a whole lot of updates. Although, I will admit that this week I actually spent some time thinking about Fantasy Football. I know it's still a little early.

TS: Yeah. Uh oh.

MH: But I'm actually thinking, okay, I need to start listening to podcasts and get ready for the season because fall is coming up here. But I don't know about you, but it popped into my head.

TS: Oh, absolutely. I had to renew my league and stuff is starting to pop up. Of course! Are you kidding me? I mean, July is when I'm starting to get excited. I mean, I know all of our listeners are excited about Fantasy Football coming up. [MH laughs] I mean, it is right around the corner.

MH: Yeah, we're about to enter that zone again. [laughs]

TS: Everybody's checking out, fast-forwarding... Yeah.

MH: Yep. They're hitting the button. Okay. Yeah, we get it. But again, I confess. It popped into my head this week and I thought, "Yep. It's getting closer to that time." So that's good, at least for me anyway.

TS: Guilty as charged as well. Well, Mike, last week we had a great conversation with Dr. David Mitchell. And I'm excited about this week's conversation with him as well. It's going to be a good one.

MH: Yeah, you know, for our listeners out there, if you've ever heard either an academic or somebody out there on the internet who wants to troll Christians or maybe one of these professional militant atheists or somebody like that who basically wants to claim that the New Testament idea of a dying and rising messiah is totally foreign to Judaism... In other words, "It's disconnected from the other three quarters of the Bible, and ha, ha, isn't that funny that Christians are just making stuff up that no Jew would have thought of," this is going to be the episode for you. Okay? Because you're going to learn about some trajectories here in our topic (which is the Messiah son of Joseph) that I guarantee you have never heard before. I had not heard of a lot of this stuff until recent years. And I think this is a fair statement: When your field is Hebrew Bible and you haven't come across something and you hit something like this, it's one of those wake-up calls, like, "How in the world did we miss this? Why is this not taught?" So this is going to be one of those episodes for you that I think you're going to find just interesting generally, and I think it'll help you contextualize some things in both testaments (Old and New Testament), and certainly help you address the charge that the New Testament is fundamentally disconnected from the Old. So we're thrilled to have David back and to share his research on this particular item today.

Well, we're excited to have David Mitchell back on the podcast. The last time we had David on we talked about his work detailing and explaining the eschatological program of the Psalter, how the whole book of Psalms (structurally and in terms of the arrangement of its content) tells the story of messiah. I mean, the whole thing from start to finish actually leads to the eschatological outcome of messiah being cut off, reappearing, and ruling the nations, everyone being gathered to worship on Zion, and so on and so forth. So that was an interesting discussion because we don't often get a lot of material on the Psalter here on the podcast. But this one, I think, people are going to find even more fascinating. Because this is an area of scholarship that is (this is

going to sound like an oxymoron) deeply neglected. [laughs] When I first came across the material we're going to talk about today, I just had another one of those moments of, "Why in the world have I never heard this before, all the way up through doctoral work?" And so we're going to talk about the Josephite Messiah—Messiah ben Joseph (Messiah the son of Joseph). And so David, before I give people a little bit of the information about where they can get the book, I'd like you, as you did before, to introduce yourself. Tell our audience who David Mitchell is.

5:00

DM: Hello, everybody. It's a pleasure to be here. My name's David Mitchell. I am Scottish. My doctorate in Hebrew Bible is from Edinburgh University. And it was supervised by Iain Provan, who is now in Vancouver, and by professors John Gibson and Peter Hayman and John O'Neill. Apart from that, I've got a degree in English Literature and Music and a Masters in Biblical Interpretation from London School of Theology. Yet I do not work as an academic theologian. In fact, for most of my life I've been a pastoral musician in one way or another, though I was also a schoolteacher for eight years. And the reason why is because after I finished studying the Psalms, I asked what I was to do, and it seemed to me the Psalms were telling me, "You have to become a director of music." At least that was the role model I saw in the Psalms. It was that or a righteous king, but nobody was asking for a righteous king. [laughter] So I just went for the director of music. The other funny thing is that wherever I went, everywhere I went, people always said, "Oh, will you lead music in our church? Will you lead music in our church?" So these were the doors that opened. So for the last 15 years I've been Director of Music at Holy Trinity Brussels, which is the Anglican cathedral of the Dioceses of Europe. In non-Covid times I'm pretty busy there with singers and orchestras and instruments and recordings. I have the great joy of leading big choral orchestral events, like the Bach Passions, and Handel's Messiah, and classical masses and big carol services. But in these Covid times, it's all been a bit more reduced. But I hope it's going to open up again, maybe this autumn.

MH: Well, like I said, we are excited to have you back on. And our focus today is something that I recommend that our listeners go up and purchase this book. You can get it on Amazon: *Messiah Ben Joseph*. This was self-published by David, but all of the elements (the nuts and bolts of what he's arguing for) have been long published in scholarly journals. And so this is an effort to sort of collect all of the data he has on the subject of this thing we call the Josephite Messiah (the Messiah son of Joseph) and put it into book form that is going to be in some way digestible to the serious student without having to have access to academic journals and whatnot. So this is a thick book. There's a lot of information here. And I'm just going to lead with something that I mentioned a few moments ago. Up until the last few years (two, three, maybe four years) I had not heard of this. I'm not Jewish, so it's not part of my heritage. But to read the first chapter or so of your book, it wouldn't have helped me anyway because it seems like so few

people know that there's this thread in the Hebrew Bible about a messiah figure from Joseph (not from David, but from Joseph). And of course, if they don't see that, they're never going to see the textual discussion around that in later periods, and then how that sort of relates to the Davidic figure that we are all familiar with in the New Testament. So this was really new turf. And yeah, again, I hadn't heard of it, but the more I read of it, I thought, "Wow. How did we all miss this?" And that question became transformed into "*Why* have we missed this?" In other words, why does this get overlooked? Is this just an accident, or is it deliberate or intentional? We can get into some of that. But for the sake of getting into our discussion, what are we talking about here, David? What is this Messiah ben Joseph? Let's just start with the simplest question.

DM: Right, well, in rabbinic literature, there is a figure called Messiah ben Yosef (Joseph). And this Messiah ben Joseph comes from Galilee to die, pierced through by ruthless foes at the gate of Jerusalem. When he dies, Israel is scattered amidst the nations, but his death confounds Satan, it atones for sin, it abolishes death itself, and then Messiah ben Joseph is raised to life again. Now when I say "in rabbinic literature"...

MH: That sounds suspiciously familiar. [laughter]

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DM: Yeah, it does. But when I say "in rabbinic literature," we are not talking about one or two texts. He appears in scores of texts, in hundreds and hundreds of references. He is a standard and important part of Jewish belief.

MH: That's just crazy. [laughs] I mean, again, how did we not know about this? Let me ask it this way. This is obviously not something that you're going to get in a seminary class in the Christian tradition or even graduate school. But does rabbinic Judaism teach any of this today, or does *nobody* teach this? And of course, the subtext is "why?"

DM: Yeah. Well, it's something Judaism has always taught. Messiah ben Joseph is in the Targums and the Talmud and in scores of texts from the early first millennium. And he has been taught ever since. You will find hundreds of Jewish websites that refer to Messiah ben Joseph. In fact, there is more interest in him than ever before. But it's fair to say that the rabbis always liked to keep Messiah ben Joseph on a strictly need-to-know basis.

MH: Mm hmm.

DM: There was something they preferred Christians not to know about. There's this great bit in the Barcelona Disputation where the Dominicans are facing up to Rambam—Moshe ben Maimon. And they say to him... They're trying to demonstrate from the Scriptures that the messiah must die. And Rambam senses that they're not aware of Messiah ben Joseph, and he stands up and

says, “I swear to you that nowhere in Jewish literature, not in the Targums, not in the Talmud, not in the Midrashim, does Messiah ben David die.” [MH laughs] Which of course was totally true. But Rambam knew all about Messiah ben Joseph, but he kept that very much to himself. So the rabbis really didn’t want Christians to know about this. And Christian scholarship has only really been aware of him for the last couple of centuries.

MH: And a minority at that.

DM: Yeah, that’s true.

MH: I can’t recall ever running across this in any Old or New Testament material, commentaries and such.

DM: Yeah.

MH: Do you think... I mean, it’s sort of, on the Jewish side, like you said, there’s this kind of obvious reason, “Let’s not let the Christians hear about this, because this is going to sound suspiciously familiar, and then they’re going to really have us.”

DM: Yeah.

MH: Why is it on the Christian side that you don’t hear about this? Is it just as sort of a general... This is going to sound like a harsh word, but I don’t mean it to be harsh. But is it just a general ignorance of the material or maybe in graduate school do we intentionally get steered away from it? Or it’s not even on the radar? What do you think? Why on the Christian side do we not talk about this?

DM: You know, when I first found out about Messiah ben Joseph, I was studying the Psalms and I was pondering all these references to Joseph in the Psalms, and then I came across Messiah ben Joseph in two places. I first picked up a copy of the *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* by Saadya Gaon, 10th century rabbi. And he was speaking about Messiah ben Joseph, and I thought, “Wow, okay. This messiah from Joseph has to come and die.” And then I found it again in Edersheim’s book, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. But Edersheim believed this was a late idea, that it developed in the 3rd century or so of the Christian period. And the more I looked around, I found everybody who knew about this was saying it developed after the Christian period. And this made no sense to me at all. Because why would the rabbis, having rejected one person messiah, invent another one exactly the same?

MH: [laughs] Right. Yeah.

DM: So it seemed very clear to me from the beginning that they could not possibly be right. So I looked into it and read up on it as much as I could. Now my PhD was in another subject, so I was doing this in between things. And it's something that took me 20 years to bring together as a book. But I finally found one or two people who didn't share the same view. And the more I looked into it, it was crystal clear that the figure was actually in the Bible. So that is... Does that answer the question? Now I've forgotten the question I think.

15:00

MH: Well, basically, "What are the barriers here?" And it really, in the Christian world, who... I mean, now the answer is "you." The answer is "David Mitchell." But who is going to be the person who spends time in the relevant material to direct our attention toward it? And there hasn't been an answer to that.

DM: I've tried to do that. I mean, there are one or two texts I haven't covered of the later texts, you know, from the Renaissance period on. But you can't do everything in one book. And there is one text in particular, an 18th century book, *Kol HaTor*, which is all about Messiah ben Joseph—300 more references to him the whole way through the book. I guess that would need another chapter all together. And I actually just published a little revision of *Messiah ben Joseph*, which adds about five or six pages, which is a little bit about a certain tradition which seems to regard Messiah ben Joseph as Metatron, which is a very interesting idea—as the Angel of the Presence. And I've also put an index at the back of all the Messiah ben Joseph texts I'm aware of. So yes, I haven't covered everything, but all the early material right up to the Renaissance period, is covered in quite a lot of detail.

MH: Let's go to the early material. Let's just start with the Torah. Or the Hebrew Bible if you want to...

DM: That's the early material.

MH: Right. So where is... Trace this idea for us in the Torah. Let's just start with the Torah. So where do we run into this figure?

DM: Right. Well, the first reference to a messiah and Joseph is in Genesis 49:24. And there, Jacob is speaking to Joseph. And he says there is one is going to arise who will be a Shepherd Rock sent from Shaddai. So this is a hero who will be sent directly from Shaddai. And he is promised to Joseph, not to Judah. We have the promise to Judah in Genesis 49:10.

MH: And this is 49:22 and around there.

DM: Yeah, 22 through to 24, yeah.

MH: Okay.

DM: And from thence will come a shepherd, a rock of Israel. And this rock is a very important figure. Because Rambam says that this is the same rock that followed Israel through the desert. Isn't that interesting?

MH: Mm hmm. Yeah. And then there's what Paul does with that. [laughter]

DM: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Rambam doesn't put it quite that way, but I think that's his implication if you read his comments on Deuteronomy 32:4. And then later on, Moses... In Deuteronomy 33:17, Moses says that the one promised to Joseph is going to be like a second Joshua. And he will be sacrificed like a firstborn ox. That's a domestic ox—a firstborn ox, which is born to sacrifice, born condemned to die.

MH: Right. That's its destiny.

DM: Yeah. But then afterwards he will become like a wild aurochs. Now the aurochs was a great, ferocious, wild ox, three meters high to the top of his horns. And it had no place in Israel's sacrificial system. It was free. And nobody meddled with the aurochs. He was a king. So this one who's going to be sacrificed like a *shor* (a firstborn domestic ox) will rise to triumph like a *rem* (like an aurochs). And these two passages in Genesis and Deuteronomy make it pretty clear that just as Joshua was a son of Joseph, so the messiah promised to Joseph will be a greater Joshua, and he will die and rise again in triumph.

MH: So right from the earliest material (the Torah), you have sort of a twin... It's like railroad tracks. Okay? You've got these parallel tracks running that, of course, are going to run through more material and then eventually we're going to see how they sort of come together. I'll tell you the... Here's a passage that really hooked me in your book. I don't want to jump too far ahead. But the passage in Chronicles... And for those of you listening out there, yes, 1 Chronicles is good for something. [laughs] But 1 Chronicles 5:1, the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel. He was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's couch, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph. Now you would expect to read "Judah" there.

DM: Yeah.

MH: But you don't. It's Joseph. Which really, I got that from your book. And I went and looked it up, and it's like, "Wow. That's not what I would expect to read there because of other things in the Torah that I was more aware of."

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DM: Yeah.

MH: But there it is.

DM: Yeah. The Ephraimites... The tribes of Joseph are one of the great forgotten realities of the Old Testament. You know, they were the head of Israel throughout most of the period from the time of Moses to the time they were exiled in Assyria. And they had their own messianic beliefs, just like the Judahites had theirs. And the tribes of Joseph believed that God had promised a messiah to them—Messiah ben Joseph. The Jews believed in a second David; the Ephraimites believed in a second Joshua.

MH: Well, isn't it interesting, too, you know, when you get, like Joseph's dream, the twelve, with the astral imagery there of everybody bowing down, the sheaves and the stars worshipping Joseph. And we tend to sort of restrict the meaning of that to the scene where Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and the tables have finally turned. But again, the astral imagery obviously is something that has a much bigger... a much wider sort of... Oh, what do I want to say here? It plays out a lot more widely than that. Because you also have astral imagery in the Abrahamic covenant, for instance. You have astral imagery associated with the Davidic covenant. But again, who they're bowing down to is not Judah, it's Joseph. So I'm sure that's going to be part of the tradition as well.

DM: Yeah, I could see that.

MH: But, you know, these are things that are easy to read over, but then when you see them, it's like, "Wow. I've never seen that before. And there it is in the text." So what did readers of the Torah do with that? Does this get developed at all in the rest of the Hebrew Bible? So let's move beyond the Torah and just ask this question: what are some other places in the Tanakh that pick up these threads—this Joseph thread?

DM: I propose that he's referred to throughout the Old Testament. I think there are allusions to him when Obadiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel speak of the future resurgence of the tribes of Joseph. It gets a bit clearer in Habakkuk. He speaks about Joshua and he calls him "the messiah of the Lord." Because he talks about "the messiah of the Lord who made the sun stand still." That can only be Joshua. And then he's looking for a second Joshua still to appear, to do the same thing again. And then we could turn to Micah. And we find he speaks of a ruler to be born in Bethlehem. And this ruler is called "a brother of the Josephites," not of the Judahites. And we have to remember that Bethlehem was Rachel's town long before it was David's town. And Rachel prayed to have another son to succeed Joseph. And she had another son in Bethlehem. Benjamin in some ways points to the Joseph messiah because he is the son which will come after Joseph. But anyway, Bethlehem has this association with Rachel and the tribes of Joseph. So Micah's ruler is to come from Bethlehem. And this ruler will restore the former dominion to Israel. That is Joseph's dominion. And the authority of the house of David will devolve onto this figure Micah says is coming.

MH: That's interesting, because Benjamin is sort of absorbed within Judah, just in terms of the tribe itself.

DM: Yeah, in a sense that's... Yeah, that's right.

MH: So there you have either a mutual association, or I'll use the word "absorption" or something like that going on here.

DM: Yeah. Well, Benjamin is always kind of borderline, aren't they? Sometimes they're looking north, and sometimes they're looking south. But they survive the time of the exile... They survive because they're attached to Judah; at least the ones who live in Judah survive.

MH: Mm hmm.

DM: And then, of course, we go into Isaiah and the famous passage. He speaks of a royal figure who will endure suffering and death as an atonement for many, and then triumph. But what many do not realize is that this figure is robed in Josephite imagery. In particular, he is a fruitful vine springing from dry ground. And that is language that we find applied to Joseph in Genesis 49.

MH: Mm hmm.

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DM: And then Zechariah combines with what all the other earlier prophets said, and he speaks of a coming king who shares characteristics both of the house of David and of the house of Joseph, and who endures suffering and death like a second Joseph. And Zechariah calls him a firstborn. And that is a very Josephite term. Ever since we started in Deuteronomy 33:17, where the messiah is a firstborn ox... Firstborn is a very important term to the Josephites. Remember, as you said, Reuben lost the primogeniture. It came to Joseph. Joseph was the firstborn. It wasn't Judah who was the firstborn. Judah was never the firstborn. He was the fourth born. But Joseph was the firstborn of Rachel and the adopted firstborn of Jacob. So yes, when Zechariah calls the messiah "firstborn," this was language that points to the Messiah ben Joseph.

MH: Mm hmm. Yeah, and firstborn, of course, is positional preeminence. So to be named... Well, to displace Reuben there in that 1 Chronicles 5 reference... Because you think when you're going back in your mind, what happens with the tribes, we're always thinking "Judah, Judah, Judah, Judah." But then when it actually gets described by the Chronicler, it's Joseph. Again, I was so struck by that the first time I saw that. Because it's one of those things, as you're reading, you mentally fill in the term "Judah" right there before you get it. [laughter] "And wait a minute. That's not the one that's there." It really jumped out at me. It was very, very intriguing.

So that was a broad, sweeping, very surface-level overview. And again, if you get the book *Messiah ben Joseph*, all of this is going to be fleshed out in a lot of detail.

But let's move a little bit now to, okay, we've got the Old Testament sort of sketch of the rise of Joseph, the preeminence of Joseph. You've got already an association between Joseph via Benjamin and with Judah there, just in the way the tribal system works out, and so on and so forth. And we take that and we go into now the Second Temple period. There's got to be people noticing this. So what's the evidence in Second Temple literature? Let's just pick the most obvious, the one that everybody's heard of: the Dead Sea Scrolls. Okay? Do the Dead Sea Scrolls pick up on this?

DM: Yeah. There's two texts in particular. One is *4Q Testimonia*. And that's a text dating from before 100 B.C. And it speaks of four anticipated redeemer figures whom Israel is waiting for. And one is a prophet like Moses, one is a king, one is a priest, and one is a second Joshua.

MH: Right. There's your Joseph figure.

DM: So there's the Joseph figure there. Of course Joshua... If your hearers don't know, Joshua of course was a prince from Joseph's line. Another text is the *Joseph Apocryphon*, which is numbered 4Q372. And that dates from before 200 B.C., and it presents a figure who is actually called Joseph. And like Zechariah's pierced king, he is suffering in the context of a future attack on Jerusalem. He appears to be dying. And in his death throes, he cries out to God, whom he calls his Father. And he cries out in psalms that God would deliver him. And he predicts that he will rise again in glory. Now this is 200 B.C.—this Joseph figure dying at an attack on Jerusalem and predicting he will rise again. And that's just what we see in Zechariah. But they see Zechariah's king as Joseph. The person who wrote this sees Zechariah's king as Joseph.

MH: Hmm.

DM: And there are others, but I think these are the main ones. These are the clearest ones. But there are one or two other allusions in the Dead Sea Scrolls which could allude to the Joseph messiah.

MH: For the sake of the audience here, I hope you're picking up on... Let me just describe it. You know? Because you could hear "Josephite messiah" and you think, "Well, this must be competition to the Davidic messiah." Or "now we're supposed to believe in two messiahs." Look at what you already know about in the Hebrew Bible. You have titles like "servant" and "messiah." You have figures. You have a new Moses, you have a new Joshua, you have a new David. It's not that you just keep counting these titles and names and types, "Oh, now we're up

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to 10 messiahs we should look at.” This text that David just mentioned is really interesting because they’re looking at the data points and they’re talking about, in this case, four different data points that have something to do with a deliverer figure. So we do the very same thing when we talk about messiah in the Old Testament. We talk about some of these: the Root, the Branch, the servant, mashiach, and then we talk about the new Moses, the new David, the new Joseph. You know, you get into the New Testament, and Jesus is the better Elijah, the better Elisha. All these things work together. Again, it’s a matrix of ideas. It’s not that, “Oh, now we’re up to 10 messiahs now.” No, that isn’t the point. The point is that there’s this other tradition that gets missed, and when you miss it, you miss the way Jews are talking about the dying and rising messiah figure—this thing that’s not supposed to be in the Old Testament, according to academia. So here we are again. But other than the Dead Sea Scrolls, what else do we have going on here in the Second Temple period? Are there any other texts outside of the Qumran material?

DM: Yes, of course. There’s all the pseudepigraphic texts. I just need to skim over this briefly. I mean, these are complicated interpretations. And I refer the reader to the book. But I propose that Messiah ben Joseph is in the two oxen, which we find in *1 Enoch*, chapter 90.

MH: Yep, *1 Enoch*, yep.

DM: The Animal Apocalypse of Enoch. And they point straight back to the two oxen in Deuteronomy 33:17. I suggest that he is also referred to in the *Testament of Naphtali* and the *Testament of Benjamin*, in the *Sibylline Oracles*, in the *Apocalypse of Ezra*, and in the book called *Joseph and Asenath*, and in the book of *Jesus ben Sirach*.

MH: Now let’s take the *Testaments*. Benjamin’s obvious. [laughs] But Naphtali, again, there’s going to be this association of Naphtali and Zebulon with Galilee.

DM: Yeah.

MH: Okay, so that kind of thing shouldn’t be unexpected. But go ahead. Feel free to describe some of these passages or some of the points, anyway, that can be gleaned from them.

DM: Well, that would take a lot of explaining. [laughs] Um...

MH: Well, just pick one or two. Whet our appetites. Because again, the reason we’re having you on is to expose not only the idea and the content, but also the book. This is where people can get it...

DM: Let's just take one example, which is the *Apocalypse of Ezra*. Everybody agrees that most of the book is pretty Jewish, but there's this one bit right in the middle (chapter 7), and it says, "And after these days, my son Jesus the messiah will die." [MH laughs] And everybody says, "Oh, Christian interpolation! Christian interpolation! Christian interpolation!"

MH: Right.

DM: And I'm saying, "No. It's not a Christian interpolation. They were people who believed in a second Joshua."

MH: Yeah, because "Jesus" is "Joshua"...

DM: "Jesus" is "Joshua."

MH: ... in the Septuagint.

DM: Exactly.

MH: Right there it is.

DM: And this writer is saying, "Look, and in these days, the Joshua messiah will die." And this is just standard Messiah ben Joseph language. It's what we find in the Talmud. It's what we find in Zechariah and Deuteronomy 33. And so there is no Christian interpolation that I can see in the *Apocalypse of Ezra*. For me it is a thoroughly Jewish text, looking for a Joseph messiah, expecting a Joseph messiah to come and die. A Joshua messiah. But then a Joshua messiah is also a Joseph messiah.

MH: Let's go back to the *1 Enoch* 90 passage. Because we've talked about *Enoch* in a number of other episodes on this podcast. We haven't done anything specifically with the *Animal Apocalypse*. But if you can describe what that extended allegory is, what it's trying to accomplish, and then say a little bit more about the passage that deals with the *shor* and the *rem*.

DM: The big question in *Enoch*, there is a thing called the *nagar*. And there's a lot of discussion about who the *nagar* was. But Dillman in 1853 proposed... And the argument is complicated. You really do need to read it in detail. But Dillman proposed that the *nagar* is the aurochs (the wild ox). And it made perfect sense, the derivation of the word into Ethiopic from Aramaic.

MH: This matters for *Enoch*, because we have... The book is preserved in Ethiopic as well.

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DM: Yeah. The only complete preserved text is in Ethiopic. And since that time basically everybody has agreed with Dillman. And if we take *nagar* to mean an aurochs, then what happens in *Enoch* chapter 90 is we see that a white bull is born, and with large horns, and all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air feared him. And they worshiped him all the time. And they were all transformed and they all became white bulls. In other words, it means that the first bull was a firstborn white bull. And something happens to him. But he is also transformed. And he becomes an aurochs. And the aurochs...

MH: He becomes a king.

DM: Yeah, he is transformed into an aurochs. And then everybody lives together in peace in the blessing of God. Um, we're not told how he's transformed. But since he is a firstborn white bull, a firstborn white bull is born destined to a sacrificial death. And since he cannot escape that death (for he is destined to it), he must be transformed into an aurochs after his death. And this is exactly what we see in Deuteronomy 33 as well. Two bovids: a firstborn ox destined to sacrifice, and an aurochs destined to freedom and to sovereignty. And the one is transformed into the other through death.

MH: Yeah, what David's talking about here is, again, Deuteronomy 33, really verse 17. But the prior verse,

May these [gifts] rest on the head of Joseph, on the pate of him who is prince.

There's another term that matters (*nagid*)

... who is prince among his brothers, a firstborn bull.

Okay? So there you have the connection between Joseph the prince and the firstborn bull. I'm reading from ESV.

He has majesty, and his horns are the horns of a wild ox.

There's the second figure there. So *1 Enoch* 90 picks up on this passage and describes what David just described, this transformation of a firstborn animal. And the whole *Animal Apocalypse* is [about the] major figures of the Old Testament storyline. The story gets retold, but the characters are now animals. That's why it's called the *Animal Apocalypse*. And so we have here this connection back to Joseph, and he's the one who is transformed into a king. This is basically the point. So *Enoch* has this vision of this transformation. And not only does he get transformed into a kingly role, but what does the rest of it say? Essentially those who are with him... I can't remember the exact phrase, but I don't know if it's his children or his followers or something like that get transformed as well. What was the language there?

DM: And all the other animals (these are the nations) are transformed into white bulls as well.

MH: Yeah. So you have the “conversation of the nations.”

DM: Yeah. Absolutely.

MH: Again, these are obvious messianic themes, but the story or the point of theology is told in an allegory using these animal figures. But the allegory itself in this particular portion goes back to Deuteronomy 33:17, which is about Joseph.

DM: That’s right.

MH: So this is what David’s arguing for in this particular Enoch instance, that you have a pseudepigraphical text that tells the same kind of story. It follows the thread that some of these other texts that he’s mentioned follow as well. Can you mention any other examples, anything that’s sort of easy, I guess maybe digestible for the podcast?

DM: Wow. Okay, well, one of the clearest ones is the *Testament of Benjamin*. Or well, yeah, but that’s kind of a long one. Let’s jump to the *Sibylline Oracles*. This is a little bit like *4 Ezra*. Everybody agrees that book 5 of the *Sibylline Oracles* is Jewish, except for one line, which they say is a Christian interpolation.

MH: [laughs] Some naughty Christian threw that in there. [laughs]

DM: And I’m saying it’s not a Christian interpolation. Here it is:

A certain man will come again from heaven, the most eminent of men, who spread upon the fruitful wood his palms, the noblest of the Hebrews, who once made the sun stand still by crying with fierce speech and pure lips.

40:00

MH: Well, good grief.

DM: Now when we say the sun stands still, well, there’s only one person who makes the sun stand still. This is Joshua. So this one is to come again from heaven, who is a Joshua figure.

MH: Yep.

DM: And he’s coming again to a place where he once spread upon the fruitful wood his palms. And people reject this, thinking it’s a Christian reference...

MH: Because of the cross, yeah.

DM: ... to crucifixion. My tutor, John O'Neill, wrote on this, and he said there were other Jews crucified in the first century B.C. apart from Jesus. And he thinks it may be a reference to one of them. Others think it may be something different. Robert Craft thinks it may be a reference to the fruitful tree and hands spread upon, not necessarily sacrificial, but Joseph's fruitful tree. There are various ways of looking at it.

MH: Genesis 49. Yeah.

DM: Yeah. There are other ways of looking at it. But it certainly is speaking of the coming of a second Joshua. And why... This is unlikely to be a Christian text, for the very simple reason that the New Testament never speaks clearly about there being a Josephite messiah. Now I'm not saying there isn't a Josephite messiah featured in the New Testament, but it was never a Christian belief. We don't find it in the early Church that the messiah will be descended from Joseph. So yeah, we do find Justin Martyr comparing Jesus to Joshua. This is linked. And this is just one more of the texts we could call upon. And it certainly is speaking of a Joshua figure who is going to "come back," is what it says.

MH: Yeah, I mean, the Joshua... I'm trying to remember what year this is. But there's a whole book now in the Mohr Siebeck series, I think it's WUNT, that talks about Joshua typology for Jesus.

DM: Yeah.

MH: But you're right, it's not the kind of thing that you hear in church or that would've been taught in the early Church. I just looked it up here. Richard Ounsworth, *Joshua Typology in the New Testament*.

DM: Really?

MH: It's 2012. Yeah.

DM: How do you spell Ounsworth?

MH: O-U-N-S-W-O-R-T-H.

DM: Yeah, but their books cost so much, eh?

MH: Oh, I know. You take out a loan. [laughter] You know?

DM: You pay £80 just to...

MH: Give me an address, I'll send you one. I'll send you one. Really, I'm not joshing you here (pun intended there). But no, I'll send you one. Because this

would be good for your research as well. But my point is that there's a lot more done now relating or looking at the New Testament and seeing Jesus as the new or better Joshua.

DM: Yeah.

MH: So even though you don't find that kind of discourse in the early Church doesn't mean it's not there. It just means either A) they weren't looking for it, or B) maybe they didn't have access to materials like Second Temple texts that are looking for it, and then they essentially don't have anyone to lead them down that trail. So there could be any number of reasons for that. Since we're in the New Testament now, how would you yourself talk about the relationship between the Messiah ben Joseph (the son of Joseph here) and Jesus (obviously, there we go—the new Joshua who is also a son of Joseph in the New Testament) and the son of David idea? How should we think about these things in tandem with each other? The first thing that popped into my head when I came across this in your work was, “Okay, we've got... When the monarchy divided, we've got the Ephraim and Judah thing. There's that sort of relationship. And you can see, like with Ezekiel, with the two sticks becoming one, and the tribes are brought back together, and now we have a whole.” So I'm sure that's one trajectory, but what are some other ones? How should we be thinking about this?

DM: I think before we speak about the New Testament, we have to say that within the Jewish tradition, there are two views of Messiah ben Joseph.

MH: Alright.

DM: I think the clearer—the more obvious—view is that ben Joseph means that he is a patrilineal descendant of Joseph. But there is another view which tends to be more hidden, which is that he is a heavenly figure. And as I said, there are some people connect him with Metatron or with the Rock who accompanied Israel through the desert. When we get to the New Testament, this duality can't exist because the basic New Testament teaching is that Jesus is a heavenly man, virgin begotten.

45:00

MH: Mm hmm.

DM: So he is not the patrilineal descendant of David nor of Joseph.

MH: By virtue of the virgin birth, yeah.

DM: Exactly. So in Jesus of Nazareth we meet one who is called, yes, Joshua (Yeshua) ben Joseph. Joshua, the son of Joseph, a second Joshua. And he does die like Messiah ben Joseph for the sins of the world. And I suggest that two New Testament writers in particular were alluding to this in their words. One

is John the apostle, and the other is Stephen the martyr. And they saw him in these terms. Many of the Church Fathers, particularly Justin Martyr, also referred to Joseph as a type of the messiah. But as I said, we're not talking here of a patrilineal descent. We're saying that Jesus... And again, this is something I deal with more fully in my new book, *Jesus, the Incarnation of the Word*. I go to some length to show that Jesus is descended matrilineally from Zadok. And yet Mary's father was a Judahite. Yet there is also some Josephite blood in there as well. So genetically, Jesus does descend from all three tribes. But the New Testament view is that these different messianic figures are rather paradigms which point to the messiah. That is how I would see it.

MH: Mm hmm. Can you talk a little bit about John and Stephen, the allusions they might make?

DM: Yeah. Well, there are several. We have this passage, haven't we, where Joseph... I'm looking at the book here. In John's Gospel, Jesus comes up in chapter 1, with Nathanael there, and he calls him... "We have found the one Moses spoke about in the prophets, Jesus, the son of Joseph." Yeshua ben Joseph... And this is the language of the Josephite messiah. Of course we realize that Jesus' adopted father was Joseph of Nazareth. But just the words there (Yeshua ben Joseph) I think was a flag to some people that there is a Messiah ben Joseph tradition going on here. But there's a more interesting thing in the Samaritan woman who is standing by the well. Now, of course, the Samaritans did (and still do) believe in a messiah from Joseph. They do not share all the details of the Jewish messianic tradition. In fact, they seem to have lost the idea that the messiah will die. But they certainly believe that the messiah is to descend from Joseph. And so Jesus is standing talking to this Samaritan woman who tells him the messiah (the *taheb*) is coming, and he will explain everything. And he's standing by this well. And in the Bible, springs of water symbolize descent. And this well they're standing by has descended from Jacob and from Joseph. And the water within it seems to me that John is using this as an allusion to the Josephite descent of the messiah. These are slightly complicated arguments. Once again, I refer your readers to the book. But I think the discussion with the Samaritan woman does point to Jesus presenting himself as a messiah descended from Joseph.

MH: Yeah, it *is* interesting, because John 4 does specifically say, he comes "to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph."

DM: Yeah.

MH: You have a direct... You have a Joseph reference in there, and then of course the well is part of that.

DM: Yeah. Just one other thing. Jesus says, "I am the true vine." And you'll hear scholars all the time saying, "Well, the vine's a symbol of Israel." Well, go and search the Old Testament. The vine is not the symbol of Israel. The vine is a symbol of Joseph.

MH: Hmm. From Genesis 49?

DM: Yeah. When Isaiah says in chapter 5... He talks about the house of Judah being his pleasure garden, and Joseph being his vineyard. The men of Ephraim are the vineyard. So when Jesus says he's the new vine, the real vine, I think this is a reference again to being the real Joseph.

MH: Hmm.

DM: So there we go. But as I said...

50:00

MH: Well, it's interesting. I'm looking at the passage now. You have in verse 7 (for those listening, Isaiah 5:7):

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of *Israel*...

Think "northern kingdom" and that's Ephraim and Joseph. And then the next line is:

...and the men of *Judah* are his pleasant planting.

So there is a distinction between Israel and Judah there. And the vineyard association goes with Joseph. So that's essentially what you're summarizing there.

DM: That's what I'm saying there, yeah.

MH: How about Stephen?

DM: Yeah, well, Stephen stands up, and he talks about Joseph as a messianic type. I mean, Joseph points to the messiah. He was rejected. Just like Moses was rejected by the people of Israel, so was Joseph. And just as Moses was raised up to be the king and the leader of the people, so was Joseph. And then, of course, he leads on and says, "Who else have you not rejected?" But Joseph is presented there as a clear type of the messiah. He is rejected by the Israelites, rejected by Judah, but he rises to become the ruler of all Israel.

MH: Wow, that's very interesting. I might as well mention the other book. What was the title again? I don't want to mess the title up.

DM: *Jesus, the Incarnation of the Word.*

MH: Yes, the *Incarnation of the Word*. I've read just about all of that book. I wrote a blurb for it on the back that people will see.

DM: Yeah, thank you.

MH: Sure. If you really... Again, we're here to talk about the Messiah ben Joseph book, but David is obviously correct (he knows his own work), there's going to be material in that book as well that is going to contribute to the discussion of the messianic lineages and whatnot. And I'll just throw this out. If you're interested in (I want to say God forbid)... [laughs] If you're interested in genealogy... [laughs] You know, it's one of these really obscure topics within biblical studies. But this latest book is a book that I haven't found anything as interesting or helpful when it comes to sorting out the genealogical lines of Jesus and Mary as this one. So this is definitely another resource for this audience to grab and take. There's a lot of fascinating stuff in it.

DM: You'll also find a lot of interesting stuff about Melchizedek and Psalm 110. So if you're interested in these issues...

MH: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I want to thank you again for spending a little bit of time with us. I mean, this is... It's just interesting. I mean, what can we say? Because again, I'm in the same boat as most people who are going to be listening to this. I had not heard of Messiah ben Joseph until a few years ago, and came across... I'm not even sure how it happened anymore. But for some reason I got linked or directed to your book from something. And I read a little bit of it here and there in different comments, and then I went and got the book and read the book. But it's just fascinating. And I think it's very helpful, again, in terms of biblical theology because it fills a void. I mean, this is obviously something that Jewish thinkers were dipping into as they thought about messiah and their own future (their own eschatology, if you will), their own destiny. In their messianic profile, this is a significant thread. The Joshua/Joseph material was significant, at least to certain sects of Judaism and certain Jewish writers. And with that, you can't deny that this particular strand—this particular element of the profile—has a dying and rising messiah. It's just there, as David has pointed out. So I think, for people in our audience who just generally want to know more, or also maybe in a certain apologetics sense... Because this is one of the things that people like to throw at followers of Jesus today. "Well, the messiah your New Testament teaches doesn't have any relationship to Judaism. And it makes stuff up. And there's no dying messiah in Judaism." Well, no, that's not correct. So I think it's going to be useful for that as well. So just thanks again for spending some time with us and for sharing your research.

DM: Thank you, Michael. It's been a great honor to be here.

55:00

MH: We're blessed to have somebody out there like you laboring in... Let's be honest, some of this material is pretty obscure, but it's also really significant. So just to have somebody who's spent the time and is trying to deliver it to as wide an audience as possible, as technical as the discussions can be. I think you're making a real effort there. And so I know our audience will appreciate that. So before we wrap up, where can people go to find more information about you, maybe some additional things about your work?

DM: Well, go to my website. That's brightmorningstar.org. And if you go to the Publications tab, you go to the Messiah ben Joseph page, you can read chapter 2, which gives you a lot of the discussion of the passages in Genesis and Deuteronomy. You'll find some of my academic papers there that were the research that underlaid this book. About 50% of the book, I suppose, was published as academic papers. But the book contains quite a lot more. But you'll get a lot of idea from the academic papers. If you flick through to that Scholarly Articles page, you'll be able read a lot of this stuff there. So there's plenty there to get you started. You might like to get the book. It's not that expensive. It's not like Mohr and Siebeck, eh? [laughter]

MH: No, no, it's not. No payment plans necessary. [laughter] Yeah, just go to Amazon.com. And we'll put links to your books and your website on the episode page. So yeah, this is great. Thanks a lot.

DM: Thank you so much.

TS: Alright, Mike, real quick. Wrap up again what we talked about in layman's terms.

MH: Sure. Yeah, there's a thread in the Hebrew Bible that talks about the preeminence of the tribe of Joseph. Joshua is from the line of Joseph, and so you have this Joshua/Joseph thing going on here that speaks of this person in a couple passages in rulership (or dare I say messianic) terms. And these data points get picked up in Judaism. As David said in the episode, when you get into Jewish literature (like the Talmud and rabbinic discourse and other forms and of course Second Temple material—Dead Sea Scrolls and whatnot) you will find talk of a Messiah son of Joseph—this new Joshua/new Joseph figure. And what's important about that, it's not just a curiosity. Because there are some pretty clear texts, and there's clear discussion within the Jewish/rabbinic community that the Messiah son of Joseph was supposed to die and even rise again. So again, this is not something that I heard going through graduate school and seminary. It's not something you ever hear in church. It was nice to hear

David reference a few Church Fathers like Justin Martyr who get into this material alongside these other Jewish texts. But there is a clear link between the New Testament idea of a dying and rising messiah and Jewish material that precedes it.

So that's in a nutshell what we were talking about today. It's just that if you don't know where to look for it in this Messiah son of Joseph idea, we wouldn't even be thinking about that term. But if you're aware of it, you can find a lot of messianic discussion within Judaism about a dying messiah who would rise and then redeem Israel and the nations and so on and so forth. It's there. It's there. So I just found the subject fascinating. I'm sure our listeners are going to benefit from it as well.

TS: Alright, dang it, Mike, another book that I've got to get. So appreciate that. [laughter]

MH: Well, I did read this one—a couple of them, anyway.

TS: Alright, Dr. David Mitchell's website again is brightmorningstar.org. And again, we'll have links to his books on Amazon and his website at NakedBiblePodcast.com. And we want to thank Dr. David Mitchell for coming back on, and with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.