

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 313

Exodus Q&A, Part 2

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Episode Summary

Dr. Heiser answers your questions:

- Why are the verbs chezeq and qashah used in Exodus 7 and what is the difference between them? [4:40 time stamp]
- Where was “three days into the wilderness?” [6:45]
- Did Pharaoh consider Moses to be a usurper? [13:00]
- Why did God write the tablets when Moses had already written the book, and how many times did he go up and down the mountain? [16:30]
- Questions about Ramses II and the late date of Exodus. [26:30]
- In John, was Jesus equating himself with the “I AM” statements of Exodus? [36:40]

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 313: Exodus Q&A, Part 2. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you doing?

MH: Well, pretty good. How are you doing?

TS: I'm doing pretty good.

MH: It's cold here.

TS: The flu is going around here. Everybody's been hit with the flu. I'm over it (if I had it). I don't know whether I had it or not. I had a fever for a day or two. But I'm good now.

MH: I haven't had to deal with any of that. I keep getting blamed for the weather here, though. Last night, teaching again... “Did you bring the weather?” Because it was 55° and raining. “It sure looks familiar, but no.” [laughs]

TS: How's the theology school going?

MH: Good. We're two weeks in now to the live class. People are enjoying it, and I'm able to keep up with that. We're going to get hit on Monday. That's when the

distance ed. class opens up. We have 120 or 130 live students spread out over two nights, and there's another 600 by distance. So that's going to challenge us logistically. So we're just waiting for it to happen. That kind of means that this week is the first real week as far as what the work load's going to be like and how the week goes. We're about ready to find out. So next week I'll have either an updated report or lament. [laughs] Just wait and see how things go, how we keep up with everything.

TS: And I saw you posted pictures about your new book that's out.

MH: Oh yeah, the Enoch book. Yeah. It's still on Amazon as shipping in March, but they released it early. So yeah, people can go up and order it. It's *A Readers' Commentary on the Book of Enoch, Volume 1*, which is the first 36 chapters of the book of Enoch. The first 36 chapters are also known as the Book of the Watchers. So yeah, people can order it now and get it. For those who might not be familiar with what a readers' commentary is, this is not a verse-by-verse, look-at-every-word kind of commentary, because that'd be 1000 pages for these 36 chapters. It's just me kind of like, if I were sitting there with you while you were reading the book of Enoch, commenting on things that would help you understand what in the world the book is saying—what it's about, what's going on. So there's nothing like it in print, which is kind of surprising. You either get zero or you get these high-end... There does exist a high-end, really, really detailed two-volume work on the book of Enoch. And then even the old version by R.H. Charles done at the turn of the 20th century still exists in public domain, but it pre-supposes people can read Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic characters. So we're trying to fill a gap here with something far less dense that is reader-friendly and helpful. So if you're interested in Enoch, by all means, please get the book.

TS: Well, Mike, this is our second Q&A on Exodus. We lied. We said we were only going to have two. But we're going to stretch this out into three Q&As because we just can't get enough of Exodus. We don't quite want to let it go just yet. But we are going to have three parts. We did have to whittle these questions down. We appreciate everybody who sent in the questions and apologize to the ones that we couldn't get to. But Mike, we have a lot of questions here. So how about we just jump into it?

MH: Yeah, we should. Some of these are actually pretty involved. We are trying to whittle out thesis questions. And you're going to wonder, "Boy, that one that you did today was pretty long!" It is, but it's still not a thesis question. So we're trying. But yeah. There are some in this episode, having looked at the questions, that are going to be pretty involved.

TS: Okay. Well, our first question's going to be from Susan.

4:40

She has a question about the verbs *chazaq* and *qashah*. She was wondering if you could address these two verbs used, and what's

the difference, and why these two verbs are specifically used in Exodus 7.

MH: Usually, you have... I'll try to summarize it this way. These are both verbs that are used in the "hardening" passages, where Pharaoh or God hardens Pharaoh's heart. And typically, you have *chazaq* used to describe that. But occasionally, you get this other verb (*qashah*). And so the question is essentially, "Why? What's the difference here? Why not just use one verb?" There's really no meaningful difference. It's nuancing the same idea. *Chazaq* is a term that refers to either physical hardness... It would be used in contexts where it's talking about something that is physically hard or something that's really strong—unable to be broken or torn, that sort of thing. And by extension, metaphorically, it speaks to a determined, solidified resistance. *Qashah*, on the other hand, often speaks to severity or difficulty of something. It's the word, for instance, behind the phrase that you see in English translations "stiff-necked," like "you're a stiff-necked people." Literally, it's "you're difficult of neck" or "difficult of the back of the neck." So it's an idiomatic expression for just being really stubborn—being difficult. So metaphorically, that option (*qashah*) is an abstraction of a physical posture or an expressive posture that connotes stubbornness or resistance. So both lemmas essentially make the same point. It's just a slightly different nuancing between them.

TS: Our next question is from Mike. And he says:

6:45

I never knew chronology and geography could contain so many issues. [MH laughs] Chronology and geography in the same sentence... impossible !?!? Truly baffling. Where is three days into the wilderness to sacrifice unto the Lord? 1) Sinai is not the place. They arrived here on the third moon after leaving Egypt, in Exodus 19:1. And 2) Marah is the place. On their way to sacrifice to the Lord, Exodus 15:22 and Numbers 33:8 both put them at Marah, three days after entering the wilderness.

MH: Yeah, these examples actually show us how complicated this is. It doesn't uncomplicate anything. So on the one hand, Exodus 19... I'll just read it.

On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai.

Well, three new moons... That would be about three months, which is a reasonable chronology. And so if that was it, you could just say, "Oh, okay. We have a three-month chronology here. That's easy." However, Marah, of course, refers to three days after entering the wilderness. So what do we have here? Is there an overlap between Marah and the wilderness of Sinai? You have this three-days afterward... Because the only sacrifice that you're going to see occurs

at Sinai with the covenant. So now you have a location of the wilderness of Sinai (broadly). You have Marah. And when you get to Exodus 24, it's at the mountain (Sinai). So what are we supposed to do with that? If you ask yourself, "Where does the sacrifice occur and are there any other sacrifices?" The answer is, "At Mount Sinai." And you say, "Well, why is that important?" It's important because when they're standing before Pharaoh... And it isn't just that scene. It's other scenes. The demand is, "Let the people go." Yahweh wants you to let his people go so they can go three days and offer a sacrifice. You have this reference... I'll just read some. In Exodus 3:18, when God tells him at the burning bush... "They will listen to your voice." He's speaking to Moses.

You and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.'

Exodus 5:3:

The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God...

10:00

Exodus 8:27, Exodus 15:22... These are phrases that connect going into the wilderness three days with a sacrifice. The only sacrifice that you get in the story is at Mount Sinai. So let's just take those verses and compare them to Exodus 19, which is a very obvious reference to three months. How do you put those things together? Why wouldn't Moses say before Pharaoh, "Hey, let us go to God's mountain," (not even give a chronology), "so that we can offer sacrifice." Or "let us go three months into the wilderness," or something like that, "that we can offer sacrifice." The statements aren't the same. And the difficulty is, how do you come up with something that is congruent? And you have the added issue of, "Okay. Are we headed *into* the wilderness?" (Like we're still moving toward it?) Or should we translate some of these verses "as they when *through* the wilderness" (like on the way to Sinai)? That's actually workable. I shouldn't say workable. That's actually a possibility. It's a legitimate translation to take these references to going three days into the wilderness and going three days *through* the wilderness. I don't even know if it helps, though. It's the same preposition in all of the occurrences where the three days are connected with the *beth* (that's the preposition in Hebrew) and then the word for wilderness. It's always the preposition *beth*. It can mean "through" rather than "into" or "to" (like a directional kind of thing).

So these are the data that you essentially have to play with. So sure, Exodus 19:1 is three months. That's clear. But how does that work with all the other ones? It's up to the interpreter to figure this out. And it definitely is part of the

whole discussion of where we're going to locate Sinai, depending on how you answer the question of, "Where are we going?" Are we going to it or through it? Should we isolate the three days to just the wilderness? And you might say, "That's a convenient way to handle the whole thing." Again, the problem is, the sacrifice is at Mount Sinai. That's about the only sure thing we have. That's where the sacrifice is and there isn't another sacrifice. So you can make that argument, but that still leaves the question on the table, "Why wasn't Moses and Aaron's wording different when it came to their conversation with Pharaoh?" Because it's quite incomplete. That's what you're left with. You could argue, "That was intentional. He didn't need to know." You can speculate on how this might work, and that's what commentators do. They speculate on how to put all these things together. So there is no quick fix to this sort of thing. And it's not solved by just appealing to Exodus 19:1. Exodus 19:1, I think, makes the issue more pronounced. But it's there. So it's part of the data and we have to think about it.

TS: Arnold has the next question. He's trying to get his head around Exodus 7. It says "see, I have made you like a God to Pharaoh."

13:00

I am wondering, did Pharaoh consider Moses as a usurper to his kingdom because he had been part of the royal family? Pharaoh represented his God and Moses represented Yahweh. Kind of a battle of the Gods with the demonstration of the plagues being the demonstrations of the "demons or fallen angels, gods." Am I reading too much into this?

MH: Well, I would say, based upon how the story plays out, the answer would be, "Yeah." Now if it was before Moses leaves Egypt, the pharaoh very well could have seen him as a usurper. In other words, if you take the whole story and you take out the fact that Moses killed an Egyptian and has to run away... And he's in exile and God tells him that, "You're going to go be my deliverer and you're going to bring the people out of here and you're going to bring them back *here*." If you took that element out... If you just had Moses in Egypt and then somehow Moses does these miraculous things to punish the Egyptian gods, well then yeah, that's like a usurper confrontation. But those other things *are* there. Basically, Moses is demanding (because this is what God tells him to say) to *leave* Egypt. He doesn't want to *stay*, so he can't really be viewed as a usurper. What kind of usurper would say, "I'm going to take over your kingdom, but I'm never going to be here. Let me out of here!" So it doesn't work on that level. But I'll grant the idea, anyway, absent these details of the story. But there's no indication that Moses wants to stick around and rule, which is how I would parse a term like usurper.

15:00

Going a related direction, just dealing with the term itself, I think the statement is relatively straightforward about being an *elohim*—being like a god to Pharaoh. The signs and wonders that occur at the hand of Moses... We know God is doing this through him. But from Pharaoh's perspective, these are things that a god

does. This is the power of deity. And since Moses is the agent—he's the conduit for these things—he's naturally going to perceive Moses as having godlike power. So Moses, of course, in the story is going to relate what's happening to the power of Yahweh. He's not going to claim to be the source of the power. But from Pharaoh's perspective, that's the way it would look. This is the power of a God that Pharaoh had refused to acknowledge. I do take the plagues as a contest between Yahweh and the gods of Egypt. We spent a good deal of time on that idea in several episodes of the podcast that cover the plagues. So I think that's kind of obvious, especially when you drill down and try to think like an Egyptian here as far as what's happening to you. How does this affect not only your day-to-day life, but when you factor in what they're thinking about the gods (how the gods are supposed to maintain their everyday life, especially Pharaoh being the incarnation of Horus)... well, it's hard to read it not as an attack on Egyptian theology—the various gods in the pantheon. But as far as “usurper,” when I see that term, I think somebody who wants to stick around and rule in the place of the one who is king at time. And that really just isn't part of the story.

TS: Kimberly has a question about the difference between the Book of the Covenant and the Two Tablets of Stone.

16:30

Why do you suppose God wrote with his finger on the tablets when Moses had already written the book? And how many times did Moses go up into the mount to meet the Lord? One time he comes down to warn the people to stay back beyond the boundary, another he comes down when the people are in heinous apostasy, and another he comes down and builds 12 pillars and an altar. Am I reading this right?

MH: Well, yeah, it's really hard to track the coming and going. And we actually alluded to this in a couple of episodes. Because, not only for the reasons that Kimberly just mentioned, where you have to read the story and think, “Is he coming all the way down or part of the way down (or is he shouting down) to do these things?” You have to reconstruct the events in your imagination. And commentators have to do the same thing. That's just part of the enterprise. So we're not really told explicitly whether he's still on the mountain when he does this or that, or he's moving around, or whether these are clean-cut, up-and-down movements. That's one issue. The other issue is, when you get these episodes, you have interspersed (before the episodes even end discretely) other material thrown in there. And it really makes the chronology quite difficult to follow. So you have this confusing, intrusive nature of some of the material. It's not something that can really be avoided. It's just that the text is what it is.

So we hit on this a little bit in earlier episodes, but to narrow the focus... I'm not saying this necessarily helps. It might even be cheating a little bit. But if you narrow the focus and ask, “How many times did he go up and back to receive the *law*?” (Let's telescope it a little bit.) Well, there are two of those. And with the other comings and goings, you have to in your mind's eye imagine what's going

on in the scene, and we lack some information about if he comes all the way down or if he moves around, different parts, and all this kind of stuff. So if you're talking about receiving the tablets of the law, those are two episodes. There's one before the golden calf debacle and one after. That's a neat way to divide them, even though you have this intrusive material in there. But that much I think is discernable. But whether that's the whole picture or not is the question.

So due to the ordering of the material prior to the golden calf, Moses' comings and goings can sound pretty confusing. Another idea (and some commentators actually do this)... If we take out all the intrusive sections, then what does it read like? (To sort of answer this question.) If you do that, then that helps a little bit. I think it does. But we're not saying, "Take out the material and throw it away." It's just, "Take it out. See what it reads like in narrative form, and that might help clarify things." So that would be my suggestion as far as, just take a whack at it, and see if that doesn't make anything clearer.

As far as the "finger of God" language, Exodus 24:12, interesting enough... Let's just read a couple of these. Exodus 24:12 reads as follows:

20:00

¹²The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction."

And you'll notice it says "which I have written." God takes credit for writing these. There's no phrase that says "finger of God" in that verse, but you do have verses that talk about God essentially producing the written content and then giving it to Moses. So not only do you have "finger of God" language (and that would be Exodus 31:18 where that phrase is actually found)...

¹⁸And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

Then you have a third reference (Exodus 32:16).

¹⁶The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

Does that mean... It doesn't quite sound like Exodus 24:12, which really does sound like God's doing the writing. The writing of God might be that God was its ultimate point of origin. It could've been a dictation or something else. But you still have that verse that you *could* read as though God is the one actually producing the written content. So there are three of these in Exodus. When you

go to Deuteronomy, you also get the idea. Remember in Deuteronomy, you're going to have a lot of repetition from Exodus. So Deuteronomy 9:10:

¹⁰ And the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words that the LORD had spoken with you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly.

Deuteronomy 10:4 is a related passage. So we have two of these in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 10:4 says:

⁴ And he wrote on the tablets, in the same writing as before, the Ten Commandments that the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. And the LORD gave them to me.

So who's the "he"? If you back up...

"At that time the LORD said to me, 'Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to me on the mountain and make an ark of wood. ²And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets that you broke, and you shall put them in the ark.'

So the "he" a few verses later in Deuteronomy 10:4 is apparently God there. We don't have the "finger of God" statement, but we have this idea of God writing. So those are five passages. In two of them, you have the phrase "finger of God" and the other ones can be read as though God's producing the stuff. Now what do we do with that? Jewish and Christian commentators disagree over the anthropomorphic language. "If God's the one writing, then he has to have fingers. He has to have a hand. He has to be embodied." That kind of thing. So they disagree over how to handle the anthropomorphic language here, either literally or some other way.

Now I think (and people who have read *Unseen Realm* [will be familiar with this]) that Yahweh as a man was at Sinai, giving Moses the law. And I talk a little bit about that in *Unseen Realm* in relation to Paul's comment about an intermediary on Mount Sinai in Galatians 3:19. Let me just read that. It's on page 166 of *Unseen Realm* that I get into this. Paul asks:

¹⁹ Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.

Now an "intermediary" implies more than one, but God is one. So in *Unseen Realm*, I talk about why would Paul be concerned to qualify what's going on at

Sinai? Why does he have to say, “Here’s what happened at Sinai. There was this intermediary figure.” And I talk about how Jewish commentators will say the intermediary is Moses. Well, that doesn’t make any sense. If it’s Moses, why is Paul concerned to qualify his statement that, “Oh, lest you get freaked out. I still believe that God is one.” If we have a second Yahweh figure there, that makes more sense, that God has to say, “Look, God is still one.” So because of Paul’s language there, I do think that the embodied... Maybe not embodied. Or at least the... Well, he’d have to be embodied if he’s writing. But at the very least, there’s an anthropomorphic Yahweh figure like we’ve seen at so many other places in the Torah. I think that he’s present at Sinai giving the law. So when I look at “finger of God” statements and some of these other statements about God producing the content, I take them at face value, because I do think we have God as a man on Sinai dispensing the law. And I’m not the only one who thinks that. There are other people who take the anthropomorphism there similarly. But there are plenty of other people who don’t. They just say there’s nothing like that going on. So those who either don’t consider this idea or they’re uncomfortable with it would prefer to point to other references to God’s fingers in verses that talk about creation, like Psalm 8:4 (just to be fair to the other side).

⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,

and the son of man that you care for him?

⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings

and crowned him with glory and honor.

⁶ You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;

There’s a reference to hands there. But if you go back to verse 3:

³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars, which you have set in place...

They would say, “Well, was there an embodied God there doing creation with the stars? There’s a reference to God’s fingers that’s obviously figurative.” Okay, I get that. That doesn’t really help me deal with Paul’s language and it certainly doesn’t erase the number of places in the Torah where Yahweh does come as a man. So I find that trajectory unsatisfying for those reasons. But anyway, that’s how I look at it. I think that it’s there to bring out this second Yahweh-in-human-form idea. That’s why I think the finger of God language is there.

TS: John thinks:

26:30

You have presented some good arguments on both sides of the early/late date debate for the Exodus. However, there is something that is confusing to me in regards to the late date. If we know from Egyptology where Ramesses II is buried and when he died, doesn't

that cancel him out of the picture for the Exodus since by the Biblical account the Pharaoh of the Exodus was swept away in the Red Sea? Also, how does the lifespan of Ramses the II (1303 BC- 1213 BC) account the for the Merneptah Stele from 1208 BC which lists Israel in line 27 as an already established nation?

MH: There are two parts to this. On the first part, about the pharaoh of the Exodus being swept away in the Red Sea, we talked about this language earlier in the podcast in the episodes that dealt with the crossing. Late-daters, of course, are going to dispute that language. Let me just read it. This is Psalm 136:15. Let me get a little bit of the context here.

- ¹⁰ **to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt,
for his steadfast love endures forever;**
- ¹¹ **and brought Israel out from among them,
for his steadfast love endures forever;**
- ¹² **with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,
for his steadfast love endures forever;**
- ¹³ **to him who divided the Red Sea in two,
for his steadfast love endures forever;**
- ¹⁴ **and made Israel pass through the midst of it,
for his steadfast love endures forever;**
- ¹⁵ **but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea,
for his steadfast love endures forever;**

Now there's the verse reference right there. So late-daters are going to say, "Well, there's no reason that we have to take that terminology and think that Pharaoh was killed. It's not any of the normal Hebrew words for killed or destroyed or anything like that. It means overthrew or shook off." So they're going to dispute the wording. They're also going to go to Exodus 14 (the actual account of the crossing) and say, "Well, it has that all of Pharaoh's horsemen and his chariots are the ones that actually go into the sea. It never actually says that Pharaoh went in." So they would argue that Psalm 136:15 should not be read as though Pharaoh *did* go into the sea. You're assuming that he went into the sea because of the overthrow language, but again, it's not the language for killing or destruction. So they're just going to dispute the whole thing and say that the verse is inconclusive.

When it comes to the second part of the question, the Merneptah Stela (or the Merneptah Stela—you'll see the pharaoh's name spelled both ways)... This is actually a famous late-date argument. So I'm going to read a little excerpt here from *Dictionary of the Old Testament, Pentateuch* volume. Walton wrote this on the date of the exodus. He specifically discusses the Merneptah Stela and something that's related. So I'll just read this. He writes:

30:00

This victory poem contains the earliest extrabiblical reference to Israel [MH: that may not be true anymore, but we'll just go with it] and has been quite controversial. Uncontested is that it is to be dated in Merneptah's fifth year toward the end of the thirteenth century. [That's in the 1200's B.C.] The significant line reads "Israel is laid waste; its seed is not." The context refers to four entities in the land of Canaan/Kharu [MH: Kharu is Egyptian for Canaan]. Three of them, Ashkelon, Gezer and Yano'am, are marked by the determinative that indicates they were city-states.

Now let me just stop there. Egyptian... In many of its words, they will put a hieroglyph (I mean, they're all hieroglyphs, obviously) at the end of a word to classify it. Scholars call it a determinative. It's not something that gets translated verbally or even transliterated. It's a cheat. It's like a visual cheat. It just allows you to classify a category for the word. What he's saying here is, three of the four entities named in this stela get the determinative that indicates they were city-states.

Israel, in contrast, is marked by the determinative that indicates it was a socioreligious group.

In other words, not a city-state. They're not really established, like in towns and cities. Otherwise, they would get the other determinative. Walton continues:

This marks a largely immovable end point for discussion about the exodus. [MH: That's a nice statement there.] Not only was Israel in the land by 1207, but it is likely that they had not just gotten there, and more likely that the initial campaigns of the conquest had been completed and the transition had been made into the judges period. Even if we allow only five years for the initial stages of the conquest and then add a generation in the wilderness, this inscription would push the latest possible date of the exodus at least back to 1240 or 1250, or midway through Ramesses II.

So that gives you a little bit of Walton's disposition towards this. But again, a late-dater is going to look at this and say, "Look, the reason it's marked this way, even if they had been there five or 30 or 40 years is the conditions of a settled national entity to the writer of this stela were not present. So you have that issue. And both early- and late-daters are going to argue. They're going to have to (just like with the visits up and down Sinai) visualize what this means—the presence or the absence of this particular determinative (city-state or *not* in Israel's case). Something that's not a city-state, just a people group. Now Walton goes on and he mentions some work done with inscriptions at Karnak.

In 1978 [Frank] Yurco deduced that reliefs on the western face of the enclosure wall of the Cour de Cachette at Karnak belonged to Merneptah rather than Ramesses II, as previously thought. The relief pictures the siege of three fortified cities and the conquest of a fourth entity not connected to a fortified city. Only one of the cities is identified: Ashkelon, one of the four enemies listed on the Merneptah Stela. Consequently, Yurco surmised that the two other besieged cities pictured on the wall but not named could be Gezer and Yano‘am, also listed on the [Merneptah] stela. If this correlation between the wall and the stela holds, the fourth scene on the wall could well represent the Israelites. A. F. [Anson] Rainey (2001) rejects this last identification because Egypt’s enemy in scene four has chariots, which Rainey considers unlikely for Israel in this period. He suggests that Israel should be associated with the Shasu pastoralists who were being brought as prisoners in the wall reliefs rather than with the enemy of scene four. Most have accepted Yurco’s identification, which only reinforces the conclusions drawn from the Merneptah Stela.

35:00

Let me try to summarize this. What you have with the Merneptah Stela... If the Exodus had occurred in 1446 B.C., that’s over 200 years before Merneptah. And it’s also well after the conquest. You’re well into the judges period. And they’re now occupying cities that they inherit after the conquest. So the Merneptah Stela wouldn’t make much sense at all. You could read it, “Oh, maybe they were driven out of these cities. Maybe he’s just in a district that they’re running around...” You know, you use your imagination. But it just wouldn’t make any sense. Now, however, if the Exodus had occurred in the time of Ramses (30-40 years prior to Merneptah) and they’re not yet into the land and occupying these cities... You say, “How does that work with the conquest? What would the Egyptians be doing there? How can the Egyptians take credit for laying Israel waste when the conquest is going on?” I get it. There are problems there, too. But the issue is, not seeing Israel as an established city-state makes more sense with the late date exodus than not. I think you can already see that either view has problems. And proponents of either view are going to have their way of reconstructing in the imagination of their audience how this would work, to either get rid of the Merneptah Stela as being relevant or to make it a pillar of the argument. It’s just the way it goes. It’s like everything else when it comes to the date of the exodus. You’re going to have ways of defending the data point, and you’re going to have ways of undermining it. So nothing changes here, really, in terms of the outcome.

TS: Alright. Our next question, a few people were tracking on the same thing. Roland and Dianne in Valley Center, CA, and also Nick. They wanted some insight over the connection between Exodus 3 and John 8:58. And Roland and Dianne’s question is:

36:40

Do you understand that the Jews understood Jesus was declaring that He was the eternal God, incarnate, and that He equated Himself with the “I AM” statement in Exodus 3:14? There are many “I AM”

statements in the book of John such as, “I am the Bread of Life” in John 6:35, 41, 48, 51; and “I am the light of the world” in John 8:12. By making these statements, do you believe that Jesus is saying that He is the “I AM” of Exodus 3:14?

MH: Well, the way I would answer this is first of all, I think theologically, yes, there's plenty in John that identifies and thus equates Jesus with God (with the God of the burning bush). I say it that way because it is not at all clear that the I AM statements go back to Exodus 3:14. Now you might be wondering, “Now, how in the world is that? Because in Exodus 3:14, God says, ‘I AM WHO I AM’ or ‘I AM THAT I AM.’” And then *egō eimi* in John, which occurs in a number of passages, is translated “I am”. So it's assumed that when you see it in John, that the reference is the burning bush incident. But there's actually another good candidate, and some would even argue a better candidate. The theology produced in either direction is the same. Jesus is identifying himself with Yahweh or being identified with Yahweh.

But since this is kind of a (I don't want to say a popular topic, but it's something that you might hear in church), I thought we would drill down on this a little bit. I think the I AM statements (whatever their point of reference—let's just set that aside for the moment) certainly create a connection between Jesus and the Father. The only question is, what do those statements derive from? So you have two issues. There's the statement (the “I AM”) and then where it comes from. Now having already affirmed that, yeah, these I AM statements (at least some of them) do equate Jesus with God (the Father), I want to get into the weeds here a little bit, because I don't think that all of them do. And the issue here is grammar.

Now for those of you who might have this in Logos... You might have it in hard copy, but I want to read some extended parts of Father Raymond Brown's commentary on John. It's a two-volume massive commentary on John. It's actually a famous commentary. It's in the Anchor Bible series. Father Brown is the same guy who wrote a 1500-page book on the birth of the Messiah and another 1500-page book on the death of the Messiah. It's just really good stuff. It's incredibly detailed. So these are go-to resources for the Gospel of John and really the life of Christ. And you can imagine, Father Brown was a famous Catholic scholar, so this is really important to them. [laughs] So this is an incredibly detailed treatment. He has an appendix in his commentary on *egō eimi* (I am). He has a whole appendix on it. And it's long. But I'm going to read you parts of it just so you can start to see why I would answer the way I do. So I think yes, some of these really do create a link between Jesus and God the Father. That's the, “Does it or does it not create this theology?” My answer to that is yes. But not all of them do. And then the second question (which we'll get to) is, “What's the Old Testament reference point?” So Father Brown writes this:

40:00

The Gr. *egō eimi*, “I am,” can be simply a phrase of common speech, equivalent to “It is I” or “I am the one.” However, it also has had a solemn and sacral use in the OT, the NT, Gnosticism, and pagan Greek religious writings. Bultmann... [MH: He’s going to quote Rudolph Bultmann here.], p. 1672, has classified four different uses of the formula:

I think these are actually handy for how we would interpret the language.

(a) Präsentationsformel, or an introduction, answering the question, “Who are you?” Thus, “I am Socrates”; or in Gen 17:1, “I am El Shaddai.” [MH: So the first way *egō eimi* in Greek can be used is just to answer the question, “Who are you?”] **(b) Qualifikationsformel**, or as a description of the subject, answering the question, “What are you?” [MH: Now catch that. *Egō eimi* can answer the question, “Who are you?” and it can also answer the question, “What are you?” Father Brown’s example is:] Thus, “I am a philosopher”; or in Ezek 28:2, the king of Tyre says, “I am a god.” **(c) Identifikationsformel**, where the speaker identifies himself with another person or thing. Bultmann cites a saying of Isis, “I am all that has been, that is, and that will be.” The predicate sums up the identity of the subject. **(d) Rekognitionsformel**, or a formula that separates the subject from others. It answers the question, “Who is the one who ...?” with the response, “It is I.” This is an instance in which the “I” is really a predicate.

Now keeping in mind this spectrum of usage, extending from the banal to the sacral, let us consider the use of *egō eimi* in John. Grammatically we may distinguish three types of use:

(1) The absolute use with no predicate.

Now you need to know a little grammar here. *Egō eimi* is a personal pronoun and a verb. “I am.” Literally, it’s “I, I am.” You could translate it “I myself am” just to convey the idea that you have a pronoun (first person pronoun) and then a verb form of the “to be” verb that is first person singular. You have them coupled together. But there’s no predicate. Remember from grammar, you have a subject and a predicate. The verb “am” is not an action verb. It’s not what grammarians call a *fientive* verb. It’s a state of being verb. So it doesn’t offer you any predication. Predication is a way of commenting on the subject. So “I am a teacher.” “A teacher” would be the predicate because it’s a way to comment on the subject, which is “I.” “Am” just sort of links the two. So Brown is saying, “Look, sometimes *egō eimi* occurs with no predicate. There’s nothing added to it that would describe the subject in any way. It’s just not there. So the absolute use occurs a few times in John.

Thus,

8:24: “Unless you come to believe that I AM, you will surely die in your sins.”

8:28: “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM.” [MH: It’s just there by itself, is the point.]

8:58: “Before Abraham even came into existence, I AM.”

13:19: “When it does happen, you may believe that I AM.”

There is a natural tendency to feel that these statements are incomplete; for instance, in 8:25 the Jews respond by asking, “Well, then, who are you?”

45:00 Jesus says, “Unless you come to believe that I AM, you will surely die in your sins.” So the Jews are thinking, “Well, he didn’t complete the sentence. That you’re what? Unless you come to believe that I’m what? Finish the sentence.” So they actually ask him, “Well, who *are* you?” It felt incomplete to them. Brown says:

Since this usage goes far beyond ordinary parlance [MH: in other words, this doesn’t sound like normal speech], all recognize that the absolute *egō eimi* [MH: with no predicate] has a special revelatory function in John...

And I would agree. My personal view is that the absolute instances when *egō eimi* is not qualified at all (it’s just “I am”), I really do think those are specifically designed to link Jesus with God. We’re not yet at the part of the question, “What’s the point of origin? Is it the burning bush or something else?” And I’ll tell you what the something else is in a moment. But I think those are the most compelling ones. And this is where Brown is tracking here. So let’s go to his second way that we find *egō eimi* used in John.

(2) The use where a predicate may be understood even though it is not expressed.

So from the context, sometimes you can infer a predication.

[John] 6:20: The disciples in the boat are frightened because they see someone coming to them on the water. Jesus assures them, “*Egō eimi*; do not be afraid.” Here the expression may simply mean, [MH: “Hey, it’s me”] “It is I, i.e., someone whom you know, and not a supernatural being or a ghost.” [MH: “Don’t freak out.”] We shall point out, however, that divine theophanies in the OT often have this formula: Do not be afraid; I am the God of your ancestors... [John] 6:20 John may well be giving us an epiphany scene, and thus playing on both the ordinary and sacral use of *egō eimi*.

Playing on these Old Testament instances. Now if that’s the case, Brown is saying, “Well, John 6:20 might have come from somewhere else other than Exodus 3. It might have come from one of these other theophany scenes.” But we’re still not at the question of, “Where does this come from?” He also brings up, in this category, this inferred predication. John 18:5:

18:5: The soldiers and police who have come to the garden across the Kidron to arrest Jesus announce that they are seeking Jesus, and Jesus answers, “*Egō eimi.*” This means, “I am he”; but the fact that those who hear it fall to the ground when he answers suggests a form of theophany which leaves men prostrate in fear before God. Once again John seems to be playing on a twofold use of *egō eimi*.

I would agree with this as well. I think John 18:5 is one of these instances that equate Jesus with God. But again, we’re still not at the question of, “Where does it come from?” So those are the first two categories that Brown says. Now third, you also see this in the Gospel of John:

(3) The use with a predicate nominative. In seven instances Jesus speaks of himself figuratively.

6:35, 51:	“I am the bread of life [living bread].”
8:12 (9:5):	“I am the light of the world.”
10:7, 9:	“I am the [sheep]gate.”
10:11, 14:	“I am the model shepherd.”
11:25:	“I am the resurrection and the life.”
14:6:	“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”
15:1, 5:	“I am the [real] vine.”

Brown says, “That’s just a taste of what’s going on here.” So you can see in that third category (use with a predicate nominative) it’s qualified. *Egō eimi* is accompanied by another word that defines it or that says something about *I* (the speaker, the subject). And that is not what you have in Exodus 3 or in this other thing that I’m going to introduce you to in a moment. So at least those... There’s no coherent way to say those go back to Exodus 3 (the burning bush).

The other two categories... I think really the first one (*egō eimi* with no predication)... That’s the strongest link I think between Jesus and God. But category #2 (*egō eimi* with sort of a contextually suggested predicate) can work, too. The third category, I don’t see that. Because “I am the resurrection and the life.” Okay, well, God is the source of life. We know that. But maybe God is just using this agent to affect life. In other words, it doesn’t have to be a necessary equation. “I am the good shepherd.” Well... It’s not a clear path back to an equation with God. I realize you can do sermonic things. You can get there in a roundabout way. I understand that. But the first two categories of the three are more secure footing that’s consistent with the grammar and the grammar in context.

50:00

Now let’s move on to the second question: the possible source. Now it’s true, it could be Exodus 3. It could be the burning bush incident because it’s true that in the Septuagint, Exodus 3:14 reads as *egō eimi*. (The Septuagint is Greek and so

is *egō eimi*.) But the reason I and others are hesitant to say, “Bingo, that’s it,” is because a really good argument can be made that *egō eimi* in the Septuagint is used of something else that makes the same theological point. It is often used to translate a statement in Yahweh’s mouth in the Hebrew Bible. And that is *’anî hû’* (“I am he”). And it’s actually a really important statement. I’m going to read you a few of these.

Deuteronomy 32:39

³⁹“See now that I, even I, am he,
and there is no god beside me;
I kill and I make alive;
I wound and I heal;
and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

Isaiah 41:4

⁴Who has performed and done this,
calling the generations from the beginning?
I, the LORD, the first,
and with the last; I am he.

Isaiah 43:10

¹⁰“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD,
“and my servant whom I have chosen,
that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he.
Before me no god was formed,
nor shall there be any after me.

Isaiah 43:13

¹³Also henceforth I am he;
there is none who can deliver from my hand;
I work, and who can turn it back?”

Isaiah 46:4

⁴even to your old age I am he...

Isaiah 48:12

¹²“Listen to me, O Jacob,
and Israel, whom I called!

**I am he; I am the first,
and I am the last.**

Isaiah 52:6

“Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am.”

You have... *’anî* is I. It’s the first-person pronoun in Hebrew. You also have an alternative (*’anôkî hû’*). You have that, too. Instead of *’anî hû’*, you have *’anôkî hû’*.

Isaiah 43:25

**²⁵“I, I am he
who blots out your transgressions for my own sake,
and I will not remember your sins.**

Isaiah 51:12

**¹²“I, I am he who comforts you;
who are you that you are afraid of man who dies,
of the son of man who is made like grass...**

So these examples of *’anî hû’* or *’anôkî hû’* in the Hebrew Bible, most of them in the Septuagint are *egō eimi*. So you could actually have John’s *egō eimi* statements going back to that. So you have a choice. It’s either Exodus 3 or it’s these instances of *’anî hû’* or *’anôkî hû’*. Most of them are in the servant portion of Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55). There are a couple (or at least one) in Deuteronomy. So which is it? And the answer is, who knows? It could be either. It could be both. So it’s not a clear-cut thing. Even though you’ll hear this from the pulpit a lot that *egō eimi* in John... You’ll hear two things that are... One of them is clearly mistaken, that all instances of *egō eimi* equate Jesus with God. That is not the case. We read seven or eight of them that are qualified that don’t really answer that question. But you have a number of them that I think certainly do, and I’m not alone here. A lot of scholars would say, “Yep, this is what John’s doing. It’s blunt. Especially the non-predicated ones. They sound odd because they want to draw attention to this theological point of equating Jesus with God (with the Father). So it’s not correct to say that *all* of them do this. I’d say a good number of them do. And secondly, it’s also not certain that it goes back to the burning bush episode. It might. But it also might go back to this other statement (“I am he”—*’anî hû’* or *’anôkî hû’*). Most of them are in the servant songs of Isaiah and then one in Deuteronomy. But who knows? The theology is the same. It’s just... It’s a little more complicated than what you might think or what you might hear.

TS: Alright, Mike. Well, that’s all the questions we have this time. That’s it.

55:00

MH: It was a lot again. They're good questions. These are not, like, Bible trivia questions. These are good questions.

TS: Absolutely. They are good questions. Alright, Mike, we're going to have another Exodus Q&A after this. Then we have some interviews coming up shortly after that in March. So be looking forward to that. And with that I want to thank everybody for sending in their questions. And thank you, Mike, for answering them, and everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.