

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 202

Hebrews Q&A, Part 2

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Dr. Heiser answers your questions about the book of Hebrews:

- Could the passages in Hebrews that seem to describe a loss of salvation actually be talking instead about a loss of inheritance in the kingdom? (Time stamp 1:30)
- What is a simple explanation for “substance” (hypostasis)? (7:15)
- Are believers’ sins judged? (23:43)
- Who are the individuals in the “great cloud of witnesses?” (27:05)

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 202: Hebrews Q&A, Part 2. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike! How are you doing this week?

MH: Good! Looking forward to getting back into these. Again, good questions last time. I've seen the rest of the grocery list, and these will be good questions, too.

TS: Absolutely. And again, I just want to echo what I said last week about how we have a great audience out there sending in great questions. We apologize we couldn't get to every question, but nonetheless, we appreciate you sending in those questions.

MH: Yeah, these are the sorts of things that I would hope... There are plenty of doubters out there that say, "Aw, people aren't interested in doctrine. People aren't interested in this or that." Well, hopefully somebody out there that thinks that way is going to hear this and that last one because, again, these are good questions. They have weight to them. They're serious.

TS: And with that, let's just jump into our next set of questions. Our next question is from David in Higganum, Connecticut.

1:30

I know that for some, Hebrews seems to speak of one possibly losing their salvation. What if this is actually dealing with inheritance in the kingdom? Moses seems to be a good example of this. In the natural, he gets saved (baptized through the waters) and sees the glory of Yahweh, yet because of a failure of heart, he doesn't get to go into the promised kingdom. In *The Unseen Realm*, the verses in Revelation are covered with regards to

overcoming, not just being saved. Isn't that also "inheritance" speak? What if the loss spoken of in Hebrews is one of inheritance and not of salvation?

MH: Yeah, I think the verses in Revelation about overcoming are about believing. You endure to the end. You believe until the end, despite all the terrible things that the visions of Revelation are showing are happening to believers (potentially or actually happening). So I don't dichotomize those two things. But let's try to go back to the beginning here.

What the question is asking is if the warning passages in Hebrews are about loss of reward in the kingdom and not salvation itself. Well, first I would say that you can't lose your salvation, you can only refuse to believe the gospel. Nothing you do behaviorally is going to result in the forfeiture of salvation. The only way you're not going to have salvation is if you don't believe. It's clear-cut. If you believe, you are eternally secure. If you don't believe—if you turn to unbelief—then you're not. There are no unbelievers in heaven. That's all I'm saying by this. There are no people who turn from the gospel in heaven. There are only those who turn *to* the gospel in heaven. It's really not that complicated, even though it might sound unfamiliar (I realize) to a number of folks in the audience. My problem, more broadly, though, with equating the Hebrews language to only kingdom reward is that it suggests there are kingdom residents who have no reward. I don't think that's really coherent. I think, like Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4, everyone's going to receive his or her commendation. You're going to be commended in some way. But we're also going to suffer loss. So I don't think it's coherent to have kingdom residents that have nothing—no reward. So I have a problem there.

But I also think that, while some passages in Hebrews might be read the way the question implies, that others can't be read that way. Let's go back to Hebrews 3 and what I think is kind of a pivotal passage here for the book. Hebrews 3:12... I'm going to read 12-14.

¹²Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

"Sharing with Christ" speaks to membership, not just reward. Earlier in the same chapter, Hebrews 3:6:

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⁶but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

It's membership. A little bit after the Hebrews 3:12-14 passage, we have Hebrews 3:16:

¹⁶ For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

I think if you take that idea—this entrance idea—and these other passages that speak of membership, I think that's kind of the point. A lot of the language in Hebrews speaks of membership in the family of God, not just reward that extends from or is related to membership. For that reason, I don't think that the trajectory works really well. Another one is Hebrews 10:23.

²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

What's the confession of our hope? What was promised? It's not just rewards that are promised. Membership is promised—membership in the family of God and eternal life as a member of God's family. Elsewhere in the New Testament (not just in Hebrews), this idea of Jesus' faithfulness—that theme—clearly speaks of membership in God's family. I'll just do one example here: 1 Corinthians 1:9.

⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The salvation that God had planned... He's going to keep that. God is going to be faithful to that because of Christ's faithfulness, and that involves more than just reward in the kingdom. It involves being called into the fellowship of his Son—membership in God's family. So I don't think that these two things are neatly equatable, or in many passages even equatable at all. For that reason, that's how I would approach the question.

TS: Becky has our next question.

7:15

I am finding myself uncomfortable and looking for a better, simpler explanation for "substance"—hypostatic/hypostasis. I have found "flesh" or "body" or various other meanings. In Bible college many years ago, I was taught (and accepted) that it was something about who the action was coming from (Christ Jesus or Jesus Christ) and the approach to humans.

Now I don't quite see how that fits in. Can Dr. Mike please address that phrase/concept in more detail?

MH: Yeah, well good luck for finding something simple here! [laughs] Let's just start this way: Hypostasis doesn't really refer to an action. It's not a verb. But I'm either not parsing what Becky is saying, or maybe it's hard for her to express what it was she was remembering. But it's not an action. So this whole part about "coming from something" I'm not following. That doesn't even seem to be part of the issue.

I'll give you a definition. For example, Erickson (and I recommend this book: *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*—it's a little, slim, handy book)... The definition of hypostasis there goes like this:

From a Greek word for "substance" or nature. The real or essential nature of something, as distinguished from its attributes. In Christian thought, the term is used in reference to any of the three distinct persons in the Trinity, and especially Christ—the second person in the Trinity—in his divine and human natures.

So it's a short definition. The term actually has a really long or convoluted history. It's a noun and it has something to do with nature or essence. Its meaning depends on who's using it and how they're using it. That's the case with all word meanings—context is the big thing. Context is king when it comes to how a term is being used. Now, I would also recommend, if you want something longer... I'm going to read a couple things. The first one is from The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, which is a peer-reviewed site (and it's really good). Their entry on "Trinity" (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/trinity/>) says this... I'll read part of it.

The Nicene formula declared that the Son was *homoousios*, "of the same substance" as the Father, which was elaborated by the Cappadocian Fathers in the dictum that the Persons of the Trinity were one *ousia* but three *hypostases*. This knocked out Arians on the one side, and Sabellians on the other...

Arians are those who said there was a time when the Son was not. Sabellianism was essentially modalism, which is technically called "Modalistic Monarchianism." It's the idea that God is one being or person who successively takes on different forms or manifestations—modes. So the Nicene formula sort of knocked both of those out of the ring. And the way it was worded was that the Son was the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father, but the persons of the Trinity were three hypostases. Continuing with the entry:

The Nicene *homoousios* formula inherited the ambiguity. Understood in one way, the claim that the Persons of the Trinity were "*homoousios*" said that the Persons

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were the same individual, skating dangerously close to the Sabellian claim that they were "*monoousios*"—of *one* substance [but in these different modes]. Understood in the other way, it said merely that they were of the same *kind*, an interpretation compatible with tri-theism.

So there were some problems with the way the Nicene Creed worded things. It got picked on after the fact.

The Cappadocians attempted to clarify and disambiguate the Nicene formula by employing the term "*hypostasis*," used earlier by Origen, to capture the notion of individual identity rather than identity of kind. By itself, this did not solve the problem. First, apart from their revisionary theological usage, *ousia* and *hypostasis* were virtual synonyms: as a solution to the Trinity puzzle this formula was rather like saying that the Persons were one thing but different objects. Secondly, "one *ousia*" still failed to rule out tri-theism [three different gods]—indeed, in non-theological cases, one *ousia*, many *hypostases* is precisely what different individuals of the same species are.

So if you're going to use these terms, someone could say, "Well, that's great! We've got one substance. All people are human, but the people are different people—different humans." So if you're going to use this kind of language (*ousia*—essence, and *hypostasis*—substance), then we've got tri-theism. They're all the same substantially, but they're three different gods. So there was still this problem. Back to the excerpt:

Homoousios, as intended, ruled out the doctrine that Father and Son were merely *similar* kinds of beings—*homoiousios*—but it did not rule out their being distinct individuals of the same kind.

The Cappadocian dictum, however, provided a framework for further discussion of the Trinity puzzle: the Trinitarian Persons were to be understood as being the same *something* but different *something-elses* and the substantive theological question was that of characterizing the ways in which they were bound together and individuated.

That's the end of the excerpt. I like the way it puts those things. Erickson, in his Christian Theology (this isn't the same book I just quoted, this is his bigger 3rd Edition Christian Theology), puts it this way:

It's clear that the orthodox formula protects the doctrine of the Trinity against the danger of modalism.

(Where you have one essence and then God just appears in different forms.)

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Has it done so, however, at the expense of falling into the opposite error—tri-theism? On the surface, the danger seems considerable. Two points remain, however, to safeguard the doctrine of the Trinity against tri-theism. First, it was noted that if we can find a single activity in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that is in no way different in any of the three persons, we must conclude that there is but one identical substance involved. And such unity was found in the divine activity of Revelation. Revelation originates in the Father, proceeds through the Son, and is completed in the Spirit. It's not three actions, but one action in which all three are involved. Second, there was an insistence on the concreteness and indivisibility of the divine substance. Much criticism of the Cappadocian doctrine of the Trinity focused on the analogy of a universal manifesting itself in particulars. To avoid the conclusion that there is a multiplicity of gods within the godhead, just as there is a multiplicity of humans within humanity, Gregory of Nyssa suggested that, strictly speaking, we ought not to talk about a multiplicity of humans, but a multiplicity of the one universal human being. Thus, the Cappadocians continued to emphasize that, while the three members of the Trinity can be distinguished numerically as persons, they are indistinguishable and inseparable in their essence or substance or being.

This is lots of theological jargon, but here's what it comes down to. In other words, all of these people (early Church Fathers and the post-apostolic people here) who received the New Testament and heard New Testament preaching and received the New Testament content written down and all that stuff... These guys are just struggling with what terms would best characterize the phenomena of the biblical text—specifically, the New Testament. How do we talk about what we see in the New Testament? (You could say “in the Bible,” but since we're talking about Christology, it's really a New Testament sort of focus.) The Bible doesn't come with an instruction manual on how to parse its language or what words to use in your language to express what you're seeing in the text. It just doesn't. So the *Sola Scriptura* idea isn't really helpful on points like this, but at least it does seek to place the biblical text as the ultimate touch-point for what we're talking about. And again, this is the spirit of what we do at The Naked Bible. We want to understand the text in its context.

So what's the context for *hypostasis* language? My answer is the Old Testament, Second Temple period, and the wider ancient Near East. Now, I think Sommer's work on *The Bodies of God* (I've referred to that book a number of times) is particularly helpful here, even though the way he talks about some of his examples sounds modalistic. Benjamin Sommer is a Jew. He has really good examples, but sometimes in the way he talks about them he sounds like a modalist. But I don't think he's really caring because he's Jewish. I'm thankful for his examples, but I just want to note that they don't have to be understood modalistically. They can be understood in a better way.

I would say, had the early Church Fathers known about some of the stuff that Sommer ferrets out, they would have been helped in their discussion about the vocabulary to use. So the goal here isn't mere theologizing. We're trying to take note of the text in context and then trying to express what's there and what ancient literate readers would have thought. Just as a little aside here; if modern Unitarians don't like that, so be it.

I want to read a couple things from Sommer's book, just to let you know kind of what I'm talking about. If you have the book... Let's just start on page 13. He starts his discussion early with what he calls "the fluidity of divine selfhood in Mesopotamia." His book is called *The Bodies of God: How God Was Thought About in Ancient Israel*. He's going to start in Mesopotamia—the wider ancient Near Eastern world. He writes:

I refer to a type of fluidity we might call *fragmentation*. Some divinities have a fluid self in the sense that there are several divinities with a single name who somehow are and are not the same deity...

If you've read *Unseen Realm*, that language is going to sound familiar. Then he starts going through some examples from Ishtar—stuff said about Ishtar to make that point. If we go to page 23, he gets into this a little bit more. He says:

On the other hand, there are some hints that the divine image...

He's been talking about idols—divine images. *Ṣelem* is the Hebrew word for images and *ṣalamu* is the Akkadian word. So he's been talking about images and their relationship to the deities. He says:

On the other hand, there are some hints that the divine image could come to be seen as a god simply known as *ṣalamu*. Akkadian texts refer to a divinity as *ṣalmu*, who seems to have been identical with the sun god. The apparent contradiction between two understandings of the divine *ṣalamu* (namely that it was identical with a particular god in heaven and that it was itself an independent god) falls away in light of the notion of the fluidity of divine selfhood in Mesopotamia. *Ṣalmu* was a body of the god.

So the image, he's saying... The Mesopotamians could conceive that you had the same deity in different places. The image was itself a god. Sommer likes to use the phrase, "it was a body of the god," but it didn't exhaust that god's being. This is a phrase that Sommer uses a lot—that you could have the deity in a localized place (here in this case, in an object). But that didn't exhaust in the Mesopotamian mind the being or the essence of that deity. That deity could be any number of other places at the same time. There's this fluidity. So the god could be in this body—in this object—but it didn't exhaust the god's being. It was itself a god, assimilated into the heavenly god, yet physically a distinct thing that

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could lose its divine status at any moment (like if you destroyed it), should the deity choose to abandon it or if it's destroyed. Page 24:

It follows then, that what we saw earlier concerning the complex self of a god also applies to the god's physical presence. The divine body, like the divine self, can be fragmented, yet somehow remain unified. Any one body was part of the god, but did not exhaust the god's fullness, just as a god's self was not confined to one person. In short, gods' bodies paralleled gods' selves.

Now, he goes on to talk about the angel of the Lord. He goes on to talk about the glory. He goes on to talk about the name—these Old Testament concepts that should be very familiar to you if you've read *Unseen Realm*. What I'm saying is, look, people who just don't like Trinitarian doctrine... "Well, that's not biblical! I can't find a verse that says..." Well, no kidding. No duh. All right? You can't really find a verse for any doctrine, where all aspects of the doctrine are confined to one verse, so that's just silly talk.

So dispensing with that nonsense, what I'm trying to suggest to you is that this theological language—this theologizing that the Church Fathers entered into to try to come up with a term (whether it was *ousias* or *hypostasis*)... That's a legitimate pursuit! What they're trying to do is come up with vocabulary that captures what they see in the text. To use ourselves as an example—Naked Bible—what I have suggested to you in *Unseen Realm* is that the idea of having God as one unified person or one unified essence existing in three different persons and doing that simultaneously... That's an Old Testament idea, and it's even deeper than that. It's an Old Testament idea that would have been familiar to the ancient Near Eastern mind. It is not an invention of Nicaea. It is not an invention of the Church Fathers. It's not an invention of (fill-in-the-blank). It's not. These are concepts that are reflected in the text and that are comprehensible and valid in the context of the ancient Near Eastern world in which the Bible was produced. If you don't like that, oh well. Then just don't like it. But it's true. It's actually true.

So back to the question, if you're going to use a word like *hypostasis*, you should realize the history of it. It's kind of a convoluted history, and it does show up in early Church language. It's not perfect, but again, they're trying to figure out what terms best capture what they're seeing in the text. To go back to Erickson's concise definition, *hypostasis* is really... You could use a word like "substance" or "nature" or "essence" and try to attach those other words to *hypostasis* to try to help you understand *hypostasis*, and then, ultimately, how a term like *hypostasis* gets used in Trinitarian discussion.

TS: There you go, Becky. [laughter] Ken has a question:

In the last podcast on Hebrews 13, you mentioned judgment for sins of both believers and unbelievers to come. Concerning the believers' judgment, does that mean sins committed by believers *after* they have accepted Christ unto initial justification, even if repented of *before* physical death, are judged in the eschaton?

25:00 **MH:** I have to admit that the wording of this question is difficult. [laughs] "Unto justification," "before physical death"... What I think the question is asking is, are sins that believers commit after believing... are those sins judged in the eschaton—at the Judgment Seat of Christ or something in the last days? Are sins that believers commit after believing judged later on? My answer is no. Sin was judged at the cross. My sins... I was born in 1963. My sins were covered by the sacrifice of Christ. My sins were all future, with respect to the cross event, but it still covered them. I was born long after the cross. The sacrifice of the cross isn't, therefore, bound by time. If it was, passages like John 3:16-17 are bogus. And so is most of the biblical talk about the cross, since it is written to post-cross-event people. So we don't have a chronological or time limitation to what's going on at the cross. Sin was judged at the cross. Period. That's when it's judged.

Sinning now is a reality, but again, all of my sins (and they were real and still are real) were all covered by the cross event. The fact that I was born long after the cross doesn't matter. The sinning now is a reality (1 John 1:10—every believer still sins). Sin does not result in the loss of salvation because salvation was gained (and couldn't be gained) by sinlessness. Again, "that which cannot be gained by moral perfection cannot be lost by moral imperfection." Rather, sin now results in what it has always resulted in: self-destruction, harm to other people, plus additional factors created by being in relationship to God through Christ. It results in being un-useful to God and God's plan. So we become tools that don't get used. It results in a loss of blessing. I like the word "blessing" instead of the word "reward," by the way. To me, being blessed in eternal life, in the context of when I get my "life review" and that sort of thing when we're with the Lord... To be blessed just feels better than "I'm going to get a prize." I just like the word blessing. Maybe that's my own hang-up here. But again, we will know, then, how God wanted to use us and how we could have been used but we weren't. So we will suffer some loss, but "every man will receive some commendation" (1 Corinthians 4:5). So that's how I would answer that question.

TS: Janet has a question about Hebrews 12:1.

27:05 **Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, is "witness" here in the sense of someone testifying in court or in the sense of a spectator of an event, or both? Are those saints of old watching us? Can people in heaven see us?**

TS: Are they watching me take a shower, Mike?

MH: Boy, I hope not. [laughter] I would say the answer to all those questions is a qualified "yes." Now, I don't think they're all equally in view, but all of them are in view in some way. I'll try to quickly explain what I mean by that.

We have no reason to suspect that residents of the spiritual world can't see what happens here. For example, angels show John (in the book of Revelation) all sorts of things happening on earth in the book. The angel isn't wearing a blindfold, and he's not guessing. He sees things that are going to happen or are happening. He sees the events as well as John. That's one thought.

Angelic mediation is an Old Testament concept. I get into it a little bit in *Unseen Realm*. I'm going to get into it more in the book that'll be out in the summer or the fall on angels. But angelic mediation requires that angels know what's going on in our lives. Now, "That's about angels, Mike. We're talking about departed Christians." Well, that's good. So am I. Because glorified believers are like Jesus. We'll be made like him (1 John 3). And so it stands to reason that angels' ability to see what's happening on earth isn't going to be greater than those of us who are going to be made like Christ. I think we're going to at least be equal and, honestly, better because Christ is superior to angels. So if we are made like him in glorification, then I think we have every reason to think that yeah, we could see what's happening on earth.

On the other hand, I think we also have good reason to suspect that we'll be more interested in what's going on in God's world than on this one. [laughs] In other words, I would rather be spending time with the Lord or with some believer I had always wanted to meet or something like that or a loved one on the other side than watching Trey take a shower. I really would! I think what's going on in the heavenlies is going to be a lot more interesting than what's going on here. So that's why I have this qualified "yes" kind of thing.

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I think the primary focus here in the passage—this great cloud of witnesses thing—is to part of what the question touched on, and that is this idea of a witness, specifically. We're surrounded by believers who have finished the course and who have inherited what was promised. They are witnesses to the fact that they have an eternal address in the household (the council) of God. They testify, they bear witness, to God's promise being fulfilled. This idea is related to the ancient Near Eastern treaty idea, where in pagan ancient Near Eastern religions they had the gods "penciled in" in treaties, and they were listed in treaties as witnesses to a covenant being made. So there's some relationship to that in the biblical instance. This kind of language occurs in several places. I personally think the most interesting one is Psalm 89. And I'm going to draw attention to an article by E. Theodore Mullen. For those of you who are really into the divine council, you're going to recognize that name right away. It was Mullen's Harvard Semitic Monographs book (I think published in the early 80's) on the divine council that really sort of started interest in divine council study outside things like a dissertator. It was a really important book. Again, I reference

it in *Unseen Realm* a few times and in other places. But he also wrote an article called "The Divine Witness and the Davidic Royal Grant: Ps 89:37-38." (By the way, those verse references are in Hebrew. In English it's going to be verses 36-37.) That was from the *Journal of Biblical Literature* in 1983. I'm going to post that article in the folder for newsletter subscribers, but I want to quote a few things from it, just so that you know what we're talking about here and how it applies to Psalm 89 and, I think ultimately to Hebrews 12. So on page 208-209, Mullen writes this:

Within the context of the recent scholarly emphasis placed upon the use of treaty-forms in the ANE, the relationship between the Mosaic covenant and the Davidic royal grant has received great attention. While the Sinaitic covenant is most commonly associated with the Hittite suzerainty-type treaty, the best parallel to the covenant with David is found in the royal grants which depict the unconditional promise of the king to the vassal as a reward for faithful service to the suzerain.

And then he says that our focus will be Psalm 89:37-38 (again, the English verses are 36-37). Here's what it says (in English, verses 36-37):

³⁶ **His offspring shall endure forever,
his throne as long as the sun before me.**
³⁷ **Like the moon it shall be established forever,
a faithful witness in the skies."**

Those are the two verses. Back to Mullen. He says:

Our focus will be on Ps 89 37-38, which presents a motif not found in the oracle of Nathan [2 Samuel 7]—the concept of a divine witness to the Davidic royal grant. The "witness in the heavens," the 'ed bassahaq [witness in the clouds/skies] of v 38, is the guarantor of the grant and, as such, places the poetic promise to David in Ps 89:20-38 solidly both within the mythico/religious concepts associated with covenant motifs in the ANE in this period and also within the legal requirements associated with the royal grants.

I'm going to rabbit-trail from Mullen for a moment here. Do any of you recognize the "in the clouds" phrase—*sahaq*? If you've read *Unseen Realm* or you've heard me lecture, you should know where that comes from. The other time that phrase is used is also in Psalm 89, a little earlier in the divine council scene—Psalm 89:6-7:

⁶ **For who in the skies [*bassahaq*] can be compared to the LORD?
Who among the heavenly beings [*bene elim*] is like the LORD,**

**⁷a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones,
and awesome above all who are around him?**

We're going to come back to that because the same phrase occurs in two different places in Psalm 89:1. It's clearly divine council, and then you have this other "witness in the clouds" thing going on. So back to Mullen. On page 214, he writes this:

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The parallelism of v 38 would tend to equate the witness in 38b with the moon in 38a. This is the identification made by M. Delcor, who notes that the image of the moon as a faithful witness evokes the juridical imagery of treaties in the ANE where the sun and moon are named as witnesses. These two heavenly bodies, along with heaven and earth, represent natural opposites of creation which preserve the covenant with Israel or David. These opposite pairs, or "olden gods," are often cited as witnesses in the rib [the lawsuit genre] in the prophetic works (cf. Deut 32:1-2; Isa 1:2-10; Jer 2:12; Mic 6:1-12; etc.), and have a twofold function. Not only do they insure the efficacy of the curses or conditions, but they also guarantee the stability of the covenant itself. Hence, if this "witness in the heavens" of v 38 is to be identified with the moon, the very nature of the universe guarantees the stability of the covenant grant. The promise that the throne of the offspring would be before Yahweh like the sun, i.e., eternally (cf. v 38), further connects this concept with that of the treaty witness in the ANE.

Yet this identification of the "witness in the heavens" is not wholly accepted [and he doesn't accept it, either, and this is why he transitions here]...

In attempting to identify the witness, we should note that v 38 does not specify a definite figure. The phrase *vo'e'd* denotes "a witness," not "the witness." While it might be pointed out that the usage of the definite article is sporadic in Hebrew poetry, it should be noted that it is orthographically represented in vv 10α, 16α, 17α, and 50α of the present psalm. Hence, one might conclude that the psalmist desired to leave the designation indefinite. In the same manner, it should be recognized that this witness in v 38 is compared to, but not identified with the moon, just as the throne in v 37 is compared to, but not identified with the sun (both employing the preposition *kē-*). This places the "witness in the heavens" on a level comparable to that of the sun and moon in status and function. Perhaps a further clue to the position of the witness is contained in 89:6-9 [the divine council scene], the depiction of Yahweh in his heavenly court. It is most interesting that the phrase *bassahaq* occurs twice in this psalm—once in v 7, in the form of a question, and once in v 38, in the form of a promise. Both occurrences presuppose some figure who stands before Yahweh in his court...

If vv 6-9 and 37-38 are seen as integral parts of the psalm and its imagery, we would assert that both introduce the concept of the covenant into the legal realm of Yahweh's assembly [council].

Now, Mullen goes on and he starts giving parallel data from Ugarit, where El is the lead deity and Baal is the co-regent (vizier). If you've read *Unseen Realm* or you've read any of my journal articles, this is going to become important. Baal, at Ugarit, is the witness to decrees of El. I use this in my dissertation, along with my discussion of the witness in the clouds as indicating that Baal is the council co-regent. I use that to argue that the witness here in Psalm 89 is the Second Yahweh in Israelite thought. Because in Israelite religion, the head of the council wasn't El, with Baal as his vizier—his co-regent or co-ruler. In the Israelite version, it was the invisible Yahweh and the visible Yahweh. They occupied the two slots. Yahweh occupied both slots. So you have the Second Yahweh as the witness. Well, who's the Second Yahweh? That would be Jesus. So what you have here is you have Jesus—the second person of the Trinity (the Son)... You have the Son being a witness to God's covenant with David. In other words, you have the eternal messianic Son bearing witness to (and, therefore, validating) the covenant of his own earthly kingship. It fits in really well with Hebrews 6:13-19. We can't cover everything in these episodes, so here we go with this. Let me read Hebrews 6:13-19.

¹³ For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, ¹⁴ saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." ¹⁵ And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. ¹⁶ For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. ¹⁷ So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, ¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. ¹⁹ We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

For our purposes (back to the plural witnesses), look at what you have here. You have God validating the messianic covenant—the Davidic covenant. The messiah is the son of David. It's completely tied to Psalm 89—the Davidic covenant. You have God validating his promise to David by means of a witness (himself), just the Second Yahweh figure. And that second Yahweh figure is the same one that became incarnate as the messiah. So you have God and Jesus promising, certifying, fulfilling, and validating everything between themselves. And they can't lie. God can appeal to no higher authority.

40:00

That gets real interesting, because in Hebrews 12 we have the plural witnesses (this is back to the question). For our purposes (going back to the plurality there), we should read the plurality of Hebrews 12 (the "great cloud of witnesses"—the witnesses in the clouds) against the backdrop of Hebrews 2. What's Hebrews 2? That's where Jesus presents believers to God and presents God to us in the congregation—in the council. This is Hebrews 2:10-12. We read that scene... It's us, in effect. It's believers who are in glory in the council being presented to God and God presented to them, and Jesus says, "Look, these are my siblings!" He is the guarantor of the covenant. So we are the witnesses in the clouds (or we will be) bearing witness to what the original witness in the clouds accomplished through his own obedience, after which he sat down at the right hand of the Father. The imagery is pretty dramatic when you really get down to it. So the "cloud of witnesses" idea does have real hooks back into divine council thinking. And if you take it back to Psalm 89, God can promise by no higher authority than himself, and it's the Son who is the *the* witness to that covenant. He fulfills that covenant (the messianic covenant), and then by virtue of his becoming incarnate to fulfill that covenant, we become his siblings. And in glorification, we are part of the witness testimony. It's a theologically saturated passage—just that one phrase. And it has deep ancient Near-Eastern roots.

TS: Mike, are you sure that they don't want to watch me take a shower? You don't know. You can't say that *elohim* aren't watching me take a shower. You have no idea.

MH: I'm going to go out on a limb and say that's correct. [laughing]

TS: You have no idea, sir. You have no idea what you're talking about.

MH: [laughing] Like I said, I will go out on that limb.

TS: All right, sounds good. Well, what great questions, again. We appreciate everybody that sent in those Hebrews questions. Next week we're going to get back into some regular Q&A's, so be looking forward to those questions. And then we've got some interviews coming up, Mike.

MH: Uh, huh. Good ones!

TS: We want to again thank everybody for sending in those questions, and we want to thank Mike for answering those questions. And I want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.