

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 139

Q&A 18

December 31, 2016

Scholar: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Episode Summary

Dr. Heiser answers your questions.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 139, our 18th Question and Answer Episode. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you? Did you have a good Christmas?

MH: We did. It was a lot of fun. All the kids were at home, so that's always good when we can get everybody together and kind of watch the expression on people's faces for the gifts (laughing). So yeah—it was fun.

TS: That's good! I had a Christmas gift... I won the Super Bowl for our Naked Bible League!

MH: Oh, my.

TS: The champion is here! (laughing)

MH: That's tragic.

TS: I am your 2016 Naked Bible Fantasy Football League champion. Please... everybody... send me your praises at treystrickin@gmail.com. Don't hold back.

MH: Maybe we'll just torpedo the league next year. (laughs)

TS: I'm the champion. How does it feel to be on the show with a true champion? I mean, do you feel different? I kind of feel different.

MH: Yeah, I just think I'm having an out-of-body experience here.

TS: This is the wrong podcast for that.

MH: (laughs) Yeah, we can talk about that on Peeranormal.

TS: There you go. Are you doing anything fun for New Year's? Got any New Year's resolution for 2017? You're pretty booked. Can you give us a...

MH: You're asking me if I'd do something for fun. Of course not! You should know better.

TS: Right. Just studying, reading, writing...

MH: Probably.

TS: ... grading papers...

MH: No, I don't have to do any grading, so I could sit at my desk with the Productivity Pug on my lap and just think about the fact that I'm *not* grading, and that would be fun. It's a pretty low bar.

TS: How productive is 2017 going to be? We've got one book coming out in the spring, another book possibly.

MH: I'm not anticipating much in the way of production. It's not looking very... well, if people subscribe to the newsletter, this is the kind of thing I do in the newsletter. I'm not going to publicly lament on the blog. In the next issue of the newsletter (which is coming out any day now), I sort of have this year-in-review. On the one hand, people may read it and think, "You guys did a lot this year. Mike was productive." Mike looks at it and thinks, "Yeah, Mike should have literally done two times as much." I try to explain the math to people that I really could do more. If I was doing this full-time, I literally could do two to three times as much. So when I get a question like, "What does 2017 look like?" that's what filters the answer.

TS: That's why we need you listeners out there to help support Mike and the podcast and the show, and Miqlat. Our goal is to get Mike to do this full-time so he can produce this content full-time and a lot more than what we're used to. So if you're interested in getting more, *please!* I do not want to wait another decade for *Unseen Realm 2*, so help me out on that listeners, please. Nekked Nation out there, let's try to get as much help as we can.

MH: I was going to say that if people do subscribe to the newsletter, I literally just lay out the math. I'll give you the quick version here. Because of my day-job at Logos, I know precisely what I can produce in word count per day because that's part of what I've done over the years. I can easily do 2,000 words a day. Sounds like a lot, but it's like five pages in Microsoft Word. At my day job, I've gone four or five months doing that every day—day after day after day after day. That comes out to three books a year. So I look at that and say that's what I *ought* to be doing, in addition to the podcast. If I was doing this full-time, we could do

video. We could do lots of things. That's always floating around in my head—what I *could* do. And then I always kind of look at what gets done because I don't have the time, and it's just depressing. So thanks for asking! (laughs)

TS: Please go out there and support this show. Again, this is a Q&A. For you new listeners, this is a Question & Answer episode, where Mike will answer your questions. You can send your questions to me at treystricklin@gmail.com (you can get that on nakedbiblepodcast.com).

MH: Let me break in again. This is a good example. We should be doing a Q&A every week. It's just time. It's just logistics.

5:00 **TS:** We could probably do a Q&A every day with as many questions as you *cause*.

MH: (laughing) Don't give me a number!

TS: I mean, every episode, we probably get a thousand questions just on one episode.

MH: Thanks for that. That's awesome.

TS: My bad. Let's just get to it and knock these questions out. Are you ready?

MH: All right. Yeah, I'm ready.

TS: Our first one is from Chris. Here's his question:

I have heard your teaching that the creation accounts are not scientific descriptions, but polemics using pre-modern Ancient Near Eastern cosmology. That makes perfect sense. Do you read the account of Noah's flood in the same way—namely, that the setting assumes certain Ancient Near Eastern conceptions of geography/cosmology?

MH: Yeah, this actually takes us into territory where in one of the online courses I teach, the first assignment is always to do a word study on the terminology in the flood story. I don't care what position they take, but the assignment is, "Can a local or regional flood view be defended exegetically from the text?" So part of what I want them to see, what I want them to ask themselves when they go through that assignment, is really to think about context.

I say that to get us into this subject, because I'd say that the account presumes the known world at the time. This would mean it isn't global like we think of global. So it's not about taking certain parts of the description and saying, "Oh the mountains here, they do this or that... is this how people would have looked at mountains?" It's just that the world of the time is given to us in the Bible.

Specifically, it's given to us in Genesis 10. So really, one of the key questions to approaching this question (and just generally interpreting the flood account) is this: Is Genesis 10 the correct context (or part of the correct context) for interpreting Genesis 6-8? If you're not familiar with Genesis 10, it gives us the nations known to the biblical writers. It actually lists them out. You're not going to find nations elsewhere in the Bible that are found outside the geographical parameters. In other words, it's basically the world of the Mediterranean, maybe a little bit beyond what the Greeks knew as the "Pillars of Hercules" and all that stuff, into what is now Spain and stretching over toward what is India. But basically, the Mediterranean world, which includes parts of Africa, the Middle East, and stretching out toward what might be the northernmost parts at most of India or something like that. That's the known world of the time.

So Genesis 10 lists a bunch of nations. If you plot them on a map like you can on any Bible software or in any study Bible, this is the picture that's going to emerge. So the question is: Should that chapter inform our understanding of how we read the flood account? And I would say that it should because those nations are the ones that extend from Noah's sons that survived the flood. So if that's part of our context, then it's very evident that we should be reading the biblical flood in light of that context. I'm not talking about science. Science isn't even on the table here. We're just asking, "What is the correct context for the biblical writer." So if you're going to look at that, it's kind of obvious that this is their world to them, and if they're writing about a flood that affects this region, then for the writer that's "the world." But we know that it's not the globe, because there are lots of other nations (Australia, North and South America...) that aren't in these parameters.

Beyond that, there are other things to consider here that people don't often think about as far as how to approach the flood narrative. I would say we need to also consider the vocabulary of the flood account. This is where that assignment that I give people in this class comes in—especially the phrases that those who take a global view (in other words, they want to read the flood account and say it's global like we think)... There are certain phrases that sort of drive that argument. And I ask people to fix their minds on those phrases because there's more to them than what you would think.

10:00 Before I go on here, you could argue that the intent of the passage of the flood description was "all the world," so we could take the flood story and say that we're going to use the intent as sort of the context by which to frame the discussion. Okay, that certainly could be on the table. But if you just take Genesis 10 by its lonesome and use that as the context for interpreting the flood, then you're going to come out with a local or regional event. These are interpretive decisions, they're hermeneutical decisions. Neither thing is totally self-evident in how we should think about what we're thinking about when it comes to this.

But anyway, back to the phrases. What I'm talking about here are phrases like "all the earth" or "the whole heaven" or "all flesh." These are phrases that take the Hebrew word *kol* (which means "all, every or whole") and then it combines it with a word like *eretz* ("land or earth") or *basar* ("all flesh, the whole earth, all the earth") or *šamayim* ("the whole heavens" or something like that). If you search those identical phrases through the Hebrew Bible, you will find the identical phrases occur a number of times. Within those hits, there are clear instances where the context dictates that the phrase should not be understood in terms of exhaustive totality. Let me give you some examples. Let's go with *kol* and *eretz* ("all the earth" or "the whole earth"). It shows up in Genesis 2:11. This is the description of Eden and the four rivers.

¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole [kol] land [eretz—"all the earth"] of Havilah, where there is gold.

Are we really being asked to believe that every place in Havilah was infiltrated by this river? Like every square inch of it has a tributary or some part of this river that runs through it? Obviously not! You wouldn't have any dry land. Are we supposed to say the *kol/eretz* of Havilah (all the land of Havilah) was surrounded by this river? In other words, the river surrounded the *entire* region or place called Havilah? Again, you can't get exhaustive totality in the context of that verse. It occurs in Genesis 2:13 where it's the Gihon (these four rivers with Eden). Here's 1 Samuel 14:25:

²⁵ Now when all [kol] the people [eretz] came to the forest, behold, there was honey on the ground.

The word *kol* presumes people here in the context. You're talking about a mass of people going into the forest. Are we to presume that every last person of the earth (let's just make it the land of Israel to not be ridiculous) went into that forest? Of course not! Obviously not. Isaiah 14:7:

⁷ The whole [kol] earth [eretz] is at rest and quiet...

Really? Like no human or animal in the entire globe was making a sound? You could just go on and on with these sorts of phrases. Abraham to Lot in Genesis 13:9:

⁹ Is not the whole [kol] land [eretz] before you?

No, I would suggest it wasn't because Lot wasn't looking at the entire globe, nor could he. Lot's not standing there with Abraham and seeing Australia. So these phrases in many places do not—they cannot—speak to exhaustive totality. The

same thing with *kol basar* ("all flesh"). Let me just run a search here and look at a few of these. Joel 2:28. Let's just take a look at one here:

**"And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh [kol basar];
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.**

15:00 If you're going to say that's exhaustive totality, then every person on earth is going to receive the Holy Spirit. But that isn't the case! Only believers do. This phrase, again, is something that occurs right in the Genesis account. So I would suggest... Again, I don't really care. This is on my list of issues that I really have to muster interest to really care about (whether someone is a global-flooder or a local/regional-flooder). I don't really care. I only care when people tie it to salvation or someone's view of inerrancy, because I can go for a long time going through Scripture... I could be standing in front of an auditorium full of people just running searches and showing you the exact phrases in context where they cannot mean exhaustive totality. And then the question is very simple: Is it okay to take these instances of these phrases (where they don't mean exhaustive totality) and use them as the hermeneutical filter for the flood account and argue for a regional flood? People would say, "No, that's illegitimate, you can't do that!" And then it's very easy... I can just say, "Well, of course I can, because of Genesis 10. Genesis 10 is not all the nations of the globe, it's all the nations that they knew, which is regional."

It's not difficult to argue for a local/regional event and have a really text-based argument for it that has nothing to do... I didn't even bring up science. I don't care what science says. I'm not a scientist. It doesn't amount to a hill of beans to me. I don't use science as a hermeneutical tool. What I just gave you was text-based information. We could go to the chronology of the flood account. Here's one, and I'll be done after this. I don't want to belabor it too much. But if you look at the flood account... I'm going to read a few verses to you. See if you catch a problem here. Genesis 8:3 says:

³The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down...

⁵And the water decreased steadily until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible. ⁶Then it came about at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made; ⁷ and he sent out a raven, and it flew here and there until the water was dried up from the earth. ⁸ Then he sent out a dove from him, to see if the water was abated from the face of the land; ⁹ but the dove

found no resting place for the sole of her foot, so she returned to him into the ark; for the water was on the face of all [kol] the earth [eretz]. Then he put out his hand and took her, and brought her into the ark to himself.

Do you see the problem? Genesis 8:9 tells us that the water was on the face of all the earth (*kol, eretz*). But 40 days earlier, the water had receded sufficiently for the mountains to be visible, so the water wasn't really on the face of the entire earth. The face of the entirety of the earth was not covered in Genesis 8:9, even though that's the way the language sort of makes it sound (*kol, eretz*). So even here, the vocabulary (this phrase) does not mean exhaustive totality. Again, I could go a long time going through stuff like this. I don't really care... I don't make it an issue of how I look at somebody's commitment to inspiration or anything like that, but a lot of people do. All I'm saying is that's kind of a mistake to do that.

So I hope that answers the question and also illustrates that it's not just an Ancient Near Eastern thing, even though the cosmology is part of the picture (the sort of pre-modern cosmology). But part of the picture, as well... If you want to argue for a local/regional view, this is how you would do it. I just modeled it for you. This is how you would make a text-based argument for it, using the text of Scripture to do so. But I don't really care one way or the other.

TS: We've got another question from another Chris. He's troubled by Psalm 137:9. I'm certain a lot of people are! His question is:

Why is it okay to say "Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!" This is directed at the children of Babylon. Crushing the skulls of babies sounds like an atrocity, not judgment. It isn't merely descriptive, but rather a blessing upon the murder of babies!

MH: Imprecation... It's very easy for us to look at that and sort of view this as an isolated event with sort of no context. But the logic of it... It's poetic language (which doesn't mean that the psalmist isn't really wishing it, because the psalmist is wishing for his enemies to be judged—whether that means every last person or not is a different but related issue). Let's just take the language for what it is. I think we've had this question, maybe a long time ago. We did it somewhere, maybe in the series on Leviticus.

20:00

I'll be honest that my view is a minority position. It's not an insignificant one, but it is going to be a minority position. In a nutshell, I look at imprecatory prayer as deriving from the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3). In that passage, God himself tells Abraham that he will curse anyone who curses him (treats him lightly) and his descendants—in other words, God's children. If someone treats them with contempt, God says, "I'm going to judge them." So when the psalmist (or anyone else) prays for God to judge people or kill them or their relatives or their children... the basis of wanting that to happen has a context to it, specifically

in Psalm 139. The questioner brought up Babylon. Babylon had a long, long, long history of being the bad guy in the Old Testament, specifically toward the people of God (toward Israel). So the psalmist is, in effect, asking God to remember Genesis 12:1-3. The psalmist is not going to take the matter into his own hands.

What imprecatory prayers and imprecatory psalms really mean is that the person is angry or in anguish and is saying, "God, I want you to remember that you said those who do x, y, z to us—those who treat us with contempt—you will judge and curse them. I am asking you to do that. I am asking you to remember this covenantal promise and take care of business." Even to the n'th degree, even to these horrific, over-the-top kinds of descriptions. But the psalmist is not going to act on that emotion. The psalmist is asking God to take care of the problem—to judge the evildoer in whatever way God sees fit. And I think that's important because at the heart of it, it's not a biblical justification for you to get angry at someone and lash out at them. It's actually the opposite. It's a biblical injunction for you to tell God just how you feel, even in really dark terms. You're telling God just how you feel. In the case of the Israelites, they had seen all of this happen to them a hundred times over. We're going through the book of Ezekiel and this is the kind of stuff you get, especially in the last episode with the Assyrians. It gets even worse than that. This is what they had experienced. So for the psalmist to say, "What gives? God, you need now to turn around." You could say, "I get it. We apostasized, we went and worshipped other gods and this is what happens." But that doesn't take away the Abrahamic covenant. The psalmist wants justice in the end on the basis of this covenant. So that's what imprecation is really about.

Now, the question comes up: What about Christians? Should we pray these kinds of prayers? Should we vent this way like the people of the Old Testament did? I would say yes because Christians are the inheritors of the Abrahamic Covenant. That is explicitly stated in Galatians 3. So it stands to reason we can ask God to judge our enemies, as well. What we can't do is judge our enemies ourselves. We're not supposed to take matters into our own hands. So these prayers at their very heart are pleas to God in very visceral language. For God to judge evil, for God to judge the people who are doing bad things to his kids, his children. For God to remember the original promise (Genesis 12:1-3) and do something about it. And then you just leave it up to God. Imprecation is not a justification for a Christian or anyone (whether it was an Old Testament Israelite, either) for taking matters into their own hands. That's just I think how we need to frame the discussion. It's up to God how he will remove and judge those who oppress and curse his children. That's up to God. It might be something mild God decides to do or it may be something harsh, but that's up to God. It's his job description and it's not ours.

I really don't think that there are really any coherent alternatives to take the language seriously, but yet realize that the psalmist isn't asking God permission to do these things himself. They're just using the most visceral language that you

can use, but they're leaving it up to God ultimately. And if God judges the Babylonians a different way, then that's up to God and the person praying the prayer has to be content with the way God took care of the situation. It may not be what they want or what they're feeling, but God lets people emote. God lets people tell him exactly how they feel. The key here is that you let God decide what's best. Lastly, I think we get kind of offended by the language. We need to remember the "divine warrior" imagery from the Old Testament. And it's not just Old Testament. We've talked about this before on the podcast where the description of God as a warrior on behalf of his children (Israel, specifically)... That stuff (like in Psalm 68, just plucking out an example—there are a number of divine warrior passages)... That language in the Old Testament does, in fact, get applied to Jesus in the New Testament. The reason for that is the vision of the Messiah coming back at the Day of the Lord to judge the nations, to judge Israel's enemies. If you look at Day of the Lord passages, yeah—people are going to lose their lives. It's going to be violent and bad. That isn't the only way that God judges, but that's part of the picture. So at the return of the Lord at the Day of the Lord (the return of Christ), he's not coming back blowing kisses. He is cast as the judge of the nations, and that's his job to decide how evil gets judged. But he allows us (he allows the psalmist and I would say us, as well) to vent. He knows who we are, he knows we're human, he allows us to vent. But the venting is supposed to leave the matter with him and not take things into our own hands.

TS: All right, our next question is from Rusty in Oklahoma.

My question is about the women in Matthew's genealogy, like Bathsheba. I am wondering if there is any significance to her name being called *Bathshua* in 1 Chronicles 3. It reminds me of Judah's wife Shua from 1 Chronicles 2. So I wonder if there is more to the reference since Tamar is mentioned in Matthew's genealogy and not Shua. The thing I am impressed by this connection is the lack of a seed from Judah's sons by Shua, except for Shelah who fathers sons in 1 Chronicles 4 who are described as the house of linen workers at *Beth-ashbea*, which sounds and looks a lot like Bathsheba. Could this be one more thread tying the women in Matthew's genealogy together for some reason? 1 Chronicles 4:22 also mentions the grandsons of Judah who ruled in Moab, which could be a slight reference to Ruth as well. And we hear no more about Shelah's sons. So what is Matthew trying to show us? I see four women who have infidelity in common, but is there something else he is messaging?

MH: Well, the short answer is yeah, there is more to this. For the sake of this episode, I'll give some seed thoughts. But this is actually a chapter in my forthcoming book (*Reversing Hermon*). There are things going on in the genealogy specifically with these women that telegraph this idea that the one who will come (the Messiah) will undo the effects of the transgression of the Watchers (the Enochian story of Genesis 6). You think, "What does that have to do with the women?" Well, that's what the chapter is about. The chapter is based

on a recent dissertation from Marquette. I'll just give the seed thoughts here because there are some things that draw these women together. I think it's appropriate to mention Ruth, and of course Bathsheba. I'll just read you a bit of an excerpt from the new book. That's probably the easiest way to do this. We have here a reference to Tamar:

30:00

Tamar is the first of the four women in Matthew's genealogy (Matt 1:3). She is known primarily from Genesis 38 [MH: the questioner gave a reference to Judah in Chronicles, but that's a flashback to Genesis 38], where she deceives Judah, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, into an illicit sexual encounter. We need to recount the story here so the connections to the Watcher template will be decipherable.

Before I quote that, all these women have some sort of sexual transgression element involved in their story, either something done to them or something they do—something just in their back story—that is supposed to draw our attention to the theme of sexual transgression. And then there are things in the text, as well, that take our minds back (in terms of specific vocabulary words) to the episode of Genesis 6:1-4. I'm not going to get into the nuts and bolts of that here. Let's just go to Genesis 38, just so people can sort of get the context. Starting in the first verse:

It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. 2 There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua...

¹² ...In the course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died. When Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. ¹³ And when Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," ¹⁴ she took off her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil...

... and she dresses up like a prostitute. In the verses that we didn't read and some of the backstory, Tamar was the one that had lost the succession of husbands. The last of Judah's sons was sort of next in line because of the whole custom of levirate marriage, and Judah had withheld him from her. It's not just a sexual thing. It's for the purposes of having children, which is tied to inheritance of property and all that kind of stuff. So he has withheld his last son from her because the other ones have died after being married to this woman (Tamar). When Judah's own wife dies, he has a period of mourning and then he goes up to this particular place where the sheep-shearers were. Tamar hears this and she thinks she's going to get revenge, essentially. She's going to trick him. She dresses up like a prostitute, seduces her own father-in-law, and then, of course,

she gets pregnant by that. I'm assuming we know the rest of the story, how she eventually gets vindicated and he is shown to have basically betrayed the thing he should have done, which was to give her his son. We have this whole incident that revolves around this Canaanite woman who was the daughter of Shua. She was *bath* ("the daughter") of Shua: *bath-shua*. Keep that in mind because the terminology is going to come up again, and it already did in the question.

Now Bathsheba's name becomes part of this, because in 2 Samuel 11 (where readers first encounter her), she is called "Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam." In 1 Chronicles 3:5, she is given a different name. She is called "Bath-shua, the daughter of Ammiel." In Hebrew, the first part of the name (*bat* or *bath*) means "daughter." So the name from 1 Chronicles literally is just like the situation back in Genesis 38. It means "daughter of Shua," which is the part of the passage we just read.

This whole issue with *Bath-shua*, connecting Judah's situation where this woman in question was a Canaanite... We're not told specifically if Tamar is a Canaanite, but the woman Judah had married was a Canaanite. She's the daughter of Shua. Then we get this going on with Bathsheba, of course, who gets involved with David. It's because of this that it's possible (and scholars have theorized) that Bathsheba was a Gentile (a Canaanite), so that Uriah and Bathsheba were not a mixed couple (a Jew and Gentile), but they were both Gentiles. The connection back to Tamar is interesting, again, for the purposes that I deal with in that particular chapter. The issue is not so much that these women are Gentiles. We can't prove that all of these women were Gentiles. There are some that were for sure and there are others for whom you can make a peripheral argument like this one. But the real issue is that not only are they potentially (at least two of them but maybe all four of them) sort of "another seed" outside the Israelites, but they definitely (all four of them) have something in their background that has to do with an illicit sexual relationship. That becomes part of the backstory and (in some cases) part of their redemption. In other cases, it's peripheral to them and someone else has to have that problem taken care of and they were victims, that sort of thing.

35:00

But as I'm going to argue in this chapter of the new book, all of these women are connected by the theme of sexual transgression. I'll just give you one example. Ruth is called a *gebirah*, which is the feminine equivalent of *gibbor*, which is a term that comes from Genesis 6:4 (the *nephilim* are called *gibborim*). That doesn't mean anything in terms of her literal, physical genealogy. It's just a term that people would have picked up on that would have taken their minds back to the Genesis 6:1-4 incident—connecting something in Ruth's heritage, in her story. And Boaz is a *gibbor*, as well. There are things going on here that connect their backstory to these four verses in Genesis.

Why does that matter? It matters because of this idea that it was because of the sexual transgression of the Watchers—that they came to earth and they not only

had this heaven/earth transgression, but they also taught humans how to basically destroy themselves through different points of knowledge. There are things about, let's say (one of the things mentioned in Enoch) make-up and perfumes and all this stuff. By themselves, you could look at that and think it's no big deal. Those things are often mentioned in biblical stories to portray a seduction incident, so that takes the reader's mind back to this theme of sexual transgression, which sort of gets its kick-start in Genesis 6:1-4 (or at least the blame for that kind of behavior is laid at the feet of this incident). That becomes the bad well-spring from which people just go crazy. They take something that in and of itself could be neutral. Some of the things that the Watchers "teach" humans are (in other certain passages) neutral, but they can also lend themselves to destructive and self-destructive behavior.

That's why, in Jewish thinking... back to our old question: If you ask the average Christian why the world is the way it is and why there is so much sin and evil, the only answer you're going to get is Genesis 3. If you asked a first-century Jew the same question, they would not say Genesis 3 (the Fall). They would say that's *one* element. The other element is Genesis 6:1-4, and the third element to that is what happened at Babel. So all three of those things frame depravity for a first-century Jew, whereas Christians are taught to only think of one of them and exclude the other two. The New Testament writers *don't* exclude the other two. So the expectation of the Messiah in between the testaments and in certain episodes in the New Testament draws on this idea that the Messiah is supposed to be the cure for all of this garbage, all this depravity that springs from these three incidents (not just the one).

I don't want to go too much further than that because I really can't do the terminology and the naming issue justice in this brief description, but at least those are sort of the nuggets. This is a good catch on the part of the questioner. It's something that Hebrew readers would have noticed, and then the question comes, "Why is it there, and what is the writer trying to intentionally draw attention to?" As we'll see in *Reversing Hermon*, oftentimes it's this episode—this second segment of the three causes for why the Messiah needed to come.

TS: All right. Rachel in Texas wants to know (after reading your notes on Isaiah 34):

40:00

I noticed that both Isaiah 34 and Matthew 24 mention "fig leaves" right after saying that the stars will fall. If the two texts are about the same ideas, would that mean that the "fig leaves" in Jesus' parable represent the same heavenly beings as they do in Isaiah 34? Do you think that is what Jesus was saying? Could you elaborate on what their "coming out" and "summer is near" might mean?

MH: I wouldn't say that the leaves "represent" actual entities. They represent something (I do think I would agree with the questioner) that is consistent in

Isaiah 34. Let's just read the passages so listeners get a feel for the context here. So in Isaiah 34:4 (this is one of the passages that the questioner is alluding to) we read:

**⁴ All the host of heaven shall rot away,
and the skies roll up like a scroll.
All their host shall fall,
as leaves fall from the vine,
like leaves falling from the fig tree.**

We spent a good deal of time talking about Isaiah 34 in an earlier episode, where this language is not just about celestial events. There are other verses in this passage, and there are other passages that make it clear that at the Day of the Lord (when the host of the nations get judged), the host of heaven will get judged, too. It's linking that God is basically going to clean house, not just on the earth but also in the spiritual world (in a nutshell). So it uses this "host of heaven shall fall as leaves fall from the vine" or "like leaves falling from the fig tree." And then in the New Testament, in Matthew 24 (and Matthew is not the only place that has this—you get this in Mark 13, as well), we read:

²⁹ "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven [MH: stars—very familiar language for divine beings in certain contexts] , and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. ³² "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³ So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁴ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

In Matthew 24:32, "fig tree" is the Greek word *sykē*, and that is the same term used in Isaiah 34:4 in the Septuagint. So it's very conceivable to me (and this isn't unique to me; other scholars are going to say the same thing) that in his description of the Second Coming here and the other stuff associated with it (the judgment of the nations, etc.) Matthew is drawing on Isaiah 34:4. I think you can make a really good case for that, that Matthew and Mark have Isaiah 34:4 in mind. The stars are the gods of the nations—the general powers of spiritual

darkness that are hostile to God. There's a lot of precedent for that. In earlier episodes of the podcast we've talked about that at length. They're judged in the final sense at the Day of the Lord. That's when the nations are also judged and believers are put over the nations. In other words, the nations get reclaimed. Their gods are finally defeated and the believers rule the nations of the world in the New Eden on God's behalf, like in Revelation 2 and 3 (toward the end of both of those chapters) we see "to him that overcomes" getting put over the nations and ruling the nations with a rod of iron—the messianic language there used of believers. This is all familiar stuff if you've listened to the podcast for any length of time.

The point of the fig tree is that it's a useful teaching analogy. I'm going to read a little section here from one of my favorite commentaries on Matthew (it might be my favorite one) by R.T. France. He says:

45:00

The fig tree is used because it is the most prominent deciduous tree in Palestine, and one whose summer fruiting was eagerly awaited. The appearance of its new shoots is a clear harbinger of summer, and once they appear the observer may know for sure how long it will be before the fruit is ready.¹¹³ In the same way the occurrence of the preliminary events [MH: of the first century—Jesus' first coming—the "already but not yet"] will inform Jesus' disciples clearly that the process which will end in the temple's destruction is under way and the end is "near, on the threshold."

Recall that there are passages (again, we had this in a whole episode) that speak of the gods already being defeated. In other words, their rightful status is overturned. Paul is demanding that the Gentiles abandon them. Even though God had put them in charge of the nations, they had become corrupt. That's what Psalm 82 is about. God had put them in charge (Deuteronomy 32:8-9). Gentiles, though, should now reject them because the coming of Jesus and the death, burial, and resurrection (especially the resurrection) signals the fact that it's time for the nations to come back home to the true God and abandon the lesser gods who have become corrupt and are their evil taskmasters.

So there are passages that talk about the gods already being defeated, but not yet destroyed. Their ultimate destruction is awaiting a future time at the Day of the Lord. The same is true of the New Testament "tribulation talk." First century believers would (and did) endure severe tribulation. But even worse tribulation would come right before the eschatological Day of the Lord. So I think it's hard for a lot of Bible readers and Bible students to process this kind of stuff. I hate to say it this way, but all they've ever been taught about prophecy is *Left Behind*. So people who only know this sort of Pretribulation Rapture kind of format... This isn't to exclude the possibility of a Rapture. I've said before that I never say that couldn't be the case, but I don't consider it very likely. It *could* be. But if that's all you know—that's your total framework—there are a lot of things in the Gospels

that are going to confuse you. If, however, your framework is the "already but not yet" that we talk about a lot on this podcast, then you can see how some of this stuff Jesus (or Matthew or Mark or whoever) is talking about was real in their day and it really did happen to them, but then there are other passages that say that was just a harbinger of something else to come—sort of the template for something else yet to come. You can see fulfillment in their day *and* fulfillment yet waiting. But if all you're ever trained to think about is whenever somebody says something that sounds eschatological it's *only* future, then you're going to have a tough time reading the Gospels. I just want to throw that out to maybe some listeners that this is really the only way they've ever been taught to process eschatology (end-times talk). There's an "already but not yet" thing that flows through most of this stuff, and that's why we need to pay attention. We don't need to be Amillennialists and say everything's already happened or full Preterists or whatever. And we also don't need to be the other side and say nothing's happened and it's all yet future. Actually, the answer is somewhere in between, like in so many other cases.

I think the fig leaf thing is a useful illustration that once you see this (and you're going to see it, you're going to experience what we're talking about here), but if it's tied to Isaiah 34, then the ultimate destruction of the stars of God is associated with the Day of the Lord, which has not yet happened. You can go to the New Testament, even in the Gospels, and see Jesus and other people talking about how the Day of the Lord is yet distant, yet future. So it's not that there's a contradiction, it's that we have a "both/and" not an "either/or."

TS: Our next question is from Lance. He wants to know:

Why did Jesus ask the Father why He forsook Him on the cross? Jesus obviously knew what He was doing and why He was doing it. Is it a translation thing? Is it something more esoteric?

50:00

MH: I think it's a genuine expression of feeling God has forsaken him. I would just say this generally before we want to jump into some things that I think are helpful here. To affirm the humanity of Jesus is not to deny his deity, any more than when he doesn't know what day or hour he's going to return. In a nutshell... I'm going to read a section from an important book about the crucifixion. It's called *The Death of the Messiah* and it's by Father Raymond Brown, who was a very famous New Testament scholar. He was a Catholic scholar, but his specialization was the Gospels. This is one of the major works on—just like the title says—the death of the Messiah.

But in a nutshell, Jesus knows why he's doing what he's doing. He's there to defeat the powers of darkness and have the solution for the fact that we have to overcome death and the "Lord of the Dead" and all this sort of stuff. He knows Psalms are going to be read in hindsight about resurrection. He knows all this stuff. Yet it's a very human thing for him to feel left alone and in despair. He prays

in Gethsemane to have this cup taken from him if it's possible, but it turns out it's not. So when he has to bear the sins of the world and God doesn't intervene and do it a different way, I think this is a genuine expression of despair. Jesus is human. He's not just God. He is God, but he's also human. This is one of those things where I think we need to just take it at face value and not try to dress it up and pretend it isn't there, like I said a few minutes ago about Jesus not knowing the precise day or hour that he's going to return. The humanity of Christ shows in different passages in different ways. I think we have an instance of that here. I like the way Brown discusses this. I think he does a nice job of capturing this idea. This is from *The Death of the Messiah*, pages 1048 and 1049. (Laughing) This is a massive book!

A particular eschatological aspect is the final battle with evil. In language echoing Isa 11:4, according to 2 Thess 2:8 the Lord Jesus slays the Lawless One (*anomos*) with the breath/spirit (*pneuma*) of his mouth. Acts 8:7 employs *boan* and *phonē megalē* [great voice, great sound] to describe the shriek of unclean spirits as in defeat they come out of the possessed. [MH: so he's comparing this language to the language of Jesus' anguish when he cries out] (Note that on the cross four verses after Matt 27:46 Jesus will let go the *spirit*.) Does the violent description of Jesus' outcry suggest that in his death struggle with evil he feels himself on the brink of defeat so that he must ask why God is not helping him? In any good drama the last words of the main character are especially significant. It is important for us, then, to ask how literally we should take, "My God, my God, for what reason have you forsaken me?" (Ps 22:2).

There is much to encourage us to take it very literally on the level of the evangelists' portrayal of Jesus... In the tragic drama of the Mark/Matt PN Jesus has been abandoned by his disciples and mocked by all who have come to the cross. Darkness has covered the earth; there is nothing that shows God acting on Jesus' side. How appropriate that Jesus feel forsaken! His "Why?" is that of someone who has plumbed the depths of the abyss, and feels enveloped by the power of darkness. Jesus is not questioning the existence of God or the power of God to do something about what is happening; he is questioning the silence of the one whom he calls "My God." If we pay attention to the overall structure of the Mark/Matt PN, that form of addressing the deity is itself significant, for nowhere previously has Jesus ever prayed to God as "God." Mark/Matt began the PN with a prayer in which the deity was addressed by Jesus as "Father," the common form of address used by Jesus and one that captured his familial confidence that God would not make the Son go through the "hour" or drink the cup (Mark 14:35–36; Matt 26:39). Yet that filial prayer, reiterated three times, was not visibly or audibly answered; and now having endured the seemingly endless agony of the "hour" and having drunk the dregs of the cup, Jesus screams out a final prayer that is an inclusion with the first prayer. Feeling forsaken as if he were not being heard, he no longer presumes to speak intimately to the All-

Powerful as “Father” but employs the address common to all human beings, “My God”...

55:00

On theological grounds others challenge more directly a literal interpretation of Mark/Matt. The charge is made that to take literally the wording about God forsaking or abandoning Jesus would be to deny Jesus’ divinity. Certainly Mark did not imply such a denial, for immediately after Jesus’ prayer in 15:34 we find the climactic confession of Jesus as God’s Son (15:39). Still another objection finds despair being attributed to Jesus in a literal interpretation of the prayer. Despair, understood as the loss of hope in God or of salvation, is considered a major sin, and the NT affirms that Jesus committed no sin. This is a rather pointless objection, however, for nothing in the Marcan passage suggests a sense of the loss of salvation or forgiveness (or even the need thereof). Jesus is praying, and so he cannot have lost hope [MH: In other words, if he lost hope, why pray?]; calling God “My God” implies trust. Because he saw how Jesus died, the Marcan centurion confesses that Jesus was God’s Son; Mark could not have meant that Jesus’ despair prompted such a recognition. Thus, despair in the strict sense is not envisaged. Rather the issue is whether the struggle with evil will lead to victory; and Jesus is portrayed as profoundly discouraged at the end of his long battle because God, to whose will Jesus committed himself at the beginning of the passion (Mark 14:36; Matt 26:39, 42), has not intervened in the struggle and seemingly has left Jesus unsupported. (That this is not true will become apparent the second that Jesus dies, for then God will rend the sanctuary veil and bring a pagan [the centurion] to acknowledge publicly Jesus’ divine sonship.) Jesus cries out, hoping that God will break through the alienation he has felt.

I think that's really a good description that honors the transparent reading of the text and lets it be what it is. It's a human expression that we've gone through this whole battle and God isn't intervening, but there are ways to read it and ways to not read it. Brown goes through the ways to not read and gives examples from the same passages that contradict flawed conclusions about how we should read this. In that section I just gave you, that's exactly what Brown does. So he's saying "There are ways to read this and ways to not read it. And you don't read it in certain ways, because if you read the whole passage and the things that immediately follow, you'll find out how you're not supposed to read it... how you're not supposed to regard Jesus' despair." Nevertheless, he leaves it in place. He doesn't try to pretend it's not real.

TS: Our last question is from Kurtis. His question is:

The authorities in Romans 13:1 is *exousia*. I was wondering your thoughts on Romans 13, Ephesians 6:12 and Isaiah 9:6 and in turn its relation to the divine council if there is any.

MH: Ephesians 6:12 is evident. You're dealing with spiritual beings, spiritual forces of darkness. Isaiah 9:6 is probably referring to the government being upon his shoulders. *Exousia* there wouldn't be divine beings, it's going to refer to rule—the responsibility, the task, and the rightful rule.

Let's just focus on Romans 13. I think the *exousia* there (the "authorities" in the plural) refers to human governing authorities. There are a few reasons why. First, if we go to the passage, the first verse says:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.

1:00:00 "Every person" would include Christians. So having been delivered from the divine powers over the nations (let's just look at Gentile Christians for now), the authorities like elsewhere (like Ephesians 6:12)... It makes little sense for Paul to tell Gentile believers to then be subject to them again, and even less sense if we're talking about Jewish believers in Jesus. They were never even under these spiritual authorities. They had only one authority—the God of Israel. So it doesn't make any sense to view them as spiritual powers of darkness there and for Paul to be telling Christians to submit themselves to spiritual powers of darkness. It just doesn't make any sense theologically. The term itself can be very generic in other contexts of just "ruling authorities" in terms of human rulers, and that's the way I take it.

The second reason I would say is that the description of the rulers here in Romans 13 doesn't match the description of the gods of the nations, like in Psalm 82 or other passages. It just doesn't match, because in those passages it's very evident that they're corrupt and evil and wicked. They do the opposite of what Paul describes in Romans 13. The powers here—the powers that be—are to reward righteousness and to punish evil. That's not at all what the gods of the nations were doing. In fact, it's the opposite.

Thirdly, I would say that the reference in Romans 13 to "not bear the sword in vain" is a clear reference to earthly punishment of criminals in that day. It's a very familiar term. So I really don't think there's any good reason in Romans 13 to view the *exousia* there in that passage as the gods of the nations (the principalities and powers).

TS: All right, Mike. That's all the questions we have for this one, so we appreciate you answering our questions. Next week we're back into Ezekiel, is that correct?

MH: Mmhmm... that's correct.

TS: Okay, is there anything else you'd like to add for this show?

MH: No, I think that's good. Those were good questions. Keep the questions coming. We are chipping away at them and we'll do the best we can with them.

TS: That sounds good, Mike. Well, I want everybody to have a Happy New Year and a good 2017. This is our last episode of 2016. It was a good one. Only more good things to happen in 2017. We look forward to it. And again, Mike, thanks for answering our questions. I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.