

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 215

Q&A 27

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**Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)**

### Episode Summary

Dr. Heiser answers your questions about:

- The sin of Nadab and Abihu [1:55]
- The lost chapter of Acts found in Constantinople [2:50]
- How we know the Genesis account is a polemic of Mesopotamian material and not vice-versa [7:00]
- Whether bowing to Stan would have fulfilled Jesus' mission [11:40]
- The height of the floodwaters as polemic [14:45]

### Transcript

**Trey Stricklin:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 215: our 27th Q&A. I'm the layman Trey Stricklin. And he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how you doing?

**Dr. Michael Heiser:** Pretty good.

**TS:** Well, this is our second week in Israel, so hopefully things are going good.

**MH:** Hopefully. (laughter)

**TS:** We're not actually live right now on the air in Israel.

**MH:** Right.

**TS:** But this is week two of the Israel trip. So hopefully everything's good.

**MH:** Like I put on the Facebook page months and months ago: I'm not a prophet. But it would be handy, you know, right here.

**TS:** It would be.

**MH:** Sorry.

**TS:** If anybody is a prophet out there, shoot me an email at treystricklin@gmail.com, and you could also send me your questions for the Q&A at that email address.

**MH:** You want it in time for the fantasy draft. I know what you're angling for there.

**TS:** Oh, I don't need any help with fantasy.

**MH:** (laughter) Yeah, right.

**TS:** Let's... (laughter)

**MH:** I forgot, I forgot.

**TS:** I'm all good there. I'm all good there.

**TS:** Hey, the NFL draft just happened last week. How'd your team walk away?

**MH:** Good.

**TS:** Yeah?

**MH:** Good, I'm happy.

**TS:** Yeah? Cowboys did phenomenal as always. So, you know...

**MH:** Of course. (laughs)

**TS:** I can't complain, you know. We all know. All right, people probably don't want to continue talking about (both laugh) American football. So why don't we just get into our questions of the week?

**MH:** Good idea.

**TS:** Our first two are from Marian. And the first question is:

1:55

**Could Dr. Heiser explained what the exact sin of Nadab and Abihu was? Does "strange fire" mean coals from somewhere other than the altar? Was it because it was not Aaron offering the incense? Wasn't incense supposed to be burned on the incense altar?**

**MH:** Well, this is a pretty easy one. I'm going to suggest to Marian that Episode 73 in our Leviticus series (specifically the episode on Leviticus 10) answers all those questions. So I don't think I can condense that in two minutes and improve

on it. So that's my answer: go listen to Episode 73.

**TS:** Eventually, Mike, we're going to have every answer to the question be “go listen.” Just go listen to a certain episode. So, I like that.

**MH:** (laughing) Right, of course.

**TS:** Question two:

2:50 **What is Mike's opinion on the lost chapter of Acts found in Constantinople?**

**MH:** Well, I had never actually heard of this lost chapter of Acts found in Constantinople. So, I looked it up. It was discovered and published in 1871—this supposed lost chapter. There are zero peer-reviewed articles on it. There are also zero dissertations. That's a bad sign. (laughs) In other words, this has all the trappings of some sort of paleo-babble kind of document that no scholar since 1871 has thought enough of to actually do any study on it. So again, that's a bad sign.

But for the sake of learning about it, I did some looking online, since I don't have anything peer-reviewed to go to. And we'll put this link on the episode website in case people want to see this. But this manuscript (found again in the late 1870's) purports to be Acts 29, a missing chapter of the book of Acts. There are some really good...At this link, there's some really good questions to ask, and again, these are the kinds of things that just make the whole thing stink. Where's the original manuscript? Now the writer of this particular website notes this:

The manuscript, if it existed at all, was found in the possession of a sultan in the late 1700's or early 1800's at the earliest. The information about the manuscript was first published in 1871, almost 150 years ago.

5:00 There's nothing in terms of research databases or whatnot that show that the manuscript has been seen by anyone else in the last 150 years—the actual original manuscript or what purports to be the original manuscript. That's a bad sign. That means that scholars can't take this original manuscript, presumably, of course, written in Greek if this was Luke's hand and a copy of something produced by Luke, like the rest of the book of Acts... There are literally millions (millions—I'm not exaggerating) of Greek manuscripts from the period, and not just to the New Testament. I'm talking about koine Greek fragments—fragments of Greek material from the first couple centuries before Christ and on into the early Christian centuries overlapping with the era of the New Testament—that have been found and catalogued and scholars work on them and put them into databases and whatnot. And to see that nobody knows where this one is is highly suspicious.

Another question he asks is: where are the references in ancient literature to a lost chapter of Acts? Does anyone ever talk about something at the end of this chapter being lost? Or does anyone ever talk about how Acts should not end at chapter 28? And the answer is no. Nobody even suggest that anything has been lost from the end of the book of Acts. So again, another really, really bad sign.

Now, if you do any reading on this, you'll find out that there are things in this presumed lost chapter that are used to promote the idea of British Israelism. And that pretty much is the death blow. This has all the marks of a manuscript contrived—made up—to enforce an idea in the 19th century. Remember, this supposedly came out in 1871. This is one of those eras (19th century, early 20th century) where this idea of British Israelism was prominent—that the people of the British Isles are vestiges of the lost tribes of Israel, and that kind of thing. This is one of the eras where this was a big deal. And so again, this has all the marks of something made up just to promote this idea. So, what do I think of it? Not much.

**TS:** Jared's question is about episode 103—the Moses and the bronze serpent episode.

7:00

**Dr. Heiser talks about (as he often does) how Genesis 1-11 is a polemic of later Babylonian creation and flood stories and therefore most likely 1-11 was written during the Babylonian exile. I was telling my wife this and she asked, "Why couldn't it be the other way around?" I didn't have an answer. I've heard from nearly every scholar that Genesis is a polemic of the Mesopotamian stories, but I honestly don't know why. Couldn't someone just as easily say Genesis 1-11 was written first and *those* stories are polemics of Genesis? What are the reasons this is not the case?**

**MH:** Because the Babylonian material is demonstrably older—by a long shot. Let's just take... Broadly speaking, you've got creation stories that are Sumerian and others that are going to be Akkadian. All of this sort of gets lumped together. It's Mesopotamian material whether it's Akkadian from the Babylonian period or some other period in Sumerian. So the Mesopotamian/Sumerian/Akkadian stuff about creation stories that have parallels or ("parallels" is a fair word in some cases)... Somehow they have a literary or a conceptual worldview of correspondence to stuff in Genesis 1-11 that is centuries—even millennia—older than the biblical material. So it can't work the other way around. Now, if we narrow that to, let's just say *Enuma Elish*—the Babylonian creation story that is essentially written to glorify Marduk. Even if you believe that... Let's say that Genesis 1-11 was written by Moses. So let's just give it around number: 1500 BC. That would be 900 or maybe a thousand years earlier than the Marduk story. Okay, that would be the case.

10:00

Now that still doesn't help because a lot of the details of the Marduk story are older than that. It's just that in this particular creation story, the details are changed and manipulated to make Marduk the greatest of all gods and all that kind of stuff. So there are still threads even in that later text that predate the biblical material. If you're with most scholars (and I've said before I think Genesis 1-11 was either—probably a combination—composed and heavily edited during the Exile specifically to respond to the theology of the captors of the two tribes that are held in Babylon)... If you believe that, then the creation story—*Enuma Elish* (the Marduk creation story and the Hebrew Bible—specifically this material in Genesis 1-11)—is really coming into being at roughly the same time. So, it would be very... You're not even really helped by that because then you have to assume... This is sort of my second trajectory on this. Why would we assume that an elite scribal class of Mesopotamians feel it's worth their time at all to respond to something a captive Jewish scribe is writing? You only do polemic if you think something is a threat to you. If you're the Babylonians and the Jews are your captives, they're not going anywhere without your permission. And who's paying attention to what they do religiously? We're living in Babylon. You know, it's not like the Jews have either the ability in terms of production or the permission to write something down and then distribute it throughout the Empire. And then Babylonian scribes look at that and go, (gasp) "Oh boy, we need to respond to this." It doesn't make any sense. They're not going to care one whit about what a bunch of captives are writing about their own theology and their own history.

So looking at it in reverse just doesn't make any sense. You have the chronological problem with the material from the get-go, but even if it was contemporaneous (and some of it is, but not a whole lot of it), why would an empire power like Babylon care about responding to the literature of a captive people? There'd be no need. "We're not afraid of your God. You're sitting here in Babylon. Our God conquered your God. Why should we care what you're writing?" So it just doesn't make sense, either chronologically or in the circumstances of the day.

**TS:** Our next question is from Jack:

11:40

**This probably seems like a weird question, but when Jesus was being tempted in the desert and was offered all the nations in return for Jesus worshiping the tempter, why would this not have fulfilled the mission? In Jesus' mind he would be "sacrificing himself" to rescue the nations which, at the time, if he didn't have foreknowledge of the entire plan would seem to have accomplished his goal?**

**MH:** Well, according to what we read the New Testament about the temptation, Jesus wasn't sacrificing himself. He wouldn't have been sacrificing himself. So I think the premise of the question sort of undermines the question. The trade-off is worshiping Satan. It doesn't say the trade-off is, "Well, let me put you to death."

We can't read *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* back into the account of what's going on with Jesus and Satan in the desert. And I'm not saying that the questioner is, but that's a sort of a familiar analogy to a lot of modern people because of the popularity of C.S. Lewis and that particular book. But Satan never demands Jesus' life; he doesn't demand the death. The trade-off is worshipping Satan. And I would say that you *need* a death. The Old Testament has lots of resurrection talk, and the basis of the resurrection is at stake here. You need the first fruits of the resurrection. You need death to be conquered. If we have the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world, that suggests that he has to die. And then to conquer death, he has to be raised again.

So there are a number of theological ideas at stake here. Just bowing down to Satan without having a death and a resurrection doesn't accomplish what needs to be accomplished. Then you have, like, typology of sacrifices—the blood sacrifice thing. I mean, there's that element as well. So honestly, it just doesn't fit.

There's another issue here, though, that we don't want to overlook. And that is that the mission of Jesus wasn't only about reclaiming the nations. We can't just funnel the mission of the incarnation—the whole plan of God—to be about reclaiming the nations. We have a number of problems that the Messiah has to fix, one of which is the death problem—the estrangement from God problem and the loss of immortality for humankind. So you can't have death defeated unless you defeat death. And you can't defeat death unless you die and then conquer it. So we have these theological and conceptual elements to think about when it comes to the mission.

And then when it comes to what the trade-off is, this whole thing about worshipping Satan (since it doesn't involve the death and the resurrection) can't be viewed as satisfying the whole point of the mission.

**TS:** All right. Our next question is from Jack:

14:45 **In Genesis 7:19-20, there is mention of the floodwaters exceeding the**  
15:00 **heights of the mountains by fifteen cubits. Is it possible that this statement**  
**is another example of a polemic by the biblical authors against the gods**  
**and their high places? Whenever I've been involved in discussion with**  
**fellow Christians about the flood event, this verse is often cited to justify**  
**the flood as a truly worldwide event. How should I understand this text?**

**MH:** Yeah. I don't think you can get a polemic here. This is peripherally (I would say *really* peripherally) related to time of authorship. You could say that someone writing later, either Moses... but even that's a hard sell. Because what you need is you need a proliferation of high places in Israel so that people know what the world is going on here. But that's really not the referent of the mountaintops. There's no indication that there's any specific top that you could say, "Oh, yeah that X, Y, Z God from Babylon lives there and the author is shooting at that

deity." There's nothing in the passage like that.

There wouldn't have been any high places at the time of the flood. There isn't the worship of other gods at the time of the flood, so that rules it out. And if you're going with what the later writers would have known about high places, you would expect them to sort of plant something in there that would help the reader identify specifically that feature. Because as the reader reads this, the reader's not assuming that there's any other worship of other gods at the time, either. The reader would have to be directed to something specific and then mentally associate that something specific with a deity—that it's part of their current knowledge base. There's just nothing like that.

But having said that, I think there's a problem generally, or at least a conceivable problem, with using the reference to water over the mountains by fifteen cubits to justify a global flood. On my website I posted my little thought experiment. The reason I did this, I think, is evident in the first paragraph. Those listeners out there who prefer the global flood, fine. I wrote what I wrote on my website to make this point (and really only this point): that it's wrong for you to presume that the local/regional view has no biblical argument. It actually does have a pretty good biblical argument. It's not that hard to make a biblical, text-based argument for a local regional event, as opposed to a global flood. And I wanted people to know that because if, for some reason, it becomes impossible to believe in a global flood at some point in the future, that shouldn't trouble you about the Bible, because it's very easy to make a text-based argument for a local/regional view. And going back to this this wording here, you have to ask yourself questions like: "Okay, fifteen cubits above the mountain tops—the high mountains. Well, how high is high?" It doesn't matter how much the water overwhelms it. If you have a hill that's a thousand feet tall, like in a regional event, and that's covered over by 15 cubits, well, that's impressive. But that's not like you're talking about Mount Everest. How high is high? What's a mountain? Because the same word used for "mountain" in the flood account can be used for "hill" elsewhere. Again, I point these things out in the process of that article. So a lot of people will take this language and sort of assume they have this deeply compelling argument, but they really don't. And they fail... They get distracted, I think, unfortunately, from addressing the arguments of the local/regional view, which they have to do. A lot of people who take the global view of the flood don't think they have anything to refute. They do. The issue of context is really significant. Because if we look at the flood account that "the whole earth"—whole *eretz*—is overcome with water... Well, all a local/regional person has to do is say, "Well, look at the context for that. Look at Genesis 9:19." Here's what it says, talking about Shem, Ham and Japheth—sons of Noah:

**<sup>19</sup>These three were the sons of Noah and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed.**

20:00

It defines “whole earth” as “the peoples” and, of course, the lands that extend from Noah. In other words, it's the nations in the Table of Nations. And that Table of Nations has nothing to say about Australia, China, North America, South America, Central America, Canada, or either polar region. It has nothing to say at all about most of the planet. Instead, it's a region. It's the central, eastern Mediterranean. Throw Tarshish in there and you get the whole Mediterranean. And then what we know as the Middle East—the Tigris and Euphrates Valley on up to Asia Minor and Turkey.

So is it conceivable that there was a flood that encompassed a huge portion of that region of the world? Because that's how the biblical writers in Genesis 9 defined “the whole Earth.”.

So that's what you, as a global flood proponent... You have to deal with that kind of argument. Which is another reason why I put it up there as well—to show people that, look, this is not a hill worth dying on: the flood issue, the flood debate. And it's incorrect for global flood believers/proponents to just presume they have no argument—they have nothing to refute. “This is so self-evident. I have nothing to refute here.” It's actually incorrect. There are a number of things here to think about. So, I don't think it's a really good use of that idea there (this this cubit thing over the tops the mountains). Because the description itself is malleable. It requires definition. And if you have an argument that requires definition, it's not that great of an argument.

**TS:** All right, Mike. Well, we're going to end here, short and sweet. Hopefully it's long enough to get somebody on their commute to their work or office. We'll go ahead and stop the episode here, Mike.

But again, we're on our second week in Israel. Can you give us any idea what you're going to be talking about? Or are you just winging it?

**MH:** Well, I'm going to look at where we're going to be and pull out a few things that I think are interesting about either the location or why that place was important in the flow of Biblical history. Hopefully there'll be some interesting things about Israelite religion along the way. There are some obvious ones, like going to Mount Carmel. That's where Elijah had the confrontation with the prophets of Baal. That's easy. It's not so easy in other parts, but we'll see. Just pull a few of those things out and chat about them.

**TS:** All right. Well, continue prayers for us if you will, listeners, please. And please go check us out on Facebook and subscribe to Mike's newsletter at [drmsh.com](http://drmsh.com). Follow him on Twitter, if you will. I want to thank Mike for answering our questions, and I want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.