

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 299

ETS/SBL Conferences

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Episode Summary

Dr. Heiser gives us a quick update on the 2019 ETS and SBL conferences.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 299: ETS/SBL conferences. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike. How are the conferences going?

MH: Pretty good. I've been to a bunch of papers. More than usual. And I'd say 85% of them have been pretty interesting. A couple that weren't really what I thought they'd be, but that's okay. That's kind of normal, too.

TS: Anything that stands out?

MH: Yeah. The first day, I had an interesting experience. I went to a paper. People may or may not recall that during this week, there are a whole bunch of societies that meet concurrently. So the big one is the Evangelical Theological Society. That ends on Friday. Then there's something called IBR, which meets Friday and Saturday. Then the first full day of SBL (Society of Biblical Literature) is Saturday. They meet with the American Academy of Religion. Those are the big ones. Then the American Schools of Oriental Research (that's the archeology crowd). So those are the big ones. But there are dozens of smaller societies. And one of these is the Evangelical Philosophical Society. So you get philosophers in there—people who do philosophical theology, and occasionally apologetics. So the first day, I went to a paper. Here's the title: "The Apologetic Value of Christian Demonology." So I didn't know what to expect here, because I knew the speaker would be a philosopher and not a biblical scholar. And I also didn't know if by demonology he would mean just traditional Christian stuff about demons, as opposed to biblical theology—biblical material in its own ancient context, like we do on the podcast and I focus on in *Unseen Realm*. And on the one hand, the paper was a bit disappointing because it was mostly Christian tradition. The presenter didn't really have a good grasp of the biblical material or the wider context for the biblical material. But it was really nice to see somebody who is

just a philosopher trying to make the argument that the belief in the spiritual world is really important for apologetics.

So it's kind of interesting. In the Q&A, I asked the guy a question about some of the content of his paper. What did he think was the weakest element and where might he be wrong? Because what his paper was based on was actually his dissertation, so this was his first stab at this. But it was a meaningful effort, because he had put a lot of work into it. And he started answering me and he looked at me and said, "Are you Mike Heiser?" [laughs] I did not expect that at all. Because I'm the only biblical guy in the room. Why would anybody in this room know me? And again, the paper didn't... I don't think he's read *Unseen Realm*, so I don't know what the context was. But like I said, he just looked at me and stopped in mid-sentence and, "Are you Mike Heiser?" [laughs] I said, "Yeah, that's me." And then he said something nice. Maybe he heard me do something. Maybe he heard the podcast. I don't know. But it was kind of a nice exchange. Because I let him know that I think there are some problems in the paper, but I'm just really glad to see somebody in your little wing—your little neck of the woods here—trying to think about this. Because honestly, I haven't come across anybody.

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What was interesting though was after it was over, there were three people in the room who followed me out who were evangelical Christians who were in grad school for Philosophy and all three of them *had* read *Unseen Realm*. So they're like, "Yeah, we know there are problems with this paper, but we just wanted you to know we've read *Unseen Realm*. And we're going to try to take the material and do something with it that would satisfy professional philosophers," like a philosophical defense of what I'm arguing for in *Unseen Realm* and then use it for the Church. So I had no idea, going in this room, that what we do would be on the radar at all to people who really don't specifically do biblical studies. So that was kind of amazing and really encouraging, too, that you have people in that community who see the value of *Unseen Realm* and actually want to do something with it in that way.

TS: Well, is there much content that is outside the biblical area for them to even *get* content? It seems like that would be one of the only places to go to get some of this content.

MH: Yeah, that's fair. There really isn't. Because if you don't have your head in Biblical Studies, and specifically trying to work with the biblical text in its ancient context like we do in *Unseen Realm*, you're really not going to encounter much of anything. In other words, you're not going to have a whole lot of data to work with, so you are... What philosophical theologians are doing is looking at Christian thinkers (Augustine, Aquinas, more modern apologists like Bill Craig and some of these other people) and they're trying to answer questions like, "If there are spiritual beings out there, can they act on the physical world or not?" Because they're trying to define what a spiritual being is philosophically. Because

you get into all of these—not exegetical questions, but theological questions. And that’s a whole other area of discussion to try to have some sort of philosophical or logical or intellectual discussion or justification for what the Bible says or doesn’t say.

If listeners would think about the discussion of arguments for the proof of God, those aren’t really biblical discussion (biblical arguments); they’re philosophical arguments. Things like, “Every effect must have a cause.” That’s a logical argument for the defense of God. Or things like C.S. Lewis’ moral argument, “There’s no basis to morality if there’s not genuinely good and evil. There wouldn’t be genuinely good and evil if there was not a higher being that sets the standard for good and evil.”

So that’s what philosophical theologians do. They ask these kinds of questions and then try to noodle them—try to deal with them. And so when they traverse into the supernatural world, they’re not looking at the biblical text per se. They’re just asking these sorts of questions and trying to think about them. But here again, you have three people that are trying to... What their graduate work is going to be is to use the data of *Unseen Realm* to better inform those kinds of questions and discussions, which I just didn’t expect going into the room. And I went into the room more or less as a curiosity. But it was really a nice surprise. Even if I thought the paper had some serious problems, it was just nice to see somebody trying to do something with it and systematize it in some way.

TS: It’s going to be even more interesting for those three other students who had actually read *Unseen Realm* to incorporate your content into the mix, because like you said, that guy didn’t read *Unseen Realm* for that paper, right?

MH: It didn’t seem like he did.

TS: So to see maybe the next wave of papers come across with your content incorporated I bet will be pretty fascinating. Did you exchange contact information to keep up on them?

MH: Yeah, I did. I actually sent them the pre-publication pdf of the Demons book, just so that it would help them in their graduate work, because I don’t want them to have to wait three or four months for that material. And they were real happy to get that.

TS: Can you do that for the rest of us, please?

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MH: No, I can’t do that for everybody. [laughs] That’s like professor-to-graduate-student pity. [laughs] “I’ll try to help you a little bit.”

TS: What about... Any other papers?

MH: Let me look at my list. I have my list here. I went to one... This was one that didn't quite... It wasn't really what I thought it would be. I went to one called "A Defense of the Corruption-Only View of Original Sin." Now for those who know my view of Romans 5:12, that it doesn't teach inherited guilt, rather it teaches the inheritance of death or mortality, or—as the way that this paper articulates it—corruption. So I was hoping it would be a biblical defense of this, that I would get some more information other than the journal articles I have and the two dissertations I have on the subject. But it really wasn't. One of the accusations for people who hold the Corruption Only view is that that is the doctrine of Pelagianism, and it's really not. It's a really poor accusation to make, because Pelagius was talking about salvation apart from Jesus (or supposedly Pelagius was talking about this). He rejected Augustine's view of inherited guilt. And so people presume that that means Pelagius in some way believed that our works contribute to salvation. It's really kind of a dumb argument. And that's actually what the paper was about, asking two questions: "Was Pelagius really condemned?" Because everybody says Pelagius was condemned as a heretic in the 5th century. And his argument was, he was never condemned by a universal council. He was only condemned by a regional council which didn't speak for the whole Church. Which... I didn't know that, so that was good to hear. But it really was kind of a Church history paper, kind of pushing back and saying Pelagius gets a bad rap here, and it's not really fair to tar and feather those who believe in the Corruption Only view with Pelagius because we don't really know if the majority of the Church disagreed with Pelagius anyway. So it was kind of interesting in that regard, but I was hoping that I'd get... I was looking for something exegetical there and didn't get it. But still, it was useful.

I also went to a paper (this one was today) that I didn't know going in where this guy was going to be. But the paper was on the date of the death of Herod. This is an issue for... Many listeners will know that I think Jesus was born September 11th in 3 B.C. Herod, of course, has to die after the birth of Jesus, so Herod either died in 2 or 1 B.C., whereas the dominant New Testament view has Herod dying in 4 B.C. and Jesus being born in 6 B.C. So this guy... There are journal articles that have come out recently defending a later date of Herod of 2 or 1 B.C. that do a good job. So I went to hear this guy and had no idea where he was going to land. And it was a really, really good defense of the later death date. But this was sort of a systematic breakdown of why the consensus date for the death of Herod just can't work, and then an argument for a later date for Herod's death, which fits really nicely with the 3 B.C. birth of Jesus that you get through the astronomy of Revelation 12. And this guy didn't even talk about astronomy. He never brought up Revelation 12 at all. He was just critiquing the basis of the consensus view for the date of Herod's death and did a really nice job. So that's probably the best paper I've heard to date. It was really a nice surprise, to be honest.

TS: I was just looking through the papers here. Did you go to the "Divine Warfare Imagery: The Art Narrative?"

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MH: I did not, but my friend here, Greg Lile, who lives in San Diego... Greg Lile is the guy who started Miqlat. I hooked up with him. But he went to that one and he thought it was really good. He said he was actually familiar with some of the content because of the podcast. He sort of knew what they were talking about as far as some of the contextual stuff with Mesopotamia and siege warfare and whatnot. He said that was a really good paper, but I didn't get to that one.

I actually went to three or four Evangelical Philosophical Society papers. When I go to these things and I get a chance to go to papers, I kind of like to do a few things that are outside the biblical orbit that I'm interested in. So I went to one about OBEs and NDEs, believe it or not. This paper was titled "Evaluating the Logic of Physicalism with Corroborated Veridical Perception in NDEs with OBEs." (Near-Death Experience and Out of Body Experience.) Veridical just refers to something that can be seen or heard. So what the paper was critiquing was physicalists' critiques of OBEs and NDEs. You say, "What's a physicalist?" A physicalist is essentially a materialist that believes that there is no soul—there is no existence beyond the body. And what we think of as the soul is really nothing more than the brain or something caused by brain function. So this guy was critiquing the physicalists' response to NDE and OBE research and probing it for logical inconsistencies and points of incoherence. That was actually a decent paper. Gary Habermas was in that session. He wasn't the speaker. Habermas is famous in evangelical circles (apologetic circles) for two things: his apologetics work on the resurrection and the historical Jesus, and then this area. He's one of the few evangelicals/apologists/philosophers/theologians that spend any time investigating Out of Body Experiences and Near-Death Experiences. So during the Q&A, he and the speaker got into a bit of an extended discussion, which was interesting, on how Habermas perceived not only the physicalist argument, but this guy's paper. So that was definitely worthwhile. I think he did show that there are some real logical inconsistencies with the way physicalists attack or try to rebut the idea of existence beyond the body or outside the body, when it comes to OBEs and NDEs. People might be surprised that that kind of stuff gets discussed at these academic meetings. But every once in a while, you'll have a paper like that, especially in the Philosophical section. So I saw that in the program and wanted to make sure I got to that. So that was worthwhile.

TS: Are there any papers coming up?

MH: Yeah, I'm glad you asked that, because there's one that's really interesting here. Tomorrow there's a session at SBL. It's actually an AAR (American Academy of Religion) session. I'm just going to read the title of this and everybody will know why I'm interested. This is a two-hour session put on by the Christian Theological Research Fellowship. It's essentially a panel that's going to critique somebody's book. And the book title is *Powers, Principalities, and the Spirit*. It's by a woman who is from Africa. She's African, but she taught at Duke for a while. She taught at another Ivy League school for a year or two (I can't remember which one it was). But she does some kind of ministry now. That's the

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title of the book. Here's the subtitle. Let me just give you the whole thing. *Powers, Principalities, and the Spirit: Biblical Realism in Africa and the West*. Now what I'm hoping for (and I have no idea what to expect here) is to go in there and find a bunch of scholars poo-poo the idea of the reality of a spiritual world because, "We just know better. We're scholars. We're a product of the Enlightenment and the West. We're a product of Western rationalism." And I'm hoping to see this African woman sit there and look at them and just say, "What is wrong with you people?" That's what I'm hoping to see because she lives in Africa and she knows what goes on over there. So she has this book... And the subtitle says it all: *Biblical Realism in Africa and the West*. So I'm hoping to see her challenge these people in their skepticism about the reality of the spiritual world. I know nothing about this woman. I'm hoping to talk to her afterwards (if I get anything near what I'm hoping to see) and just see what she's about and who she is. And I think that's going to be real interesting. That could be a bit of a food fight. [laughs] I'm kind of hoping it is. We'll find out tomorrow when we get there.

TS: Are there any books that have come out?

MH: I'll give you a couple of titles. But before we do that, there's one other session that is on Sunday. Sunday is my last day here. I'm coming home a little early this year. And this is a two-and-a-half-hour session. Listen to the title. It's going to be "Genesis 6:1-4 in Recent Interpretation." So basically, you're going to have a panel discussion. It's four people. I don't know any of them personally, although Ron Hendel is one of them, and he's a person whose work I'm familiar with. But I know the moderator. So they're going to sit down and talk about probably recent scholarship on the sons of God/Nephilim stuff in those verses. So I'm going as a curiosity, just to answer for myself, "Have I missed anything recent that I ought to know about?" And regardless of what the answer to that question is, I want to hear them talk about some of the more recent research on it. I'm willing to bet that the Apkallu stuff is going to part of that discussion. It'll be interesting to sit in there and hear what people think about these recent trajectories. Because that Apkallu stuff that I referenced in *Unseen Realm*, that work really only was done by Amar Annus in 2010, so it's not that far removed. And I'm just wondering what the response is going to be to that.

As far as books, there are a couple of things. The one paper I mentioned about the "Apologetic Value of Christian Demonism," that guy's dissertation was published. It's available with Wipf and Stock. So I'll probably check that out. I may get it. But there's some language stuff that's available. I'm just looking here to see if there's anything... I have an Amazon list here that I just created to keep track of things I'm going to be looking for. I want to get Carmen Imes' academic book... And by the way, this is a good opportunity to bring this up. Carmen Imes' book for the layperson, *Bearing God's Name*, about name theology and Sinai is now shipping. That's now out. So we want to make sure to support Carmen. She did a great job, and that's a significant book. So I'm hoping people will go up to Amazon and get that. We also had Gary Yates on a while back. He had that book

that was entitled *Urban Legends of the Old Testament: Forty Misconceptions or Misinterpretations in the Old Testament*. That is now shipping too, so I'll probably pick up a copy of that. The publisher sent me Carmen's shorter book, but I don't have yet the scholarly version, so I'll probably go and scarf one of those up. But other than that, I'm more or less just going to be tracking on four or five specific tables. I always go to the same tables every year, just to see what they have and what's on discount.

Here's one more exception here. This is new, and I'm hoping they have it here—that I can get it at a steep discount. *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4*. It is published by Brill, which is a high-end academic publisher. So I'm hoping... I'll have to look at it if they have it. But I'm hoping that's a survey of recent scholarship on Genesis 6. So that would be nice if that's what that turns out to be. The subtitle is *Analysis and History of Exegesis*. So that would be handy to have. So those are the things I'm specifically looking for. But otherwise, I just kind of troll for stuff and see what they brought with them, what they're discounting.

25:00

TS: Did you stop by Logos to see your old peeps?

MH: Yeah, I did. I probably have spent half an hour or 45 minutes over there, just hanging out at the booth, talking to... And this year the Logos booth was right next to the Lexham booth, which is kind of nice. So I don't have to wander around. Everybody was all in the same place. But yeah, it was nice to catch up. Some of those people I haven't seen for four or five months so it was fun to do that. And of course, a couple of them are in the Logos Fantasy League. And I'm in first place [laughs] in that league. I felt pretty good. [laughs] I had to go over there and rub it in a little bit. But yeah, I made sure to do that.

TS: Have you seen or had lunch or dinner with anybody? Are there any updates with other scholars? Anybody who stopped you in the hallway saying, "Where's my interview? I thought we were going to interview or do something." Anybody [inaudible] actually interview them?

MH: Yeah, as I was checking into the hotel, the first guy I ran into (I even ran into him at the baggage claim at the airport because I flew out of Dallas) was Darrell Bock. So Darrell Bock is confirmed for the 3rd Naked Bible Conference, August 15th, 2020. And trust me, he's looking forward to it. So we got confirmation from Darrell. And I had a breakfast meeting with Mark Chavalas. Now Mark is an Old Testament guy. Darrel, of course, is New Testament. Mark is Old Testament, but more accurately, he is an Assyriologist. He's a Mesopotamian cuneiform scholar who is a believer, so he has a special interest in applying Mesopotamian studies to the Old Testament. So his wife and his kids follow the podcast. [laughs] So we actually connected. Before the event, we were emailing back and forth. I actually knew his wife 30 years ago when I was in seminary. I was in seminary for two years and I worked in the seminary library with this woman, who wound up

marrying him. So it's kind of interesting, just the whole backstory there. But I finally got to meet him. I've known of him for a number of years but finally got to meet him. And when I asked him if he would be interested in speaking at the conference, he was really enthusiastic and he said it would thrill his kids, too. [laughs] So we have him confirmed for the event as well. I'm hoping in the next day or two to have some conversations with one or two people yet. So we are going to try to get the confirmations early so that we can be announcing it. But those are two for sure.

TS: Yeah, we're way ahead of the curve there. So that's good. Again, it's going to be August 15th, 2020, back in Dallas, Texas. Same location. Have you run into any of our listeners out there, stopping you, and mad at us for not having a Q&A?

MH: There's only one that I recognized from both. He's actually been to both Naked Bible Conferences. He lives in L.A. His name is Daniel. And I ran into him today at one of the Near East Archeology sessions. And he's like, "I'm having a great time, but I'm bummed that there's no get-together." So he had to throw that in. But there have been a lot of people here. I'll bet it's actually happened far more often than not, that I'll leave a room and start walking to the next thing, and someone will intercept me and recognize me and say, "Hey, I read *Unseen Realm*. Thanks for *Unseen Realm*." Or "I listen to the podcast." Or both. So that is a lot more this year than has been in the past. The growth of the... I shouldn't say the growth, but the *awareness* of the podcast and of course the book... It's very evident that this is growing and having an impact. I met another faculty person who uses the book in class. So I've probably had a dozen of these sort of... I'm just walking along and somebody will come over and say hi and thanks or whatever. Some of them have brought books, too. So I got to sign a few books. But there are so many people here, I don't think that was planned on their part. There are a couple thousand people here. But it's just nice to see the awareness about what it is we're doing and trying to do is really gaining traction. So that's nice to see.

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TS: When we start seeing Naked Bible T-shirts at the conferences, that'll be a tell-tale sign that [laughter]...

MH: Yeah, *that* we would have to take a picture of, for sure. Absolutely.

TS: And Dan that you spoke of graciously... I just want to say thank you on the air to Dan, because he's the one that... People who go to the conferences, he has these... Everybody signs these pictures of the speakers, autographed, and everybody signs them and he frames them for us. It's such a nice gift. We appreciate it.

MH: Yeah, it is.

TS: Alright, Mike. Is there anything else you want to leave us with or give us an update on, before we leave? This is going to be a short one.

MH: That about covers it. Hopefully, I'll be able to come away with a third confirmation. That alone would be a good, successful trip.

TS: That sounds good. Next week, we're going to be doing our 300th episode, which is a Q&A. I'm sure we'll reminisce a little bit. But we appreciate you taking the time to update us. Maybe next year in Boston, when the conferences go back there, we'll do interviews and cover it again.

MH: I don't think we'll have a home sale get in the way next year. [laughs]

TS: It's getting close! Getting ready for that long drive. With that, Mike, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.