

The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0

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“Interview with David Burnett”

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With

**Residential Layman
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In this episode Mike interviews his friend and fellow divine council researcher David Burnett. David is a graduate student and teaching pastor in Texas. Mike and David discuss how they met, David's research, and how he teaches Scripture framed by a divine council worldview at his church.

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 61, with special guest David Burnett. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. How are you Mike?

MSH: Very good. Excited to have Dave on.

TS: Yeah, our second interview so it should be fun.

MSH: Yeah, well, let's just jump right into it. Dave, you're there I trust?

DB: Yeah, I'm here.

MSH: I'm going to do what I did with Ronn Johnson essentially. If we could start off with you introducing yourself to the audience, who you are, what you do and then how you got tangled up with me, how you got drawn into this mess, all this Divine Council mess, just a little recapturing of the history here.

DB: Okay, so my name is David Burnett. I am a teaching pastor at Arthur City Baptist Church in Texas and I am finishing my MATBS thesis in Old Testament interpretation. And I have a BA in biblical studies and I met Mike years ago. How long has it been now Mike, eight years ago?

MSH: It's pushing ten so eight sounds right.

DB: It's about nine years ago I guess. It was in my undergrad and I had taken a class on Jewish Apocalyptic literature, canonical and noncanonical, with Dr. Daniel Street, who's now at HBU, and we were getting into the hierarchy of angels and I was getting really excited and interested in it and hearing all kinds of weird things I'd never heard before. And I was asking him what are the best scholars on this issue and he says that he thinks the best background for this is the Divine Council in the Old Testament and he sent me to Mike's website. And so I got on Mike's website and I was enthralled.

I read just about every, I literally read everything on his website. And that was it, and so that year was my first year to go to ETS the Evangelical Theological Society, and Mike was giving a paper on the ancient Israelite godhead and he was the chair of that session. And I was really excited to meet him and hear his paper and so I went to his paper and listened and had some questions afterwards and was getting excited. And introduced myself to Mike after the session and said I've read everything on your website. I've been thinking about these things. I'm making all these connections. What about this text and what about this text and Mike's excited and I'm excited.

MSH: Someone's paying attention.

DB: Exactly, and Ronn Johnson was there and met him and then we all had dinner that evening and I got to hang out with you guys and your wives and it was a great dinner and just kind of told the story where I've come from and where they've come, and man, we've just been talking about text interpretation ever since.

MSH: I have good memories of that, too. We can joke about it. I mean Dave wasn't the only one to come hear the paper. Sometimes you get the impression that things can be so obscure or since, as my listeners of course know, this isn't the kind of thing that you'd encounter on a normal beaten path within evangelicalism. I'll often get emailed, 'Am I the only one? Tell me,

confirm to me that other people are really interested in this,' and they are. They come out of the word work.

They hear something and they pursue it. They have a passion for it. They see the value of it. Dave's a good example of that. It just happened to be at an academic conference. So that's a familiar story but obviously one I have a real good memory of as well. If you can sort of elaborate on kind of your journey since that point, after we met, after you started really pouring yourself into this, you begin to develop your own research interests. So if you could describe some of those for people, I think they would find it very interesting.

DB: So I kind of came at this topic through the back door. I was really into the study of Paul and I got into the new perspective in my undergrad and begin to really get into Jewish backgrounds and read a lot of apocalyptic literature, and a lot of the weird apocalypses of heavenly journeys and revelations and all these things. And begin to see this was kind of long developed idea that has had lots of reception history to it, and started making the connections with the Divine Council stuff to the apocalyptic stuff and then into the New Testament. And in Paul, I was studying Romans and I was reading Romans 4 and just reading over what Paul has to say about the Abrahamic Covenant, the way he reads it. And he mentions in 4:13 that the promise to Abraham and his seed is that he would be heir of the cosmos and I'm thinking to myself, I don't remember that in Genesis.

MSH: Or Sunday school right?

DB: Yeah Abraham promised the cosmos? I remember him promised the land of Israel and the multiplication of seed, but I don't remember him being promised the whole cosmos. And so that made me dig and Paul's connecting all sorts of ideas in Romans 4 there that he reads all out of Genesis 15. It made me start this kind of research path where, where are all these ideas coming from, and it just so happens that the Divine Council piece or element to this interpretation in Genesis 15 I found when I wasn't really looking for it. I just kind of stumbled upon it and realized that in the Old Testament, which is common in ancient Near Eastern literature, is this whole concept of the stars as the astral hosts, as the heavenly hosts, or even called the sons of God.

And it's this common idea in the ancient world that the stars as we would call them stars, in Hebrew probably just means shining ones, or burning ones, I just translate them into celestial bodies in my research. But they are actually beings in the heavens in their cosmology and important to that idea is I found in Deuteronomy, is the Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy 4 especially, I'm sure many of your listeners are aware of the Deuteronomy 32 stuff because I've heard you talk about that. But specifically that language in Deuteronomy 32 is in Deuteronomy 4 as well, in the passage about iconicism where Yahweh's telling Moses not to make any graven images, not of man, woman, beasts in the field, birds of the heavens, and then he says look to the heavens and see all the sun, the moon, and the stars, and he calls them all the hosts of heaven. He says don't be carried away and worship them, those that were allotted to the peoples under the whole heavens. And that was, I didn't know what to do with that. I was like, is this in my Old Testament because I don't remember hearing about this text.

MSH: It sounds like Psalm 82 was sort of a watershed passage for me so this is where you're tracking.

DB: Well, I had already been exposed. This is post being exposed to Mike's work in the Deuteronomy 32 worldview and connecting it was Psalm 82. But then when I looked through Deuteronomy, I wanted to study Deuteronomy more and understand the Shema in relation to these ideas, understand Deuteronomy's understanding of the gods of the nations and how

Deuteronomy articulates them, and what was interesting was in Deuteronomy 4, you have this language of allotment of the peoples that comes up in 32. But in Deuteronomy 4, it's talking about the astral hosts, the sun, moon, stars. And so where in Deuteronomy 32 is the sons of God and then in 17 you have the mention of the gods of the nations, gods that were not allotted to you. And so this trajectory led me back into this whole idea connected with Genesis 15 when the word of Yahweh takes Abram outside in a vision, it's very important that this is a vision sequence, and takes him outside and shows in the stars and says, 'Number the stars, if you can number them, so shall your seed be.' And in this promise, what I found, and this is completely accidental.

I wasn't really looking for it. I assumed that somewhere in there, Paul is reading that promise as being promised to be like the heavenly host, to be like the stars in the sense of qualitatively, not just quantitatively. And so that, I had a hunch that I was right about this and I started digging through the Second Temple material and lo and behold, I found multiple readings of that in the Second Temple period as I had suspected in Philo and Apocalypse of Abraham, more than likely in Sirach, the Greek reading of wisdom of Sirach. So I'm finding in these texts this tradition of reading it that way. So text from Palestinian apocalypses to Alexandrian philosophers, it seems to be a wide ranging tradition of reading the text this way and it lined up perfectly with this whole Divine Council tradition. And I was fascinated and I ended up writing a paper on it and submitting it for a conference at HBU on Paul and Judaism last year.

And it was accepted and I presented there and it got great feedback and sparked some great conversations and immediately after I had submitted the paper to SBL the Society of Biblical Literature, for the national meeting in San Diego. When I first submitted it, it was rejected because the Pauline epistles section is a difficult section to get accepted into. And so I was expecting that but then I got an e-mail a few days later where they said that because of the amount of great submissions that they had, they were going to open a second session and it was going to be a joint session with all the Pauline epistle groups meeting together and it was going to be a panel session where they have three respondents. So they said if you'd like to resubmit, you can. And of course I did, not expecting for it to be accepted because I haven't even started my PhD yet. I figure they're probably not going to let a student member present on this. But I guess it got enough traction and some folks heard about it and they ended up accepting it. And it turns out the readers, the respondents to my paper there at SBL were NT Wright, Pamela Eisenbaum, and Ward Blanton. And it went over really well.

MSH: I was there. We ought to get into that because Ronn was, I don't know if you listened to the interview with Ronn. Ronn made the observation that how much he appreciates NT Wright, and I think we all appreciate NT Wright and what he produced. But Ronn, he had this little element of frustration. If NT Wright only knew about the Divine Council worldview, this part of his argument over here would be strengthened and would help him address certain things that he's been criticized for.

And that actually was how I felt listening to your paper and his response to your paper because it became evident to me really quickly that he just did not have the framework, the Old Testament framework, to really process what you were saying. And I was pleasantly surprised, you can tell us if you were surprised by this, but I was pleasantly surprised that you had, there were probably three or four people in the audience that just chimed in right away in your defense in the Q&A.

DB: Yeah I actually, you know Mike, that whole SBL experience was kind of backwards for me actually because I had been really interested in the study of Theosis in Paul for quite some time, the idea deification, that the promise goal of sanctification in Paul was the idea of becoming like God or like the gods. And I'd read a lot of great literature on this but I saw no one making these

connections with the Old Testament so I'm thinking Wright was going to be my biggest proponent because he supports the idea of Theosis in Paul and I thought that by bringing the Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern framework to bear on the conversation, it would only highlight those ideas and give them the depth of background that I think is actually where Paul's deriving these ideas, along with other Second Temple Jews. And so I expected him to be all for it while I'd wasn't too sure about Eisenbaum and Blanton.

I thought I might get some pushback from them and it was quite the opposite. I remember Pamela Eisenbaum very kindly saying that I had convinced her that this is how Paul was reading it. And she told me afterwards that this is something that needed to be published and Pauline scholars needed to deal with this because no one's talked about this. And so I had mentioned to her that the paper has been solicited for the journal for Paul and his letter. And so I'm just waiting to hear back from the editorial board about that, to see what journal it will come out in. But then like you said, during the Q&A time, well just leading up to that, Wright had actually pushed back and had disagreed with my premise. And in kind and polite British fashion saying that it was an ingenious proposal but I just disagree with your premise.

He was of the persuasion, the contention is really important here though. His contention was that I was mistaking metaphor with metonymy and that the astralization passages that you're well aware of Mike in Second Temple period as they relate to the resurrection, text like 1 Enoch and 2 Baruch etc., these text that read the resurrection in astral terms coming out of Daniel 12, 'in the resurrection they will shine as the stars of heaven,' there's a wide ranging tradition in the Second Temple period that reads it that way and apocalyptic Judaism, which I would consider early Christianity within those strands, of reading it that way, he says that all of those texts are metaphoric. That in his reading, especially in his resurrection of the son of God book, the massive tome on the resurrection, when he deals with those texts he treats them all as metaphoric readings, like the stars is simply a metaphor and your mistaken on this.

But the rest of the Second Temple scholars were behind me on this and other Christian scholars as well. One of the scholars that stood up immediately to my defense was Brant Pitre from Notre Dame. And he pointed out in 1 Corinthians 15 the language of heavenly ones that's used, or celestial bodies even, that's used in the Old Testament to talk about celestial bodies is what Paul calls the resurrected ones. And so this language of resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 is used, uses astral terminology that would be used for the astral beings of the Old Testament and uses it for the resurrected faithful.

MSH: That's really tricky. If you're going to approach it like Wright does when you start saying well, all this is metaphorical and then the fact of that connection in 1 Corinthians 15, Wright of course isn't going to say the resurrection is a metaphor. He's going to affirm that Paul's talking about a genuine resurrection but then he's sort of trapped in that assumption of his that this is all just metaphorical language. Well, how does that work metaphorical language but yet you're affirming the reality of this? Explain that. It seems to me like he's boxed in there a little bit.

DB: Yeah and it is kind of ironic to me because the part that I expected actually from him that he responded about was he felt that too strong of a focus on the astralization language would be reading the resurrection as a non-bodily phenomena, that they would just become spirits in the resurrection and it would be more of a Gnostic view and not more of this earthly kind of new creation, hard fleshly type of resurrection. And so because he has that kind of apologetic considerations, it's difficult to talk about these issues because when you're not bringing in the Divine Council background to this and then only looking it from the perspective of, well, I have to defend the bodily resurrection, things can get mixed.

And some scholars that I think are really helpful here, and Wright did mention one of them briefly, but in terms of the astral resurrection is still bodily is a scholar by the name of Troll Emsburg Peterson who's done a lot of work on Paul and stoicism and Paul and the Stoics,

reading them comparatively and especially Paul's cosmology and ethics and even his ontology frequently uses the language of stoicism. And he makes a good point here. And another scholar who has a book coming out that I'm really looking forward to is Matthew Teason at St. Louis University who has a book coming out on Paul and the Gentile problem. And he has a whole chapter dealing with this and he's actually cited my forthcoming article a couple of times and I've had conversations with him about this. They both point out that, for example, the 1 Corinthians 15 passage, Paul, when he talks about a pneumatic body, a spirited body, or a spiritual body as its translated often, he does not mean a non-corporeal body or incorporeal body. He does not mean a floating around spirit like the way modernists think of spirit. He's thinking spirit is actually substance. It's this substance of the astral beings of heaven, the gods or the Angels, this is the substance that they are made out of.

MSH: Yeah, whatever that stuff is, that's what we will be.

DB: Right, that's what Pneuma is.

MSH: Even without appealing to scholars, I can remember in my own church context hearing sermons about the resurrected Jesus. Okay, he shows up in the upper room and apparently he's just there, doesn't need to go through a door, doesn't need to knock, the whole kind of passing through the walls sort of thing. And yet he's very corporeal. He eats after the resurrection. He tells Thomas, hey, put your fingers here in the holes. So even on the popular level this notion of corporeality does not, really historically, hasn't been thought to conflict with this otherworldliness because that's not a normal human body. It doesn't have blood. So there's something going on there and it does surprise me that Wright, I'll use the word is sort of fearful to talk about the one aspect, the otherworldly aspect, sort of the shunting off the astral talk for the sake of affirming the corporeal talk, cutting off your nose to spite your face kind of thing where you don't really have to make that choice. So anyway that's just what popped into my head when you said that.

DB: I think you hit the nail on the head there because what we're talking about, the Old Testament in ancient near eastern background for this, is essential because when we think of the nature of the gods, and Paul even uses the language in 1 Corinthians 15 of perishable versus imperishable, like flesh and blood, when Paul puts flesh and blood against spirit in some sort of like dichotomy, it doesn't mean bodily and unbodily. It means one is perishable, one isn't. That's really all he means. The perishable must be taken off. This imperishable substance is put on. And so it's still substantive, it still bodied, it still embodied, it's still substantive but it would be this substance of the gods. That humans in their truest resurrected glorified form are like the bodies of the gods, they are completely immortal and Imperishable.

MSH: Have you read David Litwa's book on this?

DB: I've read most of it, yes.

MSH: He has an article and actually pretty lengthy chapter on this. I wonder if that was any help?

DB: yeah, it was help, and we are being transformed. Yeah, the monograph that he did with Walter de Gruyter. It was very helpful and I love his monograph. I think it's an amazing treasure trove of source material. I mean he's done extensive research on deification and Paul. But what I was fascinated about, and I mentioned this in the Q&A at SBL, was in Litwa's work, not one time in his whole section on astralization does he mention the interpretation of Genesis 15.

Otherwise, I can sing nothing but praises about that book but I was just kind of flabbergasted. I was like well I'm looking at multiple Jewish Greek texts right in front of me that reference this astral reading of Genesis 15 and not one of them is mentioned. And I talked to Litwa briefly after that session and mentioned that to him. And he thought it was interesting and hopefully I'll be able to dialogue with him more in the future. But that was fascinating to me. I'm glad the hole's there because I'm going to fill it.

MSH: Just for the sake of the listener, the point that we're making here is that if you put some of these scholars in a room with Josephus and Philo and a few other people, and Josephus and Philo more or less just sort of shut up and listen to them talk about theosis and deification and all this, and they never would've heard Genesis 15:7, they would've butted in and said hold on a minutes fellas. You're missing a really fundamental passage that we've talked about a lot. What gives? How did you miss this?

DB: Right, and its Genesis 15:5, I did hear you say that on the previous podcast, 15:5. I am really not sure how it's missed because it really does plug up all the kind of exegetical issues with all of the content that Paul, for example, is packing into Genesis 15, because there's a lot of content that in Romans 4, that a lot of exegetes have had a very difficult time explaining. And almost thinking this kind of disparate disconnected ideas, that when Paul says that the promise to Abraham is to inherent the cosmos, he also says that he relates it to the idea of God bringing something out of nothing so the whole creation idea, bringing life from the dead, the resurrection, and becoming the father of many nations, and he piles all of this into the content of the promise that was made in Genesis 15 to Abraham.

And so how do you fit resurrection in there, inheriting nations in there, inheriting cosmos in there, like new creation type event in there? How do you get it all in there? Because otherwise you're saying, man, Paul is doing some insane exegetical moves here. But if you see this piece, I think it's the missing element that a lot of scholars. Because they don't really understand the Divine Council context, they miss these elements.

MSH: Naturally you're preaching to the choir here. I would certainly agree and this isn't the only case. I've shared with people in the podcast and the blog. It's kind of startling what you see seasoned scholars miss and it's not a question of whether they're smart or not. They're not paying attention, especially if they're New Testament or Second Temple. There's only so much time they have to devote to whatever it is they're focused on and so they don't often get directed by something they read to the Old Testament, and specifically, to this aspect of Old Testament Biblical theology.

And even if they do, they don't have the luxury necessarily of camping on it and really sort going to town on it and having it make a difference. Of course you did that, and it's paid off. I want to get your take just a general question because I do get asked this question a lot. It'd be kind of interesting for people to hear what you think about it. What is the value of reading non-canonical material from the Second Temple period? In other words, if somebody in church comes up to you, and you've probably have had this happen at some point, why should I spend any time reading that? Give me a reason for caring as a layperson, somebody who's not a scholar, why should I sort of dive into that?

DB: Right, that's a really important question for Protestants. For starters, there's so many answers I want to give to this but I'm going to try to summarize it in just a couple. The first one I would say is because a lot of the apocryphal literature that we call is the apocrypha or deuterocanonical text that Catholics and Episcopalians and Orthodox still have in their Bibles, were all in the early Christian codexes. And so they were part of this literature. They predated the New Testament and they show the reception history of the Old Testament in the period between the

Testaments, which is really not the best denotation for that period. It's not intertestamental, it's second Temple. But in that second Temple period, it shows how faithful Jews are reading their Old Testament and interpreting it. And that reception history is really important because that's the highway leading into the New Testament.

MSH: yeah, it's not like the New Testament readers would've just looked at that material and said this is the way these guys are reading it. Let's do something totally different.

DB: Right, because I think a lot of the lay assumption is that you have these silent years from the end of Malachi, which is only the end of the Protestant canon, not the Jewish canon, but at the end of Malachi and then you have this great silence and then boom Matthew. And I think why that's so detrimental to our understanding of the New Testament so often is, is we're not finding some of these concepts in the New Testament that would've been normative in the Judaism's of the period. We're not seeing it. We see some of these things as unique or unexplainable when in reality, they have a very deep background in this literature.

For example, the apocalyptic tradition, a lot of the language in the New Testament of revealing the righteousness of God and beholding Jesus enthroned in heaven and journey to the third heavens, and the whole book of Revelation. I mean it a kind of assumes this kind of dialectic with this conversation with apocalyptic literature of the day and apocalyptic genre of the day and Christianity, earliest Christianity, which I think is kind of an anachronistic term when we're talking about New Testament, but when we talk about the earliest Christianity that we see in the New Testament, this is really to be read in concert with apocalyptic strains of Judaism of the time.

MSH: I often go out to events or whatever, or on the podcast, you get questions like why haven't I ever heard this before? Well a first century Jew would never say that. Anyone who's literate among the earliest Christians, they would've inherited a lot of these ideas that we talk about, Divine Council stuff in the Old Testament. That would've just been part of their frame of reference just by default because they have this continuity with the Old Testament on into the Second Temple period. And now we're here in the first century where we're talking about the apostles and the resurrected Jesus and all this stuff. Well, they would've never looked at you or looked at me if we were back there in time and said where are you getting that? Why haven't we ever heard this before? They would've heard it a lot.

DB: Right, right, I use the common metaphor that many pastors use hermeneutically, but ironically don't apply it to the study of the Second Temple literature, is the whole idea of someone digging up a letter I write to Mike or Trey about, hey, you want to come to my Super Bowl party? The Cowboys are playing the Giants. See you later, whatever. And someone digs up that letter 2000 years later and see terms like Super Bowl and you have the ancient English philologist doing studies on what Super Bowl means.

MSH: The word super used in different contexts.

DB: Exactly. We know this means very large or great in size and we know that bowl is a kind of utensil they put food in and so it must be a very large bowl. And we know the Cowboys are these figures that road on these ancient extinct animals that have four legs called horses. You would make all sorts of exegetical fallacies if you're reading the text that way and so the common idioms and the norms, simply by hearing a word or an idea that all these things come to mind. When we say the term Super Bowl, 1 million things flood your mind instantly because of the norms of language. I mean you're thinking pads, football, helmets, commercials, stadiums. You're thinking all kinds of things in an instant.

And we have to, getting into that Second Temple literature isn't to say that we hold it to equal level with the canon or we think it's lost Scriptures that we need to read and is equal to the Gospels. It has nothing to do with that. We are reading that literature so that we can better understand in Judaism, because that's what early Christianity is, it still Judaism, that we want to understand the norms of language of that period. The way that they are reading their Old Testaments, the way their exegetical traditions, not our own, because they're 2000 years removed. And so we want to understand those traditions so that we can actually hear some of these little allusions and little mentions of ideas that we may not understand or have any sort of background for and that literature helps us fill in a lot of those gaps.

MSH: I usually just tell people when I get the Canon question and understand why you're asking. I understand why a lot of people assigned importance to the question. But it's hard for me to even care about it because I don't have to see a book as canonical to know that it has value and to know that it informed a New Testament writer. So sure, if I get to heaven someday and God comes to me and says, Mike, about Enoch, you were wrong there. That should've been in there. I'm not going to care. I don't think I'm going to have that conversation, but I wouldn't care if I did. And I don't even process the question that way. It's like I know for instance taking Enoch, probably the most obvious connection. I know that Peter and Jude read this material because it informs what they write so that is sort of a hint or clue that maybe I ought to go read that so I can process better what's going on.

DB: And that goes back to the first thing I was saying about this literature is that the Peter and Jude references I think are really important because what they show is not only are they reading this Enochic reading of Genesis, but that the Enochic readings of Genesis are seeing things implicitly within Genesis that we may not see because we don't have those ancient eyes. We might read the Enochic tradition and Enochic text like 1 Enoch and think this is crazy. Where are they getting all this weird giant stuff and Angels teaching them alchemy and what the heck is going on with all this? Well, and what's the connection with Sodom and Gomorrah and angels coming down?

So it's interesting. There you see the connection between Genesis 6 and angels or heavenly beings having sexual relations with women and then connecting it with the Sodom and Gomorrah stories where angels are coming down and men want to take them and know them, and these ancient text are seeing these connections and reading the stories together, where the narrative of Genesis itself recapitulates itself and reads the stories together. And these ancient texts help us see these kinds of connections that may be implicit in Genesis already, that we may not have noticed, that they notice and they make us aware of. And what you'll find is you'll find all sorts of texts that are reading traditions that way, and then into the New Testament with the Peter and Jude connecting the watchers tradition with the judgment of Solomon and Gomorrah. And so it's like they're seeing literature of the Old Testament differently than we are, and that's where that literature is so helpful for, is to start to begin to read the Old Testament in ways that we've never read it before.

MSH: That's good. I think the more we try to communicate that to people whether the question surfaces directly or not I think is really valuable because you and I, we both preach this to our respective audiences. And this whole notion of, let's do more than pay lip service to this idea of reading Scripture in context. When we talk about context, we're not talking about evangelicalism or some narrow evangelical sub tradition or the Reformation or the Puritans or whatever. It is the context that produced the stuff. And that to us, obviously because we're down this road a considerable way, that has reached the point of being a self-evident thing. And I'm not saying that it isn't because I sincerely think it is a self-evident thing, that whatever context produced something that's the one you need to understand to process the thing produced.

That just makes abundant sense, that's logical coherence at its simplest. But yet people are not trained to do that and so when you bring up primary sources that aren't connected to the Bible at the level of inspiration, you get people who look at you like you're asking me to do what? You're suggesting I read what? It doesn't make any sense to them so I think it's real helpful to the way you framed it, to say this helps us read a given text the way they would've read it and notice things they noticed. And that's important because we become more like them. Our minds become trained to process the information more closely to the way their minds would have processed it. And that's how, it's one of the ways we can sort of try to recover that context, to have the Israelite in your head.

That's really what you need. Let me ask you this. Do you, and if you do, how do you communicate not only the source of recommendations in terms of Bible study to the people at the church where you pastor but are you able to communicate any of what I'll loosely refer to as Divine Council worldview content in your sermons. And if you do that, give us some examples how you have tried to do that? Where has it worked? Where has it not worked? If you don't, what's the hesitation? Where are you at in terms of someone who is trying to help people understand Scripture really the best way that they can, try to put some of these things within their reach?

DB: Right, yeah, I've actually done that quite a bit and it's one of those things where I'm not a big proponent of the normativity of this but I do teach expositively at my church, teach through books of the Bible, and I think I'm not saying every pastor should do this. I'm not out preaching a method here but I'm saying that's what I found to be most helpful in reorienting minds into what these texts actually mean, to read the whole text in its entirety no matter how long it takes us. And I spend just inordinate amount of time in these texts, and so what I've done at my church for example in teaching through, let's say we spent about three years and two months teaching through the gospel of Luke. And the reason why we spent so long in it is because every single Old Testament allusion, quotation, important background material, I would dig into and teach them about.

And I would really keep it in a narrative mode, keep it in a story mode where they understand how this fits into that world. But in order to construct that world we'd go back into the Old Testament text that Luke may be alluding to or outright quoting and read that text within its context and then see how it's received sometimes in later Old Testament texts or maybe in some Second Temple texts even. And then go back to Luke and see that there's been a life to this text. There's been a tradition behind it and then when you read the Luke text first and you don't have it, and then you go back to the beginning and read forward, I close again with that Luke text and you see these light bulbs and eyes like wide-open, like wow, all that is in there?

And it's an amazing ride and it's eye-opening. And so I take them through it kind of in the narrative mode, walk them through it pastorally. And the Divine Council context has kind of been shoved in there over long periods of time. At some time at some points, I would take a break and say, okay, this Sunday we're going to look at the whole kind of background of this one idea before we go back to Luke and I would do that. And so the Divine Council thing has been a constant touch point that has built on over the years. And so they're probably, a lot of them may know, oh, Deuteronomy 32, that's the song of Moses. I know what that is about. I know it. Oh, Psalm 82, I know what that's about. It's actually incorporated into the eschatology of my church and they wouldn't even use those terms. They would just kind of know it secondarily, like oh yeah, of course, the demise of the powers of heaven means that the real exalted humanity gets the world back.

And so it's just kind of part of their theological toolbox and it's in a lot of times implicit, sometimes explicit, but this is something that I've had to do over long periods of time. It's something that is not just dumped in your face like here's all this stuff. Everything you believe is

nonsense. That's childish and I think a lot of young students who have these things huge paradigm shifts just want to run into Sunday school and dump it on their people. And it's like you got to walk people through the stuff. They don't have the same education that you have. And so a lot of patience and a lot of kind of building the context narratively, taking your time and walking them through it and even having, what I found to be really helpful with this kind of material, like incorporating this material, is in our church we have a Sunday morning service and then a Sunday evening service and in some of my Sunday evening services, we do this like once a month sometimes.

We'll have a Sunday evening service which is only a Q&A time. I won't preach at all and we'll have the open Q&A on Sunday night. The church isn't about me. It's about the living Word, Christ. So if I can help, if we can discuss it and air some difficult questions or there is some idea and I always encourage them of this, if you have a little notepad or something with you, scribble down anytime you have a question when I'm teaching so that when those times come up, you'll have it and you can bring it up and we'll get answers to hopefully or we'll will just dig deeper. So it's been really cool and really helpful and I have a small church so it's easier for me to do that. With a small country church of 30 people or something, it's really simple to do that. But when you have large kind of CEO pastor driven churches where you got a thousand people listening to you or watching you on a screen, you just can't do that kind of stuff. It's more of a Sunday school kind of a deal then.

MSH: That's interesting. So you feel good about it? It sounds like you feel good about it. Would you use the word successful, that your effort to do this on a local church level has been successful? And you haven't had half your congregation leave and want to burn you at the stake and all that kind of stuff?

DB: No, like I said they trust me. This has been over a year's time easing them into this kind of thing and I think it's been successful. But I can't stress enough the patience with this. Academic context is one thing but the church context is a whole other thing. And so you got to be real careful and pastoral and walk people through these types of big paradigmatic ideas that kind of shift the way you look at Bible and the way you treat these texts. A lot of these folks, some these folks have been in church for 40 years and there theology is set. And so to kind of inch them out of it and lead them out of that real slowly sometimes can be a painful process.

MSH: I'm going to find out a little bit what this is like as far as with the release of the books. Nobody knows. We can sit here in the office and we frequently do and guess as to what reaction is going to be but we're not going to know until they're out there and they've got five or six months behind them and we'll see who loves it, who hates it and who is indifferent. It will develop and we'll learn something about how to do something with the content. So one more question. You mentioned your research in Genesis 15:5 and that relating to your thesis and whatnot. What are some other things that sort of were on your radar that you are looking forward to diving into in relation to anything that we would loosely call Divine Council stuff that you can see yourself jumping into and studying at some other point?

DB: Mike, the list is too long.

MSH: Give us three or four. Give us that in a sentence and then maybe two or three sentences of explaining what that is or why you think that's interesting.

DB: Okay I can give a couple of examples. So a lot of my research on my own and through papers has been connecting these ideas and Paul, but also I want to do this more with the Gospels. So just one more thing in Paul I'll mention and then something in the Gospels. So in

Paul that I want to explore more the Romans issues and connect more, I didn't have time to do this in my paper but I want to do this further, probably in my dissertation is connect these ideas to Paul's glory Christology and the idea of glorification and Paul, and that actually being a term connected to these Divine Council idea of astral glory and shining, the bright shining of these beings in the Old Testament, and understating that the titles like the holy ones that they're given frequently the Divine Council in the Old Testament.

Paul uses these titles holy ones to call the community who already has the Pneuma or the spirit, He already calls them if they're partakers of the Spirit and baptized into Christ or in Christ, the Pauline metaphor of salvation is in Christ, not metaphor but ontologically for him, having the Spirit that you're already holy ones. And so you're waiting, like for example in Romans 8, you're waiting on the Apocalypse, the revelation of the sons of God, you holy ones that I've called you before, when the whole cosmos knows that you're the actual sons of God and this is attached to glorify the idea of being glorified. And so I think the glory language is coming off of these kinds of celestial or astral glorification ideas and this is how Paul is talking about the upcoming, well, the current and the revealing of the deification of the believer. And in the Gospels, I found something really interesting years ago and didn't really make the Divine Council connection until more recently, probably in the past year, is in the Gospels, you have this title given to Jesus by the spirit beings that isn't given to him by any humans, and it's son of the most high.

And you're familiar with these and we talked about these texts before but something very interesting about these texts is there's been an ongoing, and your familiar with this Mike, this ongoing debate about do the synoptic Gospels actually teach the preexistence of Christ. This has been a major debate for years in modern, specifically Western scholarship. And Simon Gathercole a few years back tried to approach the question by suggesting, this is Simon Gathercole at Cambridge, New Testament scholar, try to approach it by suggesting that the 'I am sent' passages are talking about him coming from heaven. But the problem with that thesis is, is that language is so often used in prophetic commissioning that prophets saying, I am sent, I am sent. Just because there's angels that say it, too, doesn't definitively argue the preexistence of Christ from those texts.

I mean you'd have to connect it with a lot of other ideas. And I think one of these ideas is this title son of the most high because only the demons or the spirits call Jesus that and it's after his baptism when he receives the spirit. And so this notion that they know who this son of most high which the Hebrew equivalent son of *elyon*, which is the title of the chief of the Council, which is Yahweh, the chief of the Council, there's all these other beings and they know this kind of secondary figure, call him the Angel of Yahweh, call him Yahweh's wisdom, call him Yahweh's name. You develop this in your book a lot, of the name and wisdom, which you have great sections on that. But that figure, the Council knows this figure. The beings in that spiritual realm, the unseen realm, already know this figure and so when that title is used by the spirit beings to address Jesus, I think that is a good concept of his preexistence. And not only that, I would like to explore that more and research that more, but not only that, there's something very interesting connected to that title as well where you get this idea that it's not just Jesus experiencing this glorification and deification but it's actually the believers as well. And Jesus actually, I think in Luke's sermon on the plain, gives us an idea about this because he says after he's through a moral discourse, he says those who obeyed these rules, he says they will be called sons of the most high, plural, that they are will be.

This is something that is going to happen to them. And so you connect his idea with, and I don't have time to get into all of this, but the short version is you connect this with the idea of the Sermon on the Mount, Sermon on the Plain, seeing God is something that's future, that they will see God and live. This is the Old Testament concept. If you see God you died. Humans, creatures, if you even set foot on the mountain, your toast, you don't see God and live. But in the Old Testament, say examples like Exodus 24, you have to be invited up the mountain and you

see God and you live and you're actually in some sense into his heavenly temple as if you were part of the Council and you eat with him. And not surprisingly Jesus is hosting the miraculous feast and saying that they will be called sons of the most high. So I think this is early Jesus tradition that's looking forward to this deification of the true sons of Israel, the true sons of God, who will one day usurp these spirit beings. When Jesus sends out the 70, they come back saying that we have authority over these beings.

MSH: It's a good foretaste and of course the theological messaging there is pretty clear if you have the Deuteronomy 32 worldview in your head. Those aren't dots that are hard to connect. I'm curious with the sending thing, obviously the text you just referenced deals with son-ship. There's the aspect of mission, why was this son sent and you get into all that. But have you looked at or considered yet Isaiah 9:5-6, and particularly the Septuagint versification, that passage in the Septuagint. We're familiar with wonderful Counselor, mighty God, Prince of Peace, and Messiah but the Septuagint doesn't say any of that. I'm just wondering if you've if you look at that because what the Septuagint says there is the figure, the "messianic" figure there is called *megalēs boulēs* angelos, the messenger of the council.

DB: Yes, I'm looking at it right now.

MSH: So there you have a clear, I think you have a clearer messenger idea. You have a direct explicit Council reference there and that pretty easily suggest preexistence. I'm just wondering if you could tie that in its own point because that's an interesting passage. What you're going to find when you get into that is there's no mechanical explanation in terms of textual criticism. You can't really get there so that he either has a different text or it's a very interpretive rendering possibly based on some other concatenation of traditions that wind up expressing that idea in the Septuagint.

DB: You know in the past with Daniel Street we had done a seminar, just me and one other student with him on early Jewish and monotheism in Christology. And this is one of passages that we look at and for the life of me I can't remember some of those conversations now but that's something I definitely need to look into in tying that concept in with the Jesus tradition. I just haven't done that yet but that's fascinating. I definitely have to look into this.

MSH: Well, we should wrap this up. You've given us an hour and we're grateful for that. The purpose here is to get people exposed to you so that A, they know Mike isn't the only one. There are other people out there that are quite a ways into this and we run into each other at academic conferences and whatnot. Eventually you kind of find each other because people wind up in the same sessions and talk about same things and Q&A, that kind of thing. You start to sort of pick up on where people are at and how much they're tracking on different things, and I just think it's useful to have the audience exposed to somebody else that sees so much of this and is really making it a pursuit, and in your case, really trying to deliver some of the content to people who aren't as geeky as us. Let's just put it that way.