

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 191

SBL Conference Interviews, Part 2

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**Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)**

**Guests: Ben Giffone (BG)**

**John Schwandt (JS)** (Time stamp 45:35)

In our second set of interviews from SBL in Boston, we talk with Ben Giffone about how to earn an advanced degree without going into debt, teaching overseas, and his own interest in Unseen Realm content and Israelite religion. We also chat with John Schwandt, director of Mobile Education for Logos Bible Software (Faithlife). John and Mike talk about the unique benefits of Mobile Ed courses and how they are a great tool for anyone interested in learning Scripture and theology from some of the country's best professors — all without uprooting your life and incurring debt.

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 191: SBL Conference Interviews, Part 2. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you?

**MH:** We are still here in Boston. "Bah-ston."

**TS:** I can't even say that.

**MH:** Baaahh-ston

**TS:** Baa... I can't even do it. [laughter] I'm from West Texas. These Yankees... I don't understand it.

**MH:** We should talk about some of the lift drivers we've had—really thick accents.

**TS:** Oh yeah, we had one that was straight out of South Boston.

**MH:** It was really pronounced! Well, anyway, we have our second round of interviews. We have two here in Part 2. We have Ben Giffone, and Ben is a podcast listener. He's familiar with the Naked Bible Podcast and really enjoys it,

as does his mother. What's really interesting and what appealed to me about having him on the show is teaching context. He teaches in Lithuania. Believe it or not, *Unseen Realm* is known in Lithuania, as is the podcast. So we'll have an interesting interview with him. And then we talk to John Schwandt. John is the director of Mobile Education—Mobile Ed—at Logos. We'll talk about what Mobile Ed is, why it's important, and why the listeners of this podcast would really, really benefit from that particular program. We have over 200 courses that people can take right there in your own home and really learn biblical content. Mobile Ed has kind of been the wheelhouse for us. Our aim, as always, is to try to get good content to anybody who's interested. So it's another good set of interviews.

**MH:** We're back at SBL again, and we have with us Ben Giffone [pronounced "Ji-phone"]. Ben is a scholar that discovered the podcast and then *Unseen Realm*. He has a really interesting story, at least some backdrop to this. I'm going to ask him to introduce himself—how he found the podcast, where he went to school, and what he's doing.

**BG:** Thanks for having me on the podcast. Usually, I go by "Benj," just for the record there, so that people know. Because when I went to university (I went to Cairn University), there were five other Bens in my dorm. So growing up, I went by Ben or Benj, but figured at that point mononymity was something to aspire to. So I did my undergraduate work at Cairn University (formerly Philadelphia Biblical University), and that was where I really got interested in biblical studies and original languages. I grew up in a Christian home but did not really... I thought I knew the Bible well, but I realized that I didn't. So I wanted to go to seminary and graduate school and just keep on taking this wherever it would take me. So I did my seminary work for a year at Westminster Seminary. I got out in the middle of a bit of controversy there.

**MH:** Was that Pete?

**BG:** It was with Pete, yep. So I was there when he was suspended (Pete Enns).

**MH:** Oh, that's interesting. We'll try not to drill down on that... [laughs]

**BG:** Yeah, that's a story for Pete to tell, if he's permitted by contract or by agreement, whatever. So then I went back to Cairn, actually, and finished my two-year seminary degree there. Then I did a Master of Theology and PhD at Stellenbosch University in Western Cape, South Africa.

**MH:** Was that all by distance?

**BG:** Yeah, the Master's program was three oral exams on reading lists and a thesis. And so I went to South Africa a couple of times.

**MH:** Was it Biblical Studies?

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**BG:** Yes, they did Old Testament. So Lamentations was my Master's thesis, and then I did my dissertation on Chronicles.

**MH:** Was Christa your advisor, or somebody else?

**BG:** No, both projects were supervised by Louis Jonker, who teaches in the Faculty of Theology. I think Christa was in the Ancient Studies Department.

5:00 **MH:** This is interesting because I often have people ask about, "Hey, I want to go to seminary" or "I'm thinking about doctoral work." Stellenbosch... I know several people who've gone through the programs there. It's inexpensive because of the rand. Just give people an idea what you would pay for a year.

**BG:** Well, for the MTh tuition when I went there, it was the equivalent of \$4,000. If the tuition has stayed the same in the rand, that's going to be even less in dollars for Euros right now.

**MH:** That's the whole program.

**BG:** That was the whole program. Now, I had to travel there a couple times, and the travel is actually... Round-trip, depending on what time of year you go, is maybe \$1200. But once you're there, staying there is fairly cheap. In short, in three years, I did two degrees. The PhD tuition is cheaper. I went to South Africa, I think, a total of four times—once with my wife (and that was for a vacation, in defense), and I think I spent less than \$10,000 for the whole thing—for everything.

**MH:** Wow, two degrees and four trips. Boy.

**BG:** And a vacation.

**MH:** See, I mean, that's a dramatic cost reduction. [laughs]

**BG:** Much cheaper than paying for an American program, which you should never do, I think, unless you're independently wealthy.

**MH:** Really, yeah. There's a lot to be said for that. You had a good experience, I take it?

**BG:** I did. I don't think, necessarily, that model would be for everyone. I had a very supportive advisor, I had access in the United States when I was doing my research to good theological libraries close by, and I had already done Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, and some German by the time I got to the program. It wouldn't work for everyone, necessarily, but it worked for me and got me to the point where I could teach.

**MH:** Did you have a clear thesis and/or dissertation topic before you enrolled? Because with some of those in the so-called "European Model," you pretty much have to have your research topic pretty well thought-through to present it and then get it approved and then do your research on it. Is that what you experienced?

**BG:** Yeah, that's the way it worked. When I applied, I originally applied for the doctoral program and Louis worked with me for several months before I was even enrolled as a student on refining my proposal, which was basically part of my application. The faculty reviews your proposal and if they like it, you're accepted. That was the application process. Now, because I had not done a research-based Master's in the States, they considered my seminary degree to be like a second Bachelor's. That's why they admitted me into the MTh degree first and then upon successful completion of the thesis, I had to apply again for a PhD. At that time, I was a little bit sick of Lamentations. [laughter] I thought of something else to do. I stayed in the Persian period, but I wanted to do more in the area of Chronicles.

**MH:** Wow. Well, hopefully somebody out there is listening, because I get the question a lot. Hopefully you're listening now and you heard that. That might be a good possibility, both in terms of expense and if you have a clear sense of direction in terms of research, look into Stellenbosch.

**BG:** I would say so, or there are even other universities in South Africa that are internationally known. I think it really just depends on the advisor you have and the topic you want to study. If you can find an advisor who is well-known in the field and is publishing and is willing to work with you, then I think it can be a great fit. I'm always happy to put in a plug for South Africa as a great place to go with wonderful scenery...

**MH:** Oh sure.

**BG:** If you're into wine or international cuisine, Cape Town (which is right near Stellenbosch) is a great town for those things. So it's just a great place to visit.

**MH:** I have to ask you, did you do the Great White Shark thing, where you go out in the boat and watch them throw seals around? [laughing]

**BG:** You know, I did. I did cage-diving with Great Whites. It was a dream of mine. I did it two days before I defended my doctoral dissertation. [laughter] So this is in January (the height of summer for them), and it's not the time of year when the Great Whites around Seal Isle jump out of the water, but they still are present and they hunt. I had always wanted to do this and it was fairly reasonably priced, so I decided to do it. My greatest fear was that something would happen and it would be, "Here lies part of Benjamin Giffone, ABD." [laughter]

**MH:** After that adrenaline rush, I'm sure your defense was pretty tame.

**BG:** It was just a breeze compared to that. [laughter]

10:00

**MH:** So where are you teaching? You're teaching at an interesting place—something a little bit off the beaten path. It's a different route than most new graduates would wind up taking, so tell us about that.

**BG:** One of the things that my wife and I agreed on when we first set out in doctoral studies was that we weren't going into any debt to do it. And because there were so few positions available in North America for PhD's, we had to be prepared for the possibility of either doing pastoral ministry in North America (which would have been fine and I'm still not going to rule that out in the future) or going overseas to teach. That was something we had talked about ever since we were even engaged (going overseas). As I was finishing my doctoral work, the opportunity presented itself to teach at a very interesting school called LCC International University. It's in Klaipeda, Lithuania (so right on the Baltic Coast). LCC is a private Christian liberal arts university. It's not a Bible college or a seminary, but faculty are Christian and it's staffed by many people who are Christians. Maybe a half or a third are from North America (maybe it's a higher percentage than that). But many of the students who come to LCC are not Christians, would not say they're Christians, or would have grown up in a nominally Catholic or Orthodox household in Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, Latvia, Belarus, or any number of Central Asian Republics (we have any number of Muslim students, as well). But they're all required to take a core of Bible and theology courses. That's part of the mission of the school is to have these students from a variety of backgrounds in a Christian environment. They go to study business and the English language and other things like that. Then there's also a theology program. That's much smaller, for understandable reasons in that part of the world—students that major or minor in theology. That's primarily the courses that I teach—the upper-level Old Testament courses for students that are majoring or minoring in theology.

**MH:** When you get students in that particular program, what's the end-goal for them? Is it ministry, is it being a minister, being a pastor (whatever the terminology is over there)?

**BG:** It varies. Even though the school is broadly Christian in that we have Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants who teach there, the theology faculty is specifically an evangelical or Protestant faculty. In terms of the Protestant churches in this part of the world, there are very few churches that could afford to pay a pastor. And so most pastors are bi-vocational. Most pastors are male. There aren't that many female pastors. So students that major or minor in theology are often looking towards either bi-vocational ministry or simply just having a better basis in their faith—especially those that do double degrees with

something like English language or business. So it's also for personal enrichment. We don't have as many folks who are explicitly going down a pastoral track.

**MH:** How about access to Christian resources—books related in some way to theology or biblical studies? Is there a lot of it? Is there very little? Give us a description of that.

15:00 **BG:** That's a struggle for a school as small as ours. In a way, it's better than it probably could be or should be, but we always struggle to find resources. We have limited access to the kinds of online databases and e-books that students and faculty at American institutions would just take for granted. We are kind of dependent on donations for much of what we do, including resourcing the library. We get some of the library budget, but one of the ways we do this is instead of investing in textbooks or spending the resources that way, we try to use our department resources to beef up the library every chance we get. But it is not really a place where you can do academic research of a high quality without somehow getting access to journals and books some other way. So I'm very fortunate in that when I go back to the States from time to time, my home base is in Pennsylvania, which is near quite a few libraries.

**MH:** Sure. Is the issue finances or is it language? Is there a language barrier—there just aren't many books in whatever language would be a first language?

**BG:** It's mostly an issue of resources, because our students are all proficient in English before they come. Actually, many of them speak at least three languages. Lithuanian students will speak English and usually some Russian. Many of them also speak German, as well. So they're even better equipped to do research than we are as monoglot Americans who had to struggle through German or French for a graduate reading. But it's really a resourcing issue, not as much a language issue.

**MH:** Just give us an idea of one or two specific courses you teach, and then we also want to say something about... You mentioned *Unseen Realm* in the email reply that you gave me. So let's talk a little bit about some of the specifics that you teach and then exposing students to some of that content.

**BG:** Yeah, sure. Because I'm The Old Testament Guy [laughter], I'm the one who teaches the upper-level courses. So I teach them all, in a sense—all the canon courses on a rotation: Pentateuch, Narrative Books, Wisdom Literature.

**MH:** The whole canon issue would be interesting, given who's in the class.

**BG:** Yes, that's definitely something we address up front. I can tell you just a brief story that kind of got me down that track, studying this more intently. I was in Pentateuch class and we were talking about the vow of the Nazir in the book of

Numbers (the Nazirite Vow). We were exploring how it's not generally supposed to be a permanent, life-long vow, it's time-bound. I asked students, "Who is the only person in scripture who was a Nazir from birth?" And one of my Moldovan students who primarily reads a Russian Bible raised his hand and said, "Samuel." I remembered back to when I had studied Samuel—Septuagint and MT—it's there in the Masoretic Text when Hannah vows to the Lord that if he gave her a son, he would be devoted to the Lord. It says that "a razor would never touch his head." But the Septuagint says "a razor will never touch his head *and* he will not drink wine or strong drink."

**MH:** Right, you get the rest of the vow there.

**BG:** So it kind of completes the picture. But I was thinking of Samson. The fact that we have Lithuanian students using a Catholic Bible that includes the Apocrypha and we have students who work with the Bible in the Russian language, that includes also the Apocrypha but is even based on Church Slavonic (which has a mixed textual basis with Septuagint and Hebrew)... We do always have to have that discussion in class about why our Bibles aren't the same.

**MH:** Why aren't they the same, yeah! [laughs]

**BG:** It's a great point to talk about history and some of the issues involved. I think the other...

**MH:** The *Unseen Realm* concept.

**BG:** I was first exposed to your work, Mike, about two years ago. It was after you were well into the Naked Bible Podcast, so I went back and listened to some key episodes and found your stuff. Shout-out to my mom, who is a big fan, as well. I think she was the one who introduced me to it.

**MH:** [laughs] Obviously a woman of intelligence!

20:00

**BG:** Great intelligence, and a noble character, as well. I found that you were making sense of so many of the passages that in the evangelical world that I had grown up with had just kind of been glossed over, or in the wider world of biblical scholarship they were just accepted as evidence of a certain development of Israelite religion that is based on (in my opinion) questionable premises about what religion is and what revealed truth is. And so when I get to these passages in my class when we talk about Genesis 6 and when we talk about in the Wisdom literature (especially the book of Job and exploring who the *satan*/adversary is in Job), I've found that the paradigm and some of the excerpts that I give to students... When I explained it to them using your ideas, it made sense of them. As I mentioned in my email, I'm not sure they had ever read the text closely enough to be troubled by these things in the way that I had been [laughter], but it

was interesting, then, to see how they play this out in their own thinking. They come from such a wide array of backgrounds, but some of them who come from more Charismatic backgrounds—especially in Ukraine, which has a very interesting, robust set of evangelical communities that I'm just beginning to learn about... I'll actually be teaching a course there next semester (just a compressed course at a small seminary there). So those students who are more attuned to the spiritual realm and are hungering for something more spiritual amidst the darkness and deadness in the Soviet and post-Soviet kind of world... There's a real hunger to know about the spiritual. That's something I sense in a lot of my students, as well.

**MH:** You have probably heard somewhere on the podcast about the *Supernatural* translation project. I have translation rights to the little book (*Supernatural*—the light version of *Unseen Realm*). That's being translated into 20 languages. Russian is done. So I could give you links to this because they're all going to be free.

**BG:** Oh! That would be great!

**MH:** My non-profit is funding this. Russian is done. Ukrainian is still in process. We have a Czech translation going. Someone actually just emailed me recently to do Polish. So we have some of the Eastern European languages. We have Arabic, as well.

**BG:** You said someone reached out to you about doing these. Have you sensed that there's a particular hunger for that kind of thing in that part of the world?

**MH:** There seems to be. It surprised me. When we launched this, the initial idea was I wanted to get *Supernatural* translated into Russian, Arabic, and Chinese. All three of those are actually done now. But the idea was that these are places where you're going to have a church, perhaps, in an underground situation or really limited in resources. And so I thought those would be the three I was shooting for. And they actually happened really quickly—maybe a week or two after we announced this, there were people in those three languages that stepped up. Chinese is still in the process of being vetted. I can't remember what the dialect issue is in Chinese, but the people who are vetting the one translation are putting it into... I think it was done in Mandarin, and they're into another...

**BG:** Cantonese?

**MH:** Yeah, something... I can't remember which one it is, but they offered to do that. The Russian translation was done by a Russian national who is actually a pastor in Egypt, which is really kind of off the beaten path.

**BG:** That is interesting.

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**MH:** I know another native Russian speaker who vetted the translation afterwards, and the same thing with Arabic. These people just sort of come out of the woodwork. Several of them do this for a living. They take English works. They might be working freelance or for a publisher, so this became a side project for them. So the response has been both startling and gratifying at the same time. Anyway, they're for free. I'll send you the links to what's done and as other things get done, they'll be put in the same folder so you'll have access to all of them. You can pick what you want and pick what's helpful.

25:00

**BG:** Yeah, Russian is quite an important *lingua franca* at LCC. You're just as likely to hear Russian in the dorms as you are English because of all the Soviet influence. I think one of the things that I've found most interesting about the work on *Unseen Realm* and the Divine Council Worldview has been that you're trying to get people to take the Old Testament seriously on its own. Right now, I have a thesis student who is very sharp. He's German. He's doing his thesis, inspired by our Wisdom Lit. class that we had done a couple years ago, on the presentation of Satan or the *satan* in scripture and the problem of evil. Surprisingly, very little has been done on the specific relationship of the *satan* to the problem of evil—at least that's what he and I have found. It's remarkable how when you start to get into the contrast between the Old and the New Testaments, so many Christians are kind of just trained to read the New Testament back into the Old Testament without much regard for the original context of the Old Testament. And yes, there is also a need, I would say from a Christian perspective, to read the Old Testament not just on its own terms first. That's important. But also, in light of the New Testament. That's something that really resonated with me, and I think a lot of my students, as well, who are discovering the Old Testament for the first time on its own terms. That kind of way of thinking is quite attractive and quite freeing, as well. Then you can look at the Old Testament and not feel like we have to shoehorn it into some type of theological system or confessional commitment beyond the commit that this points us to Christ, and now it's our job to figure out how.

**MH:** To me, it seems that the more you take the Old Testament in light of its own context, that will open your eyes to new ways of thinking about any number of passages. Some of those new ways (in fact, a lot of them) actually do have hooks into the New Testament, where you wouldn't have seen that, either. To me, it doesn't distance the Old Testament from the New. I think it closes the gap a little bit in several respects. So it's not a Christo-centric way of looking at things, but it's not like it's cutting off Christology and these other things. It just presents different threads that will carry through and maybe take some connection point and readjust it in a certain way, but the connection point is still there. We just have to think about it a little bit differently. I know sometimes it really freaks people out to do what I'm asking them to do because they're so used to having this way of thinking between the Testaments kind of solidified. They're cemented in one way of doing that, and then it feels to them like you're trying to break it when that just isn't the case.

**BG:** Can I ask you a critical scholarship question, from that standpoint? Talk shop for a second?

**MH:** Sure.

**BG:** One of the things I'm working on right now where I'm still wrestling through this is 1 Kings 18—Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal. There's a lot of discussion about... The way I got into this question was asking why it was okay for Elijah to do what he did. He was not a Levite, not an Aaronite priest, and he's sacrificing at a place other than Jerusalem. Why was this okay? And, more importantly, how did this come to be integrated into a broader Deuteronomistic history that sees centralization and the role of the Levites as critical? One of the reasons why that passage (1 Kings 17-19) is often... More recently, scholars who work on this see it as post-Deuteronomistic—incorporated after Deuteronomistic redaction. This is because of the view that it seems to evince or reflect, that if we have a confrontation between Elijah and Baal and sort of a strict monotheism, that this must be Babylonian period or later because of our understanding of the development of religion.

**MH:** Right, because of the evolutionary assumption there.

**BG:** Right, right. So what my question is... I think the situation is more complicated, clearly, than that. Whoever put the final touches on this, I'm interested in what they thought they were doing. But do you think that the way 1 Kings 17-19, in particular, is written... that either the original author of that unit or the redactor who put it all together (or both or either one)... Did they think that Baal was a real being and simply not to be worshipped by the people of Israel—that the people of Israel should only worship Yahweh? Or is it that they believed that Baal is nonexistent, along the lines of these idol polemics that we get in Isaiah 44?

30:00

**MH:** To use an analogy (we'll start this way). Just as in Second Temple Judaism there's no such thing as Second Temple Judaism (singular)—you're going to have a spectrum of opinion... I think the same would have been true in ancient Israel. So if we had ten ancient Israelites here, you might get a variance in their answers to that question. I think, though, that based on (to use another analogy)... I'll go down two lines here. Certainly, in older material I believe you're going to have an acceptance of the reality of other gods. These are spirit beings. In other words, the belief in an inanimate spiritual world is going to be something that, far from being unique to Israel or aberrant, it's like, "Well, everybody more or less thinks this way." So that's one aspect to this. And so if that's the case, you're going to have some sense or some belief that Yahweh really does have spiritual opposition. Whoever "they" are, they don't all get along. There are rivals and things like this. So I don't see it very coherent to divorce what seems to be a really normal belief system (belief in an inanimate supernatural world)... I don't

see why it would be coherent to divorce that from lots of Israelites, including the biblical writers. And the other issue, I think, is that in later literature, you don't have a denial that there's divine plurality. You get lots of references to divine plurality at Qumran. There are over 160 references to plural *elim* and *elohim*—a dozen or so specifically in Divine Council contexts. They are rivals, but it's still divine plurality. So there's a bit of a difference. But given that you have a before and an after, why would we divorce that line of thinking from what's in the middle? So I would answer the question, "Yeah, they really did believe that Baal was some kind of entity." Baal is just a generic term for "lord" or "master," and it has geographical attachments and geographical variation—the lord or master of any given piece of turf, that sort of thing. So I would answer the question affirmatively, that yeah, they do believe this. And because they believe it, they view it not just as a violation of practice (in other words, taking away something from Yahweh), but it's throwing allegiance to something else. So I would tend to look at the issue that way. The sacrificial thing is really interesting because you do have a character like Solomon who would be firmly entrenched in the issue as you described it, with the way Israelite history is talked about. He does priestly things. So does David at Gibeah...

**BG:** So does Saul.

**MH:** So does Saul, with varying degrees of response from the prophetic community. What would the role of the prophet be? A lot of this gets into speculation. Were the kings just so awful that Elijah was viewed as the only one here representing Yahweh? Who knows if we can even go down a line like that? What have you come across when it comes to that? Is there another template for this? We wouldn't really throw him into Melchizedek. [laughs]

35:00

**BG:** No, what I think is going on here (at least my hunch at this point)... I think that you see a lot of variation in the way that these northern and Benjamite traditions are kind of incorporated into the Deuteronomistic framework, especially before the tabernacle is consolidated into the temple. I have a piece that just came out earlier this year in *Vidas Testamentum* where I argue that the Chronicler and the Deuteronomist have a bit of a difference of opinion on how centralization works, but they both agree that by the time you get to the temple, there centralization is firmly... there's no question that we're not supposed to divide our time between the tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple. But what I think might be going on in 1 Kings 17-19 is you could argue that it's an exceptional circumstance. The problem with that is that Elijah makes it sound like it's not supposed to be exceptional. Like he laments to Yahweh, "They've torn down your altars!" From a Deuteronomistic perspective, that's a good thing, right? The one-off sort of explanation makes it a little bit uncomfortable for that. There's the "Baal's home turf" explanation that says, "Well, this is just a one-off confrontation on Baal's home turf." But then you have this issue of the continuity with the previous altar. My hunch at this point about what's going on is that we have to think of the authors that incorporate these stories into their... They're not

strict automatons or they're not strictly conforming every bit of material that they incorporate into their story to their unique theology. In a sense, they let the texts that they're using speak for themselves and they're balancing community memory—they couldn't just make stuff up or change things—and they're trying to balance incorporating Northern and Southern perspectives and Benjamite perspectives in their texts. But what I think what sets the story and makes it okay is that the stones are consumed. For whenever this is being read in its final reckoning, you can read this wherever you are and say, "This is important for us to know that Yahweh is God everywhere and is sovereign over everything, and he can choose to do whatever he wants with whomever he wants. But this is not something that you should then emulate. We shouldn't go build an altar on Mount Carmel. We should still worship in Jerusalem."

**MH:** Hearing you say that... This is all speculation, but you could see where, if you're back in the day, you can really see an attitude something like, "Look, we've got these high places here. It's a shame that if they're here, Baal gets worshiped and Yahweh doesn't." So it may not be optimal if Yahweh gets worshiped at one of these places, but it's sure better than Baal—that kind of thing. You can almost see this pragmatic polemic kind of thing operating in their heads. Again, that's speculative, but if I were back there and I asked the question, "Why are we doing this?" and that was the answer, it would be like, "Okay, I kind of get it. I may not like it entirely, but I get it, at least."

**BG:** What's interesting, though, is when you have the moral assessments of kings in the book of Kings, they'll say, "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not as his father, David, had done" because the people still sacrificed at high places and things like that. And the best kings were the ones that tore down the high places, like Josiah and Hezekiah. But then by the time you get to Chronicles, you really don't see much of a mixed assessment of kings. If they don't tear down the high places, then they're looked upon negatively.

**MH:** Again, you can see that in the wake of what it preceded—the extra-awfulness of the exile and all that. That's a very human thing. Sometimes I think God certainly uses imperfect beings in lots of contexts, and they do the right thing in this or that set of circumstances and God uses them, even though they're maybe not terribly consistent. But they're still servants. We tend to have this all-or-nothing kind of perspective because of some of the things you do read in the historical books there. That's a really interesting topic.

**BG:** I think the whole story of Northern Israel in 1 Kings 12 to 2 Kings 17 is precisely that—showing how God does remarkable things, even with people who are not wholly devoted to him. Yahweh still has a relationship with Northern Israel. His reputation is still tied to them, and he's going to go to war with them and go to bat for them. He's going to punish them, too. It's imperfect, but God still works with imperfects.

40:00

**MH:** And if Judges, being part of the whole complex... That certainly happens there. So it's not like if it happens in these other books that it's some sort of aberrant "what's that doing there?" Well, it's part of the same corpus. You can certainly look at examples of doing just that, where God is willing to do that. You could even say that of David: "Even though you're a mess, you're the right person at this point in time, and let's do that." That's interesting.

**BG:** That whole interplay between Israel, Judah, and then Benjamin in the middle is where I have really camped out in the last few years—just to see the relationship between them. A lot of times, we just don't fully appreciate the dynamics in the test of the relations between those tribes.

**MH:** Let me ask this question as we wrap up: If someone really wanted to get into your turf (the Historical books, Deuteronomistic history), what's a good way of introducing that discussion to an interested layperson—somebody who has maybe not had Hebrew? What would you recommend to sort of awaken them that there's this part of the Hebrew Bible, here's why it's called the "Deuteronomistic History" (this clump of historical books), here's this unit, here are the issues to think about when reading in one of these books... Do you have a good recommendation for somebody to jump in?

**BG:** Goodness. I would say one general recommendation and then a specific plug I could make would be that Chronicles seems boring until you understand—read it closely with—Samuel and Kings and see how creative... It's the only instance, I think, that we have in the Old Testament where we have an actual author of scripture and what he was using as his source of scripture. So to see what the Chronicler does opens up a whole new world for understanding what the scriptural authors are doing. Chronicles studies have just blossomed in the last 40 or 50 years because of that whole approach, whereas previously everything was about reconstructing history and the Chronicler was thought to be late and unreliable, so nobody really paid attention. But now there's just a lot of very interesting renewed attention on Chronicles. I think any standard introduction to the narrative books or a good commentary on Chronicles will have an introduction to those issues.

**MH:** Have you read Dave Howard's... the old, I think it was Moody. What was it called? It might have been called *Introduction to the \_\_\_\_\_* and then they had a Pentateuch volume, they had a Historical books volume. Bullock did the Poetry volume. I think it was the old Moody series. Dave Howard has sort of camped out here.

**BG:** I know Dave Howard.

**MH:** But he did that kind of book. And then I think it was Baker who did a series of handbooks on the different sections of the Hebrew Bible.

**BG:** Patricia Dutcher-Walls has written a good introduction to the narrative books that's more of a narrative approach. There are a lot of really good commentaries on Chronicles that have come out in the last 15 or 20 years from a variety of perspectives—Jewish and Christian, and more critical perspectives by Sara Japhet and Gary Knoppers and Ralph Klein. But if I were to recommend something more specific and a really interesting, creative, unique take on Chronicles, I'd have to put in a plug for my doctoral advisor, Louis Jonker. He published a book with Mohr Siebeck last year that explores the... He's pulling from different disciplines, including Persian period studies and working in a post-colonial context, as well, in South Africa. But what he really brings to the text is an understanding of the multi-layered identity that stands behind what the Chronicler is doing and who the Chronicler is speaking to and how the Chronicler's work would have been received, and how it speaks to a very unique and crucial (but very exciting) time in the Persian or Hellenistic period. Judah—the Jewish community is sort of at a crossroads and they're re-thinking many things about their faith. Louis' book is called *Defining All Israel in Chronicles*.

**MH:** Oh, I saw that this morning!

45:00

**BG:** It's Mohr Siebeck, 2016—*Forschungen zum Alten Testament*—series. That's more for the real committed reader.

**MH:** Yeah, that's kind of a scholarly book.

**BG:** But I don't think you need much Hebrew or Aramaic to get into that and really glean a lot from it.

**MH:** Okay, well thanks for spending some time with us.

**BG:** My pleasure! Thanks for inviting me.

**MH:** I'm glad we were able to this. It's been an interesting discussion. It's especially nice, since you're used to the podcast and you know the audience a little bit. You know what we're trying to do here. So thanks again for spending some of your day with us.

**BG:** No problem.

45:35

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**MH:** All right, we're back at SBL and we have with us John Schwandt. John is a colleague at Faithlife, and he is the force behind Mobile Ed.

**JS:** Hi, Mike! It's great to be here!

**MH:** Yeah, so tell the audience a little bit about yourself first—your education, your areas of interest and expertise, and then we really need to talk about Mobile Ed because it's something ideal for listeners.

**JS:** Fantastic. I am a big fan... I was a big fan of Logos from the beginning. My first degree was in Landscape Architecture, actually.

**MH:** [laughs] I did not know that!

**JS:** There's actually a connection there. We all go back to the Garden, right? [laughter] When I was finishing that degree, I also loved the Bible. I ended up buying Logos in '92—so the first version of it. I've loved it ever since. Eventually, I've come to work here. And now, not only has the library grown, but we're inviting the premium professors from around the world... You don't have to now pick and choose what seminary you want to go to in order to get a particular professor. We're bringing them here, and then we connect them to the fantastic library.

**MH:** Listeners are going to know that I was at the beginning stages of Mobile Ed. The kinds of people in this audience were the people we had in mind. Just forget about the expense, forget about uprooting your family, forget about quitting your church to learn how to do ministry. If you want an education, can we create courseware—real course content—for someone to learn anywhere, on any device, no matter where they are? There's a reason it's called "Mobile Ed." We're now at a place where how many courses are actually shipping? It's a lot.

**JS:** It's over 200 now.

**MH:** Two hundred courses. We invite scholars in specifically with the intent that we want you to give us—our audience, those who jump into Mobile Ed—what you do in your classroom. It's not watered-down. It's not different. It's not something remedial. This is what they do in the places where they teach. It's condensed, of course, but there it is. This is what they... They bring their own notes. They bring the notes they use and then they give us the content.

**JS:** That's exactly right. And that's where it gets kind of fun because education is starting to change. I think it's going to really help the adult learner. The person you're talking about is *me*. I wasn't in theology to begin with. Later I went to seminary, and I had to choose that seminary for the faculty I wanted to learn from. I then became a Greek professor for 20 years and finished my doctorate while I was doing that. But as we bring these professors in and they have their class notes, we don't let them lecture for two hours. That's what I like to do as a lecturer. You're lucky I'm not just dominating this conversation right now once you get me started. [laughter] We make them stop every ten to fifteen minutes and really think about what they're going to teach. So when you say "condensed," yeah, we distill their course into its essential elements. They don't

have to keep repeating themselves because we record them and they can replay. So an adult learner can sit down for five to ten minutes and learn the key components of any particular lecture that would have been an hour long because of the repetition. And then you can stop at any point and see the transcript, make notes in it, comment with your friends. It's connected to lots of books that you wouldn't normally get to because of the trek across the campus to the library. And so we can do so much more in such a small space of time that it's perfect for the modern adult learner.

50:00

**MH:** I remember in the early days, we'd get scholars in from all over the place in the building, and they're like, "I don't know if I can get through my material in a week!" And it's like, "Look, just trust us. We know that when you're in the studio, there's a lot of repetition—a lot of wasted time. You're not going to be saying, 'Did everybody get this handout? For everybody who missed the assignment, here's what it was. For those of you who weren't here last time, let's recap what we did in the previous class period. Hey, how about the Cowboys?' You don't have these rabbit-trails and discussions. And in the early days, they were amazed that they could actually get through a semester-long course in a week. And then we chop it up into these increments. That's the thing we imposed on them—breaks in between their course content to chop it up into easily... You play back little pieces of it. And if they ever make a mistake, it's not, "Oh, I have to repeat the last thirty minutes." It's two or three minutes, it's four or five minutes. So they were just kind of stunned that they could actually get through the content. It kind of made them wonder, "What am I doing in the regular classroom? [laughs] Why does it take 45 hours during a semester to go through this stuff, when I could do it really in ten hours total?"

**JS:** It's incredible. I've found this to be true, too, at other colleges, universities, and seminaries who are recording some of their content. But they don't usually connect with the books that we have. Biola is one, for example. It's very common for them to end up distilling an entire semester down into six video hours when they do this. The difference would be the platform. So when you take a course in our platform, it's going to be connected to a variety of books and then the price-point is going to be a huge difference.

**MH:** And you can search the videos, too, because you have things transcribed. There are courses that have transcripts. You can go in and out, interact with (like you said) the sources—the library. There is a lot of difference. We should add, this is not somebody with a camera in the back of the room [laughing] and you've got the guy in the front and he's kind of tiny but you can hear him. It's not that.

**JS:** It's designed for the online learner, or the digital learner. A person is in the front space. You're in a conversation with the guide. I did mention prior as a reference point... I do think we need to think about this as a society of what we're charging one another to grow in our understanding of the Bible. The way we've



built the university system, it's very common to pay over \$1500 for a semester course.

**MH:** Yeah, a single course.

**JS:** That's a lot of money when you start to want to learn a lot of things. Since we don't have the overhead of a traditional school, we can focus on the content and we're able to deliver this at a fraction of that price-point. There's some amazing deals right now.

**MH:** We should talk about some of that, both to churches and individuals. So go ahead.

**JS:** There's a free course that's available this month. Logos has a free book of the month. This month, the free book is a course! So you can go to [www.logos.com](http://www.logos.com) and pick up an entirely free course. There's another one for \$10. And there's going to be some fantastic Black Friday deals coming up. For the entire month, Mobile Ed is the spotlight for the company. You're welcome to call them "sales," and there are a number of bundles at a tremendous discount off our already crazy-good price for what you're getting compared to most institutions.

**MH:** Correct me if I'm wrong here because I'm a bit out of the sales loop, but Mobile Ed is accessible through subscription, correct? So describe that a little bit.

**JS:** Well, subscription is a new ground for us and we're continuing to improve in that. Currently, it's \$50 a month for access to around 30 courses. That content changes every quarter. So you can quite a wide swath of education through that program.

**MH:** Yeah, you're not going to touch that anywhere. Trust me. [laughs] So you have exposure to about 30 courses you said. Is there a tiered thing or are there other subscription plans? Logos Now... what's the relationship between Logos Now and Mobile Ed.

**JS:** Logos Now is a membership program. By being a member of Logos Now, you get access to a Mobile Ed course. There's lots of ways that you're going to be able to find a Mobile Ed course. If you purchase a base package, they come with at least one Mobile Ed course. Some of the levels come with multiple ones. We have the free book of the month course right now, and the Now plan has a course. The subscription model is going to become... We're going to add some new dimensions to it in the coming year. So just kind of look ahead for that, but the value is still going to be that same great value. I wouldn't wait. We're going to just kind of add more value to the current program.

55:00

**MH:** What are some of the more popular courses or the ones that come to your mind? Like, "If you want to know about X,Y, Z topic, we have this great course on this and that."

**JS:** Well, you might be surprised to hear that our top-selling courses are done by this professor called Dr. Heiser. [laughter]

**MH:** Okay, I'll take credit for the shameless plug there!

**JS:** I mean, this guy has produced these courses on difficult passages, and those are very important. That's where we want to grow. We want to have answers to problem passages. The stuff that's obvious, well, I don't need a teacher for that. I don't want the extra instruction. So those have done very well and are very popular. We have some other fantastic professors, as well.

**MH:** I would imagine Darrell Bock's courses sell pretty well. We've got Craig Evans, John Walton, Mark Futato. Again, these are experienced professors and they've taught what we're asking them to teach many times. So this is their wheelhouse, and you get that in an easily-deliverable form. Just think about... If you're a Logos user and you take notes on a course... Let's just say you're doing a Mobile Ed course and you have your own set of notes, those are permanently part of your library. You can actually search them just like you would search a book. There are just a lot of things that change the dynamic. It's not just a static experience, where you listen to a lecture and then you leave the room and you've got a set of paper notes, or even something in a Word doc. If you're doing it in the ecosystem, you have something that becomes part of that ecosystem, just by default. And if you miss something, you can play it over. You could do it on your laptop, you could do it on your phone. This is what it's designed for. Because, let's face it, real life is complicated. There are lots of things that draw on your time and lots of things that get in the way. Nobody has an easy, smooth schedule. You have to break things up. That's the logic behind what we're trying to do.

**JS:** Yeah, and that actually made me think of something we haven't mentioned, in terms of the subscription plans. We've been talking about the serious student that doesn't have to be at a seminary, but if they are that's great, too. What about education for the adults in a church?

**MH:** Right, the curious person. "I just want to try something out for a couple hours" or that sort of thing.

**JS:** We have an amazing program. We call it the "Church Deal" because it's such a...

**MH:** That would make sense. [laughter]

**JS:** It's access to the entire video content of the entire Mobile Ed catalogue (the 200 courses) for an entire congregation. So every member of the congregation can watch it. Now, the leaders are probably going to want to own a course or have the access to note-taking, or even take community notes with the leadership team, probably. But this is a program that on Faithlife TV unlocks all of the video content. Actually, at my church we have a number of small groups using this program as the teaching content.

**MH:** I should mention the person who does the transcripts for the podcast (her name is Brenda, I've mentioned her before), she told me last week that her church subscribes to this. So she gets access to the whole Mobile Ed catalogue for the annual price dispensed to a church. Everyone in her church has access to all of the courses, and she's one... Who knows how many people take advantage of that, but she really does! She's been through a number of them already. So yeah—if your church, if you're a pastor listening to this, or even if you're not a pastor, bring it to your pastor's attention that "Hey, we should check this out, and our entire congregation gets access to every course that Mobile Ed produces." Go up to the website and find out. What would that be called? How would they find that on the website? Just "Church Deal?"

1:00:00

**JS:** It's [www.faithlivesites.com/churchdeal](http://www.faithlivesites.com/churchdeal)

**MH:** Again, Brenda was real excited about it, and I know a few other people that I've met because of the podcast that their church does the same thing. Just think about it: everybody in your congregation who would care to put their toe in, even for an hour or so, or a hundred hours. There you go—you have access to everything.

**JS:** I end up using the video content more than I want to admit because I want to study and take notes and do all the reading and links, but the day gets away from me. It becomes night and the kids are down, and I turn my Roku on (I also have Apple TV but I tend to use my Roku more)—either one—the Faithlife TV has a channel there. So I'll pop it on and I'll think, okay, I can watch five minutes of a lecture here or there. Next thing I know, it's 30 minutes later and I've learned quite a bit and kind of relaxed with it. So that's how I use it.

**MH:** Are you saying it beats *Dancing with the Stars*? Is that what you're saying? [laughter] I don't want to step on your favorite show, but...

**JS:** [laughing] That's not mine! There are few things I don't understand—a few mysteries in this world—and that's probably one for me still.

**MH:** That's one of them! Well, thanks for spending a little time with us. Again, Mobile Ed is a big deal. It's designed for people who just want to learn something about the Bible and they don't want to have to change their life, uproot everything, incur a huge expense to be able to do it. We're glad that John could

join us and introduce people to that program—that effort—and really that whole concept—the whole effort on the part of the company to get people content. That's what our listeners care about. They want content. They're the people who care about learning scripture and they jump in. They are determined to teach themselves. That's why they listen. And Mobile Ed is a great opportunity to do that in another form.

**JS:** Thank you!

**MH:** Thank you.

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**TS:** All right, Mike. Two great interviews. I want to give Ben's mom a shout-out for introducing Ben to the podcast. Good for you! Good mom.

**MH:** Yeah, really! This is what we need. I tell people, "Tell a friend, maybe tell an enemy, too." She's a real avid listener of the podcast and we're thankful for that.

**TS:** Absolutely. And Ben is feeling isolated where he's at and has nobody to talk shop to, so he can listen to your lovely voice every night.

**MH:** Maybe we can get Mori on and pinch him and then he can hear Mori bark.

**TS:** And also, Mike, real quick... Talking to John, we have a coupon code for the Naked Bible listeners. If you go to Faithlife or Logos and you check out, use the coupon code NAKEDBIBLE7. Use that coupon code when you check out. I'm not quite sure right now what you're going to get, but we'll have more details in the next podcast about that.

**MH:** You're going to get a discount on stuff, but it remains to be seen...

**TS:** I don't have that in front of me right now. Just go try it and see what happens, huh?

**MH:** Yeah, you'll get a discount on something good.

**TS:** There you go. Well, we want to thank Ben and John for coming on the podcast, and we want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.