

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 312

Exodus Q&A, Part 1

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

**Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)**

### Episode Summary

Dr. Heiser answers your questions:

- Did Moses flee to Midian because he knew they worshipped the God of Abraham? [time stamp 8:20]
- How did “behind the wilderness” get translated as “west” in the Leningrad Codex? [10:50]
- A question about where God speaks to people. [22:00]
- Was Moses circumcised? [24:20]
- Was circumcision a factor in the way Joseph revealed himself to his brothers? [28:40]
- To what extent was Moses raised with a knowledge of the Hebrew belief system? [31:15]
- How did Aaron get away to visit Moses if he was a slave in Egypt? [37:45]
- Why do we take the “Yahweh from the South” passages literally and then at other times say that God lives outside space and time? [39:35]
- Why do we read Aaron’s priesthood into Exodus 4? [40:45]
- A question about the LXX variant in the Exodus 4 passage about Zipporah circumcising her son. [44:30]

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 312: Exodus Q&A, Part 1. I’m the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he’s the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! What’s going on?

**MH:** What’s going on is we have 700 students in the Awakening School of Theology.

**TS:** That’s awesome!

**MH:** It’s awesome, but it’s intimidating. I’m waiting for the avalanche of feedback to happen. And then we’ll be scrambling. But, you know, it’s a good problem to have, so we’ll just approach it as it comes. We’re through our first week now. We had about 130 total live [in person] over two nights. And then the rest are distance students. So yeah, it’s kind of blown up.

**TS:** That's awesome. That *is* a good problem to have. And another good problem to have, Mike, is we're going to have three episodes of Exodus Q&A, because that's how many questions were sent in. So we have them whittled down to three episodes. This is the first part. We are officially done with Exodus. That's good. But we have a mountain of questions to climb before we're *official-official*. So I hope you're ready for that.

**MH:** Yep, we'll do our best.

**TS:** And also, we want to remind people, we *are* going to have a 2020 Naked Bible Conference. It *is* going to be at the same place in Dallas. And it's August 15<sup>th</sup>.

**MH:** And we know who the speakers are, too, but I'm hemming and hawing about the fifth one here. So that's why we haven't released the names. But I'm going to have to pull the trigger here shortly.

**TS:** Yeah, we'll start selling tickets here in a couple of months, which is a month or two sooner than we've ever done it. So you'll have plenty of time to get tickets. So we'll let you all know ahead of time. But we're at least two months away from selling tickets. But if you want to start planning now for the conference, it's going to be August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020. And if you want to reserve tickets, I guess you can email me at [TreyStricklin@gmail.com](mailto:TreyStricklin@gmail.com), and I can go ahead and reserve you a ticket. Why not? So if you're *that* eager to come, I'm all about it. I'll hook you up. So just let me know.

**MH:** Yep, Trey's looking for things to do. He has so little work to do. [laughs]

**TS:** Yeah, whew... I'm *am not* short of things to do. Let me tell you, people. And I apologize. If I can't get back to you in email... Mike, you probably respond better than I do in email, because I can't get to them all. I can't. I can't.

**MH:** That's a little frightening.

**TS:** I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Mike, we also have a cruise update. We've got, I think, 62 people so far that are going to join us. So that's going to be a fun trip. Plenty of room still.

**MH:** Yep, room for more. Sixty-two does not exhaust the block. So we can deal with more. If I said Mori was coming along (or both pugs), then we'd *leap* to 100, I'm quite sure. But I don't think they'd allow that. [laughs]

**TS:** That turns it into a whole 'nother cruise. I don't know if we want to go there.

**MH:** We need to do a get-together at a pug café in Japan. I now have a reason to go to Japan.

**TS:** Do they have a pug café, or just cats?

**MH:** There's a pug café. I've seen video.

**TS:** Oh, yeah, you've mentioned that before.

**MH:** Well, we should do that.

**TS:** It's on my list of things to do. It's like, way...

**MH:** [laughs] Way, way down toward the bottom, yeah.

**TS:** Well, Mike, what's going on here? All of the sudden, I see a new Dr. Michael Heiser book popping up. What's going on here?

**MH:** Oh, yeah. I had done *Reversing Hermon* with Defender. So the new one that's out is the first in (Lord-willing) what will be a series on the book of Enoch. They were going to do this (I think) in March, but then they moved it up and started shipping this week. But it's a readers' commentary on the book of Enoch. So the first volume is the Book of the Watchers. The first 36 chapters of the book of Enoch is actually kind of like the Bible in that it's comprised of separate books (sections), at least scholars have labeled the sections that way. But the first 36 chapters are known throughout the academic world as the Book of the Watchers. So volume 1 of *A Readers' Commentary on the Book of Enoch* covers that material. You ask, "What's a readers' commentary?" Well, the book is academic, but it is not a scholarly, verse-by-verse, drill-down-into-every-syllable type of commentary. A readers' commentary more or less just helps someone reading through the book of Enoch to understand what in the world they're reading. So I will comment about words. I'll comment about original language stuff and, of course, the theological content. It's the relationship of the content to the Bible—that sort of thing. But it's like a handbook, really. I don't say something about every verse or everything in each verse, but we try to pick significant things, especially as it relates to worldview theological content and its attachment to Scripture.

So yeah, the first volume of that is out. For those... I've gotten a couple of questions about this already about the translation. The translation used in the commentary is Charles' 1919 translation. And the reason we used that is because it's public domain. But I interact with the more recent scholarly translation by Nickelsburg and VanderKam throughout the book. So we can't reproduce that translation without paying significant licensing fees and all those sorts of negotiations. So we start with Charles. And where the more recent translation (based on recent scholarship and textual study) matters for the

5:00

content (for understanding the material), we certainly interact with that. So that's in a nutshell what it is: *A Readers' Commentary on the Book of Enoch*. The first volume is the first 36 chapters, known as the Book of the Watchers.

**TS:** And that's shipping already, right?

**MH:** Yep, it's shipping now, as we speak. Kind of nice that they moved it up. Actually, somebody on Instagram alerted me to something about Amazon. I went up and looked, and that popped into my screen. I thought, "Wow! I didn't expect that to be out there this fast!" So I confirmed that. Amazon had taken the pre-order thing off. So it's shipping. If you order it now, you'll get it very, very shortly.

**TS:** And the *Demons* book is just right around the corner.

**MH:** Yes, that has not moved. That is firm. [laughs] After three moves in the past. That will ship toward the end of April. That will not change.

**TS:** Alright, good stuff. Well, Mike, we've got several questions here if you...

**MH:** Yeah, let's jump in.

**TS:** First one is from Craig:

8:20

**I just finished listening to podcast #259 on Exodus 2:11-25. As you were talking about the Midianites' connection to Abraham and the possibility that they knew of and worshiped the god of Abraham, I wondered if Moses was aware of that and intentionally chose Midianite territory to flee to. Though not impossible, it's difficult to imagine Moses just heading out to who-knows-where, as there were likely plenty of non-friendly people and inhospitable places he could have encountered. What are your thoughts?**

10:00

**MH:** Yeah, I think it seems reasonable to think that the Hebrews in Egypt would have passed on the history of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob orally, and that that history would include Abraham's offspring, including the descendants of Midian. Midian was a son of Abraham and Keturah (according to Genesis 25:1–2). And if you look at Genesis 25 a few verses later, in verses 5 and 6, when Abraham gave Isaac his inheritance, he also gave gifts to the sons of his concubines (one of which was Keturah) and "sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country." So Midian would've been included in that sending away. He's actually specifically mentioned in Genesis 25:4 as part of that. So I think just generally speaking, this is an oral culture. They have a strong oral history and tradition of their ancestors, especially Abraham and his offspring—the covenant with Yahweh. So I think it's reasonable, given that contact—given the orality of the culture—there's no reason to think that they didn't perpetuate their own traditions. Honestly, what ancient people just doesn't bother with their traditions?

That's very common. So given all that and Moses' contact with the Hebrews in Egypt, I think Moses could have known that these traditions (at least in part, I think he would have heard something there)... So it makes sense that he would have gone to Midian thinking that he would perhaps encounter relatives. I think that's a reasonable thing to conclude.

**TS:** Our next two questions are from Mike.

10:50

**The discussion on the location of Exodus 3 will most likely never reach a decisive conclusion. I am always very wary of translations resulting in cardinal directions from ancient texts because the people did not think that way. For instance, looking at the Leningrad Codex from scripture4all.org we see "behind the wilderness" instead of west. Any idea how "behind the wilderness" ends up being translated as "west"?**

**MH:** Well, there are a couple of things to say here. Ancient people certainly knew directions. They were oriented east, so south is literally “the right hand.” If you're facing east, then your right hand would be pointed south, and that's how they would denote that direction. To the left would be north. And they also had the word *tsaphon*, which points to the high mountains to the left of someone facing east. So they did have these things—some sense of direction. So that I think we need to establish right away.

The Leningrad Codex... The question references the website scripture4all.org. The Leningrad Codex doesn't actually say “behind the wilderness” or anything else in English. The Leningrad Codex is Hebrew. That means... This is a reference to (like, if people go up to the website and actually look at this)... That means any English at this website is supplied by someone or something (I'll get into what I mean by that in a bit). It's just a gloss. It's a translation opinion. The Hebrew is: אַחַר הַמִּדְבָּר. The second of those terms (*midbar*) is usually translated “desert” or “wilderness” in Scripture and in all translations, really, in English. The preceding *aḥar* is unusual in combination with *ha midbar*. So *aḥar ha midbar*. That phrasing is uncommon. ESV does translate it as “west side”. The reality is that *aḥar* (and the website had “behind”)... In and of itself, that word glossed in English as “behind” really is meaningless. Behind what? You have to know behind what to even make any sense of it. So the answer to that question (“Behind what?” or “After what?”—*aḥar* typically means “after” as well) would depend on what direction one is traveling, so as to tell how one is moving toward the wilderness to get to a region “behind” it or beyond it. Or you pass that place after... And then you get to the desert. So that place is behind you. You have to know which way you're headed.

I think that's part of the ambiguity that the questioner (Mike) is getting at. ESV's “west” suffers from the same ambiguity. It's a guess. The English choice there is

going to be predicated on the translator's notion—the translator's opinion—of what the starting point of the directional journey (the path) was and what the intended end point is. And that's going to give the semantic meaning to *aḥar ha midbar* in the translator's mind. That's just the way it is.

15:00

The English in the website mentioned is certainly (I would) say auto-generated from a public domain source. So in other words, if you're going up to scripture4all.org and you're looking at the text of the Westminster Leningrad Codex and you see English there, that is not a translation. Those are English glosses that are drawn (sucked) from some other source through a computer script. We did this at Logos all the time. In this case (and in most cases when you encounter this online), the source of the English glosses is going to be Strong's Concordance or some Strong's tool, specifically because that's in public domain. They can use that and not be in licensing trouble. So people who create these sort of resources for free to put online have the computer savvy to dump the text into the computer, write a script that extracts the English and marries it to the Hebrew by lemma. (In Logos' case, we used word numbers that we created to do the mapping.) But that's how these things are put together. This is not a translation. So "behind" in that resource is not actually a translation. It's an English gloss sucked in by means of a programming script written by the person or persons who created the web resource. There's nothing shifty in that; it's just how it's done.

Now the phrase *aḥar midbar* in Exodus 3:1 really means something like "after the wilderness" or "after the desert" and this therefore provides no specific direction, for its actual meaning would depend on the starting point and some sort of contextual indicator as to what direction the writer meant. *Aḥar* can certainly describe something in the west. There are passages that use that word, and those passages include more geographical context so that you can tell what direction is actually meant by this "after" terminology. For instance, just listen to Deuteronomy 11:30:

**<sup>30</sup> Are they not beyond the Jordan, west of the road [MH; there's our "west"], toward the going down of the sun, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the oak of Moreh?**

I mean, look at all the geographical information in that verse and you can tell... "After the road," "west of the road"... You can have a really good deduction as to what direction is indicated by the terminology there. But Exodus 3:1 doesn't give you that much. As far as *midbar* goes, there's really no ambiguity there. It describes a wilderness or desert region dozens of times in the Hebrew Bible. That is quite evident in context. If you take all that to Exodus 3:1, a translation like "west"... If we had the translator here, he would justify that translation in light of two things: (a) the location of Midian, which is pretty well-known, juxtaposed



with (b) other references to the desert (*midbar*) in near context in the book of Exodus, like Exodus 15:22:

**22 Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water.**

So we know where the Red Sea is. And based upon where Israel is... On that particular journey they're headed in a certain direction, they made this or that turn... Your options are limited. But the point here is that the "wilderness of Shur" in relation to the Red Sea is also pretty well-known. And even if you wonder, "Where exactly is that wilderness?" you know that it is west of Midian, because you know where Midian is. That's the easy part here—Midian itself, the area. So you're going to get help with the "wilderness of Shur" with other passages as well. I'm going to open Harper's Bible dictionary here and read something quick.

[The wilderness of Shur is] a desert region somewhere in the Sinai Peninsula, east of the present Suez Canal. It was inhabited by Ishmaelites (Gen. 25:18) and was for a period the home of Abraham (Gen. 20:1). The Israelites during the Exodus entered it immediately after leaving the Red Sea (Exod. 15:22). 'The way to Shur,' where the angel met Hagar (Gen. 16:7), is probably the desert track leading southward from Beer-sheba, along which Saul, and later David, pursued the Amalekites 'as far as Shur' (1 Sam. 15:7; 27:8).

20:00

So what Bible geographers do is they'll take references to places, and based upon lots of other passages and what's going on in those passages and the limitations of foot travel and other geographical information in related passages... When it comes to something like the wilderness of Shur being somewhere in the Sinai Peninsula, that's relatively sure (pardon the pun). It's relatively certain. But regardless, even if you can't pinpoint *the exact* place (longitude and latitude) where this wilderness is, it *is* west of Midian. So this is how the translator would justify that translation in Exodus 3:1. It's not just guesswork. You go from the known and you try to extrapolate to the unknown.

So according to Exodus 3:1, which is quite easily read as Moses leaving Midian and moving west, after which was the mountain of God, Horeb or Sinai. And so Sinai would not be in Midian, if that is the proper reading. And that's a very ordinary reading. But it would be somewhere in the northern area of the Sinai Peninsula, reachable in three days after the crossing of the sea. And that takes us back to the problem that we covered in the podcast a lot—the problem of the half dozen or so references to Moses reiterating God's instruction. Things like, "Let us go three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to Yahweh"—a sacrifice that occurred at Sinai! So if we take those verses at face value and take Exodus

15:22 at face value and Exodus 3:1 at face value, then Sinai cannot be in Midian proper. It just can't. So there you go.

But I would agree that there's ambiguity in directional language, but it's not hopeless. There are places where you do throw up your hands and it's like, "Who knows?" But translators are working with lots of other geographical references when they try to translate a phrase like *aḥar ha midbar*. It's not just, "Hey, where do I want it to be?" Or "Let's flip a coin." It's not like that. It's a little bit better than that. In some cases, it's a *lot* better than that.

**TS:** Alright, Mike goes on to say:

22:00

**This seems to be the same sort of place Paul liked to preach the gospel—where the people were not already a part of someone else's flock or seeded with a lot of ideas that would need to be refuted. A place habitable, but not really all that prosperous. This is just like where most common people live. It is still the perfect place for God to show up, make Himself manifest, and commission more agents.**

**Why can't it be both the place where God chose to speak to Moses and the place where he speaks to us today? Kind of like the letters to the churches at the beginning of the Book of Revelation; Jesus speaks in the midst of the lampstands but not necessarily from the pulpits.**

**MH:** I'll confess, this is a little hard to follow. I don't really know what the point is. Because God does speak through people in places that are highly populated or not highly populated. He also meets people in either place. So I don't know how you're putting percentages on these sorts of things. I don't even know if that's the point. In Paul's case, Paul goes to cities all the time. He goes to synagogues all the time. There's certainly a lot to argue about in synagogues. That's basically what Paul was looking for. He wanted to debate. And Paul always went first to the Jews. (Certainly, they were part of a flock, part of a group, part of a congregation—a synagogue.) He typically got thrown out. And then he went to the Gentiles. But as Paul says over and over and over again (not just in Romans), "to the Jew first and also to the Gentile" (the barbarian). But he definitely goes to places that are populated and prosperous—major cities. Ephesus is the one that sticks out. Corinth. So I don't really follow the trajectory of the question. I don't think it's parse-able that way. I don't think Paul's activity is really parse-able in those terms. At any rate, Paul's *modus operandi*, in my mind, has little to do with the meaning of these Hebrew lemmas back in Exodus. So I don't think we can really abstract it like that.

**TS:** Rebecca has a thought on Exodus 3:

24:20



**If Moses was circumcised at birth and then placed in Pharaoh's house post-weaning, it would explain how he would have known he was ethnically Hebrew yet be ignorant of Hebrew culture, religion, and the name YHWH.**

**Exodus 4:24-25 tells us his son was circumcised but does not mention Moses and circumcision. I am assuming he already was, but his son was not, as it was not customary for Midianites nor Egyptians.**

**MH:** Yeah. You know, on one hand, you can make those assumptions. Let's just start with Moses being circumcised at birth and placed in Pharaoh's house post-weaning. We'd have to assume, in turn, that Moses remembered those sorts of details from the time he was two or three years old, because that's when you wean a child. So he has that time with his biological mother and he is raised in Pharaoh's household. So is he really going to retain conversations from being two or three? Well, I've had four kids and [laughs] I have my own life experience to draw on. [laughs] I don't remember anything from when I was two or three. So I think there's some doubt there.

And even if he noticed the physical nature of his circumcision as he grew up... "Mommy, why..." Would he even ask the question? He might. If he looked at other boys and then looked at himself, "Why am I different?" Would the Egyptian woman have told him, "Oh, that's because you're really a Hebrew and you don't really belong here. You're not my biological son." Would she really say that? I don't know. I think there's at least some doubt to that. It's also interesting that, yeah, Moses' son is circumcised in Exodus 4:24-25, but he hadn't done it when the boy was eight days old, according to the traditions of the patriarchs. So if he had known that information, why didn't Moses do it? That's part of the reason why God is angry. So there's a disconnect there, too. The reality is that we don't know whether Moses was circumcised or not. You could build a case that it's reasonable to think he was. You could build a case that it's reasonable to think he wasn't. It's uncertain. We just aren't told. Either option could work in the overall narrative in different ways. We can suggest that Moses was, assuming that his parents obeyed the patriarchal tradition of passages like Genesis 16 and 17. I'll just read one: Genesis 17:12.

**<sup>12</sup> He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring...**

This is God speaking to Abraham. Abraham, of course, passes that on to his household as well. Well, if Moses didn't do this to his own son at eight days, is it possible that his own parents didn't do it? I don't know. Again, you can make arguments either way. But, again, would he have really learned that at home?

He's not going to remember anything from when he was two or three years old. But if they didn't do it, then he wouldn't be different than the Egyptians. It was a question that would have never come up. So we just don't know. Not circumcising him wouldn't have concealed his identity, either. We talked about this earlier in the podcasts. Because when Pharaoh's daughter comes down to the Nile and finds this baby in a little basket, what Egyptian would do that? What Egyptian mother would, "Oh, I've got to hide my kid. I have to put him in the Nile." Nobody's going to do that. And if you want to kill the kid, you just throw him in. He's crocodile bait. "Obviously, whoever did this," she's reasoning, "wanted to preserve the child alive." And what children are under the threat of death? Well, that would be the Hebrews. You don't have to have circumcised child even in that case. Pharaoh's daughter's going to know that this is not an Egyptian child. So the circumcision doesn't really help there either. You know, it's just an uncertainty and an ambiguity that just goes in with the story.

**TS:** Rebecca adds:

28:40

**Also, a possible biblical precursor/example of assumed circumcision as a factor could be when Joseph cleared the room and then "makes himself known to his brothers" (Gen 45:1, NASB). In privacy, he could have used the sign of his circumcision as proof of his identity. Of course, this is not explicitly stated, but circumcision is (1) commanded of Abraham and descendants, (2) congruent with Biblical Hebrew culture, and (3) a logical reason for what Moses did and did not know.**

30:00

**MH:** I think it's clear that Joseph was circumcised because of the Shechem incident (in Hamor), when the men of the city have to be circumcised to marry into Jacob's family and so on and so forth. So I think that part is pretty clear. But I don't think that Joseph exposed himself to prove his identity here. To me, I think... He says, "I am Joseph." That's actually part of that scene in the story. So he makes his identity known by telling them his name. And if they had any doubts, the fact that he was Joseph would have explained the oddity that happened earlier at the meal, when Joseph's brothers "sat before him" (this is Gens 43:33):

**...the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement.**

So they're actually seated in the correct order of their birth. That's why his brothers are kind of looking at each other going, "This is kind of weird. Because we're all occupying positions at the table in the correct birth order." So when Joseph later on says, "I am Joseph," that would've made sense. Of course, he would have known who they were and put them in the correct order. And Joseph in that scene also tells them what happened to him (their brother, Joseph, sold

into slavery). How would he have known that, unless he was really Joseph? So I don't think we need to have Joseph exposing himself to certify his identity. He just knows things that only Joseph could know. Of course, none of this is explicitly stated, but I don't think we need the circumcision element to make sense of the revelation that Joseph gives these brothers.

**TS:** Joe asks:

31:15

**Dr. Heiser has mentioned that Moses might not have known the name of God or who He was at the time of Moses' calling. This has been fascinating to think about and makes the story of Exodus even more miraculous and shows God's grace in a new light than I had ever considered.**

**There seems to be three parts in the Bible that show Moses might have been connected to the Hebrew community, aware of who he was (Hebrew), aware of the Hebrew spiritual traditions, and familiar with the name of God. 1) When he killed the Egyptian. 2) After God calls Moses at the burning bush. 3) If Moses was raised in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22), would that include knowledge and understanding of the Hebrew belief system? I thought I would ask for clarification and insight or see if I'm missing something with my novice understanding.**

**MH:** Yeah. You know, I've already said, I think it's reasonable to think that Moses knew something of the patriarchal heritage, that he quite conceivably could have heard oral tradition of the Hebrews. We have to essentially believe that after he's released at weaning and he goes to live in Pharaoh's household, that sometime later, he would've had contact with somebody in his family. It's reasonable (again, it's not stated) to think that they would have sort of followed his progress (they obviously know who he is) and that this sort of information could have come down to him. If he knew (and I think this much he might know as a two or three-year-old) his name (that would've been ringing around in his head) is not an Egyptian word, necessarily, that might have prompted a question. We just don't know. But it's reasonable to think that he knew something about where he had come from. We aren't told exactly how he knew that. But in the scene when he sees the fight going on and he winds up killing the Egyptian, he understands the implications of what has just happened and the fact that he's killed an Egyptian and what the Hebrews there say to him when that's going on.

So the narrative certainly suggests that he had some knowledge. I don't think we need to really affirm that and then speculate to very, very specific knowledge. I don't think we're *able* to. That's probably a better way of saying that. But presuming that he knew of the identification ethnically, he did know something about his heritage, but we can't be sure of the extent or the specifics of that knowledge. When it comes to the burning bush, there's this whole issue of what

happens at the bush—the revelation of the Name. Later on (and they’re still at the burning bush scene or the same conversation, or still on Sinai anyway), when God mentions Aaron (Moses’ brother), of course it raises the question, “How did Moses know who his brother was if he was completely isolated from his birth family while he was in Egypt?” Again, he probably wasn’t. That’s a worthwhile observation. It lets us know again that Moses did know something of his heritage, and now we have an extra detail. He probably knew his family members because there isn’t any other explanation given for why he would know this person, Aaron. But honestly, that’s all it really tells us. It doesn’t say that he and Aaron sat down and talked theology. It doesn’t tell us anything like that. All that we really can discern from that passage is that he did know he had a brother and his brother’s name was Aaron.

I’ll rabbit trail a little bit here. We tend to think that if Moses knew Aaron, that they are going to talk theology because Aaron is the high priest. Well, Aaron’s not the high priest back at Exodus 3 and 4. Aaron was a Levite, but we can’t read any specific religious knowledge into that for Aaron and his family because it would only be *after* the Exodus that he’s made the high priest. And after *that*, it’s at the golden calf incident that the rest of Aaron’s people (the Levitical tribe) become involved in the priestly service (serving the Tabernacle is probably a better way to say that). So all of those things (that body of knowledge) as best we can tell is later in their story. And there’s no indication that Levi as a tribe or that Aaron and his sons as people were chosen because they had special knowledge. We talked about the golden calf. The rationale for the tribe of Levi being linked to the service of the Tabernacle is their choice to follow Moses and refuse to worship the golden calf (to worship Yahweh in an aberrant way). You could say, “Well, doesn’t that suggest they knew something about Yahweh, that they shouldn’t make images?” Again, the image command is only given at Sinai. We can’t just assume and retroject the details of the Sinai law and these events that occur at Sinai (or a little bit after)... We can’t move those back into the past and put them in Aaron’s skull, like he just knew all this stuff. There’s no way to really justify that from the text.

So we don’t really know what Aaron knew, but at the very least, he knows who Moses is and Moses knows he’s his brother. So it tells us he wasn’t completely cut off from the Hebrews in Egypt. As a prince of Egypt, he probably could move in and out of the Hebrews as he wanted to, being careful to observe certain customs and whatnot—to be a good Egyptian and so on and so forth. He would have known something, but we just don’t know exactly *what* he actually knew.

**TS:** Joe has another question on the control the Egyptians had over the Hebrews prior to Moses.

37:45

**Would the Hebrews be allowed to leave as Aaron did to visit Moses? I always assumed they were more less prisoners, but in looking at the story again, Aaron is either allowed to leave or escapes secretly**

**to visit Moses. Is there any historical information that shows if the Hebrews were prisoners or they were more less allowed to leave, except for large numbers?**

**MH:** We actually aren't told anything as to how Aaron came to meet Moses. The whole passage puts forth the idea of divine appointment, so we know that however that happened, God was behind the scenes working those events together. God was in the details there. But the narrator just doesn't tell us what God did to put Aaron in that place at that time. So we're just not left with answers to these sorts of questions. And we can create reasonable scenarios, but that doesn't mean they're correct. It doesn't mean they're hopelessly wrong, either. But I think we just need to be careful about what we can say and what we can't say. And unless the text tells us, we don't have to read anything super-extraordinary, like God picked him up in the air and threw him over there. The questioner is not doing that, but I'm just saying that there are others out there in internet-land Bible study that they will draw conclusions like that and make Aaron like Elijah in flying chariots or something. If we're not given details in the text, my inclination (as you well know if you listen to this podcast) is to not speculate. And if I do speculate, I'll tell you that that's what I'm doing.

**TS:** Andy has a couple of questions. His first question is:

39:35

**In the Exodus 3 episodes, why take Yahweh from the South traditions "literally" and then say in other places that God is outside space and time?**

**MH:** Well, we take them literally because the Israelite are embodied humans. They carry the Ark on real ground. They go to real places. You can visit them today—some of them with very high certainty. There's no reason not to take the "Yahweh from the South" traditions literally, because those places are real and exist. And frankly, all those things make sense in the narrative. There's just no reason to think anything else. Other places that God is outside space and time, well, the Israelites can be traveling to real places and that doesn't impinge upon God's omnipresence or the fact that he is separate from the material world. Those two things are not linked as though they create tension with one another. So I don't think that we have a problem here at all.

**TS:** Andy's second question is:

40:45

**In Exodus 4, why read priesthood of Aaron into the text when there is nothing in the text about the priesthood of Aaron? True, Aaron is functioning as an intermediary for Moses, *but* in his role as High Priest of Israel, he serves as an intermediary for all Israel, not just Moses. I'm not sure how you can talk about the priesthood of Aaron based on this text. Priesthood language just isn't there, even if a primitive function is.**

**MH:** That's a fair question, because the priesthood of Aaron *isn't* mentioned in Exodus 4. When we talked about this in relation to Exodus 4, I did note that this is a proposal. It's a speculation. Essentially, it's really done because of what follows—in other words, how Aaron is cast in a leadership role right after this episode. Right after Exodus 4, you get to Exodus 5. There's Aaron with Moses again as the right-hand person (and really in some cases actually being in the forefront). So because that happens, it raises the question of, "Well, how does he get to do that?" So it's really based upon what follows. You could also say that that's anomalous because there's no call narrative for Aaron like there was with Moses. And that's true. The fact is that's how he is cast, though. So we don't get a call narrative for Aaron like we do with Moses. Certainly that's the case. But it's also the case that he's there with Moses. There are two leadership figures now instead of one. So scholars look for Aaron's history in the narrative, which once all the things that Aaron winds up doing is observed and the question is asked, "How does he get to do that? Especially if there is no call narrative. Why does he occupy this status?"

And that puts us back in Exodus 4, which is his appearance in the story. So scholars would then they ask, "Is there something about what happens in Exodus 4 that relates in some way, or perhaps accounts for, Aaron's function from that point forward, especially when before Exodus 4 the focus is clearly Moses alone?" He's the only one that gets this calling. The only thing that emerges is Moses' obstinate unbelief, and so God accommodates Moses. He doesn't just obliterate him or say, "Well, forget it. I'm going to go get somebody else." So instead of doing that, God says, "Okay, I'm going to give you Aaron your brother here, and he'll be your helper. None of the reasoning there is spelled out in verse form (that's true), but it's a reasonable way to account for the data points, both what happens later and then asking, "Where'd that come from? What happened here?" And you go back to the initial appearance of Aaron on the scene and that's what you get. It's in the context of Moses hemming and hawing and refusing and not believing and so on and so forth—you know, basically expressing self-doubt and lack of faith. So God, instead of just removing Moses says, "Okay. We'll bring Aaron into the picture here." And it's only later that he becomes a priest. But he is put into a leadership role. So that's why scholars go that direction.

**TS:** Alright. Cody has a question about the latter portion of Exodus 4:

44:30

**I'm interested to hear Dr. Heiser's take on the Septuagintal account. There are a couple of major differences. For one, in the LXX, Zipporah "fell at 'his' feet" (traditionally the feet of the "Angel of the Lord") rather than putting the foreskin anywhere in particular. Next, her statement in the LXX is "The [flow of] blood of my son's circumcision is stopped." From my inexperienced reading, this could also possibly say "the blood of my son's circumcision is set/placed**



**[to or in front of somebody, presumably Moses or the Lord]”. Is there a Hebrew witness for this variant? Why might/mightn’t we favor the Masoretic rendering in this particular passage from a text critical perspective?**

**MH:** The first thing to mention and get out of the way here is that the Septuagint portion of this does not mention the Angel of the Lord. That’s made up. [laughs] That’s just a tradition. There’s nothing in the Septuagint that gets the Angel of the Lord into the passage. And the same would go for the Masoretic Text as well.

As we jump into the rest of it, it’s actually a good place to promote the Lexham English Septuagint. For those of you who want to know what the Septuagint says here or there, there is a free public translation in English of the Septuagint by Brenton that you can find online in pdf. You can also find the NETS (New English Translation of the Septuagint) online in pdf. But if you want to buy one to hold in your lap, there is now a new English translation of the Septuagint that Lexham Press (the publishers of *Unseen Realm*) has created. They created it from the data in Logos Bible software. That’s where the Lexham English Septuagint originated in digital form, but now it’s available as a book. You can get it on Amazon. So if you’re wondering, there you go.

This is an interesting question, because yeah, in the Septuagint, both in the Rahlfs edition of the Septuagint and Swete’s edition, we have the same Greek. We have προσέπεσεν πρὸς τοὺς πόδας: “fell at the feet.” It’s not “his” feet. It’s fell at “the” feet. Now if you went to a critical apparatus for the tools and resources for doing textual criticism in the Septuagint, namely the Gottingen LXX series [pronounced “Gertigan”], that resource is going to tell you that some manuscripts do insert “autou” there (the word “his”). So some manuscripts do have “fell at his feet.” But the major editions of the Septuagint do not. So it just depends. You can have an English translation... I don’t know what NETS has here, if they adapted that variant (they would include the pronoun there). Maybe they have “fell at his feet.” I don’t know. But the two most common go-to text forms of the Septuagint that scholars use today do not have it.

So the term itself... Let’s just say it this way. Other than the way it renders a particular verb, the verb in the Septuagint, (προσέπεσεν = “fell”)... Other than that word, the Septuagint here is really very, very close to the Masoretic Text. And you could actually argue that even that translation choice (one of the Greek terms for “fall”) could still conceivably be a rendering of the same Hebrew as we find in the Masoretic Text.

Some of this doesn’t really translate well to audio, but I’m going to give this a shot here. The verb choice that the Septuagint has here... That Greek lemma could be translated as “strike against” (as in an attack or reaching out and hitting). It could also be translated “touching” or “embrace” (maybe the semantic nuance of “grab” here). Because the “feet” in the Masoretic Text is a very literal

rendering in the Septuagint. “Feet” in the Masoretic Text is a euphemism for the genitalia. We talked about that in the episode devoted to this. So what it comes down to is, this isn’t difficult Hebrew. The issue is, the Septuagint translator basically does something with the verb in the Masoretic Text. It’s נגע (*naga*’), which means to touch or to reach (as in something’s moving toward something and you *reach* a certain point), strike, and approach. So the translation choice here of a verb in Greek that typically means “fall” but could mean “embrace” or “grab” or strike,” it’s still a semantic possibility.

50:00

Now you’d say, “Why would the Septuagint translator pick a Greek word that sort of muddies what’s going on here?” Because a Greek reader is going to be going along here and the Greek reader is probably going to be thinking just what we see in these English translations of the Septuagint: “fell.” That’s the most common meaning for this Greek verb. Well, there are a couple ways to think about that. We’ll speculate here on what’s going through the head of the translator. So you have a Jewish person (someone who knows Hebrew) translating the Hebrew Bible into Greek. So they know Greek. They come across the verse. And the Hebrew isn’t difficult here.

לִי: אִתָּהּ חֲתוּן־דָּמִים כִּי וַתֹּאמֶר לְרַגְלָיו וַתִּגַּע בְּנֶה אֶת־עַרְלֹת וַתְּכַרֵּת לָצָר צַפְרָה וַתִּקַּח

Zipporah takes the flint and she cuts the “feet” (and the term there is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible for the genitals) of her son. So she cuts the “feet” of her son. And then she נגע (*naga*’ = touches) to his feet (something like that). Well, you could, if you were a sensitive translator, look at that and say, “Hmm. Let’s make a word choice here that doesn’t bring out the explicit nature of the genitals.” So in his vocabulary, he comes up with this verb form: προσέπεσεν. He knows most of his readers are going to look at it and read it “fall”— “fall at the feet”—and it makes the meaning of the verse ambiguous. And he’s good with that because he doesn’t *want* the text to be so explicit. Maybe he thinks that that will offend the sensitivity of some of his readers if he really uses Greek to bring out the explicit nature of what’s going on here, of a woman... After all, circumcision was supposed to be performed by a priest, by a man. Here you have a woman grabbing her son’s genitals and circumcising him. Maybe he thought, “You know, that’s probably just going to really irritate or offend or shock some readers. So I’m going to obscure the point by the Greek word I choose here. And the ones who sort of know (they’re the wiser) are going to see what I’m doing here. They’re going to see how the word could transmit that meaning, but most of the readers are going to read right over it and not see that.” Kind of like we do in English. Because we read “feet” when really if we translated according to meaning, we would do something explicit like “genitals.”

So could the Septuagint translator actually be doing what the English translators do with this? [laughs] That’s really what it comes down to. And I think, yeah. Yeah, that’s not unreasonable to think. Because we do it in English. We obscure

the explicit nature of it in English. Maybe that did that in Greek. They just chose to do that with the verb and then translate the πόδας (*podas*) for what's going on here. If their readers catch the double meaning, "Then they'll know what I'm doing with the verb." If they don't catch the double meaning, "Well, that's fine. Then they can have Zipporah falling at the feet of somebody (arguably Moses). And that's okay, because a woman falling at a man's feet in a subservient cultural mode, that's not going to surprise anybody, so yeah, we're good. We're good now." I think that that is actually pretty likely in this passage, because the Septuagint follows everything else here pretty closely. So that would be my judgment, that we have a translator trying to not be explicit in translation and yet still be in the ballpark.

**TS:** Alright, Mike. Just like that, we're done.

**MH:** Just like that, we're done. [laughs]

**TS:** Done with Part 1. Only two more parts to go.

**MH:** Two more parts to go. A lot of questions. These are good questions.

**TS:** Good. Alright, we want to thank everybody who sent in those questions. And we want to thank you, Mike for answering those questions. And we want to thank everybody else in the wide world of planet Earth for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.