

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

### **Episode 254**

### **Introducing the Book of Exodus**

**January 12, 2019**

**Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)**

**Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)**

### **Episode Summary**

This episode launches our new book study series on the book of Exodus! As we do with every book study, this initial episode overviews the sorts of things to expect as we progress through Exodus: difficulties, controversies, and other points of interest relevant to understanding the book in its own context. Specifically, Dr. Heiser talks about how we should think about Old Testament history, historicity, metanarrative, “mythic history,” and historiography.

### **Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 254: Introducing the Book of Exodus. I’m the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he’s the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing?

**MH:** Pretty good. Ready to jump into a new book! Can you believe it? I’m still kind of shocked that Exodus won the vote.

**TS:** I know. And as we talked about last show, it was neck-and-neck, and I had to extend it again for an extra day just to try to get some separation. And by one percent, Exodus won. I can’t believe it. I’m excited! Either way...

**MH:** Yeah. Either way, I’m going to like it, but I was already assuming that it would be the End Times thing, and so I’d actually already started prepping stuff weeks and weeks ago, so I had to shift gears. [laughs] That’s why I’m still kind of shocked that I’m working on this and not the other.

**TS:** A lot of people have commented that they kind of want you to mesh the End Times into Exodus. [MH laughs] Make one big mash-up.

**MH:** Yeah, well, that’s like Mission Impossible. [laughs] We’d just have to make stuff up then.

**TS:** And Exodus, this is like your wheelhouse, right? The Torah is where Mike lives.

**MH:** Yeah. And there's lots of Egyptology stuff in here. So there's fun stuff, but I'll admit (and I'll mention it as we get into it here) that there's a lot of indeterminate, uncertain, (in some cases) mind-bending or mind-numbing stuff here, too. So I can't promise that you're going to get every question nailed down with absolute certainty. I can promise that we're going to go over things in detail, and you'll know why things are debated. And when the dust settles, you'll have a lot to think about. You can land where it is you like.

**TS:** Yeah. And with 40 chapters, it's like we're wandering around for 40 years. [MH laughs] It's going to be...

**MH:** Seeing a metaphor there?

**TS:** I can only imagine how detailed... Every episode is going to be two hours... Forty weeks long... Plus, you probably have Part A, B, and C for each chapter (like we do sometimes)...

**MH:** Yeah, there'll be a few things that I already know will require set-up even before you get into the subject. But yeah, that'll happen.

**TS:** And our audience (including myself), we love that stuff. So it's time to...

**MH:** It's a good thing you have a high tolerance for that. [laughs]

**TS:** I'm excited. I know everybody else is excited. Everybody in the groups on Facebook and emails, we had a little meme contest, and that's why on Facebook, you'll see everybody doing memes. It's absolutely fun. I'm so glad everybody has humor, even the losing people. So I appreciate our listeners. Because life is so serious. There's no reason to be so emotional and defensive. So I'm glad our audience is like us, Mike. They're just relaxed and they take it in stride. And it's okay. It's good to laugh and have fun with it.

**MH:** Yeah, absolutely. Plenty of things to keep your mind engaged.

So let's just jump in here. Like we always do with book studies, we're going to introduce the book. And what that means is, I'm not going to give you this long outline. I'm not going to talk about date and occasion. I'll say a few things here and there. But what I tend to want to do in these introductory episodes is to give you a foretaste of the kinds of things we're going to have to think about: the walls we're going to hit, the problems and the controversies that are going to pop up that we're going to have to try to think carefully through—just give a foretaste of where we're headed. I *will* say something, because Exodus is part of the Torah—part of the Pentateuch, the “Law of Moses.” As I've mentioned many times before when it comes to the authorship of the Torah (the Pentateuch), I am what used to be called a supplementarian. I don't buy the JEDP theory as it's presented. I also don't buy the “Moses wrote every word of the Pentateuch, or even 90% of it”

5:00

idea. A supplementarian is one who accepts Mosaic authorship for parts of the Torah (the core ideas, the core episodes, that kind of thing)—that there’s a definite Mosaic contribution here. There’s no reason to think that the man Moses could not have written substantially the material that we find in the Torah. But there are lots of reasons why people doubt that, especially critical scholars. And some of their reasons make more sense than others.

A lot of the JEDP idea is based on circular reasoning. So it assumes what it needs to prove, and then thinks it’s proven it. So I reject both poles. And I think what we have here in the Torah is a Mosaic core (there was stuff that Moses wrote) and then it got accrued to (there were parts added later on by other hands) and there were editorial things done to the content as time went on. God used a number of people whose names we’ll never know to put these five books into their final forms. So that used to be a mainstream view in scholarship at one point (a century or a century and a half ago). It’s not so much now anymore, but I’m still there because I think that that’s the best way to account for all the data.

So I accept Mosaic authorship, I accept other authorship, I accept editing by other hands, repurposing sources, the use of other sources, all of that stuff. Now what that means is that the question of the date of the book is going to be variable, and ultimately indeterminate, because you don’t know which hand did what. We’ll hit places (and I’ll allude to a couple here in this episode) where it’s very clear that there’s an editorial hand at work. We have no idea when that happened. So you can’t pin a date on the book of Exodus. Generally, for the Torah, you might be able to argue well for, “Well, this part’s before... In this part of Israel’s history, this part’s in another part of Israel’s history...” You can do a little bit of that. But as far as pigeonholing a date, that’s just not really possible. Now, I have a quotation here from Eugene Carpenter’s commentary. Lexham Press did the (it’s still an ongoing series) *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* and Eugene Carpenter did Exodus for us. And he writes this:

The composition of Exodus is complex and challenging, and is inextricably tied up with the broader issue of the composition of the Pentateuch. The way the author-editor has compiled the great variety of material in Exodus is an example of literary and theological genius.

We’re going to return to that theological part in a bit.

That Moses was in essence the author of the book is indicated by the text itself. Certainly Moses’ life and activities account for the origin of the book. That others had a hand in its composition even during the Mosaic era is both asserted and implied, e.g., Joshua, Miriam, Ithamar, Eleazar, and the Levitical priests. Though these people contributed to the formation of the Torah, they were not the author-editor in the sense that Moses was. They were, however, inspired and followed in Moses’ inspired leadership and composition of the biblical text.

Several sources are suggested in the text as well, though not so evident. Certain post-Mosaic statements or features of the book indicate a post-Mosaic date for the final form of the book.

So that's a good summary of a supplementarian perspective on this, and that's the camp I'm in. Now Carpenter goes on to list a few instances or texts that suggest multiple hands, and he writes this:

The text itself ascribes the following writing activities to Moses: At God's command he wrote the continuing warfare that Yahweh would direct against Amalek (Exod 17:14–15) and recited it to Joshua; he wrote down the words of the book of the covenant after presenting them orally to the people (24:3–4); and he was instructed to record the material in 34:10–27. The text also tells us that Moses charged Aaron's son Ithamar to keep a careful record of the materials used to construct the tabernacle (38:21). . . . Joshua was Moses' aide (מְשָׁרֵת, Exod 24:13), a term that indicates that he may have served as Moses' major recorder... Joshua stands out as the man who knew Moses par excellence, and it is said of him that he made a covenant (בְּרִית, Josh 24:25) for the people at Shechem. He set up (שִׁים) for them ordinances or decrees (חֻקִּים), laws or fixed rules, and model cases (מִשְׁפָּט; Josh 24:26). Only an inspired and approved successor, such as Joshua was at that time (cf. Deut 34:9), could have without impunity written these things into the "book of the law of God" (בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹרַת אֱלֹהִים). This literary activity, coupled with his also writing the law of God upon tablets of stone (Josh 8:32), suggests that he may have helped shape parts of the pentateuchal materials.

10:00

Now Carpenter has a footnote at the end of that which says this:

The tradition of the Jewish fathers as passed down through Pirque 'Abot 1:1 is "Moses received the Torah on Sinai, and handed it down to Joshua; Joshua to the Elders; the Elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets handed it down to the men of the Great Assembly." There may be more historical truth in this assertion than has been allowed in the past.

In other words, this notion of succession (of approved successors) I think is legitimately the context for the editorial activity, not only in the Pentateuch, but really throughout the Hebrew Bible. They weren't out there like Dairy Queen, hiring interns: "Hey, we need a little work on this manuscript over here. You're just out of high school, so come on over." No. These were community... Not only expert scribes who would do this activity, but they were recognized by the community as legitimate successors to the tradition. I've talked on many occasions on the podcast about how I think it's far more coherent biblically to view inspiration as a process, not an event (or even a series of events)—as a process that God is aware of, he's watching, he's superintending the entire way through. And it can take centuries. God had a sustained interest in producing this

thing that we now call the Bible. It wasn't just a moment by moment, zapping by zapping interest. If you take that view (and I've been quite open that that is my view of inspiration, and I've had a number of lectures that show why that's a whole lot better than the way inspiration is traditionally taught)... If you look at it from that framework, it makes sense that the community would recognize certain individuals, and they were skilled, and they were just thought to be a part of God's hand in producing the final form of whatever they were working on—in this case, the Pentateuch and the book of Exodus.

So that's how I approach authorship, and it has implications for dating. We'll hit some of those things as we go through the book. By way of an outline, I actually think it's convenient for listeners to keep this really, really basic outline in mind. This is also partly based on Carpenter. The book breaks down into three sections really easily.

1. There's chapter 1:1 up through chapter 15:21. That is from the oppression of Israel to their deliverance. In other words, those are events in Egypt (or concerning Egypt). Really easy.
2. From 15:22 through 18:27 are events on the way to Sinai. So we have the exodus from Egypt occur and the journey to Sinai. So the first section is events in Egypt. The second section is events on the way to Sinai.
3. And that means the last section is stuff that happened at Sinai. That's Exodus 19:1 all the way to the end of the book, 40:38. That's stuff that happens while they're at Sinai.

So it's a really easy outline: Going to Egypt, going to Sinai, and then at Sinai. The book divides really nicely into three sections. But I think more interesting is the kinds of issues we'll run into throughout the book. And I'm going to chop this up into two sets of issues, and the second set I'm going to spend a lot of time on (really the lion's share of this episode of the podcast). I think it's a good... We need to cover some things in there right from the get-go. The other stuff (the first set)... we'll bump into these things along the way so I'm only going to say a little bit about them.

So the first set of issues are related to problems of chronology and archeology. And within that set, I'm really thinking of two kinds of issues (two kinds of problems). One is the problem of archeological absence. Does it matter that there is no certain archeological evidence for the man Moses? For Joshua? We haven't uncovered the grave of Moses, "And it's really him!" or some Egyptian literary corpus that retells the story of the Israelites in Egypt and leaving Egypt and actually uses names like Moses and Joshua and Aaron. Does it matter? There's the issue of absence there. Does that matter? Secondly, there are problems of archeological data that do exist, and its interpretation. So the first

15:00

problem is archeological absence; second is archeological data and how that's viewed, how that's interpreted.

Now it's going to take more than one episode and more than one little segment like this to really get into the nuts and bolts of chronological debate—the problems of how things that have been discovered archeologically affect the way scholars date not only the book, but the events, the people, the persons, and so on and so forth. We're going to run into these things throughout the book in different places. So I just want to reference it here. And I'm actually bringing it up (this set of problems about interpretation of data, archeology and chronology) because of the film *Patterns of Evidence*. I've been asked in Q&A once or twice about this. I'll put it... I'm positively disposed to the film. I'll try to explain very briefly why here.

I want to say, though, having said that, if you think that film solves all or even most of the problems related to the exodus, you're wrong. It doesn't really solve anything. What it does is it presents a particular approach to the problems and then offers a solution. It proposes something. "Hey, if we consider it this way, then things kind of look differently. They kind of work out." And it's drawing on the work of David Rohl. We'll get into all this stuff—the date of the exodus problem, which of course is tied to chronological method. It's also tied to external chronological issues and interpretation of archeological data. What I mean by that is, if you think the date of the exodus concerns only 1 Kings 6:1, which basically says, "In the fourth year of Solomon, that was the 480<sup>th</sup> anniversary from the time of the Israelites leaving Egypt... Well there, the verse gives us the date. It's 1446 B.C., because Solomon's fourth year was 966. You just do the math." Well, that's wonderful. How did we get a real time B.C. date for that? The Bible doesn't give you, ever, B.C. or A.D. dates. What it gives you is lifespans of individuals. It gives you relative chronological. "This king reigned x years, and he was replaced by this guy, and that guy reigned x years, and then he was replaced by another guy." This is what you get. You get strings of years. You get reign lengths, lifetime spans. Nothing fixes it into real time history. For that, you need to come up with a way to correlate something written in a text with astronomy, because astronomy is how we record and understand and fix time.

20:00

Our calendars operate on astronomical principles (astronomical observation). Who in the world invented this system? Ah, that's a good question. How did anybody know really how to apply it to the Bible? Ah, that's another good question. What about ancient civilizations outside of the Bible (Egypt, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Babylon)? They were doing astronomy, too. How does their system hook into astronomy, and do all of the systems agree? Ah, good questions. And what *Patterns of Evidence* actually does... It doesn't get into the nuts and bolts, but David Rohl was part of what used to be called the Ancient Chronology Forum on the internet. I used to be a chronology nerd. I'm still a nerd, but in other ways. I used to be really into this. And it is so complicated. It is so variable. And frankly, it is so uncertain that I have frequently referred to

ancient chronology (and problems and debates about chronology) as nothing more than a quagmire. That's what it is. So what *Patterns of Evidence* does is it presents David Rohl's ideas of how to align certain texts in Egypt with biblical texts that are now separated by about 200 years because of the way these texts are dated and because of the way the dynastic chronology of Egypt is dated. And Rohl is saying there are problems with the whole system that allow him to scrunch (to compress) the chronology 200 years. If you've seen the film, you've seen these really cool... And they *are* cool. I know Tim Mahoney, who made the film. He's a really good guy. I liked the film because it does a good job of presenting Rohl's presentation of the problems and his proposed solution. It has wonderful graphics. And if you've seen it, they'll talk about how the mainstream has this text over here in Egypt, and the Bible says this, but they're separated by 200 years because of the way things are dated, and if we could just move (compress) the chronology—smash them together so that these texts would align in their dating—voila! It looks like this Egyptian thing is describing what's going on in the Old Testament. Yeah, it does. It does.

But the film doesn't raise this question: On what basis (by what authority) can we just compress 200 years? We can see that it works nicely. It produces a nice result. But on what basis do we do that? Let's say that, yeah, there are problems in chronology, but why... Are we worried more about correlating things in Exodus than actually fixing a real-time chronology? Because the film only deals with the Bible in Egypt. What about the Assyrians? What about the Babylonians? What about the Hittites? What about the Greeks? They all have their own chronological systems as well. It's the Mediterranean. They're looking at the same sun and the same moon. They're all doing astronomy and calendar. What if we only compressed it 50 years and everything lined up? Well, that still leaves us with a gap with the Bible.

In other words, this is what happens in ancient chronology discussion. People aren't just trying to relate the external ancient Near East with the Bible. Some of them aren't even interested in that at all. Some of them are trying to correlate the entire Mediterranean (every system) with each other to produce a coherent, chronological reconstruction that has no outliers. And there's a lot that can go wrong. There's a lot that cannot be known. Because there are disagreements all over the place, even in astronomical observation and the way those observations are described. There's a lot of ambiguity in a particular... The Egyptian system deals with something called the Sothic cycle—the rise of Sirius (Sothis). Well, depending on how it's worded, that may refer to an event that happens every year, or it may refer to a cycle of 1460 years. And guess what? The writers never tell us! People have to guess. Ancient chronology is based on a lot of guessing. Some of it is more educated than others. There is no synchronicity. There's no wholesale synchronicity across the ancient Mediterranean. And whole books (whole studies) have been written about these problems. So these don't get solved by a film called *Patterns of Evidence*. It presents Rohl's view, and it does it really nicely visually, but it doesn't inform you as to what gives Rohl the

authority to compress the whole thing by 200 years. It looks nice at the end of the compression. But you have to ask yourself that question (by what authority...?). How do we know that this is the right thing to do, honoring *all* of the evidence, not just textually, but astronomically, archeologically, all of it?

And then the second question is, “Does our compression work everywhere else?” This is a quagmire. But we’re going to get into (because we have to) issues of ancient chronology. And the best I can do (I’m not going to solve all the problems either) is explain to you why scholars argue one direction or the other—how it works. What’s the basis of their conclusions? And then you can do further research and land where you will. That’s the stuff that we’ll run into periodically.

25:00

What I want to spend the rest of the time on here is the second set of problems. And those are problems of historiography and literary presentation (how the book of Exodus presents its content). And what I mean here is, you can put it in a simple question: Is Exodus theology or history? Or is the answer “yes” or a little bit of both? How do we view this? Does the existence of a metanarrative (the laying out of God’s salvation plan) nullify history, or does it require it? Does it reinforce it? Are those two things compatible? What I mean by this is, it’s very evident to scholars (and you’ll see it if you pick up a good commentary on Exodus) that things written in Exodus are hooking back into Genesis (like with the patriarchs). And you will get fulfillments of certain things said to the patriarchs. Or you’ll get a progression of the covenant—covenantal language, language about the land. So that makes it very clear that the writer of Exodus is presenting theology. It’s presenting God’s activity with his people in this particular place to propel what he is going to do to reinstall the kingdom on earth and to gather his people back to himself who are estranged from him, and the nations, and so on and so forth.

So in presenting those theological points, a lot of people wonder, “Is that the same as history, or is he just doing theology? Are these two different things, or are they two related things? Are they compatible or incompatible?” Those are the big questions. So that prompts other things, like “How should we think about biblical historiography—the writing of biblical narrative? How should we think about a term like historicity? What is history? What is historicity? How do we view these things? How much precision is required for something to be considered historical, especially by modern thinkers?” If we look at a passage in Exodus, and we can see that the passage is actually arranged deliberately or actually does something deliberately to convey a theological point, does that mean that the writer had to ignore history to do that? Or is he using history? Or is there some other kind of relationship? What if we have polemic mythicizing going on (the writer is taking a shot at some ancient Near Eastern religious idea or a deity)? Well, in the process of doing that, do we have history, then? Or is the guy just giving somebody a theological poke in the eye by the way he tells a story? Is the story being told real history, or is it a theological punch in the nose? Are those

two things inherently distinct and separable, or do they work together? These are the big picture questions that we have to think about.

Let me give you some examples here. There are a lot of them. We're going to run into all of these things in the book, so I'm just going to run through them. Why does Exodus/Moses (purportedly written by Moses in the 15<sup>th</sup> century B.C., or maybe the 12<sup>th</sup>, depending on what chronology you use) use a word *keruv* (cherub) that has a well-known Mesopotamian origin? Why does he do that? The only other place we see the *keruv* is in Genesis 3, and Genesis chapters 1-11 (as I've said before) has lots and lots and lots of Babylonian connections. I thought the context for the exodus was Egypt. Why is this word there? Egyptians didn't use this. Why do elements of the tabernacle mimic Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Canaanite artifacts? The ark of the covenant has a clear point of analogy to Egyptian palanquins (they're boxes with figures of the deity inside them). The menorah has a very clear Mesopotamian counterpart—the whole tree of life kind of thing that has Mesopotamian roots. There we get Genesis 1-11 content. The structure of the tabernacle (the outline of it) is very Canaanite. Why do we get all three of these? Why isn't it consistent?

30:00

In each section, the writers (or editors) of Exodus will repurpose material found in Genesis to remind readers of things that happened before in God's redemptive plan. Does that make the story-telling artificial, or is it true history? Is it mythic? And what does "mythic" even mean? Is that history? Does it negate historicity? A myth, in academic parlance, is a story where divine beings (supernatural beings) are characters and supernatural things happen. Does it mean that it's non-historical? You say, "No, of course. God can act in history." I agree, he can. But the bigger question is, "Does this telling of the story have theology as its aim, or does it have history as its aim, and are those things necessarily separable?" That's the bigger question.

Here's another one: what about apparent literary polemic that connects whatever's being talked about in Exodus to other ancient Near Eastern stories? How about the abandoned child motif? You know the story of Moses' birth, put in a little basket, set afloat on the Nile. There are whole studies on what scholars call "the abandoned child motif." There are a lot of these in the ancient world, where the hero of a story is released or abandoned by his parents, gets discovered by somebody else, and then they grow up in completely different circumstances, and then they become a hero of the story. They go from rags to riches, that kind of thing. But you have this abandonment as a child motif.

What about Exodus 24, using the language from Baal's courtyard to describe the presence of Yahweh? So you get literary polemic that's very obvious. Is that something in and of itself? Why would the story be told that way? If we went back in time, would we actually witness this as a real time event? Or is the writer's only goal to make a theological point? How do we view this stuff?

Now Carpenter asks a few more. Why is Canaan the promised land? Why Canaan? Why is Pharaoh never named? We're going to get into this as well, because at a certain point in Egyptian history, Pharaohs *do* get named, but at a certain point before, they *don't*. Does that affect the dating of the book? Well, it might. Why is Sinai called "the mountain of God," and why is its geographical location never pinpointed? It's quite controversial as to where Mount Sinai is. Why do terms like "tabernacle" and "tent of meeting" at times overlap and at other times they are quite distinguished? What's going on there? Why is material at times not presented in a chronologically accurate way?

Here's a good example. If you go to Exodus 16:34, you have this said: "As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it (that is, his rod that budded) before the testimony to be kept." Now the word "testimony" there (*edut*) is used of the Ark of the Covenant in other passages in Exodus. Guess what? In Exodus 16, the Ark of the Covenant hasn't even been built. What are we to do with that? It's very clear that the term is used earlier than when the thing's actually built for a particular reason. Scholars have tried to figure out what's going on here. Why is this? It's certainly out of order, but that's the actual question. Why does the writer or editor arrange things out of order? Is there something deliberate that they want to teach? And if the Ark of the Covenant didn't exist, should we look at this and say, "Well, this obviously can't be historical, because the Ark wasn't even built yet." Okay, in that sense, it would be non-historical, but the writer would know that, because the writer (or the editor) is also going to work on the passages where the Ark *is* built, so he must have moved the material from this point to the next point. He must have referenced it before it was built for a reason. What would the reason be? So there you have an example of something that would be in real time potentially (I'm not going to play my hand here) non-historical, but still kind of historical, because it's just literature. The writer or editor is just taking something from the book and repurposing it in a very deliberate way to make a particular point. Is that okay? Does that violate some cosmic rule of how to write a religious book? These are the questions that we have to ask ourselves that we're going to run into. Here's a bigger example: the life of Moses. I owe this observation to John Currid's commentary. Currid has a Ph.D. in Egyptology (or it might be Bible in ancient Near East). He has really substantial training in Egyptology. He's an evangelical Old Testament prof. In his study commentary on Exodus, published by the Evangelical Press, he notes that:

35:00

The early life of Moses serves as a prototype of the [MH: entire] exodus event. What I mean by that statement is that the general and major events of Moses' life while in Egypt and in Midian model and prefigure the salient circumstances in the life of the emerging nation of Israel [later]...

In the foregoing analysis, the Hero of Exodus was defined as Moses/Israel, with Yahweh the Donor-Helper [MH: He's the deliverer]. What if we consider Yahweh the Hero? Later biblical references to the Liberation generally emphasize God's

role, barely mentioning Moses at all. In fact, the Exodus story is often described as a battle between Yahweh and Pharaoh over who shall possess Israel.

So if you keep going through this, you wind up in a different place. Do you look at Moses as the hero or Yahweh as the hero? It's just going to take you in different directions. Back to his earlier comment, if you actually do look at events in Moses' life... I'll just give you an example. In Exodus 2, Moses is born as a slave in Egypt under oppression and persecution. Then in Exodus 2, a little bit later, the baby Moses is being put in the ark, he undergoes some water ordeal and has to be delivered. Then he escapes to Midian later in life. Then he sees a theophany of the burning bush at Mount Sinai. Then he has this doubt about God using him to deliver the nation.

Well, if you look at the nation's history, in Exodus 1, they're born slaves in Egypt under bondage. Israel goes through a water ordeal at the Red Sea and is delivered. Israel escapes to Midian in Exodus 16-18. Israel has its own theophany experience at Sinai. And then Israel becomes unfaithful during the wilderness wanderings and so on and so forth. In other words, the circumstances of Israel as a nation mirror those of Moses. Is that artificial? Would we read the account one way if we look at Moses as the focal point as opposed to God as the focal point, or Israel as the focal point? These are big-picture questions. You can see them in a close literary reading—that these kinds of patterns emerge. So is that artificial? Are we getting real history or are we getting theologized history? And is theologized history not really history? These are big-picture questions.

I could go through a bunch of other examples about how, when you read it as literature, there are patterns that emerge that hook into not only other parts of the book and other parts of the Torah, but even wider ancient Near Eastern literature outside the Bible. And this is why scholars look at Exodus. They're not asking these questions because they hate Exodus, because they hate God, and they don't believe in inspiration. I mean, some of them do. Some of them don't have any time for an idea like inspiration. But there are other people who are a little more thoughtful, who accept the idea of inspiration, and they wonder, "Well, what do we have here? What do we actually have? Because we do see these patterns. The writer is very evidently doing something to us. So how do we parse that?"

Now what I'm going to do for the rest of our time here is to take you through part of a presentation I did at the Frequency conference, because it was on precisely this question. I was assigned to do a presentation on the validity of the Old Testament, which was vague enough that I could more or less do what I want. So I didn't do a session on, "Hey, how do we harmonize this with that," and that kind of apologetic thing. Because honestly, while that has some value, it doesn't address the bigger points.

40:00

So I think we need to think better and think well about some of these big-picture questions. So I'm going to prep you for the way I think about these things, because that will be useful the rest of the way through the book as we jump into the book. So I want to drill down on thinking well (and I would say thinking *honestly*) about metanarrative—about this question of, “Is literary presentation artificial?” and about terms like “history” and “historicity” and “mythic history.” I'll be bold enough to say, I think a lot of the critics who raise these questions (the people who are hostile) aren't being honest, because at the end of the day you could take all of their questions and apply those questions to their own life story and they would render themselves unhistorical. Now, that might sound a little odd, but I'm going to show you why that's the case. So let's start off here. *The Dictionary of the Old Testament* in the Historical Books says this. I think this is a good way to jump in here:

The word 'history' is Greek in origin. Its definition as a literary genre and the extent to which its use for biblical material may be anachronistic are questions raised by recent scholarship. History, for most modern Westerners, is what happened... in the past...

**And that's it. History is what happened in the past. Well, that's a little simplistic.**

...and history writing as a literary genre is an account of what happened in the past.

**That's true, but that's not all that we're dealing with here.**

The latter is judged by how accurately and objectively it recounts past events. There is some recognition that historians have their own biases, that no one is completely objective... and that writing history involves interpretation [MH: All those things are true.]. If pressed, most moderns probably will admit that it may be impossible to know for certain exactly what happened in the past. Nevertheless, telling exactly what happened remains the goal and the essential definition of the genre as it is generally envisioned.”

So for most modern people, if you asked them what history is, it's “what happened in the past.” And they don't really think too much beyond that. I'll add another assumption that many moderns (especially critics) bring to the table. They have been taught that crediting the causation of events (whether directly or providentially) to God (having God as the cause of events) cannot be considered history. That's just the way people are taught, academically. And the reason is, people will say, “We can't really be sure objectively (scientifically) if God exists, and if we can't be sure about that, then we can't be sure about his activity. How would we know that God's the cause of something if we don't even know that God is for real if we can't objectively [that's the key word], scientifically, prove

God's existence? If that's the case, we can't say anything about what he might or might not have done." Now, do you see the potential problems and inconsistencies with these ideas? That history is a record of things that happened in the past, that that's the goal of it, that the only way we should evaluate a term like "history" is that it's this completely objective record of things that happened in the past, and that then we essentially remove God from the equation... Do you see the potential problems? Well, in case you don't, I'm going to go through a few of them.

Historical reliability presumably requires, then, precise accuracy. Exactitude. We as moderns assume that to have real history, the account has to be absolutely, utterly, completely precise, or it can't be history. Now, I'm going to suggest that that is flawed. That is way overstated. I'm going to give you some concrete examples in a moment. It also assumes total objectivity is required for something to be truly historical. In other words, there's no intentional bias at all. There's no subconscious bias. Unless we can have complete, 100%, infallible assurance that something is precisely accurate and totally objective, we cannot call it "history."

That raises an obvious question (at least to me). Actually, a few obvious questions. How precise must you be in order to be considered accurate? Let's talk about sources. How many sources is enough? Because you'll have people who say, "We can't really consider the Bible as a source for this event, because we need another source to validate the first one. So if we only have a single source, we can't really see that as history." Well, there are times when you get two or three sources and they're still not satisfied. If the Bible is one of them, they still don't count it. And so my question is, "How many do we need before we actually take the Bible seriously as a source?" How many is enough?

45:00

How about conversations? Do conversations count as historical evidence? Let's say, in your own life, you have a conversation with somebody (your dad, ten years ago). You know it occurred. Nobody else was there. Now, if you were writing your own biography (your autobiography), is that to be excluded as a source because it can't be correlated? Like you just wipe that off the table like it never happened when you know that it did? If you're going to be completely... "It might be bias in there because it was you and your dad. We can't really consider that now, because are you really objective? Boy, we wish we had more sources, then we could correlate that with other sources and determine precise accuracy." You see where I'm going here.

How about memories? Memories can be accurate even if nobody else was in the room. They really can. They can be flawed, obviously. It can work both ways. But to rule them out because nobody else was there, is that reasonable? Really, is that reasonable? Since an event and the interpretation of the event are two different things, can the event be made known reliably? If we know about your biases... Is reliability made impossible or unlikely if we know about an author's

bias? Put another way... Does partial information about an event mean that what is said about the event is untrue? How exhaustive and inclusive and objective must the report be to be considered precise and unbiased?

Now, when I was at the Frequency conference, I used a book as an example. Here's the title of the book: *Invisible: The Forgotten Story of the Black Woman Lawyer Who Took Down America's Most Powerful Mobster*. I picked this book because I was speaking to an overwhelmingly African-American audience, and I used this book to grab their attention, because the book is about a very obscure black woman lawyer at the Lucky Luciano trial. She was behind the scenes, and her grandson wrote this book about his grandmother and the role she played.

Now here are the questions. Is his history—because it's about his grandmother, he's related to her—less objective than other histories of the Luciano trial? "It must be, because they're related." Well, can you objectively demonstrate that it's biased? Less objective? Or are you assuming something that you really can't prove and that might be disproved if we look at the transcripts and the court records and all of that stuff? So is this history really less objective? Were the lives of all of the other people involved in this trial researched at the same level of detail as this woman? "Well, to be objective history, he should have written books on all of the lawyers that were involved, because then we could rule out bias, and then we could cross-check information. We could get this super-precision that we need to call it history." Really? You have to write books on everyone involved to call *this* one history? Really?

How about, were there conversations from which the data are drawn? (There certainly were. This is a courtroom.) Were all the conversations recorded? Well, no. In his book, he's interviewed people who were there, people who were involved. Their conversations that they're reporting to the author weren't recorded; they're memories. Are they all wrong because they're memories—because they don't exist in written form somewhere? It gets a little absurd.

So here are some questions for us and for historical critics. Is your version of your own life objective? If you're telling your own life story, are you including all perspectives equally? How would your first girlfriend in high school relate this? How would your mom, your sister, your aunt, your cousin three times removed...? Do you have to exhaustively go to all of them and include all of their thoughts to really tell the story of your own life and have it be historical? It might be incomplete without them, but that's the question. Is an incomplete accounting still history? Is it an all-or-nothing proposition? I'm suggesting it's not. It's not an all or nothing proposition. And in fact, there's no way to do all these things, because conversations and recollections of events don't all get produced to written form and preserved so that somebody 100 years later can fact-check them. It just isn't the way life happens. So could you actually even tell your own story by these standards? How precise are your data? Well, you're the only source for that data point so we can't include it, and if we do include it, then it's

50:00

not history. Are all the recollections you have cross-checked with other source documents? How many are enough? Do you have recordings of all your conversations? Again, this is absurd.

What about God? Does belief in divine activity in your own life make something unhistorical? Divine causation shows up in many ancient Near Eastern accounts that are not in the Bible, like Rameses' victory at Kadesh over the Hittites. They attribute the activity of their gods to the outcome of events. So why do we consider those things historical but we can't do that with the Bible? Why? I think we kind of know. Because if we do that with the Bible, then we actually have to count it as a source, and if we count it as a source for our history and we can't *invalidate* it, then maybe we're accountable to it. Because we look at the Bible as something different in terms of our accountability to God. We don't do that with Egyptian texts and Assyrian texts and Hittite texts. But then we use a false test (divine activity in the story) to rule out the Bible, when we're just fine accepting it on the other side. That's inconsistent.

To illustrate this, I'm going to tell you my own story of how I got my job at Logos. We have a few minutes left here. And this, I think, illustrates well the question of history versus mythic history, including supernatural events and characters in the story and how they both can be historical. It's not a mutually exclusive idea. So here's how I got my job at Logos. This is me. I'm not embellishing it. It's just a story. It is what it is.

So when I was in my last year at grad school at Wisconsin, I'm going to finish the program in two months, which means I'm going to lose (I always had two or three jobs) all but one job, which means I'm going to lose my health benefits and basically 2/3 of my income in two months. So I had been applying for jobs since I hit the dissertation phase, which was 4 ½ to 5 years prior. And I'm not getting any nibbles. We could go into detail as to why that may have happened. I don't really know. I'd only have guesses. I don't have a job. I don't know what I'm going to do. I have four kids. And it's just not looking real good. So one of the things I was doing for four (almost five) years is looking at the SBL (Society of Biblical Literature) website where they post jobs. I know from four years of experience at that time that they only update the site the first week of every month. I've had four years of that. I know. It's entirely predictable. So I'm in the middle of the month. I come home from teaching one day. I get home. I have a couple of minutes to kill. My wife's not home yet. She's out with the kids doing something and I'm bored. I'm a little bit depressed. I'm wondering what in the world I'm going to do, and I thought, "Well, let's just go look at the job board." And I'm telling myself while I'm sitting at the keyboard typing, "You're just wasting time. You know that it's going to be exactly what you saw two weeks ago. This is stupid. Do something else. Feed the dog. [laughs] Just do something else. This is dumb." So I'm having this internal conversation while I'm going to the website. And the webpage opens, and it's been updated for the first time in over four

years in the middle of a month. And I'm astonished. And the job that has just popped in there is the job I presently have. It was the Logos job.

55:00

So I have everything ready; I've been doing this for years. I have my resume. I fire this thing off in an email. My wife comes home. And less than an hour later, I get a phone call. And it's a friend of mine now (Bill), and we start talking about this job. And then he loops in Bob (our CEO) and he loops in Bob's dad Dale (who is now retired, but at the time was our VP). We sit there for an hour and talk. And at the end of it, Bob says, "We want to have you out here. Come out and visit the office and we'll do a formal interview. You'll meet the people that you would be working with. We'll just take a couple of days and see what happens." So I look at my wife and told her what was going on, and said, "Yeah, why not." It's like a little vacation. We'll get a couple of days on the west coast—in the Northwest. We've never been there. Let's do it." So why not? We don't have any reason to say no. So we went out and visited. We went out to dinner. Bob likes to interview people at dinner. We met everybody that I'd be working with. We went through the whole thing.

At the end of this, I'm expecting to hear, "Well, it was good to have you out. We need a week or so to think about what happened here, and we'll get back to you." So I walk into Bob's office and he looks at me, and he says, "Well, we've decided to offer you the job. Here's what it pays." He gives me all of these details. Now I know (because I have cobbled an income together for years) exactly to the penny what we need to survive. And this is more than that, and I can't believe it. So I'm stunned that I actually have a job offer, after 4 ½ years of nothing. So I didn't really know what to say, so I said, "Can we have 24 hours to think about it? It's a big move." "Oh, sure." So I wind up obviously taking this job.

Now I found out years later from Dale that I was the first person to respond to that job posting. It had lived online for less than an hour. So it literally didn't exist when I was driving home from school. It literally popped out of the ether and I saw it (having the conversation with myself that this was stupid, don't look) and applied for it. He said, "You were the only person we interviewed. That was it. We had the interview. That's it. You were the only person we invited out. We're done." Now I look at that (let's be honest) and I see God's hand in it in half a dozen places. The job literally didn't exist until I got home. And I'm the only one that applied for it (or that they interviewed and brought in). And two weeks later, it's just a done deal. That's it. We don't need to have any other conversations. Now if I attribute divine activity to that, what I'm doing is I'm taking a series of events and I'm mythicizing them. I'm assigning a divine role to things that really happened. Folks, those things happened. It's still history.

What I'm suggesting is, when we look at a book like the Bible and you have writers that theologize things, they do mythic history. That doesn't mean that the events they are using, that they are attributing to divine influence and Providence and even direct activity... It doesn't mean that those things are fabrications.

Every one of you listening to this can do that kind of thing with your own life. Now I may get to heaven and God might tell me, “You know, your reconstruction of what happened that day, I really wasn’t... I was definitely in this thing, but that other thing over there, that was something else.” I’m being a little silly now. In other words, I might get corrected on how I parsed that, but it still happened. It’s okay.

When we have the Bible, that’s what we have biblical writers doing. These things happened. The way they tell the story, they may not be connecting dots quite the way God would connect them, but they’re attributing divine activity to things that happened boots-on-the-ground, and they’re telling us the story. I think the Bible’s a little more reliable, just because I think God has a more direct Providential interest in how Scripture’s produced than my retelling of how I got my job, but the idea is the same.

1:00:00

Attributing divine activity to a series of events, yeah, that’s “mythic” in academes. In the academic dialect, that’s mythic history. But it doesn’t mean it’s not *historical*. And we’re going to run into that kind of thing in Exodus all over the place. So maybe what we should do is instead of judging history by modern expectations (this “exact precision needed, total objectivity, you can’t have one source stand on its own”)... Those criteria would undermine our ability to even tell our own story—things that we know occurred.

So maybe instead of having a set of standards that really don’t quite work that well in real life, that don’t really satisfy our modern way of thinking, maybe we should be thinking about how ancient people looked at what they were doing. When ancient historians wrote, they used speeches of people. They used conversation. They used dialogue. And since none of those things were recorded, yeah, they had to make up conversation. Nobody’s following Achilles around or Alexander around with a tape recorder. Historians will capture the gist—the essence—of what was said in a dialogue that they invent. But it’s faithful to what really happened and what was said. It’s just not an exact reproduction. But we still view that as history, and they viewed it as history. We view it as history when we can put it in the context of our own lives—things that we know happened. If you’re going to be this uber-critic that’s going to discount all this stuff, well good. I want to see you write your own autobiography. Then I’ll take your test and apply it to what you just wrote about your own life and we’ll see if you really exist. It’s inconsistent, is my point.

So they used speeches. They used narrative. They did metanarrative things. They were trying to capture an event appropriately, but they used literary creativity (and even artificiality) in the way they arranged things, but it’s still faithful and is appropriate to what happened. They’re still conveying true things. Just because it’s non-modern—it’s not the way moderns would do it—doesn’t mean it’s not true. It doesn’t mean it’s not historical.

So I think that's what we need to do. We need to recognize that this is the way ancient historians do it. They incorporated things that moderns would be hesitant to include. They wrote for a different reason. They weren't just writing to recall the events of the past (like they were bookkeepers). They're not just, "We have to be exactly precise. Somebody's going to check on our work," like accountants. They were writing to convey things that happened, and they would get into the interpretation—the significance—of why these things were happening. And they would parse things through divine activity because they accepted that in their worldview. They examined present conditions and circumstances and they tried to teach things through them (some moral objective or theological objective). It doesn't mean that the thing they're using to teach that lesson wasn't real. They're just doing something a little bit differently than we would do it today. So this is the kind of thing that we're going to run into in the book of Exodus. It's important, I think, to try to be consistent in the methods that we use to evaluate whatever we're reading in the book of Exodus or something else (some other ancient piece of material), and also try to keep things in their own context. That's what's important here. So hopefully, this helps prepare us for the rest of the book, because we're going to get into this stuff a lot. A lot of things you know about, a lot of things will be new to you. But this is where we're headed.

**TS:** Alright, Mike. I'm excited, as always. I'm going to have to prepare by watching the *Ten Commandments* movie.

**MH:** [laughs] You do that. [laughs]

**TS:** I've watched that movie at least once every year as a child growing up because I didn't have cable. We only had three channels. I don't remember which network it was, but one played it every year. So I told my family that since we're covering it, we're going to have to watch the *Ten Commandments*, and my wife was like, "Didn't you make us watch that last year?"

**MH:** [laughs] "And the year before?"

**TS:** [laughs] Yeah. The answer is yes, and guess what, we're going to watch it again. [MH laughs] Did you like that movie (the 1956 version)?

**MH:** I do. I do like it. You know. It's Hollywood.

**TS:** Sure.

**MH:** But it's a good watch. It holds up.

1:05:00

**TS:** Yeah, it does. Absolutely. Alright, well, we're all looking forward to chapter one next week, Mike. And again, we appreciate everybody that voted and propelled the book of Exodus at the eleventh hour to win. With that, I just want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.

