

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 129

Conference Interviews, Part 2

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Guests: Dr. Andy Naselli (AN), Mike Licona (ML), Dr. Sam Lamerson (SL), and Kyle Greenwood (KG)

Episode Summary

During the recent annual meetings for biblical studies scholars held in San Antonio, Dr. Heiser interviewed a number of scholars about their recent work. In Part 2 of those interviews, we meet Dr. Andy Naselli (New Testament professor at Bethlehem College and Seminary), Mike Licona (Theology professor at Houston Baptist University), Dr. Sam Lamerson (President & New Testament professor, Knox Theological Seminary), and Kyle Greenwood (Old Testament professor at Colorado Christian University).

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 129, "Conference Interviews, Part 2." I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike... another day of conference in the books!

MH: Another day of Bible-Geekdom, yeah!

TS: Papers overdose... Biblical overdose again... (laughs)

MH: Absolutely.

TS: One conference down, another one to go.

MH: (laughs) Yeah, they just keep popping up! It's kind of like Whack-a-Mole here.

TS: Yeah, I think maybe we should start our own conference... I mean, there's so many of them going on at the same time. We might as well add another one.

MH: Right. We could just blend in right here. That's actually not a bad idea.

Well, here in Part 2 we're going to talk to Andy Naselli. He's a New Testament scholar. He's associated with John Piper's school and Bethlehem Baptist Church. Then we'll have Mike Licona. Mike is also New Testament. He also does theological stuff in relationship to Historical Jesus and the resurrection and what-not, that sort of thing. And Sam Lamerson—another New Testament scholar (we kind of OD'd on New Testament guys). Sam is a good friend of mine. He's been on the podcast before so he'll be familiar to some listeners. Sam's field is also a Historical Jesus. And we have a little bonus with Sam—we get into some non-biblical stuff. Sam and I have some paranormal interests... I'll just leave it at that and let you listen. And then lastly, Kyle Greenwood. We want to talk to Kyle about his book on Israelite cosmology. So that's our lineup for Part 2 and I think you'll all enjoy the interviews.

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MH: We're back at ETS and our guest is Andy Naselli. Andy, why don't you introduce yourself to get us started off?

AN: Sure. My name's Andy Naselli. I teach New Testament and Theology at Bethlehem College & Seminary in Minneapolis. It's the school where John Piper is chancellor (some know that name). He was the pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church for over 30 years, and I'm one of the elders there now.

MH: Good. Where did you get your training?

AN: Well, I did a small Bible school for undergrad and then an MA and PhD at Bob Jones University in Greenville, SC. A PhD in Theology. And then I did a second PhD in New Testament Exegesis and Theology at Trinity under Don Carson (D.A. Carson), and I ended up working for him for nine years.

MH: Wow. I didn't know the nine-year part...boy!

AN: Yeah, he's really a mentor. I love him.

MH: Wow. Well, Andy, I heard you have a new book out. Something about the conscience, so what's that all about?

AN: That's the title, *Conscience*. I forget the subtitle, but it's... (laughter)... A friend of mine named J.D. Crowley is a missionary in Cambodia for decades, and we teamed up to do it. He's got a lot of cross-cultural experience that is a big part of our book.

MH: So what's different in your treatment of the conscience as opposed to somebody else's?

AN: As far as I know, our book is unique in that it starts by defining the conscience and then explaining how you relate to your own conscience—how to have a clear conscience yourself and then how to calibrate your own conscience, so that's Step 1. Then Step 2 is how to relate to fellow Christians when your consciences disagree. And then the third step is how to relate to other people in other cultures when your consciences disagree—when their consciences may be condemning them for something different than yours would, and vice versa. That gets tricky.

MH: So let's focus on the second part of that. When consciences disagree. We've had plenty of that recently with elections and what-not...

AN: That's a great example!

MH: So what would be, either your advice, or how do you treat it academically in the book? What goes into this?

AN: Even academically and pastorally, because I'm one of the pastors at Bethlehem Baptist Church, and within the church there were people I knew were voting for Clinton, and some voting for Trump, and some voting third party, and some not voting (out of protest). My goal in that situation was not to say, "Here's how you must vote." No way! It was to say, "All right. Let's think through this from the perspective of conscience. Let's ask some questions. Does candidate A, B, or C have good character? Are they even qualified to be President? What does voting entail?" I think the answer to that last question is why so many people Christians disagree. Some view it as "I'm endorsing this person." Others would be saying, "No, it's a protest. I'm voting against that person." So they view voting differently.

5:00

MH: Yeah, endorsement versus protest.

AN: And then the third question is, "How does conscience work? How can you have a clear conscience?" And my concern was that people not vote for a particular person if their conscience was saying, "Don't do that." Because if you do that when your conscience tells you not to, you're sinning. That's a big deal.

MH: So is your approach to any given issue sort of asking probative questions, or is there some sort of—I don't want to use the word "step by step" because I know you're not going to go the checklist route. Is that the process, if we can use the word "process?"

AN: Yes. I'll try to make this up off the top of my head here. First you can ask, "Is something objectively right or wrong?" If yes (it's objectively wrong), then don't do it. That's just clear. "Should I have immoral sex with someone?" Well, it's pretty clear about that... no! Even if you can do it with a clear conscience that's sinful, don't do it. Or, "Should I get an abortion?" Well, I think that's murder and you

shouldn't murder, etc. So right or wrong is the first question. Not, "Is your conscience clear?" but, "Is this objectively right or wrong?"

So then let's say, "Okay it's not necessarily objectively wrong." Then you have to ask further questions. One is, "Can I do this activity with a clear conscience?" And an activity might actually be something that you could do without sinning, but your conscience condemns you for it for whatever reason. Don't do it! If you do that, you're sinning. I know women whose conscience condemns them if they wear makeup, for example. If they were to wear makeup in that situation, they're sinning. Someone says, "I can't drink root beer with a clear conscience." If you drink root beer, you're sinning. So that's the next question.

So then you say, "Well, I can do this with a clear conscience." Then there are other questions to ask like, "Is this going to be glorifying God? Is this going to be serving your fellow brothers and sisters? Is this going to be beneficial to your own spiritual growth?" There are all kinds of questions. So just because something is allowable doesn't mean you should do it.

MH: How do you work through somebody... Let's say, one of the questions that I get... (I'll make this up because it doesn't really reflect my own situation), but... "I think it's glorifying God to vote for Hillary because it's a vote against..."

AN: Is this you speaking, or is this...?

MH: This is hypothetical.

AN: All right. I thought it was.

MH: So somebody comes up to you and says, "I think it's glorifying God..." That's the phrase in the quotes that I want you to drill down on. "I think it's glorifying God to vote for Hillary because it's a vote against something that I either don't like about one of her opponents or some issue—her opponent holds position X and I'm at Y." So how does this apply to someone who... I imagine that you either might be wondering how they're processing something like "glorifying God." So how to you drill down on that to get the person to think well about what that means?

AN: On this issue, I have to be really, really careful to distinguish between "this is what Christians must do" and "this is what I'm personally doing." We can disagree. This is a category that Romans 14 refers to as "disputable matters." Christians can disagree over these things and should be able to get along still. So if a friend said that to me, I would just probe and say, "So, do you think the other candidate is better? Do you think Hillary is better than Trump or whoever? What about this position this person holds? Do you think that's okay?" And if the person was a very shrewd, thoughtful person and said, "Right, I think abortion (for example) is sinful, but there are these other eight issues that I think she's

good on. Every vote, no matter who you're voting for is a compromise. Not everyone is exactly right across the board, as I see it." I have a friend I'm thinking of right now who voted for Clinton with that kind of reasoning, and I was okay with that. I wasn't trying to persuade them to do otherwise. I can't do that with a clear conscience, but what's most important to me is not who you vote for. What's most important to me is that you vote with a clear conscience and you're thinking carefully through the issues. Does that make sense?

MH: Yeah. What do you do as a pastor or a counselor when you disagree with somebody's conscience decision?

10:00 **AN:** That's going to happen all the time! So I go to Romans 14 and just work through that. I forget which chapter in the book it is (I think it's chapter 4 or 5), we give 12 principles for how to disagree with a fellow Christian over disputable matters, right out of the text from Romans 14. Things like, "don't look down on someone you're disagreeing with. Assume they're doing what they're doing for the glory of God. Do this as a way to glorify Christ when you welcome one another." Those sorts of things. When you add all that up, their master is Christ, not you. You're not their judge. Mind your own conscience. You put all that together and I think it promotes massive church unity in a healthy way.

MH: I sense you're trying to take the most charitable route that you can, and ultimately how a person processes something, their conscience, all that kind of stuff—that's between them and the Lord ultimately. That's interesting. Now, would you say that in other treatments of conscience, this kind of thing—this kind of section of the book regarding how to handle doubtful disputations—do you think that's unique? Is that one of the unique things about your book?

AN: That's not the unique part. The unique part is what follows that, which is the cross-cultural aspect. So this is where I really lean on J.D. Crowley, the co-author. He gives examples like this: He's in Cambodia and a Cambodian worker comes to do concrete work on his home, and while he's there he picks three mangoes off of his tree that he just planted four years ago and it's finally—finally for the first time—bearing mangoes, and he was so excited to eat those mangoes. And the guy took all of them off the tree and ate them. To my friend, J.D., that was theft! He stole! But in that culture, that was not stealing. Just like in Jesus' time and in the Old Testament, you could walk through someone's grain field and you could take some grain or you could take some fruit, and that's not stealing. Stealing is when you're taking a bunch of it without permission. But when you're just passing through, no problem. So from the perspective of the Cambodian, J.D. was sinful for being stingy.

MH: Okay, yeah.

AN: And in that culture, of all things you need to be generous with, it's with food. So J.D. had to learn the hard way that he needed to understand how this culture

works, how it differs from his own culture, and to preach accordingly. Because what happens often is people from one culture go to another culture and they see all the things that their consciences don't condemn them for in that culture, but theirs do, and they preach against those things. When they do that, the people's consciences don't register. Instead they revolt and think, "What are you talking about? That's not wrong!" You follow me?

MH: Right, yeah... wow. Last question: In the book, how do you create a biblical definition of conscience? I'm sure you do some analysis there, so give us the short version.

AN: Short version... You're an Old Testament guy. There's not actually a Hebrew word that parallels the Greek word *syneidesis*, it's one of the few really significant theological words in the New Testament where there's not a really clear parallel. The closest is the Hebrew word *leb* (heart). It's like "David's heart smote him," he was under conviction. So what we did is we looked up the 30 times *syneidesis* (the Greek word for conscience) occurs in the New Testament and just worked through all of those. So just like if you were take an English word like "microphone" (I'm holding a microphone right now). If I were to take 100 random modern sentences with the word "microphone" in it, I could see what the verbs are that go with microphone. Like, you can hold it, you can talk into it, etc. If you put all that together you can kind of figure out what it is.

So we took the word "conscience" and we noticed what verbs go with it, what it can do. And we looked at the other aspects of it: what describes it, what words, what adjectives modify "conscience." We came away seeing that conscience can be six things, like weak, strong, emboldened to sin (or seared), that sort of thing. We looked at what it can do. It can bear witness, testify, lead you to do certain things, etc. So that's how we started to just gather data. And after doing all that, we arrived at this one-sentence definition: "Your conscience is your consciousness (or your sense, your awareness) of what you believe is right and wrong."

So that explains why your conscience might not condemn you for something that mine might condemn me for, or vice versa. Like in the media today, some people with a clear conscience think that same-sex marriage is a civil right, just like anti-racism stuff. They believe that. But my conscience works a little differently because of how I understand Scripture. So, again, it's what you believe is right and wrong. And that helps explain why your conscience changes over time. I bet there were issues in life 20 years ago that you think differently about now. What happened? Well, your conscience received new information and you processed that and it registers differently for you.

So it's what you believe is right and wrong. So that means that you need to work to calibrate it according to Scripture and according to truth. (Sometimes it's truth outside of Scripture that really helps.) Scripture can give principles, but

sometimes science outside of Scripture clarifies. Like, "Is this drug I use to prevent pregnancy an abortifacient or not?" That's a big deal, and the Bible is not going to clarify that for you.

MH: The book has a lot of good blurbs to it. I looked through those, read those. A lot of people that I would consider good scholars, reliable people... So I would encourage listeners to check it out. I would imagine people can get it on Amazon.

AN: Yes... amazon.com.

MH: And the title of it again?

AN: *Conscience [What It Is, How to Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ]*, by Andy Naselli and J.D. Crowley.

MH: Well, thanks for spending a few minutes with us!

AN: Thank you.

MH: We're back, and our guest this time is Michael Licona. Now Mike's primary academic reputation is Theological Studies, specifically the historicity of the resurrection. But he has a new book coming out, so we can talk about either some of his work on the resurrection, or the new book, which is... Mike, why don't you tell us about that?

ML: Well, the title is *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels? What We Can Learn from Ancient Biography*. It's published by Oxford University Press, coming out today!

MH: Sweet! Get on the bandwagon!

ML: It's 308 pages long. I'm really excited about it. What had happened was, years ago when I debated Bart Ehrman on the resurrection, he would bring up contradictions in the Gospels as one of the main reasons why we shouldn't trust the Gospels. We'd be debating on the resurrection, though. For me, as soon as you establish that Jesus rose from the dead, everything else becomes of secondary importance. It's like, if Jesus rose, Christianity is true, even if it were to turn out that some things in the Bible aren't.

MH: Right.

ML: So if everything else is of secondary importance, then why do we have so many problems with potential contradictions? But a lot of Christians do. I decided

I was really going to look into this. As you know, Michael, the majority of New Testament scholars today regard the Gospels as either being Greco-Roman biographies themselves, or that they share a lot in common with Greco-Roman biography. You say, "Well why not Jewish biography?" Well, because for some reason, the Jews did not write biographies of their sages in that day.

MH: There's not a whole lot of that!

ML: So if the Christians were going to write biographies of Jesus, Greco-Roman biography was the only game in town. And there are many, many reasons to believe they are Greco-Roman biographies. They share all these qualities, characteristics, of it. So what I did was I made a list of all the biographies written about anyone if they were written within 150 years on either side of Jesus. And there were about 90. Of those 90, Plutarch wrote 50 of them. So as I read through Plutarch's *Lives*, I noticed as I got to the end that nine of them were written about people who lived at the same time, they knew one another, and they participated in many of the same events. So for example, the assassination of Julius Caesar is mentioned in Plutarch's *Life of Caesar*, *Life of Cicero*, *Life of Antony*, and *Life of Brutus*. And so when you compare how Plutarch tells the same story four times, it's interesting. Same author, same sources, written around the same time, but there are differences!

MH: Right, they're not all the same. (laughs)

ML: Right!

MH: He wasn't lazy, he didn't just copy it again and again and again.

ML: So I found 36 stories in those nine *Lives* that appear in two or more of them. Of those 36, there are differences in 30 of them. And as I got through them I noticed that there were a lot of patterns. He will conflate two stories or he will take elements of one story and include it in another one. Maybe he didn't want to tell both stories, but he liked something in this story and so he just included it in a different one. He's not trying to distort it. He just wants to get it in there but he doesn't want to tell all the details. Or maybe he transfers what one person says to the lips of another. Or he compresses a story so that it appears to have occurred over a shorter period of time than which it actually did. Or he shines a spotlight on a person so that in one account there's several people there, while in another account it's only the main character being considered there, because that's what's important.

MH: Has anybody ever done this before--compared these specific *Lives* for these specific reasons in a book?

ML: You have Christopher Pelling, the leading Plutarch scholar in the world. He just retired from Oxford a year ago. Before I embarked on this, I asked him that

very question you just asked. Up to the that point, he had done the most comprehensive work on it and it was one chapter in a book.

MH: Wow!! (laughing)

20:00

ML: So this is the most comprehensive treatment...

MH: Yeah, you found a niche there! Boy...

ML: And I'm surprised no more has been done. So then what I did was I looked at all the differences in the Gospels. There are lots and lots of them. And I took the ones (19 pericopes) that seemed to be the most suggestive that the same compositional devices that I mentioned that Plutarch used--that the Gospel authors used them very frequently. And I find that it explains a HUGE percentage of the differences in the Gospels. So the reason you have these differences aren't because of contradictions. They're because of compositional devices. Of course there are other things, like redaction and oral tradition, and things like that. But what I'm saying is that in these 19 pericopes, with all the differences, compositional devices account for a very, very significant percentage of them.

MH: I'm going to get your book! It's really fascinating. For the audience, the larger point here is that just because these differences are there... Let's take Plutarch. Nobody's looking at Plutarch thinking, "What a hack!" or "He can't be trusted" or "It's inaccurate." They're not thinking these things in this area of scholarship or this area of literary output, so why should we critically assess the Gospels in a negative way for the same reasons? That's really... Like I said, I'm going to get your book! That's really fascinating that you can do that and nobody had done that before. You mentioned Bart Ehrman. My audience is going to be interested in anybody who's debated Bart. So just give us a little bit of what that experience was like. And have you had conversations with Bart outside the debate forum?

ML: Well, we have had conversations. I consider Bart to be a friend. I mean, we're not like close friends or anything like that, probably just because we don't live near each other and things like that. But I like Bart. I like him as a person. We've always gotten along well. I respect the guy and I think he respects me. We treat each other well when we debate. A lot of times we'll have dinner before our debates. We've done that in our two public debates. Then we had two podcasts on *Unbelievable* [radio show]. Then this past spring we had a written debate on, "Are the Gospels Historically Reliable Accounts of Jesus?" You can see reading it that we treat each other respectfully. I like the guy and we have fun.

What else is it like? Sometimes he can be sarcastic, but I throw it back at him when we're in person. But he doesn't mind. It's just kind of joking. He has ways of believing... I think his arguments stink! (laughter) I do! I think they're very weak arguments.

MH: Yeah, I feel the same way about his orthodox corruption of Scripture argument: "Okay we'll give you these five or six passages... a small number of whatever they are that you insist were altered in the direction of Deity." Well, what about all the other stuff that you don't have variant evidence for to even make this argument? I'll give you those five and I'll take the other 50! It just doesn't make much sense as a criterion for what he wants to do with it. Again, I'm an outsider. I've met Bart a couple times, but I haven't really had a sustained conversation with him. So my perception is as an outsider. But I would agree: it just doesn't seem like the arguments are that good. To be honest with you, I could probably come up with better ones--things that I would think would be more problematic, that really require sustained attention. But that's interesting. Craig Evans has kind of said the same thing about his experience and relationship with Bart.

25:00

ML: I think what happens a lot in my field of Historical Jesus Studies, when you're looking at things and trying to verify... look at him through the eyes of a historian... is a lot of New Testament scholars will go through school and really get very, very little (if any) training on that very topic. Years ago when I was doing my doctoral research I looked at the catalogs at the eight Ivy League schools in the field of philosophy and anything religious--the Religious Studies Department... undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral level. And I looked for any course on the philosophy of history or historical method. Again, Ivy League schools... I only found one course out of all of them. *One course*. It was only a doctoral level seminar at Princeton that had anything to do with philosophy of history or historical method. A lot of people will be graduating from those schools--great schools--and call themselves "Historians of Jesus" and won't have any training in it whatsoever. So I think that's really telling. I think that's probably what happened with Bart. These guys don't think about something...

Right now in my field of New Testament when you go to Historical Jesus studies, a lot of them are leaning towards postmodernist thought and they're going in that direction. Well, when you read the literature by professional historians and philosophers of history outside the community of biblical scholars, you find that this conversation--this debate--about postmodernist versus realist approaches to history has been going on for decades. The majority of historians today are realists. They've rejected postmodernist approaches. So biblical scholars in New Testament, they're going down the road towards postmodernism entirely unaware that this thing has already been debated. But they don't read that stuff, they're not familiar with it, so they're just going to waste their time on all this. It's like, "Fellas, the party is over and you missed it!"

MH: They're late to the game. Well, before we wrap up, do you have a specific book or books about the historicity of the resurrection that you want to recommend to the audience?

ML: Well, I guess audience members who are... If you want a self-study course on the resurrection of Jesus--the evidence for it and how to defend it in practical ways--then the book by Gary Habermas and I, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, is probably the prescription I'd give.

MH: (laughing) It's okay, you can recommend your own work!

ML: Well, it's got a little CD in the back with a game (that only works on PCs, not Macs). It's a simulated television game show with a 3-D animated game show host who's pretty funny. These games help you master the information in the book.

MH: That's interesting.

ML: And it's done with a high quality, too. If they really want to get into it, real heavy into the historical data and the evidence for the resurrection and come at it strictly from a historical viewpoint... we'll go through "What is history? How do you learn about the past? What about miracles? How do you assess sources?" We do this with the resurrection and come to the end. Then my 700+ page book on the resurrection...

MH: What's the title of that?

ML: *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*, by IVP Academic.

MH: Yeah, well there will be plenty of people in my audience that will want that one! Both of them will be appropriate for somebody. So thanks for spending a little bit of time with us. Like I said, your new book sounds really fascinating. I'm looking forward to that.

ML: Well thanks, Michael. It's good to see you again!

MH: Thanks

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MH: Well, we're back here at ETS with our next guest. This one will be familiar to podcast listeners. We talked with him a little bit last year, and we actually have had an episode with Sam Lamerson in the history of the podcast. Sam is affiliated with Knox Seminary. You're the president, correct?

SL: I am the president.

MH: Do you still teach?

SL: I still teach. I teach Greek, mainly.

MH: We're going to have a lot of new listeners. Tell everybody your background: where you went to school, what your areas of interest are.

SL: My PhD is from Trinity. My M.Div. is from Knox. My BA is from Bob Jones. So it's kind of an unusual route. My areas of interest are the parables and the Historical Jesus, and storytelling in general. I'm working on a book on storytelling, both in the Bible and in preaching.

MH: Now, for a long time you were the pulpit substitute for D. James Kennedy, right?

SL: I was. I worked for Dr. Kennedy for 16 or 17 years and then he had his incident, he got sick. I filled in the pulpit and then he passed away and I filled in the pulpit for about two and half years until the pastor came. And then after that pastor left, I filled the pulpit again for about six months, until the new pastor came. So I've filled the pulpit there at Coral Ridge Presbyterian several times.

MH: But you're out of that now. You're doing administrative and teaching...

30:00

SL: Yeah, every once in a while I still preach there, but not regularly.

MH: Well, Sam is a really interesting guy. We've known each other for a number of years. We connected, believe it or not, through Coast to Coast A.M., because Sam has a real interesting background. Tell everybody how you put yourself through school.

SL: I'm a magician and juggler, and a ventriloquist. If you don't know what a ventriloquist is, I talk to myself and play with dolls. I'm here in San Antonio... the school thing I'm here to go to ETS, but I know I'm here because my friend lives here. His name is Richard Turner. You can Google him. He's the finest technician in terms of card magic in the world. There is literally no one who is better. And to make it even more incredible, he's blind! It's just an incredible thing. We're going to be having lunch tomorrow. There's no one who has better skills with cards. He's a wonderful Christian man, but he's been approached by the Mob on several occasions to try to deal games and he has some really, really interesting stories to tell. So that's really why I'm here. I'm just wandering around at ETS until the time comes. Yeah, I paid my way through school working as a juggler. I've been on Nickelodeon a few times and some other shows. I've gone around doing stuff.

MH: I imagine you still do some things...

SL: Every once in a while. Probably I do a couple of gigs a month, or something like that. I used to be a street performer. My daughter's name is Charity, so I would pass the hat and tell everybody all this money goes to Charity, and she appreciates it.

MH: That's good! You're also really into some of this stuff... We don't really deal with it on this podcast. We have a new podcast called "Peeranormal." Down the road we want to have you on that because you have a big interest in a pretty wide topic that the Peeranormal audience would be interested in, so tell everybody about that.

SL: Mike and I met through both of our investigations of what was really going on with UFO abductions, and whether or not that might be some kind of (at least for some of the incidents) a manifestation of evil. And I'm also interested in Bigfoot. Not because I believe in it, but because I'm interested in how so many people continue to believe in a very large bipedal creature, yet no one has gotten a good photograph of him since 1967. And the proliferation of cameras... Everybody has a camera today, and yet the Patterson-Gimlin film is still sort of the gold standard for Bigfoot. I find that interesting from a standpoint of what causes people to believe in things. I find that very interesting.

MH: Do you think the Patterson film is authentic or fake or you don't know?

SL: No, I cannot imagine that it's authentic. There are a variety of reasons. Probably the best argument in favor of the film is Gimlin. He continues, even to this day, to say, "Yeah, it was really an event and I was there." Patterson, on the other hand, was a guy who just pretty much scammed his way through life. So I don't know if... I mean, it's possible that Gimlin thought it was real and it really wasn't. I don't know, but it seems to me that it's highly, highly unlikely that it's a legitimate film.

MH: So how do you interject, either in a classroom or chatting with students or at church or whatever... You're not hiding your interest in these things. How has it contributed to discussions with students or in ministry? How do they process your interest in this?

SL: I try to approach it from what scholars call the topic of "epistemology," that is how do we justify our beliefs. And I find it just really stunning that people are willing to believe in this gigantic creature who supposedly lives in every state in the U.S. and yet nobody has a clear picture of him, and yet they're willing to reject the resurrection, which is... In my view, at least, as a New Testament scholar, I think the resurrection is THE best attested fact of ancient history. And so I want them to wrestle with that and to think about how it is that they justify their own beliefs and what kind of beliefs they have that might be outside of justification.

MH: Yeah, I've often found, like with UFO's, and I've said it before: The people you'll find at UFO conferences are really primed to have big-picture theological discussions about God: who are we, why are we here, could God be an ET, what about Jesus... There are a lot of bridges there that you can get people into a spiritual conversation who otherwise really wouldn't ever entertain that thought.

SL: That's right. And the interesting thing is that many of them haven't thought carefully about justifying their beliefs about whether or not these entities that they call "aliens" might actually be evil beings. And so I have no trouble believing that there are evil beings around who want to work us harm, and that it may be that some of those beings manifest themselves in a sort of way to make us think that they're aliens. C.S. Lewis is sometimes attributed with the line, "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was making us believe he doesn't exist." And I think that in our culture, where we claim to be scientific, the evil one would far rather have us believe that aliens are from outer space and that these beings that come into our room at night, that they're aliens, than he would have us believe that they're really malevolent entities. That's very interesting. In other cultures, of course, where they are not scientific in the same way that we are, they have no trouble believing that those beings are evil beings, brought about by the head of the evil beings. And I think that's a very, very important discussion to have.

MH: So what's the rest of your time like here at the conference? Are you doing any papers? Are you going to go hear anything you find especially interesting?

SL: I want to hear a variety of papers, yeah, but I'm here mainly to see Richard Turner and work on card tricks. But at Knox Seminary we are actually interviewing for an Old Testament professor, so that's one of the things that I'll be doing here. Another of my interests is textual criticism, so I'll be listening to a couple of papers on textual criticism, and I'll go hear some papers this afternoon on the Septuagint and how we think about inspiration of the Old Testament when we're dealing with the Septuagint. Because it is a translation, and yet it's a translation that most of the New Testament authors used, rather than the Hebrew text.

MH: I'm not able to get to that particular session because I think it overlaps with... There's a whole afternoon devoted to biblical genealogies, so I'm going to head over to that one.

SL: A whole roller-coaster ride of excitement!

MH: (laughing) I'm going to head over to that because they're talking about gaps in genealogies and I'm into that. So if they hand out anything...

SL: If they hand out anything I'll get one for you.

MH: Yeah, grab me a paper, because that's really an important topic. There you go. It's a toss-up: Septuagint and inspiration or genealogies?

SL: It is an important topic because we have today in the U.S. people who claim that the King James Version is inspired, and essentially the question is, "If the Septuagint (which is a translation) is inspired, then are there other translations that are inspired? If it's not inspired, how should we make use of it?" So there are very interesting questions like that.

MH: Yeah, it really is an important topic. Well, Sam, I know you have another appointment and you have to run, so thanks for squeezing us in.

SL: My pleasure.

MH: Always fun to talk to you.

SL: It's always fun. Bigfoot lives! See ya.

MH: We're back here at SBL, and we have with us Kyle Greenwood. Kyle, I'm going to ask you to introduce yourself first to the audience. What's your educational background? Where do you teach?

KG: Well, Mike, nice to meet you, in San Antonio of all places!

MH: Nice to meet you, too.

KG: My undergraduate education was at the University of Cincinnati, which was not in a Bible-related field. I had no intention of doing any long-term academic work, but over the course of some experiences in life, I found myself in seminary. While at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, I kind of got intrigued and fell in love with the biblical languages and the Ancient Near East, especially. So I tracked that passion a little bit to Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio, where I completed my PhD in Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East in 2008.

MH: And you teach at?

KG: Colorado Christian University in Lakewood, Colorado. It's a western suburb of Denver.

MH: I always ask the Semitics people this: What was your dissertation on?

KG: Middle Assyrian Royal Theology, so more Assyriological in nature.

40:00

MH: Kingship stuff?

KG: Kingship stuff. Why did they go to war? Why did they build the buildings they built? What were their ideological or theological inclinations? What was the impetus they provided in their royal writings for doing the things that they did?

MH: As much as I'd like to talk about that (laughter), we're actually here to talk about your book. Kyle has a book on Israelite cosmology. Of course, that's going to be no unusual topic for the listeners of this podcast. But Kyle, give us the title of your book and we'll just start there. Just sketch out what you were trying to accomplish with the book.

KG: The title is *Scripture and Cosmology*. The longer subtitle I won't spell out here... Basically, the idea of the book is to help readers (especially readers in an evangelical context) to grasp what the Bible *meant*, as opposed to jumping too quickly into what it *means*. One of the barriers that I've found, anyway, in some of the circles that I've run and some of the conversations that I've had in my contexts is that we want to quickly impose modern questions on the biblical text. So that's kind of the idea behind it: Let's actually look at what the Bible has to say about it. Let's look at it in its context and how they would have thought about these kinds of questions.

MH: Listeners of this podcast know that's become kind of a mantra with me. That the right context for interpreting the Bible isn't *our* context, it's not the Reformation, it's not the grocery list. It's nothing modern. It's the context that produced the thing. Once we can grasp that, then we can talk about what might be the teaching points for us. Now, I'm curious as to your experience, because when you have your head in this kind of material for any amount of time, it just becomes a reflex.

KG: Second nature.

MH: Second nature. And then you go out, and not only is there a disconnect with the lay audience, the non-specialist audience, the average person in the pew-- but in many cases I've actually sort of been asked, either nicely or maybe confronted in an email or something like that: "Why should I care?" In other words, to us it's axiomatic that you would just do this, that we're supposed to interpret in light of original context. But for some people that is not even on the radar. They have no feel for it. So I imagine you've encountered that. So how to you try to unpack that for people?

KG: The question that I deal with directly in the book, because I anticipate that question... And as I was formulating the idea for the book (it wasn't even really in book form yet, just thinking about these ideas)... I was teaching to freshman--a large survey--class, and it occurred to me as I'm talking to them about historical

context. We have (I say "we" broadly)... We evangelicals, lay people, we have no problem talking about the context of Jesus, for example. In fact, we get excited about it. What does it mean, the size of the mustard seed...

MH: That's good because people want to know all about that kind of stuff.

KG: The three words for "love" in the Greek language, right? "Oh, there's some significance behind these Greek words here!" But when it comes to the Old Testament, there's this disconnect. I don't know if it's because of added distance chronologically, added unfamiliarity due to the region of the world and the cultures and that sort of thing, but there's less of an interest and less of an attempt made to try to bridge those gaps there.

45:00

MH: Yeah, I think people are conditioned to not be interested in a "strange" or cryptic context because they've already been told, "Well, Genesis is about this." They'll typically relate it to the Creation debate--different views about Creationism. So if you're saying, "Well, let's look at Genesis 1 the way an Israelite would have looked at it. Their context isn't all these debates." That bothers people. So how do you help them with that?

KG: The way I begin the book is to try to remind my audience that context matters and I try to use a few different modern kind of analogies. For example, *The New Yorker* back in 1976 had a famous cover page on a New Yorker's view of the world. It starts with very specific details about Lower Manhattan, names of buildings names of streets, and as the artist depiction pans back away from the focus of that location, things become a lot more vague. There's a city out there and it's called "Las Vegas." There's a couple of bumps called the "Rocky Mountains." There's this mass of water way over there that's called "The Pacific" and there's Russia, Japan, and China. I find this a helpful reminder that where we are situated geographically influences how we interpret the world. And because we are so far removed--not just geographically but chronologically--we have an influenced picture of what that world looked like. And if we want to be faithful readers of the text, if we want to hear what God said *then* so that we can understand what God says *now*, we need to try the best we can to bridge some of those gaps.

MH: A lot of our listeners are familiar with John Walton and some of his stuff. How would your book either differ from what Walton did, like in *The Lost World of Genesis One*, or where might it overlap?

KG: John and I would agree on a number of points and probably disagree on few. And those disagreements really aren't important or germane to either of our discussions or the points that we're trying to make. Both of us are trying to situate the biblical text in the Ancient Near Eastern context for the point of better understanding what it meant and being more faithful readers of Scripture. I think

both of us would be cautious to use the terms "better interpreters" because "better" is somewhat of a...

MH: Self-defining...

KG: Yeah, exactly. But if we can at least be faithful to what the text is trying to say as best we understand how the text is trying to say it, I think that's our goal. It doesn't take much looking at the Patristics or the Reformers to realize that they are interpreting that differently, but they're trying to be faithful in terms of, "What is this text up to?" What they're not trying to do is impose their questions... Well, they do, but that's not their intent, right?

MH: I get asked that a lot, and we're sort of intentional about it on the podcast. Kind of the little blurb for the podcast is "We're trying to do biblical theology that's unfiltered by modern stuff." We include the Creeds and all that sort of thing. It's not that they're bad, it's just that we have to recognize them for what they are and not use them as a filter. So I get asked this a lot. To me, I like what you said there because they're doing the best they could and there are a lot of Church Fathers that were genuinely brilliant, doing the best they could with the tools they had. And they do run into things that they have to respond to. So that's going to drive the bus for a lot of them in terms of what they decide to write or what they decide to say on a given passage. That's normal. There's nothing sinister about it. It's just they're doing the best they can for the community that they're trying to help.

50:00

KG: I would say that one of the things that both Walton and I do in our work is recognize that we have more information now that the Fathers and Reformers did not have, in light of the rediscovery of the Ancient Near East in terms of their texts. All the Egyptian material, the Mesopotamian material, the material from Ugarit and Anatolia... this helps us to understand what that context was. Even if the Church Fathers and Reformers had that material, they weren't addressing the kinds of questions and issues that we're concerned with. They had heresies to debunk, and that sort of thing.

MH: That's the way life is, and the way ministry is. So can you tell us, for someone who would pick up the book, what might especially surprise the modern reader that an Israelite would have thought? Just pick out one or two things that you sort of land on or camp out on a little bit in the book.

KG: Probably the simplest thing is the focus on how one is concerned with their immediate surroundings most of all, so they're going to define their world (the inhabited world, the cosmos) on a very constricted level because of the limited amount of travel they have and the limited amount of information they have about surrounding areas. It's not that they didn't know that there were surrounding areas. They didn't know there were lands over there, but it's kind of like the New Yorker's view of the world. They're just kind of unknowns. And so when they talk

about their world, they're talking about their immediate world. When they talk about the heavens, they're talking about how that looks like from their perspective. When they talk about the nether world, they hadn't been to the nether world! There hadn't been a driller...

MH: It doesn't have latitude and longitude. (laughs)

KG: Yeah, they're making sense of the world based on observation, based on experience, based on what grandma and grandpa told them. We need to recognize that for what it is and that we shouldn't expect to find scientific content.

MH: Method.

KG: Method, any of that stuff. Findings, discoveries, all that sort of thing. They're trying to get by from day to day and make it to the next harvest.

MH: I like to tell people, too, that "Look. Inspiration is a process. God is behind it and God knew what he was getting when he prompted someone in the second millennium B.C. to write something" It's not like, "Oh, I have to change who you are before I can use you, before I can have a productive moment with you." But we sort of have these expectations that don't really conform to either reality or God's own expectations. Again, he knows what he's getting.

One more question: Do you see any apologetic value to sort of generally treating the Bible for what it is or for letting it be what it is? Specifically with respect to this book and cosmology, how would that help someone today connect with someone who's not a believer in today's world? How would it help?

KG: The apologetic value that I see is trying to strip the Bible from saying what it's not trying to say.

MH: That's a big deal!

55:00

KG: I may have stolen this from someone along the way, but I tell my students this is Greenwood's Hermeneutical Axiom: "Don't put words in God's mouth." But in terms of helping those who may be struggling along the way with their faith or who may be unconvinced otherwise, first of all, let's try not to impose too many rules on what it is that we're trying to convince them of. Maybe it's a convoluted way of saying this, but where I see some of the biggest struggles is particularly with young evangelicals who have come up in a background where the Bible is promoting--is giving--a certain scientific viewpoint. They come along in their freshman biology class at some state university and they get a compelling, convincing argument about some scientific theory. You name it. In too many cases, that's the beginning of the end for them in terms of their faith, because they've set up a false expectation of what the Bible is.

MH: Right. It's easy to undermine.

Well, thanks for spending a few minutes with us. Could you repeat the title of the book once more? I imagine people can get it on Amazon or anything like that that's accessible. What's the title again?

KG: The title is *Scripture and Cosmology*. It's been a pleasure speaking with you, Mike! I appreciate it.

MH: Thanks for coming by. I hope the book gets some interest through the podcast and does well.

TS: All right, Mike. Well, that was four more good interviews right there!

MH: Yep, yep... interesting stuff.

TS: It's pretty interesting. We're going to have to get Sam... He promised me card tricks next time so I'm going to hold him to that.

MH: He'll do it. He'll love it. He will not be shy.

TS: Okay, well good deal. Stay tuned for Part 3, and I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.