

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 216

Q&A 28

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**Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)**

### Episode Summary

Dr. Heiser answers your questions about:

- “Already but not yet” related to Hebrew verbs [2:40]
- Wisdom represented in feminine terms [11:45]
- The significance of “new gods that had come recently” in Deuteronomy 32:17 [17:50]

### Transcript

**Trey Stricklin:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 216: our 28th Q&A. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you?

**Dr. Michael Heiser:** Good, good. Glad to be here.

**TS:** We're on our way home on a jet plane back to America—the USA.

**MH:** And that is and was a thrill. There's nothing I'd rather do. (laughter)

**TS:** Let me tell you, they do not make those Airline seats to my specifications. I do not fit in those seats. Let me tell you, it is miserable.

**MH:** Yep, yep.

**TS:** And, another thing...over there.

**MH:** There's no other way to put it.

**TS:** Yeah, it makes you appreciate America because everything over there is tiny and small. You know, it's not made for us Nephilim that go over there sightseeing.

**MH:** Yeah, they just don't want to see you anymore.

**TS:** I guess.

**MH:** They're hoping you'll come back and tell your kind. (laughter)

**TS:** And stay away.

**MH:** Just stay away.

**TS:** Yeah well, I tell you what, I'm going to if you're going to keep things small and those airline seats small... I'm telling you, it was miserable. But it's a long flight, too.

**MH:** Yep, yep.

**TS:** Nothing like your own bed.

**MH:** That's true. That's true. And nothing like your own pug. Let me just add that.

**TS:** Ohhh, pug. Ohh, yeah, yeah. And what did y'all do? Who kept your pug, the kids? Did he survive?

**MH:** Yeah, the kids. And we had some of the older girls... We flew daughter number two in to spend some time with the younger kids. I mean, we don't really have any problem with the two youngest being in the house by themselves. They're 18 and 16. Like I like to say, they can live off the land like their proud ancestors. You know, live out of the fridge, I guess.

**TS:** It's party time.

**MH:** It's the dogs, you know. Like, "Hey, let's not forget about them. Take care of them. Take them out." You know.

**TS:** You're more worried about the dog than you are the kids.

**MH:** That's exactly right. That is true.

**TS:** That's says something in there. I don't know what. But it says something. (laughter from MH) All right. All right. Well, let's get to these questions here, Mike. Our first one is from a Mike (another Mike):

2:40

**I have a question about an observation that is right up the alley of Mike's expertise. So here we go: is the "already but not yet" pattern that seems to be relatively common just a matter of the basic Hebrew verbs being either perfect or imperfect? Obviously, completed actions are perfect. But the ones still in process are imperfect—already started, but not yet complete.**

**The part of the process started becomes the "already" while the final completion is the "not yet." Is this just an example of a natural tension that will always exist to some degree when one translates between languages with different grammar and syntax?**

**MH:** Well, I would say on the one hand, you can't express "already but not yet" things either in Greek or whatever... Let's use Greek for our example. Or, of course, English. You can't translate them into English without using certain tenses or proclivities of the language. So there's a relationship between the grammar and, naturally, the ideas that are being expressed. You can't really do one without the other. I would say that we shouldn't go so far, though, as to say that the ideas themselves completely then only derive from the proclivities of the language (the conventions) and not from some bigger sense of what's going on in the flow of, not just history, but really in the flow of the plan of God on a sort of a meta-narrative scale. So, I would say the two things (the grammar and the ideas) are related but they're not completely equivalent. That's how I would approach this.

5:00

Let me try to think of a good illustration here. So what I'm trying to say is that the theological ideas come from what the grammar expresses. But it's not like this English/Greek struggle or disconnect. I mean, the ideas are going to flow from or derive from what the grammar allows and what the grammar expresses. The grammar creates the categories or the ideas, and it's left for us to discern what the pairing means. So, you have semantic issues and you have grammatical issues.

By way of example, something else other than eschatology might help illustrate this. How about sanctification? We have statements, like in 1 Corinthians 6:11: "you have been sanctified" versus other statements in the letters of Paul in which he requests a hope or a wish: "may you be sanctified" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). So on the one hand, he's looking at a bunch of believers. And good grief, it's the Corinthians, okay? You can't get more messy than that. And he says "you have been sanctified." And then he looks at another group and says, "may you be sanctified."

You also get this this notion in Hebrews chapter 10, and if you look at Hebrews 10:10 and verse 14 (and frankly, I think verse 14 is even a better example because you actually have both grammatical issues in the same verse there)... But I'm going to read verses 10 through 14. Let's go back to verse 9 to get a little context. This is the conversation between the Father and the Son here about providing salvation:

<sup>9</sup> then he [the Son speaking to the Father] added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. <sup>10</sup> And

**by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

And then you get down to verse 14:

**<sup>14</sup> For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.**

So in verse 10, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus. And then the same offering in verse 14 produces this idea of still being sanctified. So, you could say, "Well, do we only think about that as 'already but not yet' because of the grammar?" Well, the grammar is certainly indispensable. But you can think about it in terms of real life and certain accomplishments of Jesus. Jesus did do a certain thing. He did die on the cross. He did rise again. He ascended to the right hand of the Father—all that stuff. So Jesus does things. He accomplishes tasks. He accomplishes the will of God. And that results in something: namely, when we are joined to his body, we are in Christ. We are sanctified because he is sanctified. We are identified with him. But yet in our own life we are still progressing. We're still growing. We're still being 'conformed to the image of his son,' as Paul would say—those ideas.

So there's a progression here. And the progression is linked to the same sacrifice as the "already" element. We can know this by experience. We take a point of theology and we say "Well, this is great that God says this about me—that I've been sanctified. Okay. This is wonderful." But then we look at our own lives and go, "I don't feel very sanctified today. I don't look like it. I didn't look like it 10 minutes ago. I didn't think this way when I sinned or when I did this, that or the other thing."

So we know from real life that the Christian life is being lived out in real time. We are still people. We are not super humans. We didn't absorb the nature of God in all of its exhaustiveness so that we never sin anymore—never have any proclivity to sin. There's nothing like that that's true, and we know that by experience.

So in the bigger picture, we have a good sense that there's already something in the mind of God going on about us when he thinks about us. But then there's still the something else—this "not yet" aspect that is sort of where the rubber meets the road. And we know that that's true not by mere intuition, but... There *is* intuition, but there's also our own life experience.

So the grammar helps us express that and express why it is that God can look at us one way and our life experience can be something that seems to be at odds or seems to be out of sync with the way God looks at us. So there's a bigger picture here. There's an experiential element to what's going on. The grammar is intimately part of expressing that. But the theological ideas aren't exclusively

about verb forms and grammar.

10:00 Another illustration would be “died to sin.” Paul will speak of believers as having died to sin, and then he later command believers to die to sin. Well, how do we get that? Again, it’s a differentiation between what we are in the mind of God... The scripture writers are trying to teach us to look at us how God looks at us. God looks at us a certain way because when we believe in Christ, we are united to Christ. We are part of his body. We become the body of Christ. We are In Christ—all these metaphorical kind of statements. And that tells us God’s estimation of us. It’s not on our own merit, obviously, but because of something Jesus has already accomplished in real time.

And then there’s the living out of it—our experience in life that doesn’t quite sync up with the other part. So there’s a God-perspective based on the already-accomplished things that Jesus did. And then there’s our own perspective from our own life experience. And so, the scripture writers tell us why this disconnect is there and how to process it. So grammar’s an important part of that, but I don’t think thinking about the grammar really enables us to think completely or exhaustively about the issue. I think we need a little bit more than that. So sort of “the sum is greater than the parts” in some respects.

**TS:** Our next question is from Elizabeth from Pecos, New Mexico. Now in west Texas we say "Pecas" so I'm going to with "Pecos" just for the New Mexicans. Are they New Mexicans, is that what we say? What are New Mexicanians?

**MH:** I guess. If you're from New Mexico, you're from New Mexico.

**TS:** Well...

**MH:** I'm not from New Mexico, so I'm not an authority! (laughs)

**TS:** Maybe let me know what the proper term is. But her question is:

11:45 **As Dr. Heiser revealed the book of Hebrews to us, there came up a discussion in regards to wisdom as feminine. So in Luke 7:31-35, Jesus himself states, "But Wisdom is vindicated by all her children." Is it fair to say that Jesus, the son of man, is referring to himself as one of Wisdom's children? Is it possible that the father, God, and Mother Wisdom begot the Word who created all things as one of *her* children?**

**MH:** Well, if we went back to the prior sentence that this idea that Jesus was one of wisdom's children... If you define wisdom as God himself, as another aspect or person... I'm using Godhead language here deliberately. We're still talking about God. Well, that would be another way of talking about Jesus as the Son of God, okay? Then you'd be okay. But following it up with “Father God and Mother Wisdom” as though they're some sort of cosmic cohabitation here between two

distinct entities (and the key word there is *distinct* entities—two ontologically distinct entities) and then producing Jesus, then there's a problem.

And the problem really comes from reading gendered terms in the translation. Proverbs 8, Luke 7, whatever it is... Proverbs 8 is the origin point for a lot of this, when we have wisdom as being God's agent of creation (Proverbs 8:22 and following) and wisdom being referred to in feminine terms. So when we read that in translation, we think of wisdom as a woman, and that is the way in Proverbs that wisdom is cast. We have wisdom as a woman, then we have the woman known as Folly. These two are contrasted in Proverbs to teach certain precepts—certain ethics, standards of ethics, and morals.

Now you have to ask yourself, how do we parse that? Why is that done? I actually have a paper on this that's freely accessible online. Go to [www.thedivinecouncil.com](http://www.thedivinecouncil.com) and look for the paper entitled "Jesus and the Wisdom Figure of Proverbs 8." Part of the issue is that this feminine language should not be confused with biological gender, so that we don't have a dad and a mom when we talk about God and wisdom. We don't have that. We don't have this cosmic cohabitation that produces Jesus and all that sort of thing. The reason the translations are the way they are is because inflected languages (those are languages that have verb endings and noun endings and then the endings have to match up for subject-verb agreement grammatically)... Anybody who's had Spanish or German or French, or Greek and Hebrew for that matter, will know what I'm talking about here. English is not a gendered or an inflected-driven language. English is largely driven by word order, as opposed to a set of endings and whatnot. But other languages—lots of other languages—require grammatical gender for all words—all nouns and what are called "finite verb forms" so that you can match up a noun with the verb. You can tell what is the subject of the verb, as opposed to what's the object of the verb. To do that, languages use grammatical gender. It has nothing to do with biological gender.

15:00

My favorite illustration of this is in German: *das Mädchen*. It's a term that means a little girl, and it is grammatically neuter. Obviously, little girls are girls. They're not neuter, hermaphroditic, whatever. It's just a good illustration. But in German, like Spanish, like French, like whatever, words for "hammer," words for "wall," words for "straw," words for "glass," words for "corner," words for "car"... They all have gender. It has nothing to do with biology.

And so we have to realize that this is just a classification system that languages share and this is how they do it: gender, number (is it singular, plural?)... Some languages have a dual where you have a pair. Not more than two, not one—just two. You have that separate numerical category. Gender and number are the big ones. You also have case systems and whatnot. But these are all classification features of a language. It has nothing to do with biological gender. So if you realize that, you can read Proverbs 8—you can read statements about wisdom and other passages—and know that we're not talking about a female entity.

We're talking about a personification of a concept, in this case wisdom cast as a woman by the writer for literary and rhetorical reasons to communicate certain ideas. They're not trying to get us to think about biology and mothers and fathers and children in that sense (the sense that we're usually used to thinking about). So again, [www.thedivinecouncil.com](http://www.thedivinecouncil.com) Look at the paper of "Jesus and the Wisdom Figure in Proverbs 8." And again, that'll serve a little bit better, a little bit beyond this answer, at least in in our episode here.

**TS:** Becky from Massachusetts has our next question.

17:50 **The ESV reading of Deuteronomy 32:17 is, "They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded." What is the significance of the phrase "new gods that had come recently?" Especially the "recently" part?**

**MH:** Yeah. Well, I'll get to that. But let me say first: the ESV translation of Deuteronomy 32:17 is awful. It's one of the few translations that will have something like, "They sacrificed to demons that were no gods," plural. Now, you think about that. "Oh the demons.. okay, they're not gods." And then the very next phrase is "to gods." They sacrifice to gods they had never known. Well are they gods or are they not? It's a self-contradicting translation. And it's a very poor translation. I suspect that whoever did the translation felt uncomfortable with divine plurality here. What you actually have... And I have a published journal article on this. I don't think it's freely accessible. It might be; you might be able to find it with Google. The title is something like: "Should Elohim in Deuteronomy 32:17 be Translated 'gods?'" Or something like that.

But anyway, what the text actually says is they sacrificed to *shedim* ("demons" in this English translation), not *eloah*. *Eloah* is singular. It's always and only singular. So you should not be translating it with a plural. It should say they sacrificed to demons, not God—to gods they had never known. Now that makes perfect sense. It doesn't contradict itself. So adding that... the ESV here is just not good on this particular verse. I think it is fair to say, most other English translations will do much better with the verse than that.

20:00 Now about the recent gods that they had recently, that they had never known, gods had come along recently, so on and so forth... We have to again put ourselves in the historical situation. Israel had a relationship with Yahweh first. Then later, they went after other gods. So the phrasing here refers to the chronology of the story of biblical Israel. They're brought out of Egypt. They journey to Sinai. They enter into a covenant with Yahweh at Sinai, the God of their fathers. They start journeying to the land promised by the earlier covenant and the one made at Sinai, and the promises made to the patriarchs... And then they apostasize. A lot of Israelites go off and start worshiping other gods, either once they get into the land—when they have the conquest episodes... The end of



Joshua, and especially the beginning of Judges, comments on this—that God forsakes them because they intermingle with the population they should have driven out and they start worshipping those other gods. So this is what it has in mind—eventually this beginning relationship with Yahweh, the God of Israel, the God of the Bible, the God of their fathers. And then they drift off into worshipping new gods—gods that just come along much more recently in their history, that are not part of their ancient past. And they apostasize.

Now, I want to add one other thought here. This question is a really insightful question in another respect. And that is, think about the wording. The wording and the story of biblical Israel pretty much requires that Deuteronomy 32 had to have been written *after* the conquest—after or subsequent to the end of the conquest and the beginning of the Book of Judges, and therefore not by Moses. Because you can only make this comment about Israel going after other gods (gods they had not known until recently) after it happened, and that didn't happen in the Mosaic period. The only alternative would be to say "Well, maybe Moses wrote this and he's thinking about an apostasy in Egypt." But we don't have any biblical record of that. What we do have is a biblical record of Israel being taken out of Egypt, being brought to Sinai, and making a covenant with God, the God of their fathers. We don't read about any mass apostasy while they're down in Egypt. And then they journey to the promised land. They don't carry out God's directions completely. They intermingle with the populations and they wind up worshipping other gods.

For Deuteronomy 32 (at this point of Deuteronomy 32) to make sense, that's hindsight. That's the kind of thing that you get in hindsight in Israel's history. So, part of this song of Moses (I think at least at this verse and maybe some of the other parts) very clearly is looking back on something that happened post-Moses. And I say this is insightful because this is the kind of thing you run into elsewhere in the Torah, and really in other parts of the Bible, too, where we assume that it was written during a certain time by a certain person even though it's not really claimed. I mean, there's no reason that we have to take the phrase "law of Moses" and presume that Moses wrote every word of this. And we've had this discussion before on the podcast. I'm what used to be called a Supplementarian. I think that there's a core to the Pentateuch that Moses either wrote or had dictated or something. It's specifically connected with the lifetime of Moses, and then it gets accrued to by other people in the prophetic tradition. We had a question a couple Q&As ago about Genesis 1-11. I view a lot of that work either editorially, or maybe in some cases compositionally, done during the Exile, specifically to poke the Babylonian gods and their religion in the eye. You have things like this happen in the Torah. All that "law of Moses" means (*torat Moshe*)... It can mean "the law that originated with Moses." It can mean "the law that was produced by Moses". It can also mean "the law that is associated with Moses." Moses is the central character for most of the Torah and so it's very natural to think of it as the law of Moses. It could be the law that not only is associated with Moses, but the law that... it is what it is in reference to the



character of Moses.

I mean, there are different ways to understand the semantics. Realize that in Hebrew, this is a simple... what they call a “construct phrase”—an X of Y relationship between two nouns. The construct phrase has its own semantics. There are 12, 15 different categories—different ways of thinking about how “noun of noun” relationships work and what they're trying to say. There are different semantic categories, not just one.

25:00

So there's no reason to think or require that Moses had to write every word. Even with Jesus... Jesus quotes passages and attributes them to the law of Moses. Well, what else would he call it? But in Jesus' day, it's the Torah. It's the law. That's what it's known as. If he calls it something else they're not going to know what he's talking about. He also refers to other books that don't really even have stated authors. They just get named after the main characters—Samuel, and that sort of thing.

We have to make sure that how we think about scripture... Actually, it's gonna sound kind of crazy, but oftentimes in the way we think about inspiration, the Bible itself gets in the way of our theology. We need to put the brakes on that. How we think about inspiration and how we think about issues like this—like authorship and whatnot.... Our conclusions actually need to conform to the Bible itself, to the scripture itself. We can't formulate an idea and then kind of ignore stuff that we run into. But often what happens is we do formulate ideas and then we run into passages like this and we make the passage stand on its head so that we can still keep our idea—the way we think about a certain topic. And that that isn't being text-driven.

So we want to try to be text-driven. That's what we do here at the Naked Bible Podcast, or at least we try. And I think this question brings us to one of those points where we really have to think about what we're looking at.

**TS:** Okay, Michael, that was our last question. So we appreciate you taking the time to answer our questions. And hopefully we've returned home safely from Israel and we learned something and had a good time.

**MH:** Yep. All that. Lord willing.

**TS:** All right, Mike. Well, I just want to remind everybody: send me your questions, if you have any, at [treysticklin@gmail.com](mailto:treysticklin@gmail.com). You can get that on the website. Mike, I'll also post a link to your Deuteronomy 32:17 “Assume or Deny the Reality of Other Gods” paper on the podcast page. So, I'll put a link to that. And again, thanks for answering our questions, and we want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.