

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 281

Exodus 16

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Episode Summary

Bible students will know Exodus 16 as the story of God's provision of manna, the "bread from heaven" that sustained the Israelites during the long years of journeying to Canaan. The chapter is actually filled with a number of textual issues, most of which involve the question of authorship, but including the matter of the manna itself. In this episode, we discuss the phenomena of the text and apply what we find to thinking better about inspiration and historicity.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 281: Exodus 16. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike. How are you doing today?

MH: Pretty good. How about you?

TS: Eh, I've been better. But I'm good, I'm good. [laughter] Actually, by the time this comes out, it's July now, so we're in the thick of summer. Anything new with you?

MH: Nine of the last 10 days here have been under 65, which is just really unseasonably cold. So I had a conference meeting with the people in Florida this week, and they're like, "It's 99 here." And I said, "Hey, I built a fire." [laughter] You know. We just couldn't take the cold anymore. [laughs]

TS: Yeah, it's not the cold that I would worry about. It's going into that humidity that I would hate. Because it is *hu-mid* in Jacksonville.

MH: Well, I'm going to be there in mid-July. So by the time this airs, I may *be* there. But yeah, we'll get a good dose of it. So it is what it is. I grew up on the East Coast, so I know what humidity is. But the kids do not.

TS: Yeah. It does wonders for my hair, though. So that is one plus. [laughter]

MH: I'm not going to reap that benefit.

TS: I hear you. How's the house-hunting going?

MH: They look. Nobody's real serious yet because it's too early. But... Now you have me thinking about the hair. I wonder if it's going to curl the one pug's hair. Mori has the short, bristly kind of hair, but Norman is fluffy. So I wonder if it'll do that... [laughs]

TS: You'll have to take a picture for all of us. [laughs]

MH: I'm sure he'll want to do that.

TS: So we're in Exodus 16, so we're chugging away. No Part 1. No Part 2 or A, B, C, D. We're just straight-up 16.

MH: Yeah, and this isn't going to feel like *Stranger Things*, either. This is going to feel like a little bit of Bible trivia here because this chapter has a number of anachronisms in it. Some of them are more substantial than others. But it takes us into authorship issues and "when was this or that part written" issues. So it's going to feel a little bit like critical trivia or something like that. But the chapter has four or five of these in it. So on the one hand, it's not like we're doing the cool stuff like trips to Sheol and all that kind of stuff like we've been doing with the Red Sea crossing. But I think this is still productive because it's really useful (at least in my mind) that people are aware of these sorts of things in the text. Because (as I've said many times) we need a view of inspiration that accommodates these things—that includes these things in the way we think about how we got the Bible.

So I think with respect to that, this is a pretty useful episode. Because that's where we're going to camp out the whole time—on some of these oddities in the text. And all of them are pretty easy to read over. But once I point them out, I think our listeners are going to go, "Oh yeah. What's *that* doing there?" So there are a number of these things. And I do think it's useful to think about these things as they pop up in the text because academic discussions about how we got Scripture (which of course includes the whole concept of inspiration)... The reason why these things are debated and discussed in such detailed, lengthy ways is because of the text itself. So we need a view of inspiration that... It's going to sound a little goofy. We need a view of inspiration that actually conforms to the biblical text, not some abstract concept that ignores this or is seemingly unaware of these things.

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So with that said, let's just jump in. We will go through the whole chapter here, and I'm just going to read through. When we run into things, we'll hit them when we come to them and then just stop and discuss them. So the first one is going to come pretty early here. Starting in verse 1 (I'm reading ESV):

They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ² And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, ³ and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. ⁵ On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” ⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, “At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD.

Incidentally, that's kind of a bit of an odd kind of third-person reference there.

For what are we, that you grumble against us?” ⁸ And Moses said, “When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.”

And then we go into the episode when Moses and Aaron are speaking to the congregation. But back in verse 4... Let me read it again. Here's our first “Why is that there?” example.

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.

Do you see the issue? His reference to the Torah—“Walk in my law (Torah).” They don't have the law yet. They're not at Sinai. The law hasn't been given. So what is that? Is this a reference to the Mosaic law that doesn't exist yet? Well, maybe. But Exodus 15:25 (back in the previous chapter) may indicate a more general idea that God gave the people rules before they actually get The Law (capital T and L). Let me read Exodus 15:25.

²⁵ And he cried to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them.

This is the reference to the solution of the bitter waters. So the Lord makes for them a statute and a rule, so God gives them instruction (you could say) before they actually get The Law at Sinai. And the fact that the word “Torah” here shows up doesn’t necessarily mean that we have some anachronism here. Sarna takes that trajectory, and he writes this:

Exodus 15:25 leads us to assume a tradition about laws given before the Sinaitic revelation.

If this was the only instance in this chapter, you could say, “Yeah, okay. I can live with that. God’s given them rules before they get the real rules.” And so the fact that the writer would use this kind of vocabulary doesn’t mean that we have something really odd here (maybe a boo-boo), where we reference the law before it actually exists. If this was the only instance of this in this chapter, you could live with that. But as you can tell from what I just said, we are far from that being the only instance of this. Now we get down to verse 9. Let’s pick it up there again.

⁹ Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, ‘Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’” ¹⁰ And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. ¹¹ And the LORD said to Moses, ¹² “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

¹³ In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. ¹⁴ And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶ This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.’” ¹⁷ And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some

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less. ¹⁸ But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. ¹⁹ And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it over till the morning." ²⁰ But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. ²¹ Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

Now listen for what comes next:

²² On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, ²³ he said to them, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.'" ²⁴ So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. ²⁵ Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field." ²⁶ Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none." ²⁷ On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. ²⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? ²⁹ See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day." ³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.

That's reading through verse 30. We're about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through the chapter. Do you see the issue here? We have several references to a day of solemn rest and to, specifically, a Sabbath. Now we haven't gotten the Sabbath command yet. And if you think, "Well, the Sabbath is just something that was part of Israelite culture," think about what you're saying. How would they know about the Sabbath? "Well, it's in Genesis, right?" Genesis isn't written yet. The same guy who's speaking to them here (who is ostensibly supposed to record the law-giving at Sinai, which hasn't happened yet) is also the guy who supposedly wrote Genesis. We have references to the Sabbath before (biblically speaking) anybody even knows what that is.

Now there are (this is kind of curious if you actually look it up) two and only two references to a seventh day with the command or the comment that it was a day of rest prior to Exodus 20. There are only two times when you have reference to

a seventh day before we hit Exodus 20 (that's the giving of the Ten Commandments). And those two references are Genesis 2:2-3. Exodus 16:23 (which we just read) is the first use of the noun Shabbat (Sabbath) in the entire Torah. Now if that sounds surprising, yeah, it *is* surprising, but it's true. So how would they even know what's going on here? How would the people in real time at the event, if Moses is actually speaking these words to the people in the manna incident (Moses is like, "Well, this is a Sabbath to the Lord!"), I would think that because the word Sabbath hasn't been used until this chapter in the entire Torah (even if they had a Torah), they might look at him and go, "What's that? What? We don't know what you're talking about." You read through it here, and it looks like they should have known this. But how would they?

You could make some kind of argument here that... You could go either way. You could hit this hard and fast like, "This is just a hopeless, anachronistic comment here, and the editor or the writer is kind of stupid." Or you could massage this in some other way, about how, "Well, maybe they don't have written revelation, but they could have talked about it." And, of course, if you go down that road, you're going to say, "Well, what started the discussion? Who brought it up? Where would anybody have heard this other than the Torah, which doesn't exist yet? And we haven't even had the Sinai event yet." So okay, in theory, they could have been talking about six days and the seventh day as a rest day, but if you're the people in real time here, where do they get that information?

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Now obviously, you could say that Moses didn't write this. Somebody living later wrote this. Some would argue Moses either didn't write it or somebody later did, or you could have the possibility within the Mosaic composition (the Mosaic authorship tradition)... You could say, "Well, Moses didn't write it the day after it happened. He wrote it years, decades later, toward the end of his life, after the Sinai event had occurred. And that means that they have this law about the Sabbath. And then Moses is writing this down later, and then sort of adding it to the details of what happened." But that makes us think about some things as well. If you argue that Moses did write it, but at a later time—sometime after the Sinai event, but before he dies—then the wording is post-Sinai, of course reflecting back on the circumstances of the manna episode. That might sound good, but if you give it some thought, if this got written later, what would Moses *have* said in real time at the event in regard to the manna? Saying he wrote it later presumes that he only knew about the Sabbath at Sinai, which hasn't happened yet. This approach should mean that when the incident actually did happen, Moses couldn't refer to the Sabbath because he'd never heard of it. So then what would he say about not gathering the manna on the seventh day? If he said nothing, then the after-the-fact approach here has Moses making up details of the story later in his life that weren't actually true in real time. Moses had to give the people some rationale for not gathering on the seventh day. And then he changed whatever he said years later in his life to insert this Sabbath stuff. So

this particular strategy for sort of saving (or preserving) Mosaic authorship at a later time gets kind of convoluted.

Now you also can't say that the people should've known from Genesis about the seventh day being a day of rest because Moses supposedly wrote that, too. So they don't have that, either. I'm trying to show you how just this little observation really raises some fundamental questions—really important questions—about what actually happened and when it was written. And the information in the written version of this, how did that get there? Like how did this all come together so that what's written reflects what really happened? If you say that Moses wrote it or somebody else did later (like oral tradition, we'll just say), they would have to be (either Moses or this other person) recollecting some original rationale for not gathering the manna at the real-time event. But what would the source of that information be? It seems to me that to have this reflect a real event you have to assume (and that's the key word here) that God told Moses about the Sabbath before we get to Sinai.

Now you could read verse 23 sort of that way. This is Moses speaking. "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil...'" So you could say, "Well, God not only told them what to gather and bake and not bake, but God offered him some instruction about the concept of the Sabbath before we ever get to Sinai, which is where the Sabbath is going to become a command." And obviously, this is something Moses could have said in real time, that "God just told me to do this." We read it and we assume that Moses just knew this information because of Genesis. And we never stop to think, "Well, Moses wrote that, too. Did that exist? What evidence do we have for that even existing at this time?" We never think about questions like this, but critics do. They think about them a lot.

20:00 So we'd have to go back to verse 23 and more or less say that God and Moses had a conversation. God dropped a few breadcrumbs here about this Sabbath thing, even though in a Mosaic authorship model he hasn't prompted Moses to write Genesis yet. He hasn't given Moses the revelation about what happened at creation. He hasn't done any of that. But he's dropped enough breadcrumbs here in Moses' skull (so to speak) or in the conversation so that Moses knows that "this is important to God that we not do stuff on the seventh day. Okay. That's what I'm going to tell the people." And we don't have to assume that Moses knew much more than that. Now he's going to *get* more information. And once the Sabbath idea becomes a command handed down at the Sinai event, then later in his life Moses will know what a big deal this was and what the rationale for it was (the creation week and all this stuff). But he doesn't know that now. So you could read verse 23 in that way. It's a bit odd, but there's no rule against reading verse 23 that way. There's nothing that forbids it. You could just suppose that the instruction here was more general and it gets codified later.

Is that a distinction that makes a difference? To some people it is, and to some people it wouldn't be.

But I want to point it out, that even though it's easy to read this and we never think about these questions, they're actually real questions. And there will be people who have no concern (nothing invested in the idea) that Scripture (in any sense) comes from God, either providentially or some sort of more spooky kind of automatic writing kind of thing. I'm using the two ends of the spectrum here—the caricature of inspiration here—somebody who doesn't care about... Anything on the spectrum. "The Bible's just a human book. It's put together by humans, and that's the end of the story. We don't have to think about providence or God's role or anything like that. It's a book written by people about God. God really had nothing to do with the content itself." If you're in that camp (and I think it's fair to say most critical scholars are), you're going to notice things like this. And if you're mean-spirited and you happen to have a group of freshmen in front of you or somebody taking Bible as Lit and you're looking forward to disabusing them of any sense of divine origin for this document they call the Bible, you could pull this one out really easily.

So we need to be thinking a little bit better about how these things in the text come together, either at one point or in stages or with many hands—all that stuff. This is why I have that short series of lectures that I do about having a better view of inspiration. This is why it's important. We had some of these in the preceding episode, and I think in the episode before that. But this chapter has a number of these. They're easy to miss. They're easy to read over. They're easy not to think about because we have the whole canon. We just assume that Moses has all this in his head and that Genesis has already been written, or that it's oral tradition.

And you could say, "Well, it still could be oral tradition." Well, sure. It could be that just nothing got written down. That's possible. But it's an argument from silence, just like taking verse 23 the way we talked about. That's an argument from silence, too. It's possible. We just don't know. But I would say, if it *is* possible, if it *is* oral tradition, why did the people have the question? Why did it not occur to them to... Why were there some dunderheads in the group that went out on the seventh day, like "What's the big deal?" You would think (if this is an oral tradition that has become intrinsic to the culture) that there really wouldn't be a question. There wouldn't be any need to answer the question.

But nevertheless, here we are. So there are just things to think about here.

The next item that we're going to run into goes beyond mere words that were verbalized at an event, or asking the question, "What words *were* verbalized at the event?" This one's going to go a bit beyond that, and perhaps did not happen. I would say almost of necessity what's described in Exodus 16 didn't happen when it's described as happening but *did* happen later. And so the writer

intentionally wants to telegraph some particular point by creating (this is important)... The writer himself creates the chronological disconnection. In other words, it's not an error because it's a deliberate literary or theological strategy that was more important to the writer than giving us a play-by-play, blow-by-blow chronology. Let's just read verses 33 and 34. I stopped at verse 30. Here's verse 31:

³¹ Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. ³² Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'"

So we're going to talk about manna in a bit, after we get through these anachronisms here. But here is the next one, verses 33 and 34. Now listen to this:

³³ And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations." ³⁴ As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept.

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Two phrases there. Let me read the verses again.

³³ And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it *before the LORD* to be kept throughout your generations." ³⁴ As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it *before the testimony* to be kept.

So the two phrases are "before the Lord" and "before the testimony." Basically everybody in biblical scholarship (because you can just more or less look this up) agrees that "the testimony" here (the Hebrew is '*edut*') refers to the ark of the covenant. The ark of the covenant is, in fact, sometimes referred to as the ark of the '*edut*' (the ark of the testimony). Now covenant is a different word (*berit*). But the ark of the covenant is called the ark of the testimony as well. So when the testimony (placing something before the testimony—the '*edut*') is referred to, it's a reference to the ark of the covenant. I actually discussed this phrase (this word) a little bit in *Unseen Realm*. Now Sarna translates the term '*edut*' as "pact." And he writes this of verse 34:

Pact: [This is an] Ellipsis for "the Ark of the Pact" [MH: qhat we might think of as the ark of the testimony in other translations]. Hebrew '*edut*' is synonymous with *berit*, "covenant." [MH: Even though they're different words.] The Ark housed the two tablets of stone on which the Decalogue was inscribed. These are variously

designated “the tablets of the Pact” (Heb. *luhot ha-’edut*), as in 31:18 and elsewhere, and “the Tablets of the Covenant” (Heb. *luhot ha-berit*)...

So what Sarna is saying is, “Look. When you get the tablets, they’re called both things: the tablets of the covenant (the *berit*) and the tablets of the pact (‘*edut* or testimony). So this is evidence that *berit* and ‘*edut* (covenant and testimony/pact) are synonymous (they overlap in meaning) and the reference in either case is to the ark of the covenant, because that’s where the tablets were kept. Continuing with Sarna, he references Deuteronomy 9:9 and 11 there as well:

Following the revolt of Korah, Aaron’s rod was similarly deposited “before the Lord,” that is, “before the Pact [MH: ‘*edut*],” for safekeeping and for an educational purpose, as recounted in Numbers 17:19, 22, 25.

So clearly, what we have here is when you have this reference to putting something before the ‘*edut* (testimony/pact), whatever this is is being deposited (this jar)... is being put before the ark of the covenant. Now what’s the problem? It’s a very clear problem. The ark hasn’t been built yet. The ark had not been built yet. That only comes after they get to Sinai. Its construction is given to us in Exodus 25. And frankly, the whole tabernacle doesn’t exist yet. Instructions for the tabernacle and its contents are in Exodus 25-27 and a little bit in Exodus 30. This is clearly anachronistic language. You can’t say, “Well, it just means ‘before the Lord’—‘before the presence of the Lord himself,’” without a tabernacle. You have a problem there. If the deity is invisible, how do you put anything before it? You say, “Well, maybe it’s the mobile cloud or the angel.” Well that’s nice. It’s a moving target now. What, you keep following the cloud or the angel around, and whenever he stops, you put the jar there at the feet or at the bottom of the cloud? I mean, it’s really convoluted, and it ignores the kind of data that Sarna had in his quotation—that the ark of the ‘*edut* and the ark of the *berit* are the same object. This is two ways of referring to the same thing. And it hasn’t been built yet. It’s a clear anachronism. And it goes beyond what might have been floating around in somebody’s head in terms of a conversation or instruction (like the earlier examples). This was something that was either done at that moment or not. And you can’t say it was done at that moment, because the things that you need to do it don’t exist yet. Now Sarna writes of this... Obviously this isn’t news to commentators. Sarna writes the appendix of this commentary (he’s referring to verses 33 and 34, actually to the end of the chapter, which concludes with verse 36). But verses 33 and 34 is where we are now. He says:

The appendix stems from a time later than the events just narrated. It presupposes the erection of the Tabernacle, the appointment of a priesthood, the termination of the fall of manna...

And that’s important. It presupposes that the manna is going to end. It presupposes...

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...the settlement in the land, and the obsolescence of the omer measure.

Now that might be a little bit of an odd detail. We'll come back to that. That's actually interesting, too.

Medieval Jewish commentators recognized that verses 32–34 tell of events that took place later on. It was already well established in rabbinic times that the order of the pentateuchal narratives does not necessarily conform to chronological sequence.

That's true, and we've seen it already before in other instances where things will be inserted to draw the reader's attention to something deliberately. It's not careless. It's not haphazard. It's designed to trigger a thought in the reader at that particular time. There's something that the writer is trying to either teach the reader or reinforce in the reader's mind. That's why you have these disconnections. And this is going to be another such instance. Now Durham in the *Word Biblical Commentary* notices this, and he writes as follows:

This location [MH: before the 'edut (testimony)], as critics have frequently pointed out, is anachronistically specified here. "The Testimony" in front of which the jar containing the manna is to be placed is The Testimony of the tables of the Ten Words [MH: the Ten Commandments], or the Ark of the Covenant containing these tables of the Commandments (BDB, 730), and of course, neither tables nor Commandments nor Ark nor Covenant have made an appearance in the Exodus narrative to this point. Neither, for that matter, apart from this passage, has the institution of the Sabbath holy to Yahweh [MH: been given at least as a law].

These references are set here however for an important theological purpose which overrides considerations of logical and chronological sequence. Yahweh has proved his Presence in his provision for a complaining and disobedient people. That proof, miraculously wrought, must be made plain to the descendants of Israel who have yet to face the struggle of belief. They should share the story of their fathers and also the important evidences of their faith. Thus is the manna to be kept, one omer of it, one day's supply for one person. It is to be put into a jar and located in a spot before an object anyone reading this passage would know full well. The redactor who made the compilation of Exod 16 was aware of this and was more interested in the proof and its transmission to the generations than in preserving a chronological and consistent sequence.

Now let me just stop there and unpack that a little bit. What Durham is saying is, whoever is responsible for the final form of Exodus 16 wants his readers (living centuries later than these events) to mentally connect this jar with the presence of God who preserved their people during the wilderness period. So he does that

by associating the jar with the place where the presence of the Lord dwelled (which is the ark of the covenant). So it's a device designed to teach them a theological point. It may or may not actually correspond to an event in real time at the manna episode. (And I would say it couldn't, because the ark hasn't been created yet.) Rather, it is a teaching point. It is something that the editor deliberately does—deliberately casts the story this way—so that any “visitor” (I'm using air quotes now)... Anyone basically who's living centuries later who would hear about the jar and the manna... Or let's just throw in Aaron's rod and the tablets of the law. But this is the anachronistic example. They're going to know (because those things are stored at the ark of the covenant, which is where Yahweh dwells) that the manna was somehow connected to Yahweh. It was something *he* gave. They can't take a picture of it. They can't take a video of God giving them manna in real time. There's no way to “prove” the point. So what the editor does is the best he can. He associates the jar (which people could, in theory, go see)... Or if they knew the high priest and the priest said, “Yep, it's in there.” Or in theory... It's not mobile anymore, but the tabernacle does get disassembled after they get into the land in the period of the judges. People are going to see these objects a couple hundred years—centuries—after the fact, before we get to the monarchy. They're going to see these objects. And when these things get written down by juxtaposing the relationship of these objects to each other (the jar with the ark of the covenant), it's going to telegraph the point that it was God who gave us this manna. “And here's the proof. Here's some manna. Here's the jar. It's right in there before the ark of the covenant, because God was the point of origin for it.” They don't have any other means to connect these things other than written words. And since the events and the objects didn't coexist at the time but they were certainly associated, it is the presence of God that sits on the throne of the ark of the covenant who gave them the manna. Even if the ark didn't exist at the time of the manna, it was still the same God who did that. They're trying to juxtapose these things by the only means they have, and that is writing.

So this is an editorial decision, to connect two things that belong together but were not together in real time. That's what they're doing. That's what the editor is doing here. That's why we have (to us, looking back on these things) an anachronistic thing in the chapter. But they are, nevertheless, two things that belong together—two things that in real time were, in fact, associated with each other: the presence of God (the power of God) and the manna. And the only way the people are going to be able to connect these things visually or some other way (having some kind of proof that these things were connected together) was to connect them literarily in the text that they will have and that will be copied, and people hundreds (or thousands) of years later can read about it. So this is a good example of having to put yourself in the shoes of a people (Israelites) that don't have any means other than writing something down to “prove something” or preserve a thought—connect two things that belong together—even though in real time the things might not have coexisted. How else are you going to do that?

If they were artists, if Israel did lots of iconography... And of course they don't, because they don't have a country. They don't have cities. They don't have a temple. They don't have any of this stuff yet. And even centuries later in the period of the judges, they still don't have it. Even when they get a monarchy, they don't have it until Solomon. [laughs] Okay? It's not like they're building things like the Egyptians and they draw pictures all over the walls. They don't have that. This is what they've got.

So this is a good example of putting yourself in the situation and asking yourself, "Okay, if I'm the editor... This is my editorial project. I have to finish this chapter of the second book of the Torah here and I want these things connected. And I'm living at a time where we do have an ark. We do have the temple. And we have this jar here. And I know the episode (how we got the manna that's in the jar). I know that, but how do I connect these two things?" Well, the only way to do that is just to say it. Just put it in the story. Just say it. Because we don't have any real-time movies. We don't have anything like that. This is why, in the Bible, you get some of these chronological disconnections. There's just no way around connecting things for readers other than this.

So are we going to look at that and blame them for something? It's not a boo-boo. It's not an error. It's a technique. It's a means of communication. But we, on our modern high horses... "This isn't the way we would write history." Well, good for us. We have a bigger data pool. We have things like video and audio. And you go back to the whole presuppositional question we began the book of Exodus with. If I tasked you with writing a history of your own life, could you do it? Would it conform to your own standards? Get ready to fail. Because I'll be a critic on your sources. I know you didn't record in real time all your conversations. I know that you can't go back and find witnesses to events in your life. Even if you could, you don't have *those* conversations recorded. I can impose your standards on *your* own recollection of your own life and make it look like you have no idea what you're talking about, dude. I can do that. But we're content to do that with the Bible (at least many people are), and they won't do it to themselves. They won't be consistent because they have an ax to grind.

40:00

So yeah, we can get on our high horse here and look at Exodus 16 and somehow poke fun at it or turn it into some mistake or error. It's not a mistake or an error. It is a technique. It's what writers do. It's what they do with the tools at their disposal to accomplish the communicative task that they want to accomplish. That's what it is. See, this is the kind of discussion that historicity ought to be about. But instead, what happens (on the internet, on YouTube, these sites where people basically talk like they know what they're talking about)... All they can do is find disconnections or anachronisms like this and then think they've proven something. They don't put much thought into it at all. They don't impose the same standard on themselves. They don't put themselves in the same time period and the same set of circumstances because that would require thought. That would require work. It's just easier to grind my ax against this Bible

thing. And it is. It is easier to do that. But it's misplaced. It's really inconsistent, actually. Now there's one more of these. This is kind of interesting. Let's go to verses 35 and 36 here:

³⁵The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan. ³⁶(An omer is the tenth part of an ephah.)

[laughs] That's how the chapter ends, with this editorial comment about measurement. "An omer is the tenth part of an ephah." Look at this. If Moses is writing this (and I think you can tell already that he's not), how would he know this? How would he know that the people of Israel ate manna 40 years until they came to a habitable land? He might squeeze that one out because he dies really close to them getting into the land. But they ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan. When does the manna actually stop? Joshua 5:12 tells us that. Let me read Joshua 5:12.

¹²And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

That verse tells us that the manna ended the day after the Passover celebration in the book of Joshua—the first one at Gilgal, right before the invasion of Jericho. Moses never saw that. He was dead. This isn't a goof on the part of the writer or editor of Exodus 16. It's deliberate. He wants us to know... This is obviously added by somebody living later. He's connecting this thought about the manna to what he just said in the previous two verses. Now Carpenter notes here:

The writer of this note could have been Moses, his scribes, Joshua, or a later inspired editor of this document. The purpose of recapping the entire forty years in the wilderness was to emphasize that the manna was a *constant* [MH: that's important] food supply for Israel throughout the wilderness period—Israel could rely on her God to supply her daily needs. God's care never ceased, although the Israelites rebelled against him many times. In a barren desert, God supplied his people with food during a time when a significant amount of time was spent murmuring and rebelling against Yahweh and his chosen leaders. However, this wilderness period becomes, at the same time, a picture of Israel's glorious past to some writers, for Israel was never more cared for than during this time of great vulnerability and need; it was Israel's childhood, when God was forming them into a people.

Sarna adds, about verse 36... Now catch this, this little editorial measurement comment:

The omer as a measure never recurs in the Bible [outside Exod 16] [MH: this is the only place the word omer is mentioned]. The note is needed here because the omer became obsolete and unintelligible to later generations [MH: of Israelites]. A tenth of an ephah is otherwise termed *‘issaron*. The *ephah*, a word of Egyptian origin, was a dry measure frequently mentioned in the Bible.

45:00

This is clearly an editorial comment by someone living well after the fact. So this little throw-away thing about defining what an omer is... If this was written by someone near the events, they wouldn't have to do that. But since this unit of measurement falls out of use and is never used again in the Hebrew Bible, somebody working the chapter later on realizes that and says, "Nobody's going to know what an omer is. Better tell them." Footnote, end of chapter: "An omer is the tenth part of an ephah." "Ahhh. Okay, I've got it now."

This is the kind of thing you run into in Scripture. This is an obvious editorial hand. It's obvious that this material is written later, after the fact. Of course, if you connect it (as Joshua 5:12) does to the Passover at Gilgal, which Moses never saw, this can't be a Mosaic hand (these last few verses at the end here). So what we're trying to do here is just to point these out so that you aren't duped. On one hand, you're not duped into taking a view of Mosaic authorship (which some people will marry to inspiration itself) that is indefensible and easily overturned and assaulted. The sorts of simplistic things you hear over the pulpit in many cases in this regard are not helpful. They can actually set listeners up as easy targets for critical zealots online—militant atheists that have a video camera, and now they're scholars. It's easy to hear simplistic things about the text that just don't conform to the reality of the text. And then when your people (or when you yourself or somebody you know) run into these things online, they're paralyzed. "Oh, what do I do? My pastor said this. I was always taught that." Maybe it was too simplistic of an approach. Maybe the problem isn't the Bible. Maybe the problem is that we need to think better about the Bible.

So that's one of the reasons I bring these things up. I don't want you to be duped. I don't want you to be led astray and junk the faith because of Exodus 16:36. Some later hand put something in about what an omer was. "Ugh, I can't believe in inspiration now, because Moses didn't write..." Just ridiculous. You might be laughing now, but I get emails where people tell me their stories. "I was a Christian until..." "I left the faith because of..." And it's some of the dumbest stuff I've ever heard. Now it wasn't dumb to them because it had an impact—because they were poorly taught. But it's like, this would've taken five minutes to clear up by somebody who could just think better than wherever they got their information here.

If you're in pastoral leadership... Let me just get on my soapbox here for a little bit. If you're in pastoral leadership, you owe it to the people under your charge to

do some studying and to think better. Because they will come to you as the source (the person who has the answers) for their questions. And if you don't have them, where are they going to go? They're going to go to Middle Earth. They going to go out to YouTube and Google and the internet. And Lord only knows, truly, what they're going to find there. You owe it to them. So what can I say? Maybe I'm a little too sensitive to this because I do get those emails. But this is the kind of thing I want to address here.

Now for the rest of the episode (this won't take too much time), I want to talk about the manna, because there's actually something interesting here going on that might make somebody wonder about what in the world is going on in the text. There's a basic question stemming from Exodus 16:15. So let me go back there. I'm going to read you the verse again. I'll start at verse 13.

¹³ In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. ¹⁴ And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" [MH: in Hebrew, it's *man hu*] For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

Now the ESV has a little footnote next to "What is it?" and this is kind of telling. The footnote says this:

"Or, it is manna (Hebrew *man hu*)."

You say, "Well, what? That doesn't really mean anything to me." Well, if you know a little bit of Hebrew, you should know that the word for "what" in Hebrew is not man, it's *mah*. The text should say "*mah hu*." That would literally mean "What is it?" Now the fact that the ESV puts a note there... They take *man hu* and say it could read "It is manna." That hu could be translated "it" and then man is "manna." It gets rid of the question. And you say, "Why would the translator want to get rid of the question?" Because the translator knows that *man* in Hebrew is not a question. That word is *mah*. So the translator of the ESV knows that there's an issue here. There's something funky going on here with the Hebrew text.

So the NET Bible actually gives an extensive note on this. But I want to read just a sentence or two from an article here. The article is by Zvi Ron. It's entitled "What is it? Interpreting Exodus 16:15." It's from the *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 38.4 (2010): 229-236. It's seven or eight pages long. He tackles this question. He writes:

If the Israelites spoke Hebrew, and since the Hebrew word for "what" is *mah*, why did they ask *man hu* when seeing this food? Based on proper Hebrew, they should have asked *mah hu* and named the manna *mah* instead of *man*.

[laughs] So that's what his whole article is about, like "What in the world is going on here?" Now the NET Bible says this:

The text has: *מָן הוּא כִּי לֹא יָדְעוּ מִה־הוּא* (*man hu' ki lo' yadé'u mah hu'*).

See, at the end of the sentence, it actually has the correct Hebrew word (*mah hu*) but in the beginning, it has *man hu*. So *man hu* (that's the troubling portion: "What is it?" or "It is manna" from the ESV footnote. For they didn't know what it was (*mah hu*). So it's really odd that the second half of the verse has the "correct" Hebrew and the first half doesn't. So the NET Bible editors say:

From this statement the name "manna" was given to the substance. מָן for "what" is not found in Hebrew, but appears in Syriac as a contraction of *ma den*, "what then?" In Aramaic and Arabic *man* is "what?" The word is used here apparently for the sake of etymology.

In other words, their suggestion is that the writer uses *man* here to connect it with the noun that will follow later in the chapter—the noun *man*, which is manna when it's in noun form. So that's their take. Then they quote Brevard Childs' famous commentary on Exodus.

B. S. Childs (*Exodus* [OTL], 274) follows the approach that any connections to words that actually meant "what?" are unnecessary, [MH: which is unfortunate, because that's the trajectory we're going to follow here in the rest of the episode] for it is a play on the name (whatever it may have been) and therefore related only by sound to the term being explained. This, however, presumes that a substance was known prior to this account—a point that Deuteronomy does not seem to allow. S. R. Driver says that it is not known how early the contraction came into use [MH: this other form], but that this verse seems to reflect it (*Exodus*, 149). Probably one must simply accept that in the early Israelite period *man* meant "what?" There seems to be sufficient evidence to support this. See *EA* 286, 5; *UT* 435; *DNWSI* 1:157.

Now the NET Bible refers to three sources here. (This is getting a little arcane, but I kind of like this stuff.) It refers to the el-Amarna tablets. One tablet and a citation align there. It refers to Gordon's *Ugaritic Textbook*. And it refers to the Dictionary of Northwest Semitic Inscriptions. Now I'll come back to that comparative Semitic stuff in a moment. But for the time being, right here... We have an issue here—that *man* (translated "what") does not occur in Hebrew. So what's it doing here in Exodus? How do we resolve this? Now Ron's article (that article I mentioned a few minutes ago) goes through all the options, which is why

it's of interest. I will put it in the protected folder for the curious. I'm going to excerpt a couple of places from it. He writes:

In the JPS [MH: Jewish Publication Society] translation of Exodus 16:15, the phrase *man hu* is understood to be a question: 'What is it?' Many commentators affirm that the Israelites who said man instead of mah must not have been speaking typical Hebrew at that time.

The early medieval sages Rashbam, Yosef Bekhor Shor, and Hizkuni explain that man is the Egyptian word for "what," and at the time the Israelites spoke a version of Hebrew that [MH: in theory] was heavily influenced by Egyptian.

55:00 Let me just break in here. That's overstated. Now it's true that... For those in our podcast audience who've had Middle Egyptian hieroglyphs, if you have access to *Faulkner's Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* and Gardiner's grammar, Gardiner's *Sign List*, you'll find man in those sources. They note the word. It's actually a variant spelling of the normal interrogative pronoun in Egyptian. Ron's article quotes Budge. Budge is a more popular (and frankly, less accurate) *Egyptian Dictionary Lexicon* than some of these later ones are. But the later ones do have it.

Now I think this is a bit idiosyncratic. It's one word. How can we conclude that the Hebrew of Exodus 16 is "heavily influenced by Egyptian" if we're only dealing with one word? I think that's overstated. I think it's kind of unnecessary, given something that follows here. So back to Ron's article, he notes that Cassuto... Umberto Cassuto was a famous Jewish scholar who wrote a couple of commentaries on Genesis. He's kind of well-known in evangelical circles.

Cassuto gives a similar explanation, and writes that in ancient Canaanite languages the word for "what" is *man*. In Ugaritic [MH: remember the NET Bible footnote referenced the Ugaritic textbook] it is *mn* and in the Canaanite of the El Amarna letters it is mannu [MH: remember the NET Bible footnote referenced the el-Amarna letters]. The Israelites, then, were using an "ancient dialectic variant" [MH: for this word].

Currid (whom we've quoted a number of times in this series of episodes) prefers this view as well. He says:

Mān is an ancient dialectic variant found in Canaanite literature, such as in the texts at Ugarit.

And that's all true. I'm sitting here and I have the *Dictionary of Northwest Semitic Inscriptions* open on my laptop here. And there are lots of occurrences of *mn*

(man) in Northwest Semitic languages. You don't get any in epigraphic Hebrew. But all these languages are related. So in theory, the Hebrews (early Hebrew speakers) could have had this pronoun, and this noun as well. That is very possible.

So this is what we're dealing with. We don't have any specific examples, but it's very possible. Aramaic and Syriac are later, but they're in the Semitic family. They have words like *man* and *mana'* that can mean "what". Some scholars will take the Aramaic information (*mana'*) and then they'll go to the early chapters of Daniel, where the verb *manah* (to appoint or something like that, to provide) is used for the food prepared for Daniel. That's not the noun for the food. But this verb is used in what is prepared for Daniel and his companions to eat. And so they go to Daniel and they reason that that may be a later writer or editor borrowing the term to create a pun with the food itself and the question of "What was it?" That's possible, too. It's very possible.

There's another explanation offered by Ron's article, and this gets us into what many of you are probably thinking about the manna, like these naturalistic explanations. So Ron's article covers this ground, too. He writes:

The Judaica Press translation renders the phrase *man hu* as a declaration:

Not a question. So he first referred to the JPS translation. Now he's dealing with another translation. So there are Jewish translations out there that take it a different way.

When the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'It is manna,' [MH: so it's not a question, it's a statement, and the ESV had this in a footnote] for they did not know what it was... Accordingly, the Israelites named what they saw *man* because it looked like *tamarix mannifera*, a sticky, sweet substance excreted by scaly insects that feed on the sap of the tarfa tree, a kind of tamarisk, the biblical eshel. This substance contains glucose and protein and has been collected for generations by the Beduin, who call it man. In many ways this substance is similar to the biblical manna; it melts in the sun, it hardens into white granules, and it can be used as a substitute for honey. It was well known in the ancient world and is mentioned by Josephus, who wrote: "it is a mainstay to dwellers in these parts against their dearth of other provisions."

Now Ron puts that out. "Hey, the Bedouin have this thing called *man*, too. And it's this stuff secreted by insects." But Ron is fair with the information, and he says, "You know, there's a problem here."

Moses had to explain to the Israelites that what they saw was not [MH: anything natural; it was from the hand of God, it was not...] the natural sap-derived man,

but a miraculous substance sent by God. The Israelites named the food they found after the natural man found in the desert.

So what Ron is angling for here is, “Okay, maybe they used the term for this stuff, but the stuff that the Bedouin collect even today was not what they were eating. What they were eating was delivered by God. So at best, maybe they borrowed a term.” So again, Ron is trying to cover all of the bases here (all the possibilities). He doesn’t really fall with that explanation because he sees this account in Exodus 16, that Moses has to tell them what it is. And Moses doesn’t say, “Hey, see that bug over there? Lots of these bugs secrete this stuff. I know it sounds really gross, but it’s good.” [laughs] That’s not what Moses says. And it’s this idea of bread from heaven. It has a divine origin, not from insects. So Currid chimes in here about naturalistic explanations for the manna. (This one I just read from Ron is just one of several.) And he writes:

Numerous attempts have been made to define scientifically the nature of the food. For example, Bodenheimer remarks: ‘Accordingly we find that manna production is a biological phenomenon of the dry deserts and steppes. The liquid honeydew excretion of a number of cicadas, plant lice, and scale insects speedily solidifies by rapid evaporation. From remote times the resulting sticky and often times granular masses have been collected and called manna.’ [MH: That’s what Ron just told us about the Bedouin.] Such explanations are not sufficient, and they do not precisely fit the biblical descriptions. It is unwise to remove the miraculous element: manna is ‘bread from God’ (Exod. 16:15), ‘food from heaven’ (Ps. 78:24), and the ‘bread of angels’ (Ps. 78:25).

Now my two cents here, as we wrap up. To me, it makes the best sense to say that Exodus 16:15’s wording in the phrase *man hu* is drawn from an older form of Hebrew than biblical Hebrew. Even though we don’t have instances (or at least I haven’t been able to find any in the *Dictionary of Northwest Semitic Inscriptions*)... I can’t remember the date of that publication. It’s pretty massive, so it’s pretty thorough for the time it was written, but maybe there’s something else found that didn’t make its way in there. I don’t have a photographic memory of all epigraphic Hebrew vocabulary here. Far from it. But in view of that absence, inscriptions, by definition... Epigraphic Hebrew... the corpus... the number of them that we have is pretty small. It’s a small corpus. And so the fact that we don’t have examples doesn’t mean that this word (*mn*, *man*), as a pronoun “what”, wasn’t in their vocabulary. It’s in basically all the other Northwest Semitic languages around them, so it probably was. I’m content with that. To me, that makes sense. *Man* is an ancient dialect found... It occurs in these other dialects, including Ugarit and Canaanite literature—all this stuff. So it’s quite conceivable that this was in use for Hebrews in a much earlier period than biblical Hebrew. I’m good with that. I think that’s a sufficient explanation. We don’t have to just jump the shark and go off in all these other lengthy trajectories.

But I thought I'd throw some of that in in case people out there in the audience are curious.

So if you're a newsletter subscriber, you can access Ron's article (that's his last name). I'll put it in the protected folder. And for the curious, it's an interesting read. But for my purposes, where I come down, I'm content to go with the cognate information here—the cognate possibility or probability that this was part of the early Hebrew vocabulary. And that in and of itself might be something new to listeners.

1:05:00

I hope you realize that biblical Hebrew is not quite the same Hebrew that biblical characters would have been speaking, especially the ones in the early stories. Hebrew is like any other language. It evolves. Biblical Hebrew is sort of like a classical Hebrew. There are differences in inscriptions—stuff that's 10th century. 10th century is the oldest Hebrew inscription that we have (1000 BC). So biblical Hebrew, by its very nature, is later than that. That doesn't mean that all of the biblical stuff was written after the 10th century, even though most critics would say that. We have an edit... We have updating of the script. The script certainly changed. The grammar changes. The morphological forms change. So you have an updating later on, anyway, to put whatever might have existed in early Hebrew into classical Hebrew form.

But that may be news to some of you. And I'm not suggesting you have to go out and take a class in that or go get a degree. But you should know that some things in the biblical text that are problematic actually get solved because of these older forms. And I'm not speaking specifically of Exodus 16:15. There are other things, as well, where this pops up in the biblical text. And if you know, "Ah, that's just an older form of this or that particle." "Oh, okay. I got it." It's not a problem here. It just is what it is. And either a scribe, when they were updating the form of the language for the Torah, left it in, didn't care, missed it, whatever. It's intelligible to someone who knows the language from a native perspective, as the scribes did, but maybe not to us, unless you go out and get graduate degrees in this kind of thing.

So with that, we'll wrap up. This is a bit more of a curiosity trail in Exodus 16, not the good Divine Council kind of stuff that we have been looking at in earlier episodes. But nevertheless, I still think that the information is important. And just to jog us into the realization that we need to think well about how we got this thing we call the Bible.

TS: Well, you answered my questions there at the end, as far as how old the oldest Hebrew we have is (1000 BC). What's the chance of us finding anything older than that?

MH: I think it's reasonable. It's probably less reasonable in something like Egypt, because their civilization is so old and they go around and build things, and the pharaohs say, "Write great stuff about me everywhere." There's just more of it to

find. But that doesn't mean that other examples out there aren't waiting to be discovered. There's certainly no barrier—no necessary time barrier to anything like that. So I wouldn't be shocked.

TS: Do you know off the top of your head what the oldest script that we've found is? Or the story behind it?

MH: Well, it depends if you want to lump the Gezer calendar in here, which some older sources will say is Hebrew. It's probably not Hebrew. Some think of it as a hybrid. But it was used... It was found at Gezer. So whoever produced it (and there are things about it that dialectically don't work with epigraphic Hebrew)... But regardless of that, they're using it at Gezer so they could read it. So what it shows is that Hebrews... people... That's just an agrarian calendar, so it's not like a big military or scribal... You don't need a trained scribe to produce this thing. It's just something you'd use to plant and sow and reap and all of that. They could read. They could do stuff like that as far back as 1000 BC. So it's still worthwhile as evidence, even if there are niggly problems with it. Is it true Hebrew or not? Is it a hybrid of something else? Who wrote this? It doesn't really matter for what we're talking about. It was used. They could read it. They could produce it, understand it. So that typically gets the nod.

TS: That's fascinating stuff. I like that stuff. Alright, on to chapter 17 next week. Can you give us a brief glimpse of what we're going to tackle?

MH: Oh, boy. I really haven't looked that far ahead. I'm still trying to decide. I think what we... You see, 17 isn't that long. So I think, yes, we will cover 17. I don't want to jump into 18. So we need to spend a little bit of time there. But then, do I need to do that? Because we actually talked about Exodus 18 when I did that episode on Jesus' use of Psalm 82 in John 10. Because Exodus 18 is the chapter that people go to to justify the idea that the *elohim* of Psalm 82 are just the Jewish leadership. So we did a whole episode on that, pointing out the fact that, "Hey, the elders from Exodus 18 are never called *elohim*. Look at that. So where do we get this idea?" But we probably ought to just do the chapter anyway and just talk about Jewish eldership. Who are these elders? What did they do? So I think we'll take 17 next time alone, and then jump into 18 by itself.

TS: Looking forward to it. We appreciate it, Mike. Alright, I just want to thank everybody else out there for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.