Does Jacob’s Wrestling with the Angel Prefigure Christ’s Death?

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[0:00] In my last video I said I'd do questions and answers in the next few days. So what I'm hoping to do is every day, within a few minutes, give an answer to one of the questions I've received.

So the first one is about Echoes of Exodus. And the question is, in Echoes of Exodus there's a thought question at the end of chapter 10 that I just can't seem to get my head around.
It's about how Jacob's wrestling with God at Peniel prefigures Christ's death. For the life of me, I can't see the connection. Care to comment? Well, a number of the thought questions that we put in were because we just did not have the space to get into that particular connection.
There are many of these connections that, hoping that readers will be able to follow some of the patterns of reading that we illustrate within the book and then think a bit further, push a bit out into the text and think about some other patterns that we didn't explore.
So for instance, Acts 12, which I did a video on a few weeks ago, that was one of the thought questions for one of the chapters. And so if you listen to the video, you'll be able to get a sense of how to fill out that particular pattern.
[1:12] The story of Jacob wrestling with the angel is an interesting one. It may not be the strongest parallel with Christ, but there are a few things worth noticing. First of all, there is an Exodus pattern there.

There's the crossing of the water and a very significant crossing of the water for Israel's identity. I mean, their identity as Israel is achieved at that point.
That's when Jacob is given a new name, Israel. And as he wrestles with God, there's this showdown event, this struggle. He's facing Laban on the one hand and Esau on the other hand. He knows Esau is coming towards him. And so there's this twofold danger. He's just made peace with Laban, but he can't go back there. And he's moving towards Esau and he does not know how Esau is disposed towards him.
He sends on his family ahead. And then at night, he wrestles with the angel until daybreak. And then he crosses over the Jabbok.
[2:19] Again, interesting, the Jabbok is Jacob's name mixed up, the letters, which shows that his identity is in some sense at stake at that particular point.

There are a number of things that fill out this picture even more. The movement from darkness to light. On a number of occasions in scripture, we see this significant movement from darkness to light of things happening in the darkness or periods of time that is symbolically situated in darkness. Even though there are days that intervene, there is the sun going down and then a significant rising of the sun later on. So, for instance, the whole period of the Exodus, the whole period in Egypt, is symbolically in darkness.
And then the sun rises as the waters go over the Egyptians and they finish crossing the Red Sea. They're free on the other side. But before that time, it's a period of darkness.
We have, at the beginning of the Gospels, in Matthew, it's a time of darkness. It's a time of stars. It's a time of dreams.
[3:27] And it's a time of nighttime escapes. And then, later on, you have the rising of the sun. You have Christ coming onto the scene and that brings light.

Another example of this is the story of Jacob. So, the sun goes down at Bethel and the whole period that he spends with Laban is symbolically in darkness.

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And it's not until the rising of the sun, after he crosses the Jabbok, that there is this introduction of light into the story again. Now, of course, there were days that there were...
It wasn't as if... It was a whole period of darkness, literally. But symbolically, this is a period that is in darkness. And the mention of the sun coming up, the mention of dawn, is important because it represents a transition in the narrative.
Not just the beginning of that particular day, but the beginning of a new dawn within the story. So, Jacob has a new identity within that point.
[4:30] Also, God comes to him to struggle against him. There are a number of occasions within Scripture where we see God coming to his people in blessing and revealing himself to them and giving them some revelation or giving them some promise.

And then there are other occasions when God comes, as it were, as an enemy. So, God comes to Abraham and says that he must sacrifice his son. The same God who came and said that he would receive that son, says that he must sacrifice his son.
Later on, we see in the story of Moses that God meets him on the way into Egypt and seeks to kill him. Again, God comes as an enemy in this particular stage of his life.
The story of Christ, likewise, that God comes with the cup that he must drink. It's God coming as an enemy, as it were.
Likewise, in the story of Jacob, God comes to Jacob, not in blessing, not in the same way as he did at Bethel, with promises and with assurances, but he comes as an enemy to wrestle with him.
[5:43] Now, Jacob has spent his life to this point wrestling with various people. He's wrestled with Esau in the womb. He's wrestled with his father Isaac, who's not been faithful in giving him the blessing.

And he's also wrestled with Laban and his sons. And he's prevailed in each one of these things. And finally, as it were, the final boss, he wrestles with God.
And he wrestles with God, not knowing who it is. Is it Esau? Is it Laban who's continued to pursue him? He doesn't know, but he's seeking to find the name of this person who's wrestling with him. And then finally discovers, and then his hip is wrenched out of its socket and he walks with a limp from that point. Now, we don't know if that was healed at some point in the future, but it's significant. He's wounded by the encounter. And then he crosses over the Jabbok and he encounters Esau and things are restored. Now, how might this relate to the story of Christ?
[6:46] Well, look at some of the greater details, the context of the story. Jacob is threatened by Esau, this Edomite who's the father of the Edomites who's coming towards him.

And he sends on his family ahead, his 11 sons and his wives. And he sends on his possessions ahead of him and he gives great gifts to Esau.
And then he wrestles alone with God in prayer, being fearful and distressed of the coming trial that's facing him. He's wrestling with God and angels minister to him.
And then as he's wrestling with God at this point, he then meets this. Later on, he gets up and he's going towards the Jabbok and he meets this person who wrestles with him.
And as he wrestles, there's this movement towards daybreak. He won't let go and he's waiting for the dawn to come. And then when the dawn comes, he's blessed and he's given a new name and he's left with wounds.
[7:56] But he's become a new person. He's become not just Jacob, but Israel. It's a transitional moment in the people of God for their identity as a whole.

So just as the crossing of the Red Sea, the movement again is a nighttime crossing of the water, fearful, being pursued and facing danger.
And that movement towards dawn. And when the dawn comes, the waters cover the Egyptians and they're delivered. And they have a new identity, as it were, on the far side of the water.
When this comes to the story of Christ, we see a similar pattern. God comes to his son as an enemy, as one wrestling with him. And he overcomes.
He wrestles, as it were, with God. He deals with the wrath of God at the cross. He is ministered to by angels.
[8:51] The eleven cross over the brook. And there's this showdown, as it were, in the darkness. All of the light of the sky, the heavens, are covered in darkness.

And then the dawn happens the next day. You can have Easter, Saturday, there's dawn. But it doesn't really count.

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As it were, that whole period is in darkness. The dawn, the dawn that really matters, the new dawn, occurs on Easter Sunday morning.
That's when the sun rises, in both senses of the word. And there's a new identity for the people of God. Israel was formed at that water crossing. Israel was formed at the crossing of the Red Sea as well.
And the death and the resurrection of Christ is his baptism. It's his crossing. His water crossing. It's the point where Israel's greater son becomes the father of a new people.
[9:55] It's where he becomes the firstborn from the dead. And so this transition, I think, read against the background of the experience of Jacob at the Jabbok, is illuminating.

It shows part of what's happening in the story of Christ and also sheds light back onto what happens in the past. Jesus faces a struggle with an Edomite too, with Herod, who is involved in putting him to death.
He is facing the eleven, his eleven disciples. Benjamin was not yet born within the story of Jacob. And Christ has Judas who has betrayed him.
And so the eleven are with him and they cross over and they're facing this opposing force that comes to meet them. And so there are lots of similar themes. Being left alone, abandoned by the people who are with him.
And wrestling with God, both in prayer and then quite literally through the death-like struggle of that battle and that struggle with God at that point.
[11:06] Where Christ drinks, drains the cup or where Jacob wrestles with the angel. And then finally being left with wounds. Being left with these wounds that are a sign of having met with God.

And then Jacob largely disappears from the story. We don't see much of Jacob afterwards. He's reconciled with his brothers.
Things are restored. But the story moves on. It moves on to his children. It moves on to particularly the play between Joseph and Judah.
And so I think this can be a helpful way of thinking about some of the parallels between Christ and Jacob. There's a lot more there. But this maybe will clue you into some of the places to look further. I hope that's helpful. I hope that's helpful.

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