

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 161

Translating Genesis 1-11

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Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Guests: John Hobbins (JH) and Samuel Bray (SB)

In this episode Dr. Heiser talks to the men behind a new translation project, John Hobbins and Samuel Bray. The first volume of their effort is entitled Genesis 1-11: A New Old Translation for Readers, Scholars, and Translators. Our discussion focuses on the translation enterprise – what translators need to think about as they do their work. The strength of this new project is its thorough documentation by the translators of what and how they were thinking during the process of producing their translation. Over 130 pages of notes about the Hebrew text and its translation issues accompany the translation.

The work comes highly recommended, and Naked Bible Podcast listeners can purchase the resource at a discount.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 161: Translating Genesis 1-11. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing?

MH: Very good. Another busy week, but that's good. It's good to be productive.

TS: I hear you. Well, this week we've got two special guests!

MH: Well, one I know from my days in graduate school in Wisconsin in the Hebrew Department. The other is new to me, but they've partnered together on a new translation of Genesis 1 to 11. It's more than a translation, as we're going to find out. It's a significant work, in terms of the notes that are put into the translation effort. We'll say more about it, obviously, as we get into discussing it with them. But this is something that I think people would really benefit greatly from if they were to get this, read through the translation, and just take advantage of something that really answers the question: what do translators think about? And, more importantly, what are they *supposed* to think about? It's a great resource.

TS: Awesome. Let's get to it!

MH: We're thrilled to have John Hobbins with us, and Samuel Bray. I know John from the University of Wisconsin Hebrew Department graduate school experience. We'll just call it an experience (laughing) for the sake of our discussion here. I've not met Sam until we connected here today, but they have what I think is a very interesting work out. It's a new translation of Genesis 1-11 that is really hot off the presses here. We'll talk about how you can get that toward the end. I'd like to begin by asking both of you guys (in any particular order you want) to introduce yourself. And then we'd like to know a little bit, as well, about your translation experience and what the roles were in this joint production. How did the partnership form and how did it work? So let's just start there. If you can introduce yourselves that would be great.

JH: Go ahead, Sam.

SB: I'm Sam, and I'm a law professor at UCLA. Actually, this year I'm Herrington Faculty Fellow at the University of Texas, Austin. So I have two university affiliations. My background is all in the law and not in Biblical Studies, except where there's overlap between the two. I have drawn on biblical scholarship for work on figures of speech in the law. I'm John's partner in this, but my area of expertise is in the law and in language, and in the use of language in the law and here in our translation.

JH: Good. As Mike was saying, my expertise is more in languages. We got to know each other through being students in the Hebrew Department in Madison, Wisconsin, at the University of Wisconsin. It was there that I picked up some languages very early on. I learned Hebrew and Greek when I was about 13 years of age. It was a good time to learn it because it sort of sunk into my bones and it's been a part of who I am ever since. I'm a pastor, but I've also taught Hebrew in various places—in Rome and in Madison and in Oshkosh. We'll be teaching Hebrew in about a month in Gambela, Ethiopia.

Hebrew is a language that means a lot to me, and I've been involved in various translation projects as a consultant before. At a certain point, Sam approached me. He was working on a translation for the sake of his children, reading the Bible to them. It was at that point that we connected. He had read some of what I had written online. I used to have a blog. It's still available, but I'm no longer posting regularly about issues of translation (ancient Hebrew poetry, in particular—how that can be translated and how it can be understood). So we connected just because of what I had online available to anyone. He emailed me and things sort of took off after a little while.

MH: So Sam, this is kind of interesting. What translation enterprise were you working on for your kids? What was the procedure there? What were you trying to do? What was the goal?

5:00

SB: I was trying to decide on what the best translation would be to use at home for reading aloud, and the natural choice for me for something in the Tyndale/KJV tradition (which I wanted because it would have a network of allusions and connections with hymns and literature and Christian culture) would be something like the ESV or the NRSV. And so I had used both and I'd used a lot of other English Bible translations and I was trying to decide which one I wanted to use for reading every day so that it would form in the memory of my kids. The problem was the ESV is just often (despite being a good translation) awkward when read aloud. It doesn't have the same attention to rhythm and grace that I would expect in really good writing. Sometimes I hit sing-song passages (like there's one where Cain says to God in Genesis 4, "You've driven me today away") and that's the sort of thing I wouldn't let stand in my own writing! So I guess my standards for how the writing sounded when it was read aloud were very high. I was frustrated with it. The NRSV paraphrases on all the gender points, so I wasn't really happy with either one. I was trying to do some adaptation and some translation and I had been a long-time reader of John's blog and I knew we had similar attitudes toward translation and its need to be close and its need to be literary and its need to preserve the imagery and physicality of the original. So I approached John and the partnership has just taken off.

MH: You know, I'll tell you what that reminds me of (especially the sing-songy thing). I imagine some people are listening to this and thinking, "Well, that's kind of an elitist view. Like, who cares about what it sounds like reading aloud! Shouldn't it communicate to the average Joe?" and, basically, a utility approach to it. But I think that there would be a tendency to not appreciate what you're saying because we don't hear extensive passages of scripture read anymore. What it makes me think of is back in my Wisconsin days we had a woman who worked with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. There were a couple of occasions where our pastor was on vacation or whatever. Naturally, there would be the need for pulpit fill. One week he asked her to fill in. I think they were sort of in cahoots with this because what she did (and I believe, what he asked for because he sort of knew that she was good at this) was she got up and she did nothing for thirty minutes but read the text. And she was just an excellent reader. It was so memorable! I was asked to do pulpit fill a month ago and I was waffling between whether I wanted to do some sort of message that I really thought the church needed to hear or am I just going to get up and read (and not pretending I could do it as well as this person I'm thinking did). But it's so absent that if you're not used to hearing it (and especially read from something that is just well-written) you can't really understand what you're missing. I don't know if any of that resonates with you, but that's the first thing that popped into my head.

SB: Absolutely.

MH: We just don't hear it. We don't hear Scripture that often, which is kind of startling to say. Maybe John, you do a little bit more reading. I know you work hard at producing your own fresh translations for sermons, so it probably goes hand-in-glove with that, but I think the average person just has not had the experience of hearing Scripture read at length.

10:00

JH: It really is an amazing experience to translate the Bible afresh and to try to capture some of the figures of speech, some of the metaphors, in a way that perhaps hasn't been done very often. The older English translation tradition (Tyndale and King James) often did a better job than is now the case. With more modern translation theories there are other priorities. But we decided to return to some of the strengths of the earlier translations, one of which is the ability to be heard and to be understood when spoken. Another has to do with being attentive to form and structure, not just content, because we believe all three of those things are interrelated. And also, an attentiveness to the history of interpretation. We're interested in our translation work to see how the passage has been understood over time.

I'll tell one funny story. I once went to Missouri to visit relatives and I was asked to guest preach at my aunt's church. They said I could choose the passage and do whatever I wanted, and so I chose Ezekiel 16 (Mike laughs), which is a very long passage. Mike knows what I'm talking about. I retranslated the whole thing. It's full of sexual innuendo, as a matter of fact. The preacher for whom I was preaching that day as his guest looked at the passage ahead of time and said, "Oh no, this is horrible! What am I going to do?" So he read it in the King James. He read it very poorly so no one understood it. Little did he know that I had the whole thing translated again. You could not hear a pin drop after I gave it in my translation because no one had ever heard it as Ezekiel would have given it. It wouldn't have mattered what I said afterwards (laughter) because I had their complete attention.

MH: Right! Did you start looking for the exits at that point? (laughing)

JH: At that point there were a lot of red faces. But there's a power to scripture and also to Genesis 1-11. Many of these passages are full of suspense and full of a plot that's very interesting. Each twist and turn is worth paying attention to, also, in translation.

MH: I don't want you to get blindsided, but toward the end here, I'll ask either one of you to pick a passage out and just read it so we get a little bit of a feel for the translation, but that's for later. You can be thinking about it as we talk here.

So you've already gotten into this next question I have written down. I read the preface to the translation and I read a good portion of the translation, as well,

prior to this point just to get a feel for it. The question I have in front of me on my list next is: what were you trying to fix? In other words, what are you trying to do better? You've already alluded to some of these things. By way of an answer to this, if you could pick out a few things in the preface where you're explaining to the reader just this: what do you see as the problem and what are you trying to fix and how are you proposing to fix it? If you can, give us an idea of some of the issues. We've talked about how we got our Old Testament and how we got our New Testament on the podcast before, and at the end I append something about "read the preface of your Bible and it's going to talk about whether they lean Formal Equivalent (word-for-word correspondence) or Dynamic Equivalent (thought-for-thought). This audience is a little bit familiar with the two major options that get batted around, but you're after more than that. You've already alluded to that. If you can take us through some of the things you were trying to fix and how you're approaching them...

SB: One thing I think we were trying to fix is attention to the repetition in the text. Repetition is not something that's usually considered "good English style" right now, but it's pervasive in the Bible. Often the way that meaning gets constructed in biblical stories is through layer after layer of repetition, and sometimes repetition with a crucial variation. A couple of instances of that... One is in Genesis 3, where the serpent promised to Adam and Eve that if they ate of the fruit of the tree of the garden. The serpent is talking to Eve and says, "God knows that on the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil." And then, of course, we all know what happens next in the plot. I won't be spoiling the plot for anybody to say that Eve eats and Adam eats, and then what happens is that they know that they were naked. So you get a repetition of the same word. They were supposed to *know* good and evil, but instead what they *know* is that they are naked. So you get this profound irony in this sense of bitter disappointment. A lot of translations wash that out. They say that if you eat the fruit the serpent promises you will *know* good and evil, but then they *realized* that they were naked. And so you've lost this crucial connection—this echo reverberating through the text that's supposed to show you just how disappointed they are.

15:00

One more example is before the flood. It says that humans have ruined the earth and God is going to bring ruin upon them because they've ruined the earth. You've got a repetition of the same verb stem.

MH: Yeah, it's the same lemma.

SB: Exactly. But in a lot of English translations it says that humans have *corrupted* the earth and then God is going to *destroy* them. So what you miss is the sense that the divine justice is kind-for-kind, measure-for-measure in exact proportion to what humanity has done. That's a crucial part of the text! We want to try to carry that over.

MH: Yeah, "ruin for ruin" there. It's not usually a translation issue per say, but with this audience we do a lot of connecting Old and New Testament (how the New Testament writers cite the Old Testament a lot), so I'm hoping that this audience is used to hearing me (or remembers hearing me) say things like, "Look, when the writer picked this phrase/lemma, they intentionally assume (because they're writing for people in their own time period, their immediate audience) that your mind will go back to a particular passage (again, this connection/resonance between this word or phrase). They'll be able to pick up on what he's doing in the writing." This is a good example of doing that in English, where when you do have repetition of Hebrew words (and, of course, we have to assume that's intentional, that there's some stylistic intent behind that), that if you keep translating that same term with different English terms, you're never going to pick up on that. It's really important if the Old Testament is repurposing some other portion of the Old Testament. It can be only a word or phrase, but one incident or one statement will get threaded through other passages later on through the Hebrew Bible. So if your vocabulary is not reflecting that, you'll never see it.

JH: Absolutely. We see that in a number of key words in Genesis 1-11. A good example is on the seventh day, God blesses that day. We translate it, "he hallowed it." The word "hallow" is dropped out of most translations now. However, it's familiar to most Christians because it occurs in the Lord's Prayer ("hallowed be thy name"). If you only preserve it... that's basically what's happened now. If this word is only preserved in the Lord's Prayer and it's being... some other words, some other equivalents are used elsewhere in scripture, then all the connections have been severed. You don't really see how "holiness" and "hallow" even fit together. A lot is lost. We're trying to preserve some of these connections.

MH: For my audience, I'll give a familiar illustration of a big point of irritation. Every time I hit it in the New Testament I have to complain about it. That is the translation "saints." It's *hagios*. Why don't you translate it "holy ones" because that will take your mind back to "holy ones" in the Old Testament? You can recover the sense that initially humans were supposed to be part of the divine family and Eden is where heaven intersects with earth, God comes down to dwell with man... There's all these concepts that accrue (or least can and ought to accrue) to language like this. If we don't create those connections as translators between the two testaments, no one will ever get a sense that, "Oh, 'holy ones' has a history! Who are the holy ones back in the Old Testament?" Well, it can be members of the heavenly host. It can also be people. Why would it be both? Why would they do that? Again, there are theological ideas that accrue and attach to a wording like that. But it's just lost. You'll never see it because of the way the text is treated.

Do you have any other examples, or I can move on to something else? I'll just do that. Along with this, what about structure? I know you're big on structure, John,

with not only your blog, but just your general interest in poetry. What's wrong with the way most English translations convey both poetic structure and then also just other issues of structure, other kinds of structure? And how do you propose to fix that or how are you trying to address it?

JH: One way to talk about this is if you read Hebrew and you're familiar with the lexical stock of Hebrew, which seems quite limited and in some ways it's not as extensive as one might have thought just in the abstract... And so one way to describe this is the plainness and the simplicity of the diction of the Hebrew Bible. We really do our best to preserve this. You might call it "embracing simplicity," but on the other hand, to accomplish this is a very complex process because there are always trade-offs. That's the thing about translation. There is no such thing as one obvious translation and all the other ones are obviously wrong. It's not that simple. But to make a choice to not gussy-up the language of the text before us just because it's easy for us to do in English requires a form of discipline that, I think, is lacking in a lot of modern translations. When you have a verbless clause in Hebrew, for example, how many translations will just fill in with a verb that sounds natural in English? Instead, if at the structural level (how a narrative works) we go back to what you find in the early modern English translations like the King James... We carry over the "and, and, and" structure in the narrative. That's a choice that one or two modern recent English translations have also done, but it might even be counterintuitive to most people to do that. I think the proof of this is in the pudding. Try it out! See if this works for you. My experience with a translation like this is that if it's read aloud, for example, by someone who is an excellent reader, all of a sudden connections that otherwise would have been missed become crystal clear.

MH: Okay, give us an example of a poetic structure or (just for structuring matters) maybe the Lamech passage. Obviously, this isn't the Psalms or anything like that in Genesis 1-11, but there are little portions where something is structured deliberately where this kind of thing can help, or at least avoid some sort of misunderstanding. Does anything come to mind specifically?

SB: One structuring device in Genesis (not just 1-11, but throughout Genesis) is the *toledot* formula. "These are the generations of X." That formula marks the seams between a number of major units. For the reader to pick that up, you have to give it a consistent translation all the way through.

MH: I noticed also that you made that a header. Like the first verse, where you have the *toledot*, that conveys... It's a very simple typeset stylistic thing that conveys the fact that this is a new section.

SB: That's exactly right. We italicize and center the *toledot* formula. So in Genesis 2:4, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth as they were created." And behind that is not only a desire to follow the text closely, but also a kind of interpretive modesty. Instead of putting in our own titles for the

different section to try to guide the reader to think that this is the following subject, we're trying to get out of the way as much as possible and let the text speak about its own categories and its own genres.

MH: That's really interesting because my experience teaching on the undergrad level or even having a discussion in church... "This section of this chapter is about this topic." Well, how do you know that? "Look right here! My study Bible gave it a header." That predisposes the reader to think certain thoughts. I'm not saying it's sinister and evil, but it may miss the point or it may lead their thinking in some other direction that will cause them to kind of miss what's going on here.

25:00 **SB:** It also gives you permission to stop reading.

MH: (laughing) That's true!

SB: When you see like Genesis 6:9 running all the way into chapter 9 (it's the story of Noah and the flood) and there's just no break, it just keeps going, then you're supposed to read it all as a unit.

MH: You're supposed to keep going, yeah.

All right. I have a question for you about the *toledot*. If you look in Genesis chapter 11, right in the middle there at 27 it says, "These are the generations of Terah." And that is not centered and put off as a header in what I'm looking at. Maybe I just have a prepublication for this. Is that intentional? Why would you keep the generational note there in the running text instead of breaking it out?

JH: If you go back to the Dead Sea Scrolls (those are the oldest manuscripts of books of the Bible in Hebrew), you already have what are later called "open and closed sections." There are a variety of ways of paragraphing, even though the term "paragraph" is a little bit of a misnomer because you're talking about usually much longer units. Usually in Genesis 1-11 (already in the fragments that we have of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the paragraphing follows a tradition that's pretty stable. In this one instance, there is no paragraph break. And so we make the *toledot* formula into headers when they are at the juncture of a section break. That's interesting to reflect upon—why there isn't one here. It's an exception. We have extensive notes that I think people will really find interesting.

MH: Are you going to publish them?

JH: They're in with the translation.

MH: Okay, you're talking about those notes.

JH: I think those notes will be very interesting to many people because I know how many serious students of the Bible like to compare one translation to

another, but they have no way because they don't necessarily know any Hebrew, to make some sort of informed comparison. We do our best to give the reader a chance to sort of get beneath the hood and see how this operates. That applies also to the sections. What we discover (which is interesting) is that the passage that begins with Genesis 11:10, "These are the generations of Shem," in many Masoretic manuscripts is a major division, which doesn't come to a conclusion until chapter 12, verse 9. That was just an illumination for me to read this and work very closely with the manuscripts (not just with a particular printed edition) and discover that there's a long tradition going back all the way to before Christ to read Genesis 11:10-12:9 as a unit. If you do so, you discover some things that you would otherwise just miss. That's what paragraphing does. That's what division does. We block things in a certain way and we see things we would not otherwise see.

SB: One place that happens is Genesis 10, where there's the sons of Noah and it's the Table of Nations (of the different nations that come from Shem, Ham, and Japheth). If you look at an English Bible, unless it has a dozen paragraphs in that chapter... A lot of them will have three paragraphs. So they'll have a paragraph on the sons of Japheth, and then they'll have a paragraph on the sons of Ham, and then they'll have a paragraph on the sons of Shem. In the Masoretic tradition, there are three sections, but they're not Japheth, Ham, and Shem. Instead, they're Japheth and Ham (except for Canaan), then the second one is Canaan (who's one of the sons of Ham), and then the last one is Shem. What that division does is it really highlights the contrast between Canaan and Shem, which fits into one of the themes for the end of Genesis 1-11 and sets up the rest of the Torah.

30:00

MH: That's really interesting. We just went through the sin of Ham and the curse of Canaan in Genesis 9, and I followed Seitz Bergsma's article from JBL (I don't know if you read that, John). Listeners to this podcast will find what Sam just said really interesting—how the descendants of Canaan (the Canaanites, as it were, you could say) are set off and contrasted like that. That's really interesting, actually, how that is telegraphed. I like telegraphing. When I come across something like that where it's pretty clear that there's some intentionality behind this and you're supposed to think something, you're supposed to notice that the writer did this, or if you're hearing it with a good reader, you're going to pick on it by ear—what that might be. I think that's important.

Now you brought up the Dead Sea Scrolls. Do you have any sort of textual commitment? Are you going to stick to the Masoretic Text? Are you going to observe Qumran readings that might be superior and here and there give a predilection there as you keep going after Genesis? I assume you're going to do the whole Torah here, at least. Do you have any sort of guiding philosophy yet on that?

JH: Yeah, we do. We do plan to finish the rest of Genesis in short order and continue with other portions of the Hebrew Bible. It will be interesting to see. We've got some ideas on that. We've made a very explicit commitment to the Masoretic Text and also to... the text as it has been read. We explain that in the introduction. We don't mean to imply by making that choice that Masoretic Text is always the best text (however you might define that). There's more than one way to define that, of course. But we thought it would be a very important thing to stick to one text (in this case, it works for this book very easily): the *Codex Leningradensis*. It is, without a doubt, the best available witness to the Masoretic tradition. We paid attention to other witnesses, as well, but that's what we've got. It's interesting when you do that—when you make a strong commitment to one text—how you see when there is variation what advantages there are to being consistent. I guess it's a strength that we want to cultivate in the translation in more than one way, and that is consistency. So we're consistent, also, in terms of textual basis.

MH: Yeah, and you can always address things in extensive notes. You don't have to mar the consistency you're trying to shoot for otherwise. I mean, you can bring up whatever you need to bring up later on. Most translations will opt for that, even the one we did in the building, which really didn't start out as an effort to produce a translation of great literary quality. I'll be the first to say that it's not. It hasn't had that much thought put into it. We did it for different reasons, but we made the same decision there editorially. It was just easier, rather than having to evaluate so many different things, to stick to the text. And if there's something that's really important, you say something about it at that point in a note.

How about the divine name? I noticed you opt for "Lord." Again, is that to create continuity with other translations, or is there something else behind that?

35:00 **JH:** It is definitely to maintain continuity with a tradition that goes all the way back to the Septuagint. It does have its... there's always a cost in doing something like this. Whenever I talk to a JW (laughing), it's always a matter of discussion, right? I realize that for me, the struggle in particular is when I'm translating the Psalms and I'm used to reading the Hebrew as a prayer. It seems very confining not to use the tetragrammaton (the name of God) in some way because that's very much a part of the content and the form—to address God with a name, rather than a title. So there are drawbacks, there's no doubt. The fact that we have "Lord" obviously connects Genesis in a way that it connected with people in Jesus' day because that's the substitute that they were familiar with and that was not changed. That's what I'll point out to a JW. I'll just say, "I don't think Jesus thought that was an issue" (laughing). No change on that matter. We preserve that and at the same time we make a note about it so people are aware of what we're doing.

MH: Sam, if you can I'd like you to come up with an example where your specialty (the legal language) influenced how you translated something. If there's

a better word than "influenced," give us the better word. But how was that a factor? Can you give us an example?

SB: I'll give an example from a figure of speech: hendiadys. It's a figure of speech I'm interested in. According to the Genesis commentators, it shows up a lot in Genesis.

MH: Define that for our listeners.

SB: Hendiadys is a figure of speech where you have two terms separated by a conjunction and they work like "and" and they work together as a single unit of meaning. So if I'm a farmer and I say, "My cow is nice and fat." I don't mean two things: my cow has a good disposition and my cow is fat. I mean *one* thing. Nice and fat is nicely fat—quite fat. Only one thing, not two. And so one question is whether hendiadys shows up in Genesis.

Another question is whether hendiadys shows up in the Constitution. I've written legal scholarship on that. Some examples, I think, from the U.S. Constitution are "necessary and proper" and "cruel and unusual" and probably (though I haven't written on this one at length) "advice and consent." So those are examples of hendiadys.

One question is whether it shows up in Genesis. Some people think an example would "without form and void." If you think it's a hendiadys, then you're more likely to paraphrase that A-B structure and say something like the Revised English Bible does: "a vast waste." But having thought about the figure of speech and the different ways languages can connect words and use them in parallel phrases, John and I came to the conclusion that this one and some other instances (two in Genesis 1-11) aren't really examples of hendiadys but are more like rhyming pairs. So they're not trying to use two different terms to work together in a complex relationship, but rather, it's sort of like "might and main" or "shaven and shorn" or "bold and brazen," where in English we put two words together that are similar and they're getting most of the added force just from the sound. It's almost a playful accumulation of intensity that comes from the sound. So that's a very fine point, like "how are these words related and how do they play off each other," but that's a point where thinking through an issue thoroughly for legal scholarship helped with translating Genesis.

MH: Are you taking instances each on their own merits or demerits? In Genesis 1:2, you have "void and desolate," but what about something like "be fruitful and multiply?"

SB: I think that's probably the best instance... the phrase that has the best claim to be a hendiadys in Genesis 1-11. So "be fruitful and multiply" are not two separate things, but it's not a mere repetition. It's "multiply fruitfully" or "be fruitful

in the sense of multiplying." So I think that's probably more like a hendiadys than anything else in Genesis. Good call!

40:00

MH: That's interesting. Again, I'm hoping that listeners sort of pick up on, "Hey, there's a lot to think about!" (laughs) In other words, it's not just looking at one language and saying, "Okay, I know what that word is in Hebrew, so now I'm going to pick an equivalent English word. There we go. Now I'll move to the next word." We get this sort of impression especially... And I like formal equivalents. I realize I'm going to caricature it a little bit here. But this enterprise of having to account for every word like it's an atomistic process... Then when I'm on the other side of it, I've accounted for every word. Okay, we're not going to change any of those words, but we're going to try to make it more readable. That's a translation. It is difficult to try to communicate what's there without dispensing with something that might be important or, on the flip side, without being enslaved by this compulsion to account for every word. Here's an example where you're talking about how to even think about two words juxtaposed to each other. What do we do with that? There's just a lot to think about when it gets right down to it.

What do either of you think about the comfort level of readers? Do you care about the comfort level of readers with respect to translation? I'm going to pick an example here to illustrate this that's outside Genesis 1-11, but I do that to get the point across: *ha satan* in Job 1 and 2. Typically, we're going to see "Satan" (with a capital S) in that passage. In many respects, that's a concession to the expectation of the modern reader. Do you guys care about that? Do you care about conceding anything there? Or how would you approach something that, "If we fiddle with this, the reader's going to wonder why all the Bibles they've ever read say it this way and now we're doing something different with it." What are your thoughts there?

JH: We certainly struggled with it. I'll let Sam give the example—one that we start with a lot. Everyone knows where the ark landed, right? If you read our translation, it lands somewhere else.

MH: (laughing) I know where you're going with this. Go ahead, get into it!

SB: Everybody thinks it's Ararat, and we went with Arartu.

MH: Tell 'em why. I actually just read something totally unrelated where this came up, so it's kind of fresh in my mind, but go ahead.

SB: Ararat is certainly the traditional name, so it's exactly what English Bible readers expect. But the problem is that it's easy to misunderstand because it's easy to think that it refers to what in later tradition came to be called Mount Ararat. Instead, the text (both here and throughout the Hebrew Bible when the word comes up) is referring to an ancient land—the ancient land of Arartu, what

we would now call Armenia. Actually, some translations (I think *Douay-Rheims* is one) have Armenia as where the ark lands. Because readers are likely to misunderstand the traditional rendering, we went with a rendering that is very exact, according to the term used in contemporary syriological scholarship, but not the familiar one. It throws the reader off just a little bit, but throws the reader off maybe from misunderstanding rather than from understanding.

MH: The text has a plural there: "mountains of Ararat" (with the traditional rendering). So the Hebrew is obviously not indicating a specific mountain but more of a region, something more regional. I actually like that ("mountains of Arartu" is how you render it here) because you can't really be specific. It has me wondering if people are going to flag that and wonder what in the world you were thinking there, but I imagine you have notes on it that are going to get into it.

SB: Indeed. We have 135 pages of notes (Mike laughs). It's not going to answer every translation question, but it's going to be a lot of fun for people because it can help you, no matter what translation you're reading, to understand some of the decisions that went on behind it.

I think, Michael, more generally the question of the comfort of the reader is a really important one and it's a reminder of why there can't be any one perfect translation. Because every translation is going to make different choices about the comfort of the reader. And there are a number of places in our translation where you might say that what we've aimed for is not the comfort of the reader as much as the comfort of the re-reader. What John and I are asking the reader for is the kind of suspension of judgment to not expect it to be a quick disposable, skimmable kind of project. It's not a translation for skimming; it's a translation for reading closely, savoring, and re-reading. We think that reader is going to be really comfortable, but you have to be prepared to be that reader.

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MH: I'm going to say right now that I think... the book is Genesis 1-11, but personally I think the notes are worth the price of the book. For someone who doesn't read Hebrew and who can't go back and get under the hood in that way, this is almost going to be like a translation commentary and really take people who read this as a translation and then follow the rabbit trails in the notes... I think they're going to learn a tremendous amount just by doing that exercise. The only thing I think I can compare this to (and you guys have gone considerably beyond it) is the NET Bible (online), where they try to explain why they rendered something this or that way. Like, "this is a pronoun here but we substituted this noun because of the context." They'll get into things like that—the nuts and bolts sort of details of why they're doing this maybe with the tense or a participle or something like that. But you guys are going considerably beyond that sort of thing. If people will get this and just look at the notes, it's just going to really amp up what they get out of reading the text and having to think about what they're reading—why it is what it is. I just wanted to throw that out at this point because

we have this issue with Arartu. People are just going to learn a lot by following a bunny trail like that.

I have two more questions. What do you think about preserving ambiguity? I know this is asking for a lot in translation, but there are passages... I'm going to use a New Testament illustration for the listener to help us all understand what I'm getting at here. 1 Corinthians 7:1. If you look that up in different translations: "It's good for a man not to touch a woman." "It's good for a man not to have sexual relations." "It's good for a man not to marry." You can justify any one of those in different ways, but if you're just looking at the text, it is the lemma for "touch" and so a rendering that is something like that preserves ambiguity and refrains from interpretation. So how do you feel about the issue of preserving ambiguity in a translation?

SB: I think it's important to preserve ambiguity. We're not trying to create ambiguity, but where the text can be read in different ways (and especially where through the history of interpretation by Jewish and Christian authors it has been read in different ways), we want to try to keep those lines of interpretation open for the reader. One place where we do that is in Genesis 2, when God makes the garden. We have in Genesis 2:8, "And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden aforetime in the East, and there he put the man whom he had formed." There's a crucial ambiguity of whether it means "in the East" or it means "aforetime" (in former times). We've put both of those in the translation because the phrase can point in either direction and we want to leave that open and not close it down for the reader, where possible.

MH: That's a really interesting example because for somebody who doesn't read Hebrew, the lemma there (*qedem*) can be either, just like you said: "east" or some other qualifier like "beforehand" or "in the past" or something like that. That's really interesting. John, are you on board with that? I would think you are, since you're partners on this.

JH: Yes. We did work hard in several key instances to preserve a range of interpretive possibilities. Sometimes it was because that's just how things go. A particular word or phrase in Hebrew has a wide resonance and it's takes some work to pick a phrase that in English is as extensive in its possible resonance. We also do something that I think is worth pointing out, and that is (not always because there's many)... but in a number of key instances we try to carry over some wordplay. Mike, you know all about this. You read Hebrew, so you know how often there's wordplay going on. Maybe a good example is at the border between chapters 2 and 3, where it talks about the two of them as being naked (the man and his wife) and they were not ashamed. And then the next line (in fact, there's no division in the Masoretic Text, it's part of the same paragraph)... "Now the serpent..." We translate it "smooth and shrewd, beyond every other beast of the field." There is a wordplay here. There's a word for shrewdness and it sounds very similar to the word for nakedness in Hebrew. A number of

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commentators have very skillfully pointed out how the wordplay here is intentional. We draw attention to that in the notes and we do what's called a double-translation. "Smooth" captures the connection with nakedness and "shrewd" represents the standard meaning, if you wish, of this term.

MH: That's a good example. Last question. John, you're a pastor so I think this will be in your wheelhouse, and we have a lot of pastors who listen to the podcast. What do you think the responsibility of the pastor is when it comes to what we've been talking about (translation). Should the pastor be introducing people to options and alternatives? Why or why not? Because I can imagine some would think, "Good grief. On a Sunday morning I don't want to be getting people "confused" by all the possible things there are to think about in their Bible. I'd just be thrilled if they'd read the thing." So that could create sort of an inner compulsion or propensity to just avoid getting into these sorts of issues and really getting into the text at this level or in this way. What would you recommend, or do you have any strong feelings one way or the other on what the pastoral job is here when it comes to what we're talking about?

JH: I certainly have a strong belief in the fundamental Reformation doctrine of the clarity of Scripture. At the same time, there are passages which can easily be understood in more than one way. So how to hold those things in tension and be honest about it... I think in the end it pays to be honest about passages that are difficult. It wasn't just the Ethiopian eunuch who was able to admit, "I don't understand this!" That's a good point of departure. We can go from there, rather than just assuming that we understand it. A certain humility is helpful. The example of the Ethiopian eunuch relates to Genesis 1-11 because we made a choice, too, with some of the place names. The word in Hebrew for "Ethiopia" is *kush*. That often just gets transliterated. Nimrod is from the land of Cush. We give it the same equivalent that we find in the Septuagint, which is Ethiopia. What's interesting about it is that connects us all the way to the New Testament. If you don't pick a term that bridges the two testaments, then you're not going to see the connection. Who would guess that the land of Cush and the land of Ethiopia are the same unless you give a concordant translation?

SB: Michael, I think your last two questions are related, too, because if a translation leaves ambiguity open and leaves open the room for interpretation, then it does make it easier on the pastor because you don't have to preach against the decision made in the text.

MH: Yeah, that's a good point.

Do either one of you guys have a passage you'd like to read? Something that is substantial but not another half hour? (laughs) Just give us a flavor of something that might bring out some of these things we've been talking about to give listeners a sample. I've already said... I didn't put it this way, but I'll put it this way now: Even if you don't like the translation, the notes are just worth the price of the

book. But the translation is the centerpiece here. It's the sweet spot of what John and Sam are doing. Can you give us a sampling?

SB: I can read Cain and Abel. Genesis chapter 4:

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Now the man knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore *Cain*, saying, "I *gained* a man through the Lord." And she bore again, his brother, Abel. And Abel was a herder of sheep, and Cain was a worker of the ground. And it happened, at the end of a span of days, that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, he also brought an offering, of the firstlings of his flocks, of their fat pieces. And the Lord looked with favor upon Abel and his offering, but upon Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. And Cain burned greatly with anger, and his face fell. And the Lord said to Cain, "Why does it make you burn with anger, and why has your face fallen? If you mean well, will your face not be lifted up? And if you do not mean well, at the door couches Sin. Toward you is his longing, and it is you who must rule over him." And Cain said to Abel his brother.... And it happened, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. And the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know: am I my brother's keeper?" And he said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. So now cursed are you by way of the ground, which gaped wide her mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand: if you work the ground, no longer shall she give her strength to you. A trembler and a wanderer shall you be upon the earth." And Cain said to the Lord, "My iniquity is too weighty to be forgiven. See, you have driven me out this day from the face of the ground, and from your face I must hide, and I shall be a trembler and a wanderer upon the earth, and so it will happen: everyone who comes upon me will kill me." And the Lord said to him, "Therefore everyone who kills Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken upon him." And so the Lord granted Cain a sign, lest everyone who came upon him should slay him. Then Cain went out from the face of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Wandering, east of Eden.

MH: In that selection... I was looking at the ESV, which I think leans toward formal equivalence. But what you were reading does bring out repetition in that section in a few places where ESV doesn't. I thought it was interesting. The ESV has "the Lord put a mark on Cain." You can still get the idea that this is something God's doing to help him or some favorable act, some merciful act. But granted, I think your translation brings that out better. There were just a number of things in there that would draw attention. Again, for listeners, I do recommend getting this because you could use this and compare it with the translation you're used to and then take advantage of the notes. Why are they doing what they're doing? On the one hand, you might be used to a study Bible doing a little of that. Here you're going to get a full-blown discussion of the things that really need to be thought about. Whether you agree with where John and Sam come down on this is sort of immaterial, but what sort of thought process went into this and what

sort of thought process needs to go into the whole enterprise? I think it's really valuable. So I want to thank you both for doing the work. Thanks for coming on the show.

SB: Thank you. It's a pleasure!

TS: Before we go, John, is there a blog or website? Anything you'd like to promote or where we could read more about you?

JH: Well, you can always check out my blog, "Ancient Hebrew Poetry." Easy to find. I think GlossaHouse (our publisher) I'm sure will work with you guys in the future to have a special discount. I think you have the information.

TS: We do! I got it. The discount code word is "GETNAKED."

MH: (laughing) Is it spelled 'N-E-K-K-E-D?'

TS: NO, it's "N-A-K-E-D." It's normal. It's "GETNAKED." I don't know how to say it.

MH: What's the website where you'd put in the discount?

TS: I'll put the link on the website for everybody, so if you go to nakedbiblepodcast.com, I'll have a link there with the discount code "GETNAKED" so you can get it. That's the discount code. Sam, is there anywhere we can find out more about you? A blog or anything you'd like to promote?

SB: No, I'm not a regular blogger, though I will be doing a legal blog at the Washington Post. I'm going to do a ten-part series on the translation coming up next month.

TS: Awesome.

MH: Wow, that's interesting! You can throw in your work about the Constitution, as well. I'm a political junkie in the sense that I listen to a lot of talk radio and I was a political science minor, so that's something I'm actually interested in. Again, what's the title of that, and I imagine it's on Amazon, right?

SB: The long article on hendiadys, if that's the one you mean, or the book?

MH: The book.

SB: I'm an author of a case book: *The Constitution of the United States*. That's with several other law professors. You can get it on Amazon and you can get a link to it from my web page at UCLA.

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MH: Is that used as a textbook anywhere?

SB: Yes, it's a textbook used in a number of law schools.

MH: And the reading level... What kind of level of detail are we at, or is this just an overview of the issues?

SB: It's a book that's intended for law students, but part of what my co-authors and I think is really important is the Constitution is not the preserved and special possession just of lawyers and judges. It's the people's Constitution. We the people have adopted it, and we think it should be of interest to everyone. So I think the book is going to be interesting to everyone, but I should warn you that it's got the price of a textbook (laughter). It's not cheap, but that's the idea. It's everybody's Constitution and we want to explain everybody's Constitution to law students.

MH: All right, well thanks again!

JH: Thank you, and I hope your listeners will check out GlossaHouse, our publisher. They can go directly to GlossaHouse. That's not too hard. <https://www.glossahouse.com/product-page/genesis-1-11-a-new-old-translation> You'll find it easy to preorder the book. It will be out very soon.

MH: Okay. Thanks for your time!

SB: Thank you for the opportunity. Really appreciate it.

MH: Absolutely.

JH: All the best Mike. Bye for now.

MH: Thanks. Bye.

TS: All right Mike, that was another good one. It's always interesting getting into the textual criticism or translations, if you will, of the Bible.

MH: Yeah, I think listeners will appreciate that there's a lot to think about here. What John and Sam are trying to do is really a literary work—to try to treat the Bible as a literary work of artistry and try to preserve the writer's intentionality in ways that are really hard for us to detect because of translation. A lot of translations obscure things that we're supposed to notice, that our attention is supposed to be drawn to. I think what they're doing here is really worthwhile.

TS: Absolutely. I'm really looking forward to reading that. The book, again, is *Genesis 1-11: A New Old Translation for Readers, Scholars, and Translators*. They have a discount code for all of our listeners, and that's "GETNAKED." I will put the link (Mike is laughing)... What's funny about that, Mike?

MH: Did you talk them into that?

TS: No, no, I didn't! I love it!

MH: Of course, of course (laughing).

TS: It's perfect. I love it. I'll put the actual link to the publisher on the nakedbiblepodcast.com website. Go over there, get nekked, get your discount... it's perfect.

MH: I'll take your word for it.

TS: Absolutely. Please go over there, get the book, can't wait to read it. But Mike, next week... Be careful because I'm looking at you. I'm giving you the evil eye.

MH: I know. We're going to do an episode on the "evil eye," believe it or not. There's a passage in Ecclesiastes that sort of factors into this idea that the way somebody looks at you sort of affects you in various different ways. This is actually part of ancient Near Eastern lore/belief. I've actually been asked this a couple times in email and such. It would surprise you to know that there's actually a decent amount of scholarly material on this. So we're going to take a crack at talking about the evil eye here on the podcast.

TS: I don't know if I should be excited or worried because I'm going to be constantly head-on-a-swivel. (laughter)

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All right, Mike. Again, we just want to thank John and Sam for coming on and talking with us. Also, we decided that we're going to open up our voting on July 1 for the next book that we're going to cover. The voting will open up on July 1 and run through July 23rd at midnight. You'll have to wait. Stay tuned to hear what you're actually going to be voting on. We've got three choices for you. So July 1st the voting will begin. And again, just want to thank John and Sam for coming on and just want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.