

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 259

Exodus 2:11-25

February 17, 2019

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Episode Summary

Exodus 2:11-25 is the story of Moses' capital offense in Egypt and his subsequent escape to the land of Midian. The story includes several textual and interpretive difficulties, leading to important questions. Where is the land of Midian? What is its relationship to Horeb? Is Horeb Sinai and, if it is, why do other passages distinguish the two? Who is Moses' father-in-law: Jethro, Reuel, or Hobab? Did the people of Midian worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Egypt—and if not, why is God's holy mountain connected to Midian?

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 259: Exodus 2:11-25. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. How are you doing, sir?

MH: Well, Trey, my car died. It's not going to be like a country music song, you know... [laughs]

TS: You know, I was asking if you believed in spiritual attacks before the show, because I have a car that's down, too. So somebody or something out there is attacking our vehicles.

MH: Yeah. Well, they fired and missed you and got me. [laughs]

TS: They got both of us! But what are you going to do...

MH: Yeah... So, hat over my heart, we had to say goodbye to our minivan.

TS: So just long walks now?

MH: No, it's back to the bus. I could work a lot from home, but when I have to go in, it's bus time. I did that for a couple of years, so we'll be fine.

TS: Do you have a good bus system there?

MH: Yeah. I just live 10 minutes from any bus stop, so I have to have somebody drop me off at the bus stop. But then I'm good. Just drop me off and pick me up at the bus stop, and it's fine.

TS: Yeah, I hear you. Well, we didn't talk about the Super Bowl last time. What are your thoughts on how the Super Bowl went?

MH: [laughs] What a boring game. Do you know how boring this was? Without giving any names out here... I do these Memra courses online, and I have an NFL Hall of Famer taking the Hebrew course. And I recognized him by his email address and reached out to this guy. "Are you this guy?" And he said, "Yep." So he played for the Patriots back in the day. So when the Patriots won, I shot him a little email and said, "Hey, congratulations. I'll bet this was exciting." And he goes, "I didn't even watch the game. It sounds like I didn't miss much." [laughs] I'm like, "Yes. Opinion confirmed. You did not miss much."

TS: Well, I enjoyed it. Defense showed up. They punched each other in the mouth. And it was fun to watch. So hats off to New England, again.

MH: It's just punting. I was hoping the punter would get the Most Valuable Player award. What I was really hoping for was a *Stranger Things* trailer. But I didn't even get that.

TS: Several more months, but it's coming.

MH: Yep. So now I'm in the dead zone. The dead zone until baseball starts. I don't watch basketball. I don't watch hockey.

TS: You've got to get into March Madness.

MH: It's the dead zone. What can I say?

TS: I hear ya. I hear ya. [MH laughs] That's why people have this podcast, right? To fill the void.

MH: [laughs] That's why I have this podcast. [laughter] Oh man, it's just trudging towards MLB, March 20th, a couple of games in Japan, and then the rest of the teams start the next week. So I've got to make it.

TS: I hear you. Well, I guess we wrap up chapter 2 this week.

MH: Yeah, we'll get through chapter 2. So we're in Exodus 2:11-25. That is the remainder of chapter 2 today. And a couple of things to park on in the course of this episode, but let's just start by reading the chapter, just so it's in the heads of those listening. This is when Moses flees to Midian. That's the series of events in which we are falling.

5:00

¹¹ One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. ¹² He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³ When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, “Why do you strike your companion?” ¹⁴ He answered, “Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid, and thought, “Surely the thing is known.” ¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well.

¹⁶ Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. ¹⁷ The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock. ¹⁸ When they came home to their father Reuel, he said, “How is it that you have come home so soon today?” ¹⁹ They said, “An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock.” ²⁰ He said to his daughters, “Then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread.” ²¹ And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. ²² She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.”

²³ During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. ²⁴ And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. ²⁵ God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

So that is the remainder of Exodus chapter 2. And, as is our pattern, just some things of interest in the passage. I'm not going to rehearse the passage back to you, as most of it is self-evident as to what happens. But there are some things (as usual) going on under the surface. Then there are a few stopping points that really deserve some attention. The first one of these is in verse 15. And that is when Moses flees Pharaoh and stays in the land of Midian. So “What in the world is the land of Midian?” is the obvious question. And it's actually a more important question than we might realize, because it's going to take us into other areas as we proceed through the book of Exodus (a few other really important topics). It

just doesn't seem like it's much more than trivial, but trust me. I think you'll see why it's not in a moment. I'm going to start here with Sarna. In his Exodus commentary, he has a few things to say about this. He says:

Moses is now an outcast fleeing for his life. The "land of Midian," where he takes refuge, refers to an area under the control of one or more of the five seminomadic tribes that, according to biblical sources, made up the Midianite confederation...

And he cites a few passages here. Numbers 31:8 says:

⁸They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of their slain, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. And they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword.

Notice the plural kings there—more than one person. So Numbers 31:8 alludes to this idea of a confederation of kings (of rulers) that are all operating under the rubric of Midian. So Midian is going to be a place where there's more than one domain—more than one ruler. It's going to be this tribal confederation kind of thing. Joshua 13:21 refers to:

...all the cities of the tableland, and all the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, whom Moses defeated with the leaders [plural] of Midian, Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the princes of Sihon, who lived in the land.

This is interesting because here we have the Midianite kings ("Midianite rulers" is probably a better way to say this) in the time of Joshua under the authority (or some sort of lordship confederation) that Sihon of Og had control over. Of course, he's one of the Amorite kings. That gets into the Rephaim, with the giant clan material. Here, they're referred to as "princes of Sihon, who lived in the land." So this is the time of Joshua. This is going to be some years removed, obviously, from when Moses wanders into the land of Midian. But for our purposes here, it's like, okay, this is some definable (or maybe a little bit fuzzy) region of land. It has five rulers. And it's this confederation idea. And it is interesting that Moses winds up here. Later this region is going to become infamous because of its association in some way with Sihon of Og (this king of the Amorites). Now if you remember in Deuteronomy 2 and 3, this is the area of Bashan. Well, Midian is considerably south of that.

So how to reconcile these two things? It's a little bit far afield from what we're doing right now. It could be that Sihon had an extended oversight or had control over (maybe by tribute, maybe a vassal arrangement) with Midian—that these princes of Midian were somehow under his authority. This isn't necessarily giant

clan territory in Midian. But it has some relationship to what's going on there, that we're going to read about much later. So that is a point of interest. Sarna goes on and says:

The Midianites ranged over a wide area of the Near East, stretching from the eastern shore of the Gulf of Akaba...

So think of a map. Think of the Red Sea. It has those two prongs. The left prong points toward the delta region of Egypt. The right prong is the Gulf of Aqaba. And to the east of that, on the other side of that watery prong, is what is now Saudi Arabia. That prong delimits, in modern terms, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. You have Jordan as well, also referred to as the Arabian Peninsula (that idea). So Sarna is saying, "Midian, as a land, stretches from the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba," so that right-hand prong eastward.

...up through the Syro-Arabian Desert...

This is going to be the Arabian Peninsula—Saudi Arabia today, Jordan.

...and into the borders of the Land of Israel, west and northwest of Elath.

Elath is right at the tip of that right prong, if you're looking at a map—that right prong of the Red Sea. So north and northwest, obviously, would take us into the land of Israel—probably not as far as Bashan, but maybe the lower region of Bashan. Who knows precisely how this would have been defined. It's just general territory. So we can't take this as evidence that Moses has fled into giant clan territory. It's possible, but it's more likely that there was some sort of overlordship relationship between the king of the Amorites (Sihon, Og) and the Midian confederation—that the latter was somehow subservient or answerable to the former.

So let me just throw in one other thing, because we're going to get into... You probably have already picked up on it. This is going to directly relate to the location of Mount Sinai—the location of the burning bush incident, which we'll actually get into more next week when we hit Exodus 3, because that's the passage for it. But we'll say a few things about it in this episode. But I want to add what *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* says here about Midian. I'll read you a selection here.

The origin of the name midyan is unknown, though it has been suggested (Mendenhall 1973: 163ff.) that the root mady- is non-Semitic, and possibly cognate to the designation of Medes of much later times. The biblical genealogy (Gen 25:2) includes two variants, midyan and medan, cognates of both of which appear in Greek sources of the Hellenistic period as names of towns E of the Gulf of Aqaba (Knauf 1985).

So there's that location again, east of the Gulf of Aqaba, over in what we would now think of as Saudi Arabia, and a little bit north of that is Jordan.

Biblical tradition listed the eponymous ancestor, Midian, as one of six sons born to the patriarch Abraham by his second wife, Keturah (Gen 25:1–6).

So that's what the writer was referring to by the biblical genealogy of the name Midian. It shows up in Genesis 25:1-6, specifically verse 2, as one of the six sons born to Abraham by Keturah. Back to the quotation...

According to this account Abraham sent these sons away from Canaan to the E country, a tradition that implies an origin in Canaan proper for these proto-Arabic tribal designations. This tradition is now powerfully reinforced by linguistic evidence that derives the pre-Islamic Arabic language and writing system from the Bronze Age Mediterranean coastal region.

So there's a connection linguistically between the Arabic language (before the advent of Islam) and languages that are closer to the Mediterranean coast, which of course would be Canaan proper. So the linguistic evidence backs up this notion of Genesis 25:1-6 as far as having a Canaanite origin for the people of Midian (in biblical terms) through Abraham and Keturah. Now, continuing on with *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*... It takes, what I guess is fair to say, a liberal bent when it comes to some of this material. I'll just read it to you.

15:00

The Midianites as a historically existent society are represented in the Joseph stories (Gen 37:25–36) as traders traveling by camel caravan ... The Midianites as a historically existent society are represented [MH: in this passage as this caravan traveling...] between Gilead (N Transjordan) [MH: the other side of the Jordan] and Egypt, and in this case dealing in slaves as well as “gum, balm, and myrrh.” The term Midianite alternates with the term Ishmaelite [MH: in that passage], probably to be explained [MH: here's the liberal bent a little bit] by the fact that at the time the narrative reached its present form, the Midianites had ceased to exist as a distinct social group but were identified with an ethnic group later called Ishmaelites. The narrative certainly is not earlier than the monarchy [MH: the time of Saul, David, and Solomon], and there is no reason to believe that it is based upon any historical event.

That's from *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*. It's by Mendenhall. He's playing his hand as far as his view of the historicity of the text. That's why I said “liberal bent.” Sarna, back in his... This is actually a different commentary. He has a Jewish Publication Society commentary on Exodus, which we've quoted from before (and we did a few minutes ago), and he also has the Genesis volume. Here's what he says in the Genesis volume. He's a little more charitable than Mendenhall is in the *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*. So when you're talking about

discrepancy between Midianites interchanged with Ishmaelites... Because again, if the Midianites came from Abraham through Keturah (back in Genesis 25), then how can we possibly call them *Ishmaelites*? Because Ishmael was born by Hagar. So we have a disconnection here (a problem). And Mendenhall's solution is, "Well, this is not historical anyway, and it's probably because the Midianites ceased to be a people by the time this was written, and they just got conflated by mistake—so on and so forth. Sarna's a little more generous. He writes this:

The discrepancy in names has been variously explained by traditional commentators. Genesis Rabba 84:20 [MH: this is rabbinic stuff—that's what he means by "traditional commentators"], followed by Rashi, postulates that Joseph was traded several times. Ibn Ezra identifies the Ishmaelites with Midianites on the basis of Judges 8:24...

And I'll read that.

And Gideon said to them, "Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil." (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.)

Remember Gideon was connected with the Midianites. So I'll repeat that:

Ibn Ezra identifies the Ishmaelites with Midianites on the basis of Judges 8:24, which relates that Midianites possessed golden earrings "because they were Ishmaelites." This passage suggests that the term "Ishmaelite" was used as an epithet for "nomadic traders" rather than in an ethnic sense. "Midianite," on the other hand, indicates a specific ethnic affiliation. Even if the two names are indicative of originally distinct narrative strands that have here been interwoven, it must have been the close connection between Ishmael and Midian in biblical tradition—both being offspring of Abraham (25:1–2, 12)—that led to their fusion.

So he doesn't see this as any indication of it not being historical. So he's more charitable than Mendenhall was in *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*. The point here is that Moses is a distant relative of the Midianites before he gets married to Zipporah—before he meets Jethro (or Reuel). We'll talk about those names in a moment. Moses is already something of a distant relative because Moses is from the line of Isaac and Jacob, back to Abraham. He's an Israelite. So there's some connection already. There's some family connection.

Back to verse 15: Moses goes to Midian. As I mentioned before, this is going to take us into the burning bush encounter and this location of Sinai—all that stuff. So I'll just telegraph this a little bit (deal with it a little bit) because we're going to return to this topic in other places in this series on the book of Exodus. So let's just look at Exodus 3:1, because right after our portion for today (Exodus 2:11-

25)... Moses is in Midian (he flees to Midian), he gets married, he has Jethro (or Reuel), his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and then the very next verse (Exodus 3:1) says:

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

20:00

So Exodus 3:1 is typically read as though Moses is tending Jethro's flocks in Midian. So the assumption is that the mountain of God in Exodus 3:1, which is named there as Horeb, seems to be in Midian. Now, you could read the verse that way (and some do), but the verse could also be read in a different way. Think about it. I'm going to read it again.

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

The verse could very obviously be read that Moses *left* Midian and journeyed to the west of Midian (or a wilderness west of Midian). In other words, Exodus 3:1 doesn't actually tell us with certainty that the mountain of God (Horeb) is in Midian. You can't really use that verse for it. Because if you read the verse, "Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro," (now Jethro certainly is the priest of Midian; we've got that), but he "led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb." So Horeb could very well be perceived (and actually be) to the west of Midian, somewhere where it wasn't in Midian proper.

Of course, the difficulty here is, how do we define Midian with any precision? Because it could be this territory east of the Gulf of Aqaba, all the way up north to where you hit Elath, and even beyond that into Canaan territory. How do we know this specifically? I mentioned this. You can't read that, I think... This is my opinion. I used to be on this bandwagon that Mount Sinai (or Horeb)... We have to deal with that as well. What's with the two names? I used to be on the bandwagon that Mount Sinai was in Midian, specifically Jebel al-Lawz. I'm not anymore. I think it's possible, but there are some serious uncertainties with it (and problems with it). And frankly, the evidence used popularly to support the idea ranges from something contrived to just being weak and iffy. It's just far from secure. [laughs] Let's put it that way. There are some significant problems with it. I think we can leave the door open to it. But certainly, you can't take this Midian language and take a flock and go all the way west of the Gulf of Aqaba, all the way down to the traditional Sinai. This is hundreds and hundreds of miles, through arid desert country, to hit the traditional site of Sinai. I don't see how Exodus 3:1 can really be reconciled with the traditional site.

But what people fail to realize is that there are actually more than two candidates for Sinai. It's not just a choice between the traditional Mount Sinai at Jebel Musa and Jebel al-Lawz in Midian or Saudi Arabia. There are other possible locations. They just don't get the press. There are certain passages of Scripture that would frankly rule out both the traditional site and a location in Midian, but would actually work well if you're talking about territory that's just to the north or northwest of the Gulf of Aqaba (the tip there)—Elath. There are other candidates here.

So that's as far as I really want to get into that specific subject. We'll hit it again as we're going through Exodus. But I'm just putting those cards on the table—that I used to think a lot more highly of the Mount Sinai in Arabia idea than I do now. It does have serious weaknesses. But the traditional view also has some pretty serious weaknesses, too. But there are other possibilities.

Before we leave that, I mentioned about the names Horeb and Sinai. Now what I just read (in Exodus 3:1) takes us into other questions. What's the relationship of Midian to Horeb? Is Horeb in Midian or is it to the west of Midian? If you read the verse, you could read it that way. Then also, what's the relationship of Horeb to Sinai? Here's a significant passage. I'm just going to read you this without getting into it because it's in Exodus 17. We'll hit it at some point in the course of the podcast. But Exodus 17:1-7 says this:

25:00

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ²Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. [MH: catch this line] ⁶Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

So this event occurs at Horeb. If you keep reading Exodus 17, they're only going to get to Sinai around Exodus 20, in Exodus 19. They have a ways to go before they get to the place where they get the Law. So here we have a disconnection. It's a clear disconnection between the mountain (or just the term Horeb) and the mountain of God that they're going to end up at. So that's another issue for when we're trying to determine (or at least come up with an idea) of where Mount Sinai is. Exodus 3:1 links the two. And it's not the only passage that links Horeb and Sinai. And then you have other passages like this one that clearly distinguish them as separate locations. Now Sarna comments on this. He says:

Many texts seem to identify this location [MH: he's commenting on Exodus 3:1—Horeb] with Sinai, but there are also indications that they may not be identical. Thus, while Mount Sinai appears frequently, Mount Horeb is rare, and there is no reference to the wilderness of Horeb as there is to that of Sinai. Further, an impression of some distance between the two is gained from the story of the water crisis at Rephidim as told in Exodus 17:1–7. [There] the divine spirit is said to have been manifest before Moses, close by “on a rock at Horeb”; yet Rephidim was the last station of the Israelites before entering the wilderness of Sinai. We may be dealing with different strands of tradition, or Horeb may have been the name of a wider region in which Mount Sinai, a specific peak, was located; perhaps that peak eventually lent its name to the entire area. Horeb means “desolate, dry.” Its location has not been identified.

So we're going to hit all this again when we get into Exodus 3, but you should know (even at this point) that we've got some problems here. Between Midian (What is it? How wide is it? Where does it go? Where does it stop? Does it have borders?), Sinai, Horeb, all these place names. There is variability and there just isn't agreement. So we have to think about, “Well, what do the terms mean in which context, and why?” And all that sort of stuff. The location of Sinai is not a simple thing. So if someone tells you it is a simple thing (“All you have to do is look at this or do that”), it just isn't. It just isn't. There's just more to it than that. A close reading of Scripture is going to take you into some of these problem areas, and if you don't deal with them, you're really not dealing with the subject (very well, anyway).

30:00

So let's move on. We're going to keep going here in Exodus chapter 2. In verse 16 we read, “Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters...” Then in verse 18, we read, “When they came home to their father Reuel...” And then in verse 21, we read that the priest of Midian, named Reuel, becomes Moses' father-in-law, but in Exodus 3:1 (which we just read), it is Jethro who is Moses' father-in-law, and he is explicitly called the “priest of Midian.” So what's going on here? Who is Moses' father-in-law? Is it Reuel? Is it Jethro? Who is the priest of Midian? Is it one of these two guys? Why the different names? See, it's actually going to get worse because you're going to have a third name thrown in in certain passages. This is a well-known historical/textual problem in the book and elsewhere. So I'm

going to read from P.E. Hughes' article in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* just to give you some flavor for how some scholars approach it. He writes:

The "priest of Midian" of Exodus 2:16 is called Reuel in Exodus 2:18 but referred to as Jethro in Exodus 18:1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10 and 12 [MH: and in Exodus 3:1]. In addition, in Judges 4:11 mention is made of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses.

You have three! I'll just read you that verse. This is Judges 4:11:

¹¹ Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh.

Okay, so now we have three? What are we supposed to do? Back to Hughes:

Cumulatively, not only is Moses' father-in-law given the three names of Reuel, Jethro and Hobab, but the latter does not align with Numbers 10:29, which describes Hobab as the son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law.

It's starting to sound like "I'm My Own Grandpa" now (the old folk song). Back to Hughes.

Different proposals have been presented to solve this dilemma, from source-critical solutions [MH: the JEDP thing] (Jethro = E; Reuel/Hobab = J)...

The idea is that this is why they're mixed—because the Pentateuch is just a mixture of these different documents, that the editor just goofed here. That's a standard source-critical approach.

...to the suggestion that a misreading of the Numbers passage may have influenced the identification of Jethro as Hobab in Judges [MH: so then we'd have an error in Judges], to the proposition that we may be missing fine distinctions between personal and clan names.

That's the third option. Some have proposed that we're just missing some fine distinctions between personal names and clan names.

This latter perspective was advanced by W. F. Albright, who concluded that Reuel was a clan name and Jethro his proper name, with the seeming reference to the same person in Numbers 10:29–32 attributed by him to a misvocalization in the Hebrew text...

So Albright's solution is, "Look. One of these is a clan name. The other one is a personal name. And Numbers 10:29-32 confuses things because in the Hebrew text, some scribe at some point put the wrong vowels to the consonants." Remember the consonants are the things that were the original part of the composition. Vowels were added much later. So Albright notes that if you look at the Hebrew there, you can read that the Hebrew term as *hōtēn* ("son-in-law") of Moses as opposed to "father-in-law," which would get a different pronunciation. So this was Albright's solution. Sarna (we'll bring him into the picture) in his Exodus commentary writes this:

[Reuel] is mentioned once again in Numbers 10:29—"Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law" [MH: Albright is saying it could be son-in-law, depending what vowels you give it]—where it is uncertain which of the two is so designated.

So Sarna points out, if you actually read Numbers 10:29, "Hobab, son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law," you can't actually tell which one is Moses' father-in-law. It could be Hobab or it could be Reuel. It just depends on, syntactically, how you take that. It's the relationship of the word order with the semantics. So he says:

It's uncertain which of the two is so designated. From Judges 4:11 it would appear that Hobab is the father-in-law, but in other texts this latter epithet is given to Jethro [MH: So Hobab and Jethro—two different names], who also bears the title "priest of Midian." Rabbinic exegesis reconciles the discrepancies by assuming that Reuel was the grandfather of the girls and that the other names all refer to the same person, who bore several names. Many modern scholars prefer to assign the variants to different strands of tradition. However, it is to be noted that the title "priest of Midian" is only [explicitly] attached to Jethro. This raises the possibility that Hebrew *yitro* (yeter) is not a proper name but an honorific meaning "His Excellency."

35:00

And as a biblical parallel, he points to Genesis 49:3. I'm going to read you that verse.

**Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength,
preeminent in dignity, and preeminent in power.**

The word "preeminent" there (occurring twice in the same verse) is the word *yeter* in Hebrew. It's the same that you'll find in passages for Jethro. So Sarna is suggesting that Jethro really isn't a proper name. We should probably understand it as something of an honorific title, like "His Excellency." He further bolsters that by appealing to Akkadian. Think about it. *Yitro* (in Hebrew) sounds a

lot like *atru* (Akkadian). Akkadian is east Semitic. Hebrew is northwest Semitic. Sarna says:

In Akkadian *atru* (*watru*) means “preeminent, foremost,” and several old Akkadian names begin with that element.

They begin with *atru*, which to Sarna suggests that we have an honorific title here. It’s “sir” or “His Excellency.” George Washington is a good illustration. He was referred to as “His Excellency, George Washington” or “His Excellency, President George Washington”—something like that. It was a title that Washington actually... Later on, when they were talking about what to call the leader of the nation, he didn’t want to be called “His Excellency” because it sounded too much like kingship. So “President” was what they decided on. But this is the way Washington was referred to routinely. So it could be a similar idea. Lastly, Sarna points out:

In Ugaritic several personal names are prefixed by the element *ytr*.

Exactly the same as Hebrew (*yeter* or *yitro*). So that’s the end of Sarna’s contribution there. So it’s very possible that the way to reconcile this information is just as we tried to summarize there—that you might have a confusion between son-in-law and father-in-law in the one passage, it just depends on what vowels you apply to the Hebrew consonants. You could have Jethro as a title akin to “His Excellency.” These elements remove the obstacles (remove the contradictions). You’re not forced to say, “Well, these passages are what they are because they’re hopelessly contradictory, because some editor goofed up when he was making the Pentateuch from these two different documents (J and E).” You don’t have to go there. For some, that’s just an easy solution, because they’re committed intellectually to the JEDP idea. And I’m not an opponent of editing. I don’t buy JEDP because I do think it’s based on circular reasoning (as I’ve said many times on the podcast). But editing certainly happens throughout Scripture, including the Torah. But we don’t need to appeal to that sort of thing when we actually have a fairly, not only reasonable, but fairly easy solution here. Repointing Hebrew (because the vowels are not original) and then looking at other occurrences of this Hebrew lemma *yeter* and seeing (not only in the Hebrew Bible, but also in Akkadian and Ugaritic) that it refers to some sort of preeminence idea for a person. So the idea that it’s an honorific title could make pretty good sense.

Other items here. Let’s talk about the name Reuel. Some of you have already tracked on this. Hearing that term, you’re going to be on this point already. The name means “friend of God.” *El* is the generic term for God. The other part is the word for friend or companion. “Friend of God” or maybe “friend of *El*,” although Knauf, in *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, writes this:

The name means “The Friend of God” or “God is Friend”; ’ēl in personal names does not necessarily refer to the God El.

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And he’s right. He’s right about that. Just because it’s *El* doesn’t mean it’s a proper name. That’s completely fair. Knauf isn’t a card-carrying evangelical by any means. For those of you listening who presume that these sorts of discussions default to some sort of evangelical censoring, then you’re wrong. Listen to more of the podcasts and you’ll see how wrong that is. We’re just going with good scholarship here. It could mean either, but it doesn’t have to mean *El*. There’s nothing wrong with it, specifically because of some of the things we’re going to get into here, about going back to the Midianites and their ancestry and all that. So it could be El, but that doesn’t mean El was perceived as a different deity than the one Moses is going to encounter at the burning bush and later. So *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* says this. This is Knauf’s article on that particular entry (Reuel). He says:

Reuel [is] a son of Esau [MH: This is one Reuel, where the name shows up.] (Gen 36:4, 10, 13, 17; 1 Chr 1:35, 37). If the list of Gen 36:10–14 reflects the structure of the Edomite tribal system in the 7th century B.C. (Knauf 1989: 10, n. 45; 61–63), [then] Reuel was one of the three major Edomite tribes and had four subtribes (Gen 36:13)....

And that would be no surprise, because Esau is identified with Edom in Genesis 36 and elsewhere.

In Num 10:29, Reuel is the father of Hobab, the eponymous ancestor of a Kenite clan that settled in the Negeb among the tribe of Judah (Mittmann 1977). This clan may well have belonged to the Edomite tribe Reuel before it migrated to the other side of Wadi Arabah. Therefore, Reuel as Moses’ relative is possibly identical with the Edomite tribe (cf. also Albright 1963)

And he references Albright here, who went along the same trajectory. The point of all that is that it’s quite possible that Moses, therefore, represents both lines from Isaac (Jacob’s line, because Moses is from Levi). And if you have this connection here with Esau (Isaac had two sons—Jacob and Esau), Moses is emblematic and has some sort of blood connection with both sides, as well as being a distant relative of the Midianites, who overlap with the Ishmaelites. And there you have Abraham’s seed outside the line of Isaac, which is really kind of interesting. The person, Moses, could represent all of... The two lines within the one Abrahamic line and then the line in another Abrahamic line. It’s just kind of interesting, genealogically. Now Carpenter writes that, given the lineages involved:

It seems likely that the Midianites would have known of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but not by the name Yahweh as revealed to Moses in chapter 3 of Exodus.

In Exodus 3, God is going to reveal this name to Moses. In other words, it's quite coherent to think that these people (the Midianites) knew of and worshiped the God of their patriarchal forefathers. That's perfectly compatible with what we're reading and what we know of them genealogically. It would be reasonable (because you have all these lineages going back to Abraham and Isaac—having the two lines of Jacob and Esau) that these people would have known about the God of their forefathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That doesn't necessarily mean that they knew that God by the name "Yahweh." Because if we take Exodus 3 seriously (and Exodus 6:3 is another allusion to this), then God's revealing something to Moses at the burning bush. "I am that I am. I am who I am." We'll talk about the meaning of the name when we get to Exodus 3 in the podcast. But if they already knew that, that wouldn't be a revelation to Moses. But it was a revelation. And he's identifying in Exodus 3 (the same passage) with the people in Egypt and their forefathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). It's the same deity.

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Now people who are listening to this are going to think, "Well, that's just kind of weird, because in my English Bible, I read the name Yahweh in passages before Exodus 3 in some passages that have to do with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I read 'The LORD.' It's Yahweh there." That's correct. You do. And here's where... This is actually where the source-critical approach to the Torah really started. Because you have revelations of the divine name in Exodus 3, and then when you have the same divine name (supposedly revealed in Exodus 3 to Moses at the burning bush) show up elsewhere in the Old Testament with earlier patriarchs, some people looked to that and thought, "Well, that just doesn't make sense. The Pentateuch must be, therefore, a combination of different documents, where you had one person writing about God using the name Yahweh, another person writing about God using *EI* or *EI* derivatives (like *EI Shaddai*), and then somebody came along in Israelite or Jewish tradition and he wove these two things together into one cohesive narrative and he mixed the names." This is the core of the Mosaic authorship issue (J and E documents—D is something else, P is something else). But this is where it actually begins—because of issues like this. And we've run right into it. Now you don't have to embrace the entirety of the JEDP idea to accept this. I'm what used to be called a supplementarian. I believe there was a Mosaic core. I believe we have material composed or heavily edited in Babylon (Genesis 1-11). I believe we have other material that gets codified (put in writing) from oral tradition of ancient people of Israel themselves. They knew these stories about their ancestors, and eventually those stories got written down. And yes, I think you do have editorial evidence where you have at some places an editor must have used the divine name Yahweh in earlier scenes (earlier episodes) specifically so that his readers would understand that we're not

dealing with two deities here. In other words, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would have known God by *EI* and *EI* names. Good, they're worshipping one God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And when you get to Moses, Moses encounters this same God who reveals to him another name, and he's going to relate to Moses by a different name. Well, the patriarchs didn't know that, but it doesn't matter, because they're the same deity.

But whoever is reading the Hebrew Bible centuries later sees and understands that both he and his own readers (as he's putting the final touches on this thing that we're going to call the Torah, and wider than that, the Tanakh) sees the need to make sure his readers understand that these names all lead to the same place (all lead to the same deity). So an editor would insert the subsequent name (the covenant name—Yahweh) into passages so that his readers understand that it's the same God (it's the same entity, the same deity, the same person). This is the way you would do it. You tie those threads together.

Now you can do that without having the Pentateuch be (in terms of its origin) completely created out of four different documents. My view... And it's a minority view now. It used to be a majority view, back in the day. My view is that you have a substantial element of oral tradition from the Israelites (the Hebrews), you have Moses writing material, and then that stuff gets edited later (gets accrued to and edited later). See, what JEDP really wanted to deny was any sense of Mosaic authorship. That's really what it was after. That's what was in the crosshairs. And once you do that, you don't have a need for Moses, and they were questioning even the existence of Moses. So that's really what that was about. It wasn't about trying (necessarily) to come up with a better way to understand why we have the Torah, and let Moses be a contributor. That's the supplementarian position that I hold. I don't see any reason why Moses could not have been a substantial contributor to what we call the Torah.

But if you're a JEDP guy, you don't say that at all. Even evangelicals who buy into JEDP say that Moses didn't have anything to do with this, as far as composition. He's the subject of a lot of it, but as far as composition, he had nothing to do with it. And they'll still affirm the historicity of Moses, but he didn't touch the thing. I think that's too extreme. And ultimately, the way JEDP is articulated and defended, it does fall prey to circular reasoning at points. I've talked about this before and blogged about it, so I don't want to keep going down this road. But this is a really good example where you've got this situation. You just run into it in the text.

So, backing up to the major point for our purposes, it's completely coherent that the Midianites (if they're Edomites or Ishmaelites or whatever-ites) that this people group that Moses finds himself in the midst of, it's completely coherent that this group would have worshipped the God that Moses worshiped while he was living in Egypt. And his people, the God of their ancestors. Because that same God is their ancestors' God, too. He's their God too. All these other

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ancestors (these other people groups)... We know that by virtue of the genealogical comments that I've read here over the course of discussing the topic here. It's not unreasonable to have this picture.

So Moses wanders into Midian and they know who the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is. It's interesting when you get to Exodus 4... Remember the famous (or infamous) "bridegroom of blood" episode? This is where God wants to kill Moses, and then Zipporah has to save the day, and there's something going on with circumcision. (We'll get to that, too.) But she's the daughter of the priest of Midian and she knows that circumcision is a big deal. That's right out of the religion of the patriarchs. So it's very consistent, even though it requires *us* to think a little bit differently about some things.

Now to wrap up our episode, just a couple of other things. Let's look at Zipporah in verse 21. Her name means "a bird." It's either a term of endearment or to reflect her beauty. In verse 22, we get Gershom. Gershom has an interesting meaning.

²² She gave birth to a son, and he [Moses] called his name Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."

Gershom comes from... The main stem of the word is *g-r-sh*, which means "to drive out" or "to drive off." It's the same lemma used to describe the action of the shepherds in verse 17, when the daughters of the priest of Midian are being driven off. The shepherds came and drove them away. It's the same lemma there (*g-r-sh*)—to drive away. And it's kind of interesting that Moses, of course, witnesses this while he's in a foreign land, and he has been driven out of Egypt. He's forced to flee by Pharaoh. So just the name of the son hearkens back to the occasion where Moses met his future wife and he was received into Jethro's family. Sarna points out:

But Gershom also carries a wider, national allusiveness, for later in the narrative the stem [g-r-sh] is used three more times, to underscore the abject humiliation of the stubborn pharaoh as he is forced to reverse his refusal to let Israel go.

Later on in the story, he drives them out. In other words, the term is going to be picked up by the writer just to draw connections between Moses being driven away, and Moses rescuing these women from the shepherds who were driving them away, and then of course the name of Moses' own son. There's an interconnectedness throughout these characters and these scenes. Sarna says:

The folk etymology interprets the name as a composite of *ger sham*, "a stranger there" and is taken to signify being "a stranger in a foreign land."

Ger is “a stranger” and *sham* is the word for “there.” So we get this “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.” That statement is still true, because Moses was driven out. But scholars have pointed out that what we actually have here is the lemma *g-r-sh* “to drive out” and it’s used intertextually in a number of other episodes here.

In verses 23-25, we read:

²³ During those many days the king of Egypt died...

When we were discussing chronology earlier... You cannot say that you have the same Pharaoh who was the Pharaoh of the oppression and the one who was seeking Moses’ life and have the same guy be the Pharaoh of the exodus. Because he dies. Here it is. I don’t want to rehearse that. But this is something that needs to be accounted for. And it’s kind of astonishing how many treatments of the chronology of the candidate for Pharaoh just omit this, or just never seem to see it. I don’t know how that is, but it’s true. I can show you specific examples of pretty good published stuff, but it’s not in there. Continuing in Exodus 2:23:

...the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. ²⁴ And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. ²⁵ God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

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That’s the way it ends. “And God knew.” He knew what? Haven’t you ever wondered that? You get to the end of Exodus 2, “and God knew.” What? It feels like there’s something that should come after that. The best answer is probably found in Exodus 3:7-8a, because it aligns with the third-person narration of Exodus 2:23-24. So if we read Exodus 3:7-8:

Then the LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and bring them out of that land...

So what God knows is what’s happening to his people. And that’s what we read in Exodus 2:23-24. It’s just odd that verse 25 ends that way. “God saw the people of Israel—and God knew. It’s just really abrupt, but that’s what it is.

Now as far as literary stuff (and we’ll end with this), we’ve picked around a few of the problems in the passage and a few things we’ll be picking up in later episodes with Exodus 3 and beyond. But there are some real interesting literary

things going on. I just want to read a summary by Hughes in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. He has a really nice way of summarizing, literarily, what's going on in this passage. He writes:

His [Reuel's] significance is further emphasized by the fact that he is properly named Reuel—meaning “friend of God”—in Exodus 2:18, which provides a sharp contrast to the oppressive, anti-creational bent of the Pharaoh who has just been described as seeking to kill Moses (Ex 2:15).

So Reuel, “the friend of God,” “God’s companion,” is set in contrast to Pharaoh. One is the friend of God and the friend of Moses; the other one wants to kill him.

The hospitality of the priest toward Moses the outsider not only contrasts with Pharaoh and his banishment of Moses from Egypt but also serves to illustrate the impending legal concern for upholding the cause of those on the margins of Israelite society.

Carpenter gets into the foreshadowing of all of this. He writes this:

The conclusion (v. 22) and previous context (including Gen 15:13; 50:24–25) [MH: Verse 22 is the reference to Gershom, and that Moses was a sojourner—a stranger—in a foreign land] work together to indicate that Moses’ status in Midian is ultimately temporary and to anticipate an open door for him to return to Egypt to lead Israel to their own land of inheritance... The event of Moses’ deliverance of Reuel’s daughters foreshadows not only Exod 18 but the entire episode (vv. 16–22) in Exod 18:1–12 in an incipient form, *mutatis mutandis*. It is Moses who informs Reuel/Jethro of Yahweh in chap. 18, not the other way around... This scenario involving meeting one’s bride at a well recalls similar scenes in Gen 24:12–16, Isaac and Rebekah; 29:1–14, Jacob and Rachel. All of these episodes stress the providential care of God for the persons involved, but in this case, it is Moses’ exile and sojourn in Midian that is most important... Moses’ act of kindness had ramifications that he did not expect, but the reader will recall that he had been a “favored baby” (2:2), a status that also applies to him as an adult. That special status is revealed powerfully in the functions God places on Moses, God’s chosen leader.

What he’s saying here is that the whole thing... Moses winds up in Midian. You’ve got the association with Zion. You’ve got the kings of Midian. He’s running from Pharaoh, but what happens to him? He runs into the “friend of God,” Reuel, and he is taken in by that family. He delivers (and the word there is the same as you’re going to get with deliverance elsewhere in the Exodus story) the women from these hostile shepherds who are driving them away from the water. It foreshadows the deliverance that Moses is going to be the agent of for the entire nation. And really, it foreshadows even more than that, with the

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salvation of God's people later on in the New Testament. He is a stranger in a foreign land. He's been driven out. And he refers to the driving out. All these things are to make you connect in your mind (Moses, Egypt, Midian, Reuel) with what's going to happen later—specific episodes, specific deliverances, specific places, specific people, ultimately, that Moses is going to be involved in. So these little seed words and seed thoughts in the last few verses (16-25) of Exodus 2 that set the stage to become little springboards or jumping-off points for the story as it's going to unfold later on. Because some of the same verbiage is going to be used that you'll have seen before, and it'll take your mind back here in some clever ways.

So I just wanted to throw that in, because I like intertextuality. If you don't, I'm sorry. But I like intertextuality because the biblical writers are intelligent. They drop things—little breadcrumbs, words, phrases, imagery—because they want you to connect ideas in the present (what you're reading) and they also want you to remember them when you get to other places in what they're writing, and you can see how one thing foreshadowed the other. I think it's just interesting to be able to trace those things through.

So next time, we will hit Exodus 3. We have a lot to talk about: Horeb, Sinai, Midian, the revealing of the Name. There's a lot of stuff there that we've seen the precursor of already here. And it's not going to be unique to Exodus. There's going to be a lot of that going on in the book.

TS: Alright, Mike. And also, we're going to be splitting chapter 3 into two parts.

MH: Yeah, it'll be at least two. I'm not sure how it's going to be. But I'd like to cover the first 14 verses next time. We'll see how far we get.

TS: Alright, Mike. We appreciate it. Looking forward to chapter 3 next week, and I just want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.