

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 311

Exodus 35-40

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Episode Summary

Exodus 35-40 is highly repetitive with the content of Exodus 25-31. However, the order of the material presented is quite different. This episode explores how scholars have thought about the similarities and differences. Scholars have discovered literary patterns and theological messaging in comparing and contrasting these sections of Exodus. This episode reminds us to consider the intentionality of repetition and other patterns on the part of the writers / editors so that we don't fall prey to the temptation to judge their work incorrectly.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 311: Exodus 35-40. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you?

MH: Pretty good. Two days from the day we're recording this, the new school starts (Monday, February 10th)! So everybody on this end is chomping at the bit, ready for this thing to start. We had the *Unseen Realm* film premier this last Wednesday night, and there were a lot of people from the community who came to that and told me they'd sign up for the school. So everybody's ready to go. I am too. I'm just waiting for it to start. [laughs]

TS: Yeah?

MH: Waiting to get into the regular routine. I like routine. It's really helpful to me. So I'm looking forward to it.

TS: Did you get a lot of good response from the movie?

MH: Yeah. I think there were probably 1500 people there. Because the auditorium holds 2500 and just from the look of it... I mean, it wasn't completely filled, but it was substantially filled. So I'm thinking 1500 is probably right around

the number that came. So, yeah. It was a good evening. I had not seen the film up until that evening.

TS: Thoughts?

MH: I actually liked it. I think they did a really good job. It's dense. They pack a lot of content into 70 minutes. But I think the visuals are good. The whole thing left me wishing that I had a voice like Eric Mason. [laughs] He's one of the scholars in the film. I met him years ago and have been to his Frequency conference in Philadelphia. He just sounds so good. [laughs] I almost texted him during the film, like, "Dude, you just sound great! Why can't I sound like you?" [laughs] But they did a good job. People seemed to really enjoy it. So I thought it was a really good event.

TS: And is Florida still treating you well?

MH: Yep. We had a tornado warning last night for a few hours. But I think it was really for the next county over. We had some wind and we have a skylight, so you could hear the rain a little bit more. Mori went under a table. [laughs] I guess it spooked him a little bit. But nobody else was really affected.

TS: Alright, Mike. Well, hey, this is it. This is the end of the road. The last five chapters of Exodus.

MH: Yep.

TS: That's crazy. It's amazing. It's been probably just over a year. And I'm sure everybody needs a break from the book study.

MH: Right. Nobody's going to want to watch the Ten Commandments anymore. We've beaten it out of them. [laughs]

TS: Yeah. Well, don't forget... We probably have enough... I have to send you those questions, Mike. But we probably have enough for two Q&A episodes covering Exodus. So at least this will wrap up the actual book itself. And then we'll have two more. I'm cutting off the questions. So we appreciate everybody that sent in Exodus questions. And then after this one, we'll have two more of Exodus Q&A. And then that'll be it. That'll be all she wrote. So you have to go to NakedBiblePodcast.com and go to our store and please buy a Book of Exodus sticker or shirt to remember the book of Exodus.

MH: [laughs] There you go.

TS: You know? I love it. Commemorate it.

MH: [laughs] Burn it into your memory there.

TS: Yeah, I love the little logo we have on it. We've sold actually quite a bit of shirts and stickers on the book of Exodus, so that's fun.

MH: We should get one for Leviticus that says something like, "If we can do this book, the podcast is for real," or something like that. I remember that was the challenge, why we picked Leviticus first.

TS: Yeah, I'm going to go back and create one for each one, so we will. But if you did get a Book of Exodus something, then take a picture of it and hashtag it #nakedbible so we can see it out there. I'd like to see what people got or how they're using it or something. It's fun. It's just fun.

MH: Yeah. Alright, well, let's just jump it.

TS: Let's do it.

5:00

MH: This is Exodus 35-40, as Trey said. And as we promised last week, one episode. And we might as well just start with the obvious observation to explain why we're doing it this way. And that is most of chapters 35-40 repeats material in chapters 25-31, which we went through in some detail. So we're not going to reinvent the wheel and be repetitive. But I want to talk about this phenomenon. Why is there so much material repeated at the end of the book that's already gone before? What's the point with that? So just in general, to summarize the issue, I want to jump into it this way. I'm going to read a little bit from Douglas Stuart's commentary on Exodus. And he summarizes what's going on here. Then I'm going to do the same with a little bit from Pete Enns' commentary, just so we get the feel for what it is we're looking at. So Stuart says:

Exodus 35–40 contains a high proportion of the same material already revealed in chaps. 25–31, but not in the same order. Several factors account for this reordering, most of which will be addressed [MH: in his commentary] in detail... [MH: We're not going to get into the whole thing, because it's quite dense.] Foremost among these factors [MH: why there's reordering] is the need to portray in chaps. 35–40 how the various objects were actually constructed in order. In chaps. 25–31 the call for Israelites to bring as donations materials out of which the tabernacle and its furnishings can be made is followed by a description of the objects themselves in the order of their importance and holiness, that is, moving from the most sacred (the ark, a direct representation of Yahweh and the place of his contact with his people) to the least sacred (the courtyard perimeter). [MH: So that's the order you actually get in chapters 25-31.]

In chaps. 35–40 by contrast the objects are described in the order they were actually constructed, an order dictated by common sense and necessity. A modern analogy might be found in the difference between how a church might

be described before being built and the order in which it would actually be built. If a church building committee were describing what they wanted their new church to be like, they might well start by describing the sanctuary, then perhaps certain other interior rooms, then perhaps the general external appearance, what sort of steeple (or not) might be desired, furnishings, lighting, and other décor. But a builder could not build the church in that order. He would start with clearing the site, then pouring footings, and then a foundation, and then sills, then the framing. The building committee's ordering of its desires would be completely appropriate, but so would the builder's ordering of the building process. The two orders are not the same, and no one who really understands the building process from conception to construction would expect them to be. The vision comes in one order, the implementation in another.

So I think that's very reasonable and helpful for Stuart to point out. There is a certain pragmatic difference between chapters 35-40 and what you read in Exodus 25-31.

But it's more than just pragmatic construction issues as well. We're going to see that in this episode. But I want to throw in a little selection from Pete Enns' commentary here to highlight the same issue, just putting things in a different way with a different angle. Enns writes:

Chapters 25–40 manifest a basic structure. Chapters 25–31 record the instructions for building the tabernacle; chapters 35–40, its actual building. Sandwiched between them is, among other things, the story of the golden calf, a story of rebellion and eventual forgiveness. This is not just a story of any sort of rebellion, but of the Israelites attempting to set up an alternate cultic system to the one given in chapters 25–40...

Note also another clear organizational element in these chapters. The rebellion section of chapters 32–34 is framed by passages on the importance of keeping the Sabbath (31:12–18 and 35:1–3... [MH: So on the exact either side you have these references to Sabbath.] This is hardly an accident. Precisely what this structure means to communicate to the reader, however, is not spelled out in the narrative itself... [The] references to the Sabbath are intended to connect the building of the tabernacle to creation.

10:00

We saw a lot of that earlier when we had episodes on chapters 25-31, that there was this connection between Sabbath and creation and the Tabernacle. There was a whole matrix of ideas that played off one another. We're going to return to that in this episode a bit as well. Back to Enns. He says that the references here connect the building of the Tabernacle to creation.

Building the tabernacle, in other words, is an act of re-creation, culminating in the Sabbath command—a new seventh day, as it were. The close affinity between creation and Exodus (creation and redemption) is something we have seen throughout this book, so it is no great surprise to see it developed here at its climactic stages.

(Right at the end of the book.) Now when we talked about these connections between Sabbath and creation and the Tabernacle and the furnishings, the way the whole narrative plays out, we referenced an article by Kearney. And it was referenced in two other sources that we used and that I put in the protected folder—one by Angel Manuel Rodriguez (it was an Andrews Seminary Studies article) and another selection from Frank Gorman's book (*The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time, and Status in the Priestly Theology*).

So we're going to return to some of that material by way of reviewing a little bit of that material. That's going to set up a little bit of understanding or at least how to think about the difference in order... The differentiation... Chapters 35-40 are mostly the same as chapters 25-31. There are differences. And of course, you have this order difference as well. So I'm going to review a little bit of what we covered before to help set up where we can go from here.

So those two scholars (Rodriguez and Gorman)—they referenced Kearney in some places—focused on literary analysis. They noted, for instance, that we have seven speeches in Exodus 25-31, which are dealing with the Tabernacle. And lo and behold, you also happen to have seven utterances by Yahweh in Genesis 1 and 2 (which are obviously about creation). So that's a literary comparison, just the way things are written—seven speeches in one section (Exodus 25-31) and seven speeches in Genesis 1-2. More specifically, though, the seven speeches giving instructions for proper activity in sacred space and for building the Tabernacle parallel the seven acts of speech in the construction of the cosmos in Genesis 1:1-2:4.

So it's more than just a number. It's more than just, "Hey, there are seven speeches in both things. Isn't that interesting?" Well, if you actually look at the seven speeches, they give instructions for the formation and activity in sacred space (Tabernacle) and the construction of the cosmos in Genesis 1 and 2. And of course, this plays into what we've talked about on a number of occasions. John Walton has done a lot of work here about how the cosmos—the creation account—is Yahweh essentially creating a temple. The cosmos is his temple; the earth is his footstool—all this imagery, where Genesis 1-2 are really about the place where Yahweh is going to come to dwell with man. It's going to be his home (the earth).

So there's this sacred space element—this temple element—even to the creation of not only the cosmos but even the earth. You get the macro level (the cosmos)

and then the earth is the footstool. You get the funneling down a little bit—Yahweh come to earth itself. That becomes his living space, specifically in Eden. It gets funneled even more in the Genesis account.

So this is the kind of thing that, if you're looking to compare passages and you start noticing these patterns (these repetitions), it's not just about the number (seven of this, four of that, three of...). It's not that. That's part of it. But the bigger part of it is thematic, that there are conceptual and thematic connections in these repetitive cycles.

15:00

So Rodriguez, in his article, gave us a few even more specific examples of how the seven speeches with their creation elements... And they also include Sabbath. They end with the Sabbath—how those two sets parallel each other. Rodriguez wanted his readers to notice that if you look at these parallel sevens (just the passages themselves), you'll notice another pattern (or other patterns). There are six days plus a seventh day. So he writes:

Six days plus a seventh day. According to Exodus 24:15-17, Moses climbed Mount Sinai to receive instruction for the building of the sanctuary, waited for six days and on the seventh day the Lord spoke to him from the theophanic cloud. The sequence of six days and a seventh day is the same we find in Genesis. It is uncertain [MH: in Moses' case] whether the seventh day in this case was a Sabbath, but the reference to six and seven days suggests a connection between the two narratives. In both cases the seventh day provided the time during which there is a special meeting between God and humans.

Now elsewhere in Exodus, it's very clear that the Sabbath is part of this. And Rodriguez is going to point out some of that as well, and so is Gorman. The seven speeches of Exodus 25-31, in fact, close with Sabbath rest just like the seven speech utterances of creation. Rodriguez writes:

Seven divine speeches. God gave Moses instructions concerning the building of the sanctuary through seven speeches introduced by the phrase "The Lord said to Moses" (25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12). [MH: That's the way the speeches are telegraphed.] The seventh speech brings the instructions for the building of the sanctuary to a close with a call to keep the Sabbath (31:13, 17)... In the Creation narrative in Genesis, God spoke during seven days and rested on the seventh day. It seems that it is that pattern that is being followed in the building of the Tabernacle.

Now Durham, who is the author of the *Word Biblical Commentary* (which we've used before in this series), is aware of all of this. He knows that Rodriguez and Gorman are sort of playing off this earlier study by Kearney. You can go back and listen to the earlier episodes where we quote more from Rodriguez and Gorman and mention Kearney's work. Durham, writing the *Word Biblical*

Commentary, is aware of all this stuff, because that's what scholars do when they write commentaries. They do literature reviews so that they know everything that's been written on the subject matter to that point. Then they can reference it or disagree with it or build upon it—so on and so forth. So Durham's assessment of this is interesting. He says, basically (I'm going to summarize him) that there's a lot to like there. There's a lot to like in what Kearney and Rodriguez and Gorman are saying. But he's not entirely persuaded that all of that is the point as to why we have this similarity and the differentiation in ordering for chapters 35-40 compared to chapters 25-31. And he writes as follows. He's going to hint at why he's not entirely persuaded, and then he's going to make his own contributions here. Then we're going to drill down into that. So Durham writes:

According to Kearney's theory, chaps. 25–31 present seven speeches of Yahweh to Moses, based on the seven days of creation; chaps. 35–40 echo this structure faintly in speeches made by Moses...

[Neither Kearney's theory or any of the others that focus on literary patterns] gives any satisfactory answer to the question of the similarities and differences of Exod 25–31 and 35–40 ... despite their helpful illumination of a number of detailed points... What links Exod 25–31 and 35–40 is not primarily a series of literary connections, but a series of theological ones; and at the heart of the theological connections is the ever-present irreducible minimum of the Book of Exodus, the immanent Presence of Yahweh...

The similarities of Exod 25–31 and 35–40 may all be accounted for on the basis of their rootage in this all-encompassing theme [MH: (the Presence of Yahweh)]: both sections, each in its own way, are preoccupied with Israel's need to experience the reality of Yahweh's Presence. The differences between Exod 25–31 and 35–40 may all be accounted for if four probabilities are kept in mind...

20:00

I'm going to list these four. But I think he's onto something here, not only because of what we're going to get into in the next few minutes, but also, if you remember, the golden calf incident really revolved around the lack of the presence of Yahweh. (Because he's up on the mountain with Moses, and who knows what happened to Moses.) It's been 40 days—and the Israelites panic over that situation, and then their attempt, through the building of the golden calf to re-present Yahweh... They're going to build this golden calf thinking (poorly) that this is going to usher in Yahweh's presence again, or attract him back, or something like that. They're a bit desperate because they can't go back. They can't go forward. They don't know what to do. They're just stuck at this mountain. They don't know what to do. Their leader's gone. The presence of Yahweh isn't evident for the last 40 days. "So by golly, we're going to bring it back. We're going to do something here." Then they go to Aaron, who is the logical person to

go to to make this happen. So even that revolves around this theme of presence. Now Durham lists these four probabilities. He's highlighting the differences now.

The differences between Exod 25–31 and 35–40 may all be accounted for if four probabilities are kept in mind:

(1) Exod 35–40 is based on the same theme as Exod 25–31 [MH: this immanence thing is central in his mind] but follows a different order;

(2) Exod 35–40 omits or adds material in comparison with Exod 25–31 in relation to its own separate purpose and was not intended simply to duplicate chaps. 25–31;

(3) the obvious repetition of parts of Exod 25–31 in Exod 35–40, sometimes even a verbatim repetition, is for didactic and liturgical reasons, and perhaps also by reason of genre;

But he's more tuned in to the theological stuff. So he thinks it's didactic—to teach people. You learn by repetition. And he's thinking of the reader and the hearer here. And also liturgy—that these passages are going to be used in cultic ways. And when the cult is doing anything, whether it's offering a sacrifice or celebrating something, it's all about the presence of Yahweh and what he has done. So he's fixated on this presence idea.

(4) the two sections are seen as having developed along with both the Exodus composite and, to a degree, alongside each other, and are viewed in the context of Exodus as a whole rather than as parts in isolation.

Basically, to translate that into more normal English and not academese, he's saying, "Look, you can't really understand the parts without understanding the whole. The whole has to inform the parts." And his argument is that the whole of the book (all these sections, and really all the way back to the beginning) is about Yahweh dwelling among his people. It's about the immanent presence of Yahweh. So that, for him, is an overarching idea that he believes *must* be a central focus of explaining *anything* in these chapters in the relationship of chapters 35-40 to 25-31. So I'm not going to drill down into everything he does, but we're going to drill down a little bit here just to give you a sampling of how Durham thinks this should be approached.

So on his first observation (or his first probability) that 35-40 is based on the same theme as Exodus 25-31, but in 35-40 the presentation of the presence of Yahweh follows a different order, a different way of doing it... So on that point, he says:

The theme “Yahweh’s Presence in Israel’s Midst” is presented in Exod 25–31 by extending a call for the offering of materials worthy of symbolizing and remaining near Yahweh’s Presence...

Think of the instructions to build the Tabernacle and its furnishings. So there’s an extension of a call for materials worthy of symbolizing the presence of Yahweh...

...then following that call with a series of instructions for the preparation of such media [MH: such materials], listed in a sequence moving from the most intimate of those symbols (the Ark) to the symbol farthest from it (the Tabernacle Court)...

So he’s saying this is the way Exodus 25-31 telegraphs or gets us to think about the presence of Yahweh. He says:

This order... is closed by the establishment of the command to keep the sabbath as a sign of the uniqueness of a people among whom Yahweh is resident.

God is resting, building sacred space. Just like in Genesis where he was with Adam and Eve, now he’s among his people. So this is Exodus 25-31, centered by the theme of Yahweh’s presence. Then he says this about the other chapters (35-40). He says:

25:00

The theme “Yahweh’s Presence in Israel’s Midst” is presented in Exod 35–40 in an order that begins with this sabbath-emphasis...

The other one ended with it. This one begins with the Sabbath-emphasis. That’s Exodus 35:1-3. It’s the Sabbath regulations. So it begins with Sabbath-emphasis...

...then moves logically to the gathering of materials and the recognition of the artisans, to the actual construction of the Tabernacle and its equipment and its Court, to the preparation of the sacral vestments [MH: what they’re going to wear] of those who will minister in and join the three circles of nearness, to the erection of the Tabernacle and the climactic arrival onto it and in it of [MH: guess what?] Yahweh’s Presence. Into this sequence have been inserted two summary sections, one dealing with the precious metals used in the fulfillment of Yahweh’s instructions and one dealing with the fulfillment of all those instructions.

So he’s saying... Let’s just take those two intrusive summary sections out of the picture. He basically says 35-40 in a significant way *inverts* 25-31. It begins with the Sabbath and it culminates in the presence of Yahweh. Whereas the other one begins with the call for materials that would be associated with deity. And we talked a lot about this with relation to objects that were made with gold and objects that were not made with gold. The gold was there to telegraph the idea of

the greatest sanctity. “This is where the deity lives. This is the stuff the deity uses most intimately or most directly.” So that’s how Exodus 25-31 begins, with that sort of note about or alert (big header) that signifies that now we’re going to start talking about where Yahweh is going to live among us—where Yahweh’s presence is going to dwell, among us. That’s how chapters 25-31 begin. And then it ends with the Sabbath. And chapters 35-40 begin with the Sabbath and end with Yahweh actually coming into or upon (in the cloud) the structure (that which was built).

So he’s saying, this is how we need to understand this. It’s not just these seven cycles of utterances and the literary sevens and taking us back to Genesis. Durham would say, “Look, all of that’s true. But the thing to really notice is the idea of Yahweh living among his people. That’s how we should read why things are different (especially the order) in chapters 35-40 as opposed to chapters 25-31.” And even in those two intrusive sections that he mentions... They’re just kind of thrown in the middle there or in different places. He says even those... One of them deals with the precious metals (the appropriate metals) and the other one is just sort of a summary of the fulfillment of Yahweh’s instructions. They did their job the way Yahweh told them to do it. So they’re intrusive in a literary sense—they just show up in places and mar the presentation. But he said they don’t really mar the presentation if you ask yourself what they’re about. They’re still about presence. Because even the second one (about just doing your job the way God told you to do it), how many times have we seen (most recently with the golden calf episode) that Yahweh wants things done the way he wants them done, and does not really tolerate improvisation. He has reasons for that. So it’s still an important section about him being among his people.

Another issue let’s drill down on. Durham talks about the repetition. So this is helpful in Durham’s mind. And I think he’s onto something—that we should be thinking about the presence of Yahweh to understand the different order or presentation. But what about the repetition? Durham writes this:

The redactor who brought Exodus into the form in which we know it must certainly have been aware of the similarities between the two sections, including the numerous points where the parallels are verbatim. [MH: Like how could you miss that?] The fact that the repetition remains suggests some purpose for it, and given the essential nature of the theme underlying the two sections, that purpose may be understood as both didactic—the instruction of Israel and Israel’s priests concerning fundamental symbols and practices that were all too frequently either corrupted or abandoned...

30:00

In other words, he’s saying, “Look, repetition is not only a memory aid here to get people to remember things. But repetition draws attention. So his argument is going to be, for those who are dealing with the material in a written sense and who are most immediately involved in carrying out what it says (not just on the

ground when they're building the Tabernacle and its furniture, but the priesthood generally, who's going to be responsible for what's described in Exodus 25-40)... The fact that so much *is* repeated should tell them, "Hey, news flash! This is important. It's so important that we're repeating a lot of it. Even though the order is different, we're still repeating a lot of it. So attention here." It's just a way to highlight the importance of the material. So Durham thinks that's probably what's going on. And then also liturgical. So he says it's didactic...

—and liturgical—the ordering of movement and perhaps also word in the round of worship by which Israel both asserted and reinforced faith.

In their liturgy, the fact that these things are recorded twice not only says, "Hey, this is important," but a lot of that stuff does involve and will involve liturgical practices, certain objects (the Ark, the altar). These are going to be associated with sacrifice, for instance, that you get... This is obviously the role of the priest. So it has a lot to do with making sure the liturgy is correct and understood when the information in Leviticus comes around.

So I think he's got some decent points here to help us understand this. He references Umberto Cassuto who was a famous Jewish scholar who wrote some commentaries on Genesis and Exodus.

Cassuto has suggested also the influence of the ANE genre of the giving of divine instructions which are then reported as carried out by a detailed repetition of the instructions.

So you actually see this in the ancient Near East, where a deity will give instructions to priests or people or whoever and then the instructions are carried out (they're enacted) and then repeated, very similar to what you have here.

Cassuto's example is the Ugaritic account of King Keret's dream (Gray, *KRT Text*, 12–14) in which El gives instructions subsequently followed by Keret and repeated nearly verbatim in the account (15–18) of his [MH: the king's] accomplishments.

So Cassuto's argument is saying, "Look, we see this kind of thing elsewhere. And so maybe that's part of what we're looking at here. It is a literary thing. Maybe it's just a genre conformity here." So Durham is willing to throw that in here. But if you push him to the wall, he's going to opt for it being didactic and liturgical. The repetition is designed to draw attention and importance—make sure that the duties are carried out correctly. And it's all about the presence of Yahweh. So it's nice of him to include that, because we like ancient Near Eastern parallels. But at the end of the day for Durham, it's more about those other things than it would be a literary or genre consideration. He also talks about the fact that

chapters 25-31 and 35-40 need to be seen as *complementary* of one another as well. He writes:

The questions of which section is nearer a supposed *Vorlage*...

That's a supposed original. Like which one came first. Since a lot of the content is identical, which one was written first? We would tend to think they're writing things in the order of the chapters, but there were no original chapter divisions and things like that. So he's saying,

The question of which section is nearer to the original... and of how one section can be seen to presuppose or to supplement the other tend to draw attention away from the manner in which the two sections complete each other as instruction and obedience, as promise and fulfillment. Yahweh instructs Moses and gives him the visionary pattern of his intentions in chaps. 25–31; Moses passes along the instructions and his understanding of them as they are carried out in chaps. 35–40. The first sequence begins with the call for materials; the second section begins with the offering of these materials. The first section ends with instructions for the priests' ordination, then is followed by a sequence of supplemental material which ends with an emphasis on keeping the sabbath as a sign of the special relationship founded on Yahweh's Presence. The second sequence ends with the advent of Yahweh's Presence onto and into the newly built and erected Tabernacle, an authentication of the symbols and an authorization of the beginning of worship with them. In sum, there is an intercomplementary relationship between Exod 25–31 and Exod 35–40 throughout, one that links these sections far more closely and far more consequentially than has generally been assumed.

35:00

Now in my view, I think all of these observations are worthwhile. There's no cosmic rule or expectation that there is only one goal of a writer. Like we have to choose between whether the writer... Was what he was doing a literary exercise or a theological one? The answer is, "Yep." Because one thing is going to contribute to the other. The other is going to inform the other one. They're going to be complementary. They're going to telegraph certain ideas to the people, whether that's an inversion of the order of events in one section and then the reversal in another. Or certain things getting repeated verbatim that would let them know that this is important. All of these things are on the table. At least they should be on the table. They're all strategies. They're strategies that move in different directions, but they complement and complete one another. They present a fuller picture of the ideas—a small subset of ideas—that the writer did want to communicate. So sometimes the best way to communicate that is through repetition. Sometimes it's through difference—changing things up, like order. Writers have different strategies. They don't always use the same strategy the same way in the same place. They just don't. There's no cosmic rule that we

have to pick, “Is this literary or theological or something else?” There’s no rule that tells us what to do there. There are different strategies for communicating important (and in this case, related) points.

Now the takeaway for all of this in this episode (and we’re going to wrap up with this)... I’m going to say a few things here. I don’t want you to think of this as Bible trivia. I don’t want you to think of this as “Okay, we can understand what’s going on when we read these chapters. We’ll remember, ‘Okay, the order is one way in chapters 25-31 and different in Exodus 35-40.’ That’s kind of a neat little scholastic exercise. Thank you, Mike, for that.” There’s actually a more significant application to this and to things like it that we’ve seen in the book. So I’m going to say a few things here.

1. Recognizing patterns helps us to discern points, themes, and ideas of central importance (in this case, creation, Sabbath, and Yahweh’s presence). This is why I have said in the past that you would get more out of your Bible if you read it like it was fiction (especially narrative). Because when you read fiction, you automatically assume that the writer is doing something deliberately to you—that there’s intent. It’s not just a travelogue. It’s not just an itinerary. When you read fiction, you know that you’re being played with by the writer. And so if we would go into reading narrative in Scripture that way and know from the outset that it’s not just a travelogue, it’s not just a list of this and that, it’s not just that the guy who wrote this was probably bored that day and wasn’t thinking anything. No. The writers of Scripture are intentionally trying to do things to their readers. And they will use certain techniques to draw attention to important themes and ideas. And they use all sorts of strategies for doing this.
2. The patterns *are* intentional. And since that’s the case, they don’t often conform to linear storytelling. This means that we ought not judge the coherence of a passage or even section of a book or a section of Scripture based on our expectations of how stories should be told or how narratives should be written. In a lot of cases, we let our modern bias influence our judgment and our assessment of stuff that’s in the Bible. Let’s just be honest. Not only didn’t you write it, but the person who did write it and the hands that went into giving it to us in its final form were thinking specific things. And they were doing things to the text of Scripture to highlight and communicate certain ideas and themes for their audience. They were doing intentional things. And if they need to change the order of something, even though the content is identical, they’re going to do it. They’re going to decide how best to draw attention to X, Y, or Z. So it doesn’t really matter that, “Oh, this isn’t the way that intelligent writers today would write narrative. Therefore, the person who wrote this in the Bible was just a hack,” or “they just didn’t know what they were doing.” That is just a modern conceit. That’s what that is. Which brings me to me third point.

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3. Consequently, the person who compares these two sections (Exodus 25-31 and Exodus 35-40) and charges the writers editors with errors when differences arise... That person judges incompetently, and I would say even stupidly. This is what happens a lot in biblical criticism. You have your source critics. These are the people who are just fixated on “I see a difference in the text. That must be a different source. Where did those sources come from? Let me speculate now. Let me compare the sources that I’ve come up with in this section when I see other differences in some other section. Maybe... can I match these sources up? How do I do that?” And then they try, and by golly, they succeed, in their own minds. They’re going to make their case for whatever. This is why I think JEDP is so often circular in reasoning. But I don’t want to drift off into that.

But look at what’s happening in that. They (the source critics) are looking at differences and they’re asking a question, “Hey, where are the sources?” Because they assume that this must be the explanation. And this is why historically, the next wave of biblical criticism was literary criticism (applying literary approaches to the Torah instead of the source-critical thing)... This is why those two schools in the early days of critical study of Scripture didn’t like each other. [laughs] Because the literary critics would say, “You people are out to lunch. You’re just speculating. You can’t really prove this. It sounds like a nice idea to say this or that source from this or that time. Okay, none of us here are really committed to any form of Mosaic authorship, so go ahead and run with that. Some of this sounds good. Some of it just sounds nutty. But we have a better way of approaching this. It’s literary analysis.” And nowadays there’s a bit more of a friendly relationship between the two. They’re trying to sort of come together in terms of their approach and the implications for each.

But here’s the bigger point. People, even when they... I’ll just zero in on the literary criticism thing here. Even when they can see that there are literary reasons why a writer does this, that, or the other thing, there’s still this temptation to judge it. And honestly, I’m just thinking that’s really out of place. Because it’s just not coherent for you to judge the end result of a thing produced in literary terms as being erroneous or containing errors or conflicting with something else when the literary artistry should tell you that that was never their intention. They’re not writing stuff so that it conforms to this other stuff in every possible way (in every detail, in the order of...). It’s just not even on the table for them. What they’re trying to do is something different. Oftentimes writers will change a detail just so that you notice it, and that’s mission accomplished for them. “Aha! We’ve drawn your attention, because you read it this way over here and now you’re reading it this other way. Well, we hope that you’ll figure out why we changed it—why we added something, why we took something out, why we changed the order. Because we want you to think about what you’re reading. We want you to assume that we (the writers and editors) are trying to draw your attention to get you to notice something.” That’s the whole point. And so for us to say they goofed in different places is really to misunderstand their goal.

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So it's a bit of a hobby horse with me, because I don't see why the observation of the artistry cannot and should not give us a better appreciation for the intelligence of the writer, not *less* appreciation for the intelligence of the writer. Or I don't see how it would build the assumption that, "You know what? We can sit in judgment on the writer because we're just better. We just know better. We would do this a different way and it would be a better way." Those are modern conceits. That's what they are. So I think we need to realize this.

4. This is why (not on everything) but on a lot of these sorts of things, when it comes to the question of inerrancy, I suspect... It's just a suspicion. I don't have anything to base this on, like empirical research or something. But I suspect that evangelicals who abandon the idea of inerrancy do so far too quickly when it comes to this kind of material. They come across inconsistencies... "Hey, there are lots of differences between Exodus 35-40 and 25-31, even though they're talking about the same stuff. There's lots of inconsistencies here. This comes before that and that's not the way it..." It's like the Synoptic Gospels, too. The Synoptic Gospels do this, in terms of the order of events and whatnot. So we encounter this and it looks to us like there are clear inconsistencies here. And in one sense, there are. But the question is, "Did they goof, or is it deliberate?" And I think a lot of evangelicals who are willing to jettison the concept of inerrancy do so without even asking that question. And that is a question that *needs* to be asked. Is there some way to think about this where we can see intelligence and intentionality behind what we can (as the reader 2000 years removed)...? We notice an inconsistency here. Is it possible that that's there for a reason? It's intentional. And when you get into literary analysis (like we've just illustrated here with these last several chapters), the answer is, "Yeah." There are people who really invest a lot of time at a real nuts-and-bolts level in the text to discern what might be the whole point here of the inconsistency. It's not a goof. It's designed specifically to draw your attention to something. So that is a question that needs to be asked—why the inconsistency might be there.

So just in the book of Exodus, we've seen a number of places (this episode and other episodes) where that's really what's going on. So let's not be distracted... I'll end with this. Let's not be distracted by the village atheist out there on the internet. I'm sure you're going to find websites that compare Exodus 35-40 and 25-31. "Oh, look at all these errors! It's this way here and that way there. Look at these errors! Just so many errors! I can't just grasp—I can't comprehend—the magnitude of the stupidity of the biblical writers! Look, they're just goofing everywhere!" And those people are so under-informed that they never even ask the question, "Might this be intentional?" And then, when you ask that question and you actually get into scholarship and you see that, "Yeah, you can really build a good case that this is intentional," then the question changes to not how dumb was the writer, but "How dumb am I not to ever have considered this possibility?" But typically out there in the internet world of Bible-hating or Bible-

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criticizing, you often don't find that level of introspection or honesty when it comes to this. And some of that's a sourcing problem. They don't look for good sources. I get it. This is the world I live in all the time, so I understand that there's an exposure problem here. But I'm hoping that this episode and some of the other stuff we've covered at least exposes *you* to the fact that there *is* an exposure problem with those who would criticize Scripture along these lines. And I'm not saying there aren't any problems (that there aren't any impassés or really tough situations). Those things are out there. They exist. But their number is dramatically reduced when we're at least willing to ask the question, "Might this be intentional? Might this be some literary thing that's going on here—a strategy?" Because in a lot of cases, it's like, "Yeah, it is." And it might take a book or a dissertation or some journal article to ferret that out for you. But there's a lot of this stuff to consider, and I think a lot that just generally helps us think better about Scripture. And to me that has apologetic value. So I'm hoping that's what you take away from this last episode.

TS: And just like that, Mike, we're done. Congratulations!

MH: Just like that. [laughs] I won't say it was a blink of an eye. [laughs]

TS: Just like that...

MH: Ah, just like that.

TS: How's it feel?

MH: It feels good. I'm ready for some Q&A now, Trey. Bring it on! [laughter]

TS: Man, I don't know how I feel about it. It'll take me a little bit to process it. I'm so used to typing Exodus and thinking about Exodus.

MH: [laughs] "I'm so used to typing Exodus." [laughter] Yeah, I know what you mean.

TS: Well, alright. Congratulations. That's a milestone. Well, we appreciate it. I have all the questions I can handle (or that Mike can handle), so be looking forward to the Exodus Q&As next week. And with that, Mike, we appreciate it. And thank *you*. Thanks for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.