

# **The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0**

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**“Q&A 8”**

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**With**

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## **Q&A 8**

**Our 8th Question and Answer episode!**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 82, Q&A 8. I'm your layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you doing this year?

**MSH:** Very good. Happy New Year.

**TS:** Are you still following through with your resolutions, no smoking?

**MSH:** Yeah, I'm still trying to do all those things.

**TS:** Good, well, this is our eighth Q&A so we probably got about a bunch of questions here from over 6 people, so you just want to jump right into it? And then after, we have a bunch of updates and news we've got to cover that's happened over the holiday break.

**MSH:** Yeah, that sounds good to me. Let's just jump in.

**TS:** So the first one is from Mark, and his question is, the scene with Jacob in Genesis 32:22-32 was one of those that stood out to me as odd when I first read it. Now he wants to know, and he has about five questions here, so I'm going to read them all and let you attack them. He wants to know, in this situation of Jacob wrestling with God, a unique biblical story or is it based on something else for the sake of theological messaging?

If it is unique, do you believe it happened, as in, did God take human form and allow Jacob to physically wrestle? If it is based on some other story or event, what is the writer taking from and what is the message? What is the significance of the anatomical location of injury to the hip? Is the story event a kind of telling of man's free will in that God allowed man to wrestle with him or foreshadowing of what is to come in Israel's future in the Bible?

**MSH:** Okay Genesis 32 is this incident where Jacob wrestles with the man who, when we go over to Hosea 12, we find out, and even in the Genesis 32 passage, we find out this just wasn't an ordinary man. Hosea uses the term Elohim there. And when the name of the place happens in the Genesis 32 passage when it's named Peniel, I've seen God face to face, you get an indication this isn't just a normal guy. So with that as a backdrop, I'm not really sure what the questioner means by is the story based on something else. I don't know if that means another text, some external text from some other civilization, so I'm not really sure there.

Despite that uncertainty I would say I don't think that this story itself is based on anything. I don't know of any evidence that would suggest it's taken out of some other literary text or it's borrowed in some sense for a polemic purpose like you see in other places. So I don't think it's based on anything. I think it's part of a series of theophanies and angelic appearances as men in the book of Genesis. So in that sense, it's normative. For those who read Unseen Realm would know that yeah, I accept what the biblical text says in these instances, that God not only can but did appear in human form. An appearance of God in human form isn't unique. It actually happens in a number of places.

For those who have not read the Unseen Realm, you'll get a bunch of those, appearance of the Angel of the Lord or just other angels in human form, again, nothing unique. There are plenty of examples. Now, what's unique here one aspect of it is the wrestling, is the struggle. Granted, Genesis 19 you have angels physically handle Lot, Genesis 18, so they do physical

things but we don't have any sort of fight or struggle in another episode. So that part of it makes it unique. And that's part of the story, that you have this episode that is a way to illustrate or maybe cast in a different light, because Jacob's name is going to be changed to Israel, but sort of the things that he's encountered in life, the difficulties abstractly, that he's encountered in life, struggles so to speak.

And really his strivings with God because the whole episode stealing the birth right and some of the other stuff he's done, this sort of gives visual or in this case corporeal form and for the sake of Jacob, a sort of visceral time and place reminder of really what he's been doing spiritually, struggling with God and against God. And so it becomes kind of a living object lesson for him. And we can pick up on that because we can go back and read the account. Now what about the injury to the hip? The hip is specifically mentioned in verse 32. That's important. Let me just read it.

<sup>32</sup> Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

**MSH:** Now the reason I say that's important will become evident in a moment here. But just generally, what we have here is this is a comment by the writer to sort of cast an explanation for why later Israelites, the phrase, unto this day, therefore to this day the people of Israel don't eat this or that, so later Israelites had a custom of not eating this part of the thigh that is on the hip socket. That doesn't come from Leviticus.

It was something customary and so the writer living post-Jacob is explaining this custom in light of this event so it provides an explanation for the custom. That's an editorial note added to the Torah, either when this portion was originally composed or something later but it gives a justification or explanation for the custom. Now I want to read just a statement here from one commentator. A lot of the explanation's kind of long and windy but this one brings up something that I think is worth addressing in light of some of the stuff we've talked about in Leviticus. Westermann says,

“The reason given for the prohibition which does not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament is difficult. The prohibition is concerned with the part of an animal's body whereas the event that gave rise to it was concerned with a person, Jacob. The most likely explanation, according to Westermann, is that this part of the body was subject to taboo because it was regarded as belonging to the reproductive area, the loins, because it's the thigh that joins the hip.”

**MSH:** I don't really buy that. And I mention it because other listeners might come across that, and we've had sort of these abstract laws and rules and customs in Leviticus as we're still going through the book of Leviticus, but we've run into these things before. And they've made sense in their own context but there's some problems here. On the one hand, it's true that various references in the Old Testament to the “thigh” in English translations are actually euphemisms for the genitals. That is true. For instance, let me just give you an example. Eliezer, the servant with Abraham, this whole thing about put your hand under my thigh and vow to me that you're going to find a wife for my son so that my lineage can live on and I can produce an heir and all

this kind of stuff. Without getting into the details, this was a familiar expression because there's nothing sexual going on between Eliezer and Abraham but the idea of putting the hand under the thigh, really putting it under the genital area.

Specifically, this vow was taken to ensure the survival of the lineage. Abraham was looking to continue the bloodline through Isaac. Isaac needed a wife. So there are certain contexts and this is an Ancient Near Eastern, Middle Eastern custom of antiquity as to how you would take a vow because it sort of linked your success in the vow, not only in this context with someone else's line but abstractly you were binding yourself to an agreement and the well-being of your own family, either in terms of retaliation or in terms of success or failure, depends on your ability to carry this sort of thing out. So that does happen. It's true but I don't really think that this kind of works in the Jacob passage.

It seems better to say that the struggle left Jacob with a permanent injury to perpetually remind him of the event and the focus of the event is his name change. So he has this physical infirmity now and every time his attention is drawn to that, his intention will be drawn to this struggle and the fact that you're no longer Jacob, you're Israel, just the whole episode and what happened to him physically and spiritually through that, and then later generations, by adopting this custom, would also be reminded of the event. So the food taboo here sort of commemorates the event as well. As far as foretelling something about man's free will or what's going to happen to Israel in the future, I'm not sure which future were talking about. Is it the bondage in Egypt? I would say no. It doesn't have anything to do with that.

Blessing, maybe but I'm dubious of that. Exile, I don't really see this foreshadowing specific future events. I realize why the question's being asked. You could say well, this conceivably conveys the idea that it's Yahweh's people, Israel. Persecution is going to come. Physical harm is going to come. But I would say that is a bit odd because this was an angel, and I would argue likely the Angel of Yahweh, who inflicted this and it wasn't a punishment. It was leaving him with a physical reminder. Of all the biblical figures that might need reminding of a relationship they have with God and their responsibilities, it might be this guy Jacob because he's continually just flip-flopping all over the place with his loyalties, his own ethics, that kind of thing. So I think it just makes better sense to go with something like that rather than try to abstract it too far out.

**TS:** Mark has a tray of Enoch questions, which means three. The first one is, was the Enoch of Genesis 5:21-24 a character based on someone or something and used by the writer of Genesis 5:21-24 for some purpose he wants the reader of the time to understand or did this Enoch first show up in this biblical writing Genesis 5:21-24? Second one is, if Enoch was unique to Genesis 5:21-24, do you believe he really existed? And the third one is, if Enoch was a character based on something else, who is it and what do you believe was the purpose/message?

**MSH:** Well, there are two Enoch's in the early chapters of Genesis and they're distinct people. There's Enoch who's the son of Cain and the father of Irad, that's Genesis 4:17-18, and then there's this one the question's really directed at, Enoch, the son of Jared, Genesis 5:18, who's the father of Methuselah, verse 21. I don't think the one in chapter 5 plays off the one chapter 4, so if that's sort lurking behind the question, I don't think there's a relationship there. Now, we've talked a little bit about the genealogies and I've posted some things on the blog before. The genealogies of Genesis 5 in which this particular Enoch occurs, the one who live 365 years, the

one who was taken by God, the one who walked with God, that sort of thing, that figure is nestled in with a bunch of these other pre-flood figures. And their genealogies are given, these long age spans and whatnot.

There is a striking parallel to the genealogies of Genesis 5 and the long ages from Samaria. It's known as the Sumerian King list. So in that sense, the Enoch figure occupying position seventh, the seventh from Adam, is going to have a number seven parallel in that list. And it's true in the Samaria King list there are some explicit connections by virtue of names with things, people that show up in Genesis 5. So the Samaria material would predate the Genesis material by a considerable amount but even if there is some sort of, borrowings are not really the right term. What I think we have going on here and you'd have to go up to the blog those of you who are listening here. I recently, it's been in the last week, posted an article by a guy named Lloyd Bailey that proposes what I think, to this point anyway that I've seen, is the best attempt, it's not a conclusive kind of piece of work or article, is the best attempt I've seen to make sense of the numbers of the long age spans in Genesis 5 through some mathematical cipher or mathematical pattern or device.

I really do think something is going on there because you can do the same thing with the Samaritan King list and there's this very obvious relationship between these two things. So instead of just sort of borrowing, we're writing Genesis 5 today, whether you think that's Moses or somebody else, they're not sitting there thinking like I need a King list here and I need some genealogies and I like math. Let's throw some of that in there. Oh, here's one from Samaria. I'll borrow this and now I can get to work. That isn't the point. What I think's going on, Genesis 1-11 is very Mesopotamian in its flavor in all sorts of ways. It is a re-writing or a re-casting in a number of cases for polemic purposes, for theological purposes, a recasting, a retelling of pre-flood and post-flood events, specifically not from a pagan viewpoint, specifically not from a Mesopotamian religious theologizing of history.

It's an Israelite, it's a Yahwehistic theologizing of history. For the sake of analogy, that's how I'll talk about it. So in that sense there's some relationship to this. But in terms of somebody just sort of liking something they read and I'm going to borrow that and have one of my own, there's more to it than that because there is this pre-flood imposed post-flood history. And there are theological messages that can be conveyed when you are, as a writer, when you are reacting to or responding to some other piece of literature, in this case the Samaria King list, that your readers who were familiar with that will know better, maybe not completely because in this case, the mathematical ciphering is still something of a mystery, even though you read Bailey's article, there are a lot of patterns he detects that are pretty apparent you once you follow what he's saying. But in some way, they would know that the writer of the Torah here is responding and replying to, in some cases for theological reasons, to this other version of events. So in that sense there is a relationship and there is a purpose.

As far as did Enoch existing, I don't think there's any reason to deny the existence of a person named Enoch before the flood event. That's wouldn't really be any point of uniqueness in and of itself. There's nothing special. If you have an Israelite writer who is writing about Enoch and he's number seven, number x in the list, any of these guys, there's nothing special about being the only you. So in this version, the name is Enoch. Now there could be, people have argued for the idea that, well, both lists, even though they're composed at different times, both writers, even though there's this considerable gap of time between the two, both writers are thinking of the same individuals, the same this guy or that guy. That's quite possible but it would

still be that guy. It would still be a historical figure in that instance. So what I'm trying to say here is the fact that there could be a mathematical cipher going on in Genesis 5 with these genealogies does not rule out that these were real kings or real people and that God could interact with one of them, Enoch, and take him prematurely or give him some kind of special point of information.

So I don't view those ideas as mutually exclusive. As far as the question about the purpose of this and what the messaging might be, since I've already said that I think the numbers in Genesis 5 are some sort of mathematical cipher. There are specific conceptual and theological ideas that the writers trying to convey through this technique. Since I embraced that idea then I do think there is some sort of message. What it might be, people are still trying to figure out. Now here's a quote from Bailey, the article I mentioned I posted on my blog a short time ago. Bailey says this,

“It is often pointed out that Enoch's life span of 365 years equals the number of days in the solar year. The connection between the two lies in the identity of his counterpart in the Sumerian King list. They're both in the seventh position. The name there is Enmenduranna. Another text tells us that he was summoned to heaven to be instructed in the lore of the *baru*-priesthood. His cult city, according to the King List, is Sippar, well known as a seat of solar worship. Further connection between the two persons (Enoch and Enmenduranna) may be found at Gen. 5:24 where the former is likewise taken to heaven ('Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him').”

**MSH:** So there's this relationship and you say well, why would the writer of Genesis 5, what would be the point? The point would be to deny that the *baru*-priesthood of Samaria had special knowledge from their god or gods. It would deny that we should be worshipping the sun as the sort of progenitor of the way the heavens work, the way the year works, the calendar year. It's Yahweh of Israel. You go back and read Genesis 1, it's God, the God of Israel who created the sun, moon, stars for times and seasons and all this stuff.

So there's some theological jousting going on in that but it's actually bigger than that. Let me read you a selection. This is going to be a fairly lengthy selection from book by Rachel Elijor. And for those of you who do have access to the Divine Council bibliography, this is not available in PDF. It's a book that I couldn't find in PDF. It's called *The Three Temples*, and it's basically about astral religion in Israelite and Jewish religion, biblical and inter-testamental second period Jewish thinking theology. So here's what she says. Follow along. It's really kind of fascinating. She writes here, this is the beginning of chapter 4 in that book. She writes,

“Time as conceived by the authors of Qumran literature, the Dead Sea Scrolls, in particular the Temple scroll, a text known as MMT, the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, the Damascus document, the Blessings of Psalms scroll, the Calendars of the Priestly Discourses and certain pseudopigraphic works, namely Jubilees and first and second Enoch. A time was conceived by these people as something not arbitrary. It was not an arbitrary man-made structure or human order dependent on unstable observations and determinations influenced by external conditions,

adjustments, and errors. Time was of divine origin, a cosmic pattern obeying preordained immutable laws, a cycle that had been recurring since sacred time was imprinted on nature during the seven days of creation and consecrated through the Sabbath day. Time was envisaged as the reflection of divine order in the universe, so designed as to perpetuate the cycle of life, blessing, and fertility, an order in which time and space are sanctified and interdependent from the earliest stages of creation which took place in time divided into seven days and in the space formed during those seven days. The calendar was not entrusted to man subject to adjustment and change, dependent upon human calculations or terrestrial considerations, for it represented the concept of a profound comprehensive reality, a divine reality beyond the reach of the senses but reflected in the cyclic numerical harmony revealed in the passage and changes of time. The calendar, based on a cycle of Sabbaths and seasons, embodied the eternity of the primeval order based on the eternal cycle of the sun and the cyclic motion of the celestial bodies which could be precisely predicted by numerical calculation. The calendar also related the secrets of the cyclic nature of procreation depended on accounting and calculation.”

**MSH:** I'll just stop there. In other words, it refers broadly to nature, there's planting and harvest ideas like that, but also a certain fairly regular set of time for conception and childbirth, those sorts of things in both the human and animal kingdom. So back to Elijior,

“The calendar also related to the secrets of the cyclic nature of procreation dependent on counting and calculation, purification and oath, ensuring the continuity of abundance life and fertility. Any infringement of this sacred cyclic pattern as expressed in the fixed numerical proportions of its component parts, any attempt to ignore the divine pattern based on number and counting would generate impurity, bringing in its wake curse, death, and oblivion. The calendar of weeks and seasons of Sabbaths and covenants with its eternal cyclic numerical pattern was taught to humans by divine angelic revelation.”

**MSH:** Now if you've read the Book of Enoch, that's very explicit, how teaching humans how the celestial heavens work and time encounters. This is laid at the feet of the watchers. And so she's referring to this Second Temple material that discusses that. Now with respect to Enoch, she writes,

“The aim of Enoch literature, whose hero described as Enoch have you chosen from among the sons of Adam and called a righteous man, repeatedly transcended the boundaries of time and place. It was designed to link cosmic with the ritual simplicity to elucidate in detail the relationship between divine sevenfold structure of heavenly time, as reflected by sign and oath like Sabbath's son, the number seven, son of righteousness, these sorts of phrases. Enoch, son of Jared, was the seventh in the list of generations from Adam to Noah. This is stated in the biblical record of Adam's line and in the list of patriarchs of the world in a prayer



found at Qumran. The length of his mortal life, 365 years, was exactly parallel to the number of days in the solar year, specified sometimes elsewhere as 364 and sometimes as 365 in the various calendar traditions.

**MSH:** Now what she's alluding to there is in some Dead Sea Scrolls, there is the number 365 for the calendar year and there's the number 364. And it's a long-standing academic debate as to why there's a difference in the numbers. Is there something being communicated there? Elior has a footnote here. She says,

“The real solar year comprises 365 1/4 days that a full cycle of the sun's apparent motion covers that but the schematic year in the Qumran calendar consists of 364 days, which was 52 weeks, 52 sevens. The calculation comes out to 364. The number of days in the solar year was quite well known in antiquity. We learn from Egyptian literature and Second Enoch, and the authors of Enoch and Jubilees were well aware of this discrepancy, 365 versus 364. We do not know how the priestly community actually coordinated the real and ritual numbers but there are cyclic calculations involved in a calendar of 364 days and an additional day was included in the ritual count, which was perhaps added once in four years to compensate for the difference.”

**MSH:** So I'm going to stop there but you get the idea that Jewish writers and theologians looked at Genesis 5 and they produced a lot of this other material in this stream of Second Temple Jewish tradition, books like Enoch, and that material tells you that they're looking back at Enoch and they're thinking something is up here with Enoch, with this 365. So to those people, there was a purpose. There was a message and to those people, as Elior commented, they linked that number because he was the seventh from Adam. Seven is important, seven days, six days and then the Sabbath, that's a week.

They linked that number and his age number at 365, Enoch became for them both a symbol and a cipher and a figure through whom the truth about time and calendar and the movements of the heavens, the celestial objects, all the stuff associate with time and keeping time, Enoch became the central figure in understanding that, and tracking it, and mapping it, and looking at it, trying to discern meaning out of it. Because the belief was, and I've commented on this before, the belief was that the God of Israel is the one that created this system. And when we observe this system, when we tap into it, not only are we trying to mimic it with our rituals on earth to observe it and keep in sync with it through Sabbaths and festivals and seasons and all this stuff, not only are we trying to do that but we believe as the Jews at the period did, we believe that God can be communicating certain things he's up to through celestial events.

I've talked about this before relation to the birth of Jesus and all that sort of thing. So in that sense, this is what's going on with Enoch. So in Enoch's case, the mathematical cipher was taken very clearly to relate to timekeeping and the way the heavens work. They're doing what God made them to do and when something unusual happens or when we observe certain positions of certain things and the ancients attach certain meaning to certain stars in certain positions and whatnot, that that telegraphs something to us. We're eons removed from this way of thinking but this is what was going through their head. So I just wanted to give an illustration of what some of that involves. And at the end of our episode today when we talk about what

some things Mike is working on, if I remember I'll bring this back up because there is something I'm working on that relates to this specifically, but at this point, we'll just move on to the next question.

**TS:** Alright. The three are from Lindsey, and the first one is, should we imagine the vision of Daniel 7 to be literal in a sense that the beast he sees are more than merely symbols representing kingdoms but actual divine beings in heaven receiving authority for their respective nations to rule the world for a time?

**MSH:** I don't think so. I think they are just visions. They are artificial composite beasts that telegraph symbolically the character of the nations in question. I say that because the text makes it pretty clear that the beasts are nations. They are to be understood as nations.

**TS:** The second one is, Yahweh allocated the nation's to sons of God, but what about new nations that rose up after the event? Would there have been a new son of God allocated to newer nations, like Rome for example?

**MSH:** No, I would say no to that because the issue is the geography. The geography stays the same even when the place names change and even when we have a change in which human population gets control over the geography. The geography is the same. So I think the fact that it can change hands and it can get other names doesn't really change sort of the outlook or the worldview of Deuteronomy 32.

**TS:** The last one from Lindsey is, what do you think of the language of cosmic upheaval in the Olivet discourse and how it appears to draw from Old Testament texts about the judgment of nations? Would the stars fall from heaven and heavenly powers that are shaken refer rather to heavenly upheaval and something like meteors preceding the Lord's return?

**MSH:** I wouldn't read too much into making a distinction like that since the judgment of the nations is part of the eschaton. It is part of the end of the world, if you want to use that language, the day of the Lord, that kind of thing. So I don't think we can make a neat distinction between the two things. That's what I heard in the question, so I wouldn't do that.

On the other hand, you get this reference to the judgment of the heavenly powers and I do think that there is something to viewing the judgment of the heavenly powers and the nations they control being both geographical regions and entities, if I can call it that, and these cosmic celestial spiritual powers. I think there is a connection there. If you go to a passage like Isaiah 34, you actually have them mentioned in tandem. This passage draws on some things from Psalm 82, which is going to be familiar to a lot of my listeners. But in Isaiah 34, I'll just start at the beginning. It says,

Draw near, O nations, to hear,  
and give attention, O peoples!  
Let the earth hear, and all that fills it;  
the world, and all that comes from it.

<sup>2</sup>For the LORD is enraged against all the nations,  
and furious against all their host;

**MSH:** Now, you can take that language there, host, but elsewhere, and I can't remember if I've actually ever posted this paper but, not this last year but the year before at the academic conferences, there was a guy who wrote a paper, part of his dissertation, on this passage and it links to Psalm 82 and to Deuteronomy 32. And he made the observation in that paper that their host in Hebrew, that phrase when it occurs elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible frequently denotes divine beings, like the heavenly host, cosmic spiritual beings. So you read that, the Lord is enraged against all the nations and furious against all their host, you think that this refers to human armies, probably not. It's not that it can't but it's not only that. It continues in verse 2. It says,

he has devoted them to destruction, [**MSH: which is an interesting phrase, again, it's *charam*, which those who've read Unseen Realm know that that sort of a packed verb there**] has given them over for slaughter.

<sup>3</sup>Their slain shall be cast out,  
and the stench of their corpses shall rise; [**MSH: Now we're talking about something physical**]

the mountains shall flow with their blood.

<sup>4</sup>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.

**MSH:** So here you have an example where this celestial upheaval language, this cosmic upheaval language is used both in probably astronomical terms. It includes judgment of the nations and then lurking behind the background, because the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, uses astronomical language, just the phrase host of heaven, sun, moon, and stars, host of heaven, for those who are familiar with the Divine Council stuff, you trace that language through Deuteronomy, it gets linked to the gods, to the gods of the nations in Deuteronomy 32.

It sort of culminates there so all of these things I would say are in play since the presumption was that celestial objects either were heavenly powers or were connected to heavenly powers or whatever the relationship was. It's going to be different in the mind of ancient people. Nobody's thinking of the same thing all the time but you have all these ideas on the table so we can't rule out any of these things. Only God would really know what measure of each possibility is in view, but for me, I think all of these things are in play.

**TS:** Okay, the next three are from Eric from Pelican Rapids, Minnesota. The first one is, I have no formal credentials to back it up but I do a fair amount of Bible teaching junior high to adult. I have to admit that your knowledge makes me feel inadequate to the task, which is why he appreciates your blog posts on June 25, another sign of how anemic evangelical pulpits have become. Can you expound on what you feel the role of the not as educated as you Bible teacher is and what he has to offer to those willing to listen?

**MSH:** It's a great question. I would say just do the job. The job is important and, full disclosure here, I would once have been your student and lapped it up. So the amount of knowledge really has nothing to do with the need to do the job and the need for the job to get done. It has more to do with who your audience is and who your audience might be in the future, in other words, what would kind of ministry you envision yourself having. If you are, I hate to say it this way because it's going to sound negative and I don't mean to sound negative or not overly negative but, if you are a dedicated student of Scripture that puts you ahead of most people in your church.

That sounds bad but it's blunt and it's true. If you are a tenacious dedicated student of Scripture, most people are not. Now this is a conclusion that I personally had to be drawn to kicking and screaming. I did not want to believe it. But life has taught me and ministry has taught me that it's true. I remember when I became a Christian in high school and on into college, I went to Bible College, a Christian school, and I dabbled in seminary. But I remember thinking that, again, I didn't have any background. I was unchurched. I didn't have any background so take this for what it's worth. But I remember thinking and assuming that every Christian was into the Bible as I was, and God basically had to in some cases, disturbing ways, tell me, no Mike that is a misguided thought.

That is just not true. You can wish it was true and you can try to live in this fairytale world where it is true but it is not true. So I would say to Eric look, if you're a dedicated student, you are already ahead of this curve that you might feel like you're behind. Don't worry about it. Just do the job. Most of the people in church are going to be fairly low information. What I mean by that, that sounds pejorative but what I mean by that is they don't assign a real urgency or a need to knowing lots of Bible stuff. It doesn't mean they're unfaithful, doesn't mean that at all. They have made the decision to follow Christ and so they're content with that. They're dedicated to it. They're not going to change their mind about it. They're not going to waffle, but they're not going to be like you, and they're not going to be like me.

So do the best you can, learn as much as you can, and you are already ahead of this curve, so don't let the low information folks sort of ignore what you say, don't let that bother you. The people who are there to learn will thank you for the effort. They're the ones you're really there for in terms of depth, but you can get everybody. And teaching somebody something about Scripture, it's all important. So don't worry about your credentials, don't worry about I don't know as much as this guy, that guy, who cares? You are in a place to do this job. It's an important job so do it. Don't use it as an excuse to not do it or to do it less than your capable of doing it.

**TS:** I'd like to add to that. If I was in junior high, speaking from a layman point of view, and somebody exposed me to this way of thought or ideas or the context Scripturally, I would've loved it. Just the fact that you're exposing it to people, it's up to them to go on and learn as much as they can or they want to do but just the mere fact that you're exposing people to these ideas and way of thought is more than enough that, hopefully, will last the rest of their life on Bible study.

**MSH:** You will not capture everybody. You won't even capture the fascination of the majority. Look, this is me talking. This is Mike Heiser talking. This is what I try to do on the web. I have

had to come to grips with the fact that the sweet spot of my ministry, it's not the masses of people in church, even though I wrote a book like supernatural to try to spark interest in this sort of thing with just the average new believer, the average low information believer. We try to do things like that and with my books, the 60 Second Scholar, all that, it's all aimed at those people. But the reality is the sweet spot of my ministry are the five or six people in every church who are just starved for content.

Those are the people that when I think of, if I had to focus on just one audience as being the primary for what I do or what I can do with the rest of my life, it's those five or six people. It's not the masses. Someone else can reach them and I can give them material to help spark an interest in Scripture. I realized this just sounds bad, like, we have to work hard at getting Christians interested in the Bible. But the fact the matter is, yeah, you do, and for me, and I'm saying for Eric look, if you're worried about I just don't know; if I knew more, I'd get more people interested. Forget it. Do not let that define your ministry. Learn as much as you can, dispense as much as you can, realizing that it will be juicy. It will be chunky biblical theological goodness to only a few. But the ones who aren't in that group, you can still teach them something. And if you don't, who's going to? So just do the job.

**TS:** And as with anything, the more you learn, the more questions you have. It never ends. It just keeps going and going.

**MSH:** It never ends for me. Exhibit A to that is the Divine Council bibliography. The project's complete now but there are lots of things that will get added to that, I could add to that. I don't have a photographic memory so I don't remember at all the contents of everything in there. Even if I did, a lot of that content would still generate questions that I'm still thinking about, and I am, so it never ends but you are going to be the product of the result of cumulative affect, cumulative effort.

And you have to take the long look and not halt yourself or impede yourself by thinking oh, I could be more effective, God would be happier with me or have a better ministry if I knew XYZ like this other person does. That's just the wrong way to think about learning Scripture and it's the wrong way to think about ministry.

**TS:** Eric's last question is, you mentioned 70 or 72, depending on how you count for the number of nationalities divided at Babel. Has it occurred to you or do you see any significance that 24, the number of human elders in Revelation, is exactly 1/3 of 72, and Satan fell and took one third of heaven with him?

**MSH:** It has but the gods over the nations are not said to be the result of a satanic fall so I see no correlation between the two. In the same way, I wouldn't see correlations between all the things in the Bible associated with the number 70. There are a lot of them. It doesn't mean they're all connected or correlatable. I also think the Masoretic Text number 70 is preferable to the Septuagint 72. The difference between the two, by the way, for those who may not recall this from Unseen Realm or didn't read it, the difference is how the Septuagint translator divides two names in the Table of Nations list instead of keeping them combined.

So both numbers, 70 and 72, derived from the same source, Genesis 10. It's just a translator decided to do one thing with a name that the MT didn't do. When you get 70 or 72 in

New Testament manuscripts, it's because one person is referencing the Hebrew text. The other one's using the Septuagint. It all goes back to Genesis 10. It all goes back to the Deuteronomy 32 worldview, which builds off of Genesis 10 and Genesis 11. So there are other problems, too. You have a third of the stars get cast to the earth, that's actually ambiguous. Are the third conquered by the dragon? Do they get killed, are they conquered, or beaten, or do they defect with the dragon? The text isn't really clear.

You could read it either way. Revelation 12, that's the passage where you get this third of the Angels and falling and that sort of thing. It's comes from Revelation 12. That portrayal is also associated with the birth of the Messiah, if you go back and read Revelation 12. So it's not associated with the division of the nations, the Deuteronomy 32 worldview. Another one is 24, of course, is 12+12, and those 24 are faithful to God. If that number does align to the number of the sons of Israel and then the 12 disciples, they're all loyal. None of them are defecting or are evil. So I don't see how it would make sense to correlate them with the fallen 24 of Revelation 12, the fallen third. I don't see how that would make any sense. Now, there's something still lurking behind this.

That's another possibility because Revelation 12, we have this astral theological stuff going on there, that we have this astral prophecy stuff associated with the birth of the Messiah that I've talked about before. That's Revelation 12. Well, here we have the 24 elders here is also in the book of Revelation, Revelation 4-5. So there may be some sort of astronomical thing about them as well, and I'll give you an example here. Bruce Malina, who is the guy who wrote a book called *On the Genre and Message of Revelation*; subtitle is *Star Visions and Sky Journeys*. Malina is a New Testament scholar. His focus is on sociological stuff in the New Testament era. He believes that Revelation, the book, is a very good example of the literary genre known as astral prophecy.

If you want to know why, get his book and read the intro at least. I've commented on Malina's book before. I think he observes some things that I think are really important and that New Testament scholars need to pay attention to. I think he goes a little overboard. He minimizes that Revelation's use of the Old Testament, for example, which is really crucial. It's not just about astrological or astral theological stuff in the Greco-Roman world but he tends to sort of get tunnel vision. I've criticized him for that before, but I recommend the book because he'll introduce you to things that you'll never find anywhere else. But he says this on pages 93 and 94, Malina thinks that the 24 might point to something called astronomical decans. I'm not real sure about that. I'm not committed to the idea. It's just something I'm unaware of it and I'm thinking about but here's what he says. This is on page 93.

“In Revelation 4:4, around the control throne, making a circle in the sky along the celestial Horizon were 24 thrones. **[MSH: So you have the 24 elders surrounding the throne of God and of course, they're enthroned and so you have 24 thrones surrounding the central throne.]** On the astral thrones are 24 gold reef person's clothed in garments of light called elders. The astral thrones themselves mark off 24 segments of the horizon while the central throne of God might readily be identified with a constellation. From where do the 24 thrones derive and what is a throne in this case? **[MSH: And then he quotes Ptolemy, the famous Ptolemy who says,]** The planets are said to be in their own

chariots or thrones and the like when they happen to have familiarity in two or more of the four sided ways with places in which they are found. For then their power is most increased in effectiveness by the similarity and cooperation of the kindred property of the signs which contain them. In some thrones are positions of power in the sky. Now why would there be 24? **[MSH: and then he quotes Diodoro of Sicily who wrote,]** shortly before the Christian era, shortly before the AD period, who observes relative to Babylonian astronomy this. Beyond the circle of the zodiac, they, the Babylonians, designate 24 other stars of which one half they say are situated in the northern parts and one half in the southern. And of these, those which are visible, they assigned to the world of the living while those which are invisible they assigned or they regard as being adjacent to the dead, and so they call them “judges of the universe”. **[MSH: So what Malina is getting at, I’ll read you two or three more every two or three more sentences here. There’s something astronomical going on here. He says,]** In terms of celestial personages, these elders on their thrones of power would fit the profile of those truly significant astronomic beings of antiquity, the astral deities known as decans. The word decan from the Greek deca, 10, is a creation of the Hellenistic period to designate the astral deities who dominate over every 10° of the circle of the zodiac. These deities are far more ancient than the Hellenistic period since the decans derived from Egypt in Pharaonic times. The deities in question often varied in number from 72 to 24, although 36 was the proper decan number given a circle of 360°.

**MSH:** And then he just goes on and on with more of that stuff. So the reason I'm quoting this is since we have this astral kind of thing happening in Revelation 12, since there other examples of John's writing where John uses things like gematria. He uses lots of symbolic language. John is famous for this. Maybe the 24 elders has something to do with that. I don't know. I'm not committed to Malina's view. I think it's interesting and something that I'm reading about because of something else I'm working on. So probably just best to leave it there along with the previous comments.

**TS:** The next question is from Jason and he is currently reading through Exodus. There seems to be a pattern when the Lord tells Moses something to tell the Israelites and then Moses tells them something slightly different and often more restrictive than what God said. So the Lord gives a simple plain instruction, Moses then embellishes and adds onto it. Is there any theological lesson here? Jesus chastised the Pharisees for adding to God's law. Did that pattern start with Moses or am I reading too much into it?

**MSH:** Well, honestly, I don't see a problem here. God said they could take a day's portion and Moses defines a day's portion as a homer. Since it's his stomach and the stomach of the fellow Israelites, that's I think just a judgment on his part so I think it's just pragmatic. In other words, take what you'll eat. Don't waste it. And don't think about storing up excess. You need to trust God that you'll be fed tomorrow so take only what you'll eat now. I don't think there's really anything to be read into the difference.

I don't think Moses is changing the command. I think he's applying it to their specific situation in terms of what they'll eat. Don't store it. You're not going to waste it. You're going to trust God that we're going to get this every day because that's the point.

**TS:** The next question is from Matthew in Southern California. First, he thinks he's getting a handle on the ideas behind the Babel event but he was curious about the mindset of the people that gathered together in Shinar to build the thing. The phrase in Genesis 11:4, let us make a name for ourselves, makes him think perhaps the goal was apotheosis.

Is that a reasonable assumption or do you think it was something else like perhaps trying to contact and/or worship lesser elohim, and if so, this being prior to God separating the nations and apportioning their overseers, who would these elohim be? I guess the underlying question would be were Marduk and Ishtar and the rest known and worshipped before God appointed them over the nations?

**MSH:** It's an interesting question because of the ramifications for, how do I want to say this, how you would understand the flood and the geography of all that. I think taken the first part of it at first, the whole notion of. I think he meant apotheosis. That idea is sort of, for lack of a better way to put it and do it succinctly, to become divine, divinization, that's sort of thing. So we're going to build this tower so we can sort of join the gods and they can make us part of their family and all that kind of stuff. We can become like them, become divine now. In principle, I don't see that concept being in contradiction to the concept of they were just building this to do just normal worship, let's just put it that way.

They're not unrelated concepts but I think it's a bit of a stretch to presume that those building the Tower of Babel have joining the divine, in terms of your becoming divine, in view. I don't think that they would've viewed building the temple complex that that would lead to divinization for everybody. Typically in Mesopotamia, that kind of language was reserved for kings and priests, and in Mesopotamia, king and the priest could be the same person. So I don't think it's broadly applied to all the workers, that kind of thing. That would be a stretch. Now Genesis 1:26 is a good example for Israelites thinking that does democratize divine sonship, every person is God's imager, and we have this family metaphor that's part of the imaging idea that I discuss in the Unseen Realm. But I don't see Genesis 11 really making that point about the whole worship thing.

It really depends on how you sort of view the chronology. I think certainly before the Babel event, it's how does the Babel event, the Tower of Babel and the flood event before it, had does that align with certain things that an archaeologist would dig up, some object of devotion or some figurine of a deity or whatever? And the answer to that really is really hard to know, how those things fit together. The way the biblical story presents this is that there is at least knowledge of the one true God up through the Babel account and then that's where this judgment occurs. So I think the surface reading there, the face value reading there is that this is the point at which you get other pantheons. This is the biblical rationale, the explanation that this is an act of judgment.

You could, depending on how you'd think about the archaeology and the chronological questions and even the question of the extent of the flood, you could presume that while it probably took a long time to build this thing and the migrations that are described in Genesis 11 took a long time and maybe people were already either adopting the worship of some other



entity that they believed exist because they're going to believe in an animate active supernatural world, that idea that surely God must have other divine beings that work with him. Let's worship one of them. Who knows what they're thinking but you could have some sort of precursor ideas so that when we get to the Babel event, that the Tower becomes a manifestation of not only just a willingness to depart from the will of Yahweh but also a change in loyalties. Maybe they are worshipping some other deity or at least that's what they're thinking in their head.

That's what they're doing, they're aligning themselves with some other force or deity that they either have been exposed to or whatever. We're just not told. We're not told how this chronology works. So it's possible some of this could have began before the Babel event but the most transparent reading of it, what you get the biblical text, is that if this is a punitive act on the part of Yahweh because what happens at Babel. But the mere act of building it could suggest there's something else going on. So I think that's a thought that we need to have on the table and make part of what we think about when it comes to this particular worldview. Going back to the divinization question, I think making for themselves a name doesn't really have divinization apotheosis in view. And the reason I say this is because *shem*, the word name, is the object of this verb, *asah*, nine times the Old Testament.

And each time the notion of achieving renown or achieving fame works really well in the context and so I don't see this passage as an exception. I don't see Genesis 11 as being the exception to, oh, we're not thinking about building renown for ourselves, that this is the place where we localize the deity and anyone who wants to relate to the deity has to come over here to us. That would've made them famous. I think that's quite sufficient for the context as opposed to, oh, if we do this we'll become part of the divine family. I think that's a bit of a stretch for Genesis 11.

**TS:** Okay, the next few are from Chris, and the first one is, what criteria were used to decipher a person's maturity or ability to read and/or practice various mystical techniques? In articles such as the Old Testament response to Ancient Near Eastern pagan divination practices and your Myth draft, you maintain at least two key elements, although these relate not so much to personal experience as they do being due to binding revelation and prophetic apostolic authority.

The contact was initiated by God or by a member of the Divine Counsel working on his behalf and the other is the experience includes a direct encounter with God and his Divine Council. Is there any sanctioned method for self-initiation into the unseen realm or should one just accept the fact that if God wants one to be active in both realms, material and immaterial, that he will initiate the activity? If there are any sanctioned methods, what criteria would be used to determine one's readiness or maturity?

**MSH:** I don't see any sanctioned method of self-initiation into the divine world. Biblically, we're not given any of those, and even if you want to include something that the priest would use, Urim and Thummim, or something like that, well, those are still given by God. You're still doing this thing to get divine knowledge according to directions and instructions given to you. So I don't see that there's any sort of self-initiated process or method that God has not first delivered or first outlined, first instructed in Scripture. So that would also revisit the observation that there's no age for self-seeking divine encounter that would be endorsed in Scripture.

**TS:** His second one is, is there any detail or source discussion of similar depth as your Gnosticism series that you could point me to in reference to Kabbalah, whether the Jew's version or the Western hermetic version? Could you make some comments and observations about Kabbalah? Is it studied or practiced in any place in the life of a Christian? I have in mind your comments on the burning of the books of magic in Acts and the idea that such things have no place in the life of a follower of the way?

**MSH:** I have not created anything on Kabbalah. I have a friend, Fred Klett, and this is not the comedian by the way, who has a ministry. He's had the ministry for probably 20-25 years, specifically to Jews in Philadelphia. It's not a messianic Church. He has sort of an evangelistic ministry to Jewish people in Philadelphia. He actually spends a good deal of time on Kabbalah so you could Google Fred Klett and Kabbalah and you'd find some lectures he's given online. Fred is sort of a resource for that. I have a number of my own resources, like Introduction to Western Esoteric Thought that will naturally discuss Kabbalah. But it's not something I've really jumped into myself as an area of interest. Getting back to sort of the overall flavor of the question, I don't see any endorsement of seeking mystical knowledge in the Bible.

I don't see any biblical endorsement of that, if one means by that self-initiation or self-solicitation of non-human intelligences. I don't see that all. I see the contrary to that, a couple places in Job, even God doesn't trust his holy ones, Galatians 1 says even if an angel from heaven shows up and gives you the gospel, don't believe it. I see the opposite thing going on in Scripture and I think the rationale for it is because not only are the holy ones potentially, they could mislead you, but this isn't your turf. How are you going to know, how are you going to be able to parse this sort of thing? And so this is why Scripture gives these parameters, because God says I am trustworthy. I do have your best interests in mind. I love you. I have a covenant relationship with you, all these things, and if you want to know what I'm thinking or how to contact me, here you go.

These are the hoops to jump through. Jump through them, that kind of thing because it's about your protection and it's about you getting information from a divine source that has your best interests in mind. If you go out on your own, how are you going to judge that? That's different than a practitioner, someone who wants to have mystical experiences and then they try different things. So there's a difference between seeking to be a practitioner of mysticism versus seeking to understand the outlook, the system, all that stuff, to understand what mysticism teaches, what it is and what people do and that sort of thing. So practitioner is trying to seek contact for enlightenment which is a pursuit, historically and I would say inevitably, linked to either imposing the terms for divine knowledge, inserting your own terms for divine knowledge, for gnosis, to become enlightened or meriting your own status in the divine presence, in the divine family.

And that's very contrary to the Gospel. What I mean by access, in other words, you wouldn't desire to be a practitioner if you were content to have God give you the information on his terms exclusively. Or you wouldn't be a practitioner if you didn't think you were going to get some reward out of it. But that's all different than just sort of an academic inquiry about western esoteric systems, western esotericism, or mysticism or all that sort of thing. I read a lot of that stuff but I'm not a practitioner. I'm not seeking these encounters or anything like that. So that's the way I would approach it. Kabbalah is just a form of Jewish mysticism. It's not necessarily to people who are practitioners not necessarily something overtly sinister or overtly occult. But

why do people do it, because they want to be in control of the terms of their own divine encounter, their own encounter with the numinous, with the divine presence, and they expect to get something out of it. So I don't see how that's consistent with the patterning that we get in Scripture about this sort of thing.

**TS:** His last question is, at least in certain parts of the Word, the authors seem to almost presuppose contact with this incarnate being's. One passage that comes to mind immediately is 1 John 4, and testing the spirits. Since Christians and Jews seem to be prohibited from rendering in esoteric parlance, how would a Christian, especially after the apostolic air, be expected to come in contact with elohim, what do you think was going to John's mind as he wrote it?

**MSH:** Well, testing the spirits doesn't of necessity imply soliciting the spirits or going out looking for spirits to test. If you read through 1 John, the whole notion of testing the spirits is linked to false teaching. It's very clear, very overt. So obviously I would say 1 John wouldn't be legitimizing self-initiation into false teaching or self-initiation into some sort of episodic encounter where you could be misled. I think the point of the language is that claims about spiritual truth, in the context of 1 John it's really focused on Christology, but claims about spiritual truth that contradict apostolic teaching are presumed to come from competing spirits, competing opposition, opposition in the spirit world. So those claims need to be evaluated. They need to be judging.

They need to be tested. If you look at 1 John 4:6, right there in the passage. it juxtaposes the Spirit of truth with the spirit of air. I think all that illustrates Scripture's elevation of revelation over personal experience. Now the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive but if the source of both is the true God then both of those things will not be contradictory. Scripture consistently moves us to judge personal experience by the revelation given by God through inspiration to the masses. In other words, this whole idealized I'm doing my own thing here to tap into the divine knowledge or to have an encounter with God is quite contrary to both explicit passages and the whole patterning of what's going on in both Testaments I would say.