

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 314

Exodus Q&A, Part 3

March 9, 2020

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

**Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)**

### Episode Summary

Dr. Heiser answers your questions:

- Were the Israelites aware of their relationship with Yahweh before Moses took them out of Egypt? [Time stamp 2:15]
- Why is it necessary that the laws covered in Exodus 21-23 be added late in the time of the land? [4:10]
- Do you know of any academic sources that would agree that Anoki or Anki are really Enki—as in Enki Yehovah? [7:40]
- Instead of giving Israel the land of Canaan, why didn't God just give them Egypt? [19:10]
- Do the Dead Sea Scrolls or Septuagint shed light on the hand against the throne of Yahweh/hand upon the banner of Yahweh? [24:40]
- Do you believe the "I will" statements in Isaiah 14 are echoes of Pharaoh's statements in Exodus 15? [25:20]
- Is it possible that Aaron is telling the truth in Ex. 32:24, that the calf really did come out of the fire in some supernatural manner? [30:10]
- Is it possible that the Levites were only demanding that the Israelites repent after the golden calf instead of killing them? [50:00]

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 314: Exodus Q&A, Part 3. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! Guess what? I hit the record button this time.

**MH:** That's good.

**TS:** Mike and I just went through the whole intro of this and the first question, and I noticed I didn't hit the record button. So Mike, I got the record button this time. First time in five years.

**MH:** I was just going to say, we should tell everybody that that's the first time you've done that. So...

**TS:** I get a pass on that one.

**MH:** First time for everything. It's a mulligan.

**TS:** Yeah. I looked down, and I read the first question of the Q&A and, "Oh, it wasn't recording!" So we've got lights now. I guess all these lights mean it's on. It's working. [MH laughs] Hello? Is this mike on?

**MH:** That's good. I don't really have any lights on this end. [laughs]

**TS:** Oh my gosh, Mike. What did we talk about? Now we need to recreate what we talked about a few minutes ago when I wasn't recording.

**MH:** No we don't. The word "baseball" was in there and then you probably zoned out...

**TS:** That's right. That's exactly right. You were talking about the Naked Bible league coming up.

**MH:** No, you didn't hit the button before I mentioned the word baseball, so you can't blame it on that.

**TS:** Yeah, I fell asleep. That's why I didn't hit the button. Baseball.

**MH:** Right.

**TS:** Oh my gosh.

**MH:** You knew it was coming, right?

**TS:** Just how happy are the people that we saved them from a lot of baseball talk?

**MH:** Their loss.

**TS:** [laughs] Did we talk about anything else important, before we get into the questions here?

**MH:** Not as important as baseball, no. So we can just jump in.

**TS:** Alright. That's what we do. Here we go. Alright. Our first question...

**MH:** Are we recording? [laughs]

**TS:** We are recording this time. Our first question *again*, is Ginny. She asked the same question I read a while ago:

2:15

**I did a study some months ago in Sunday School regarding the Passover in Egypt. I found a website about threshold covenants. In looking at those covenants and reading about how they were executed, I begin to wonder if the Israelites performed sacrifices and other worship-related events to the gods of Egypt. Were they aware of their relationship to Yahweh before Moses took them out of the land?**

**MH:** Well I have to confess that I've never heard of the term "threshold covenants" before, so I'm not sure how to answer this one. But in any event, the gist of the question is something we actually covered during the first Q&A. I can't specifically recall which question it was. But it was about the knowledge that Moses had of his ancestry and Yahweh and things like that. I think it was the first or second question of the first Q&A. So there'll be more elaboration there. Suffice it to say at this point, I think it's reasonable to think that Abraham's descendants told stories about their ancestors. So they would have been aware of their relationship to the God of their fathers. Whether they had heard the name Yahweh before depends on how you take Exodus 6:3, which of course we talked about during the Exodus series and in that earlier Q&A. So I don't know if I really want to go beyond that. Listeners can refer back to those discussions. But yeah, Moses would've known something. The Israelites would've known something. But to get really specific is difficult, even for Moses, as we talked about in that earlier Q&A episode and of course when we hit Exodus 6 in the podcast. So I think I'm just going to leave it there.

**TS:** JW has our next question. He wants to know:

4:10

**Why is it necessary that the laws covered in Exodus 21-23 be added late in the time of the land? Israel had lived in the land of Egypt (they had context of living in a settled culture) and they were looking forward to living in the Promised Land.**

**MH:** Well I would say it's not *necessary*. It's just that some of these laws don't fit a Mosaic context—a boots-on-the-ground, Moses-is-here-among-us context. In other words, they apply more to a settled urban life situation which, of course, is not the case when Moses is around because they're traveling through the desert *toward* the land. They're not *in* the land. Some of the laws presume a temple. So we get things like this that don't really fit a Mosaic context.

5:00

And then secondly, there's next to nothing in these laws that is worded like a prophecy. Once in a while, you'll come across language that is prospective (looking ahead). But there's nothing like, "And it shall be when you shall get into the land..." or something. There's not a whole lot of that. There's just a tiny bit of it. But the ones that matter are where we get differences in the laws where we don't get this prospective language. And that does happen. So because that's the case, there are scholars who would say, "Well, what do we do with that? It just

seems like this is material that is pertinent *to* and, therefore, generates *from* a subsequent time period.”

So it's not like all of the laws are like that. There are isolated instances where you get something like that. And you have two schools of thought. We covered this in the podcast when we hit these sorts of things. Some will say that this is prospective (all of it), whether we get the “future” language or not. It's prospective. And typically, that gets married to a traditional view of the authorship of the Torah (Mosaic authorship and whatnot). And then another side will say, “No, it was stuff that was added later. When the people get into the land, the laws have to be updated. So they did update them.” And they wanted to link them back to Moses, because they wanted them to carry authority. They wanted them specifically connected to the original laws. So things got written that way for that purpose. So it's kind of a mixed bag. The truth is probably somewhere a little bit of both. That kind of thing. But by no means would I say that it's *necessary* that all of them be viewed as if they were written later or something like that.

**TS:** Alright. Our next question, Mike, is pretty funny in the email (I know you didn't get it). But it's actually... He wants to be referred to as The Norwegian of Panama. And he actually was recommended... He wanted to know how international our show was because he was recommended to the show by a friend in South Africa. And he's obviously in Panama. And he's a Norwegian. And he was talking about somebody else in some other Latino country he didn't specify. But they all met in Israel. So everybody was talking about it. So The Norwegian of Panama's question is:

7:40

**In my discussion with a diehard Sitchinite friend, I learned the latest Bible "lie" is Exodus 20:2, the first word "Anoki" which should be "Anki" a direct translation of Enki. [TS: I hope I said all that right.] [MH laughs] Mike, do you know of any academic sources that would agree with Anoki or Anki really being Enki as in Enki Yehovah? Or as you say, Yahweh?**

**MH:** The short answer to whether I know of any academic sources that would agree that Anoki, which is the first person personal pronoun (in other words, I), should be Anki (like a deity name)... And the answer is, of course *not*, because it's nonsense. Now it's hard to know where to start with absurdities like this.

First of all, if you had an equivalence... Let's just say that it's Anki. So we have... Basically, you wouldn't have a sentence. [laughs] It would be something that would be really non-translatable. That's the first problem. You also wouldn't be translating it as Anki. You would actually be just taking the consonants and creating a transliteration to make that. So there's a difference between translation and transliteration. In other words, the Hebrew for *aleph-nun-kaph-yod* isn't “translated” as Anki or Enki. That would be a transliteration. But the result of it would just be gibberish.

10:00

Another problem is Enki is Sumerian, which doesn't even have an alphabet. So there we've got a problem. Again, like I said, it's hard to know where to even start. The Sitchinite whom the Norwegian of Panama was talking to seems to think... And this is common with ancient astronaut silliness or Jordan Maxwell silliness (that kind of stuff). But the Sitchinite seems to think that sounds in one language equate to the same words across languages.

To illustrate how ridiculous this is, consider the word "atone," like to atone for sin. Atone in English sounds exactly the same as Hebrew 'atôn. So are they the same word? That's what the Sitchinite logic would want you to conclude. Now atone, of course, sounds exactly the same in English and Hebrew, but it's just too bad, because *atôn* in Hebrew means "female ass" (a female donkey). There's obviously no relationship [laughs] to the verb "atone". But again, if you're using Sitchin logic, sounds in one language that form a word must mean the same thing or be the same word in a different language.

No human language works this way. Period. Zero. This would be complete incommunicable gibberish nonsense. *Chin* in Chinese isn't the thing that is below my lips—the bottom of my face. That's not what that is in Chinese. "Oh, it sounds the same." Obviously, that isn't the case. Because what you're dealing with here is the human mouth can only form a certain number of sounds, because of your tongue, your teeth, and your palate. This is basic linguistics here. The human mouth is only capable of creating a finite number of sounds. And so that's why you get verbiage—you get speech—that sounds the same across languages. But that doesn't mean that those sounds mean the same things. It's just the limitations of the sounds that we humans are able to make to communicate. So the Sitchinite doesn't seem to realize something this basic.

Another illustration. I'm daydreaming now about swimming in a yam at Thanksgiving. After all, English y-a-m is spelled the same as Hebrew y-a-m. And I'll pronounce both the same way to make the point. Yam. It's just too bad that in Hebrew *yam* means "sea" or body of water. Well, I can swim in one of those, but I'm not swimming in sweet potatoes at Thanksgiving. You could go on and on and on with the utter nonsense that extends from this idea that is presupposed by what this Sitchinite is telling our friend, The Norwegian from Panama. It's just ridiculous.

Now again, I hope that's sufficient to make the point. Like I said, I could add layers to the nonsense which, frankly, ought to be part of a stand-up routine instead of something that you would call study. But the truth is (this is the sad truth) you cannot expect (I'm speaking directly to The Norwegian of Panama here) coherent thought from a Sitchinite. It's sad but true, and it's an observation born on my part from over 20 years of experience with these people. They have abandoned any inclination to think on the basis of actual data using rational thought. They literally just make stuff up, or they parrot things someone else has

made up about texts (whether it's the Bible or some other ancient text). And they don't bother in the least to analyze *anything* they're being told or parroting. I wish this wasn't true, but it is. You should just tell this guy, "Look, we can have a conversation when you're willing to use the reason that you're blessed with but that you're now wasting." Otherwise, there's no point.

15:00

And I suppose if you were irritated enough and if you knew this... And you're going to know it now because I'm going to say it. You could ask him why his hero (Zechariah Sitchin) didn't accept Art Bell's request to debate me on his show back in 2001. It's now Coast to Coast AM with George Noory, but the original host of that show was Art Bell, who's now deceased. And I've been on that show over 30 times, talking about ancient alien nonsense most of the time. And way back in 2001, Art Bell asked if I would debate Sitchin on his show. And I said yes. And Norwegian of Panama, your friend can go listen to the show. I'm not making this up. I'm not like Sitchin. I don't make stuff up. So he can go listen to the show. Art wanted the debate. I said yes. But I actually didn't think for a minute that Sitchin would say yes. He had nothing to gain by this and he had a whole lot to lose. But if it was so easy to take what I'm saying in opposition to things like we just talked about, this nonsense with language... If it would be so easy to demonstrate to the world that I (Mike) am wrong, why didn't he do it? The answer is, because he couldn't. And Sitchin was smart enough to know that. But those who follow his work make no effort at all to think about what they're actually being told. There's no effort at analysis. There's no effort to apply coherent thought to it. Because the thesis (this ancient astronaut thesis) is so attractive to people (for any number of reasons) that they just don't bother. They just don't bother. It's like a kind of fundamentalism. That's what it is. So Norwegian from Panama, you should just know that. I would not waste any time trying to have a coherent conversation with this person, when they will refuse to really do any analysis of what they're saying or what they're being told.

**TS:** Mike in the late 90s, I was working in San Francisco, and one of the computer guys I was working with owned a bookstore back in the South. And he got me onto Sitchin, telling me all about it. I was just eating it up. "Planet X, are you kidding me? Nabiru?" Whoo, I was eating it up. And so I bought his *Twelfth Planet* book (his only book that I got), and I read that. And after reading it, I was like, "Uh. No. This is not right."

**MH:** [laughs] I read it after being on Art's show. Because it's like, he didn't ask me to debate Sitchin until, I think, the second show I was on. But I kept getting questions about Sitchin. And I was like, "I wonder who this guy is." I mean, I knew who Von Daniken was. But then I did a little looking and it's like, "Oh, this is an ancient languages scholar. Ancient aliens..." And I thought, "Well, this guy sounds like a fellow traveler here. He's into the languages." And out of curiosity, I bought *Twelfth Planet* and read it. It was just horrible. It's like every page has something wrong with it. So when I went back on Art's show, I actually said... And Art had a big audience (5-10 million people). I said, "Look, I don't think

Sitchin knows any of the languages. At all.” And I would repeat that today. And I don’t. What people who follow Sitchin also don’t realize is that there are people who are in the UFO/alien circuit that they would think are sort of on Sitchin’s side. But I have heard some of the most bizarre things about Sitchin from those people in conversations. Because I know a lot of these people. And honestly, I don’t believe any of it. I don’t believe Sitchin was some sinister psy-op guy or Illuminist. I hear all this stuff. I don’t believe that at all. I think he was just a guy who basically created his own mythology and bought into it. I think it’s as simple as that.

**TS:** Did you ever get any blow-back from Sitchin’s camp? Did he ever comment about you directly anywhere about what you were saying?

**MH:** I don’t know that he (Sitchin) ever did. The guy who was his webmaster did. But that’s the only instance I ever had about it.

**TS:** Yeah. It would’ve been nice to have gotten a comment from him before he passed.

**MH:** Well, again, he has nothing to gain. There’s no point to it. So why would he bother?

**TS:** Alright. Rick has our next question. And he asks:

19:10

**Instead of giving Israel the land of Canaan, why didn’t God just give them Egypt? Both lands are good land. Both lands had idolatrous nations inhabiting them. God had already defeated Egypt. Is there anything that makes the land of Canaan better land than Egypt? Other than that it was “the promised land”?**

**MH:** This is an old question that really takes us into *Unseen Realm 2* territory. And because of that, it’s really impossible to answer this in any really coherent way. This is a thesis topic, or one that would take several chapters in an *Unseen Realm 2* book to cover. If you (those of you listening) were at the Lubbock, TX, event last August, this is going to make more sense to you than it will to anybody else. So I’m just going to say stuff here. And I’m going to have to be brief, because this is a topic that far exceeds a Q&A. So I’m going to be upfront and say, “Look, what you’re going to hear me say now is bound to not make sense because I can’t unpack it here.”

So with that little caveat and intro, I’m going to say this: I think the answer to “why Canaan” is made comprehensible when you know about the Amorites and Amorite migrations. These are historical events and peoples. The Amorites are a big deal. I think God chose Canaan because that is where the concentration of the Genesis 6 (the flood chaos) fallout had settled, through the Amorites and then later the Hittites and the Hurrians and then the Sea Peoples. Now a number

of the people group names of the conquest and the rationale for the “devote to destruction” bans are linkable to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Hurrians and, of course, the Sea Peoples. All these groups are sort of intertwined because of migrations and invasions that wind up (not exclusively) in Canaan. But Canaan becomes kind of ground zero for these people groups that all have traditions about their own descent from the flood (and from the gods).

So that’s why I think Canaan is important. All roads link back somewhere to these people, and specifically the Amorites. The Amorites have these traditions. The biblical writers looked at the Amorites very negatively because the initial Amorite migration actually sweeps through Babylonia—sweeps through Mesopotamia. What we think of and what the biblical writers thought of as Babylonians (in other words, the anti-Eden people—the anti-Eden place) is actually Amorite. Hammurabi was an Amorite. He was an Amorite king, part of the Neo-Babylonian Empire... A significant part of Nebuchadnezzar’s agenda was to revive the Amorite dynasties that had gone before him. This is why Og of Bashan is referred to as an Amorite king (king of the Amorites). Amos 2:9-10 calls the tall enemies of the conquest Amorites.

I realize that none of this is going to make sense. None of this is going to form a coherent picture in anybody’s mind. Because what I’m giving you is fragmentary because this is a question that far exceeds the Q&A and is really *Unseen Realm* 2 territory. But in a nutshell, that’s why I think Canaan was important—because of who wound up possessing the land before Israel gets there and the fact that those people were direct descendants (both conceptually and physically) from these places that had these flood traditions, that viewed themselves as descendants of the Apkallu and whatnot. So I think we have a matrix of ideas working here. And Canaan becomes a focal point because those are the people who are in this place, in this land. And if I’m correct in *Unseen Realm* that the rationale for the *kharem* (the “devote to destruction” commands) is specifically designed to eliminate the descendants of the flood that extend from the Nephilim (the Apkallu) and all that stuff... If that is correct, then that helps us understand why Canaan was the place God chose to put his own people and to settle there. It was a direct reversal of the anti-Eden chaos that we read about in pre-flood and during the flood days. So I know that’s fragmentary. I know it doesn’t make a whole lot of sense. But of the podcast here, that’s about the best I can do with that question.

**TS:** Tim has our next two questions. The first one is about Exodus 17.

24:40

**Do the Dead Sea Scrolls or Septuagint shed light on the hand against the throne of Yahweh/hand upon the banner of Yahweh?**

**MH:** I would say no on the Septuagint. The vocabulary there is pretty normative. The Dead Sea Scrolls say the same thing except for one manuscript. There’s one manuscript that, instead of the “arm of Yahweh,” it has Yahweh saying, “I



swore with uplifted hand” instead of the arm language. The other scrolls, though, are consistent with the arm language. So we don’t really get a whole lot in terms of appealing to those manuscripts.

**TS:** And Tim asks:

25:20

**Do you believe the “I will” statements in Isaiah 14 are echoes of Pharaoh’s statements in Exodus 15?**

**MH:** I think this is a... What he’s referring to is, “I will ascend to heaven. I will set my throne on high. I will be like the Most High. I will sit on the mount of assembly. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds.” All this language from Isaiah 14, having something to do with Pharaoh’s statements in Exodus 15, where you get things like, “The enemy said, ‘I will pursue. I will overtake. I will divide the spoil.’” So on and so forth. Most of what’s in Exodus 15 isn’t in the mouth of Pharaoh. So I don’t see much of a relationship, just generally, and I don’t see much of a relationship in terms of the specific kinds of things that Isaiah 14 is alluding to.

The larger part of the answer is, I think Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 draw on a Canaanite (and possibly a Sumerian/Babylonian) material or tale about a cosmic rebellion in the Divine Council. So that’s really not the setting for anything with Pharaoh. Also, I don’t think Isaiah 14 borrows Egyptian material either, nor does Exodus 15. So I don’t really see much of a relationship. For those of you who are new listening to the podcast, when I bring up Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, I touched on some of that data in *Unseen Realm*. There will be more about both of those chapters and their relationship to Genesis 3 in the *Demons* book, which comes out at the end of April. There’s a lot more to this view, though, than you’ll find in both of those books, though. I should say, as people on the internet (scholars and just people who are commenting on *Unseen Realm* or this idea) push back on the idea that there’s a relationship between Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 and Genesis 3... And again, that’s not news to anybody who’s listened to the podcast or who has read *Unseen Realm*. I’ve been very upfront that that’s a minority view. But it is a view in scholarship (and really, good scholarship). So listeners should realize that I meant what I said in the introduction to *Unseen Realm*. The *Unseen Realm* book is the starting point. It’s not a theory of everything. It is the beginning point for the ideas that are in that book. I’m saving a lot for later. So don’t be impressed with internet rebuttals. The Ezekiel 28 thing, of course, we addressed in a podcast episode specifically in more detail. The *Demons* book will have more on that. Again, I have a minority view, but I’m in good company in not seeing Adam as the cherub in Ezekiel 28, but instead looking at it as a divine rebellion. Same for Isaiah 14. But for the sake of our purposes here, by no means have I put forth all that I could to defend those ideas. Not by a longshot. So we’re dribbling it out. There’s a strategy here. Some things, you just have to put up front. Like *Unseen Realm*. It is the beginning point. It is not the end point. It’s not all that we could say. Nowhere close. We have plenty of data for another couple of books. Just like *Unseen Realm*. So we have to start somewhere. We

can't just dump a thousand pages on people and expect anybody to read that. So we are doing it in stages. And then hopefully doing it in such a way that people will see... They'll be able to follow it and see how one thing builds on the other.

**TS:** And that second process is starting on the cruise in October. Is that right, Mike?

**MH:** Yeah. We're going to dip into *Unseen Realm 2* content. Yep. That is true.

**TS:** Alright. And then please tell us you've started at least thinking about putting together the book.

**MH:** [laughs] You know, I can't say that. Because I'm just generally overwhelmed with other things. You know, I have pages and pages and pages of notes as to what to cover. That I do have. And that's actually in a readable, coherent form. But that's about as far as it goes.

**TS:** Alright. I'm going to need some kind of outline or something, Mike.

**MH:** [laughs] Yeah, good luck with that. [laughs] I need one, too.

**TS:** Alright. Alex has a question.

30:10

**Is it possible that Aaron is telling the truth in Ex. 32:24, that the calf really did come out of the fire in some supernatural manner? Maybe he started to work on the process (32:4), but to his surprise a miraculous idol came out of the fire, thus validating his proclamation to worship it? The text never calls Aaron a liar, but it's clear that Aaron's intention was to make an idol, and so he did and is credited as doing so (32:35). But is it an assumption that Aaron is lying about the gold coming out of the fire as a calf, as if he was surprised and expects Moses to understand?**

**MH:** I'm skeptical that we... This is going to sound awkward. I'm trying to avoid a double negative here. I'm skeptical that we should *not* view Aaron as making excuses. In other words, I don't think that the calf emerged out of the fire supernaturally. I think Aaron is indeed making excuses for himself. Now having said that, some scholars have suggested that he isn't making it up, that he isn't lying. This is going to take a while to unpack. So this'll be one of the longer answers here. But I want to take people through the data. And there's not a whole lot of it, and I think there are weaknesses to it. As we talk about it, I'll let you know why some scholars entertain this idea, why they've suggested it. Now in the podcast episode on this, I referred to Carpenter's commentary. He says this:

Aaron's response claims that the people in their evil intentions demanded gods and he tried to help them, even though they slandered Moses by their requests. His assertion that the calf was self-generated recalls well-known theogonies of the self-generation of the "gods" in Egypt as well as in Canaan and Mesopotamia.

Then he has a footnote. He's referencing J. Oswalt's article, "The Golden Calves and the Egyptian Concept of Deity," which is a 1973 article in *Evangelical Quarterly*. Now I don't have access to that article, and to be honest with you, I don't think it would give us anything. Because this isn't a theogony text. It's just not. There's nothing in the golden calf episode that's about the formation of generations of deities and drifting into cosmology. There's just nothing like that. So there's actually something better in another article in terms of a parallel that I'm going to refer to in a moment that would be a better trajectory. I don't think there's anything fruitful by appealing to theogonies about gods self-generating each other. The golden calf isn't a god. It's a golden calf. It's an idol. They destroy it and burn it and grind it up. So it just doesn't fit. That trajectory just doesn't help.

Now there's another detailed article that pursues the idea. Durham in his *Word Biblical Commentary* refers to this one. He footnotes it. It's about the calf emerging by itself from the fire. He says:

...the line about the calf emerging by itself from the fire is not a myth of divine autogeneration [MH: So he's not buying it either, but he references this article:] (so Samuel Loewenstamm, "The Making and Destruction of the Golden Calf—A Reply." *Biblica* 54.2 (1973): 237-246).

And the Loewenstamm article is very detailed. It's a good article for this subject. It's very thorough. I'm going to quote a few excerpts from the Loewenstamm article where he tries to explain or put forth this idea. Other scholars have noted that the other parts of the passage, and we commented on this in the episode about some of the noun and the verb and the instrument that Aaron uses is clearly about making something, fashioning the golden calf and whatnot... So Aaron certainly has a role, which the questioner pointed out pretty clearly. We're not saying Aaron has no role. Alex isn't saying that. But you get this input here, and I think that's going to become important later on. So the issue is, as Loewenstamm says:

Aaron's description of the production of the calf in V. 24 [MH: "it just came out of the fire"] presumably alludes to the fact that [MH: Aaron himself said] the calf emerged self-produced, whereas V. 4 asserts that it was Aaron who made it. [MH: Things that look contradictory.] Both these verses, on the other hand, which refer to the making of a *golden* calf, appear to be contradicted by V. 20 which states that Moses *burnt* the calf, contrary to the fact that gold does not burn.

35:00

It melts. It doesn't burn. So now we have three verses in the passage here that seem to work against each other. And Loewenstamm goes through explaining various attempts to deal with the burning issue (because gold doesn't burn). He has several pages on this and that view and critiques all of them. He appeals in one instance to an Ugaritic text that gives us a whole grocery list of methods of disposing of the deity Mot. And in that list of how we get rid of Mot, you will find methods of disposal that are mutually exclusive. They're contradictory. So Loewenstamm says, "Look, we shouldn't be reading Exodus 32 like these things work against each other. They're all there because the writer is trying to communicate the idea of total destruction—total annihilation." So this Ugaritic text that talks about the ways that we get rid of Mot... these are self-contradictory things as well. That's the only idea that it's trying to convey—just total annihilation, total destruction, nothing left. It's not meant to be scientific or factual or something like that.

And so Loewenstamm goes through that. And that's how he handles those three verses that seem to work against each other. And then he gets to the matter of the question here about... We just talked about the destruction of the idol. What about the creation—this autogeneration idea? So he starts that discussion on verse 4, which we commented on in the podcast, where we have this engraving tool. Or do we have it cast in metal? I'm going to read what I had quoted from back in this episode just so that you understand what's going on here. This is Sarna:

The meaning of the Hebrew phrase is uncertain. The verb *va-yatsar* can denote "he fashioned" or "he tied up"; the noun *heret* can signify "a stylus" or "an engraving tool." The phrase may therefore mean that Aaron fashioned the gold with a tool. This, however, would be inconsistent with the description of the image as being "molten,"<sup>8</sup> and one does not use an engraving tool on gold. It is possible that *heret* is a variant form of *harit*, "a bag", which appears with the same verb as here in a similar context in 2 Kings 5:23: "He wrapped [*va-yetsar*] [MH: the same verbiage] the two talents of silver in two bags [*haritim*]." In Exodus, then [MH: this is the picture that emerges], Aaron tied up the gold earrings in a bag. [MH: This is the gold that he gets from the people.] It is noteworthy that when Gideon made his image, he "spread out a cloth, and everyone threw onto it the earring."

**So he's saying, Aaron did just like Gideon. He collects the gold and puts it in a bag.**

Finally, the Hebrew phrase may well have originated in the technical vocabulary of ancient metallurgy and then become a metaphor simply expressing the imparting of shape to metal, regardless of the technique employed.

**Most likely we have a wooden model of the calf and it gets overlaid with gold that is put into a molten state when Aaron takes it out of the bag and then that's the**

process that he uses. So they could carve the object in wood with the engraving tool. And they could melt the metal that goes over it. Sarna is saying, “Look, all these things go together. They can be understood coherently together.” Now Loewenstamm concurs with that. He thinks that legit. So the question is, “How does that relate to this, ‘Hey, it just popped out of the fire’?” So Loewenstamm writes this:

The various possibilities of interpreting the phrase “and he fashioned it with a *heret*” consequently be reduced to two broad alternatives: (1) that Aaron fashioned the golden calf with a sculpting tool and, (2) that he had bound the gold in a cloak or bag. We have already noted [the objection] to the first alternative: molten images are not produced with sculpting tools but with casting molds. To assume that Aaron might have used a graving tool *after* the calf had been cast requires a forced reading of the text and contradicts Aaron's description of the making of the call in V. 24.

That’s the “it came out of the fire” verse. On that verse, Loewenstamm says:

40:00

[Regarding] Aaron's assertion that he threw the gold into the fire "and there came out this calf" (v. 24), [is] Aaron's claim to be taken as a crass falsification of what the narrator described happened?

I’ve already hinted that I’m going to say yeah, he’s just making it up. He’s making excuses. That’s where I’m at on this. But Loewenstamm says:

This assumption, however, finds no support in the text; [MH: here’s what he means by that] there is no allusion on the part of the narrator that this was so [MH: that Aaron was lying – Aaron never gets accused of lying], nor is Aaron punished or reprimanded.

For my part, I don’t think that’s a good objection to Aaron making an excuse. Do we really have to require the Bible to tell us the motivation for every statement that comes out of a biblical character’s mouth? Do we have to have that to make a coherent judgment? Can we not judge anything like this for ourselves? For example, are we to believe that Moses really was incapable of communication in Exodus 4, as opposed to him making excuses? Later on... If you remember Exodus 4, you know, “I can’t speak. I’m slow of speech.” Maybe he was a stutterer or something like that. So are we really supposed to take that at face value and conclude that Moses was actually (in real life) *incapable* of speaking to someone? I just think that’s... I not only think that’s kind of absurd, I think it overreaches what we read subsequent to Exodus 4 in the book of Exodus. Later on, when Moses *does* speak (and he does), he does just fine. We aren’t told otherwise, nor are we told that the Holy Spirit miraculously took away his speech impediment. Whatever the problem was, he was able to move beyond it. He was still able to function, is my point.

So back in Exodus 4, he uses it as an excuse to not go on the mission God wants him to go on. I think that's a completely reasonable reading of Exodus 4 because of what we see later. But we're not told any of that, is my point. If we're going to follow Loewenstamm, we can't draw that conclusion because we don't have a verse for it. I just don't think that's a good retort to the notion that Aaron is just making excuses. We don't *have* to be told everything to be able to read the narrative and draw conclusions.

Let's keep going, because the real weakness in what Loewenstamm is going to point out here is the parallel that he and a handful of others think supports the idea of autogeneration for the golden calf. So back to Loewenstamm, he writes this:

This tension between the verses has been frequently discussed in Midrashic literature, and the various Midrashic passages discussing these verses leave no doubt that the prevailing view in Midrashic literature is that the calf did, as Aaron claimed, emerge self-produced...

So rabbinical literature says, "Yep, it just popped out." Back to Loewenstamm:

...despite averseness to accept the resulting heretical corollary that the calf possessed an innate vitality...

Like it was alive when it very obviously wasn't. So the rabbis just more or less skip that contradiction. And by the way, that's actually important, because if Aaron is telling the truth that it just emerged from the fire, why doesn't it move? Why isn't it alive later on? If you're going to take that language and apply it to the emergence, why don't you apply it elsewhere? And the answer, of course, is it's not in the text. And I would suggest to you that what we do have in the text is Aaron's excuse. Back to Loewenstamm:

However, biblical scholars have invariably ignored the Midrashic commentaries as irrelevant to the natural interpretation of the verse. [Umberto] Cassuto proved the exception among them and discussed these Midrashic commentaries in an article on the building of Ba'al's palace in Ugaritic literature. In the same paper Cassuto concluded that in ancient Canaan there obtained the belief that cultic objects were produced by themselves and not by human workmanship. He finds support for this view both in the account of the construction of Ba'al's palace in Ugaritic literature and the Midrashic commentaries on the biblical accounts of the erection of the Tabernacle and the construction of the Solomonic temple.

Let me stop there. Did you catch that? The same rabbis that said, "Yep, the calf just popped out," also say that the Tabernacle built itself and the Temple built

itself. This is why biblical scholars have ignored the Midrashic commentaries, because that's just nonsense.

In Ugaritic literature Ba'al's palace is described as having been completed after a fire had acted six days upon the gold and silver that Ba'al had provided for the construction of his palace. Cassuto rightly contends, therefore, that the passage remains unintelligible unless it is supposed that the narrator of the epic believed that on the seventh day the metals acquired the desired form by themselves, whereupon Ba'al proclaimed that he had completed the construction of his palace as he had provided the building materials and the fire.

Now Loewenstamm goes on to note that Midrashic commentators also thought the Temple built itself, the Tabernacle built itself, and so the golden calf pops out and forms itself. So he's saying, "Look, we've got this other commentary. We've got medieval commentary and then we've got this one example in the Baal Cycle where it kind of puts forth that idea." Now I would say that the Tabernacle and Temple stuff is an obvious over-reading of passages like Exodus 40:17-18. I'll just read it to you:

**<sup>17</sup>In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected. <sup>18</sup>Moses erected the tabernacle. He laid its bases, and set up its frames, and put in its poles, and raised up its pillars.**

Like, really? Did Moses build it all by himself? Or should we take the passive: the Tabernacle was erected and Moses just gathered all the material and then it built itself? I think both of those are ridiculous. Because the biblical text says... It tells us who fashions the objects for the Tabernacle and the drapes and all this. There are other people involved. It's obviously not just Moses. And it's obviously not by itself. Now Loewenstamm jumps in here and says that the Ba'al Cycle passage is persuasive enough. In other words, he knows that the Tabernacle and Temple Midrashic idea is just kind of weird. But he says, "Look, the Baal Cycle parallel is persuasive enough to allow us to conclude that Aaron was not lying." He writes this:

To the mind of the biblical narrator the calf was produced both by Aaron and by itself just as the author of the above Midrash asserts that the Tabernacle was both erected by Moses and that it had erected itself. When viewed thus, verse 4 is complemented and explained retrospectively by verse 24. Aaron bound the gold in a cloak or bag and made the calf (v. 4) by casting the gold into the fire [MH: That was Aaron's role, Loewenstamm says], whereupon the calf emerged of itself (v. 24).

Now this is what he wants his readers to think that the biblical text is putting forth. I just don't buy it. And here's why, when it comes to the Baal Cycle parallel here.

Other than under-reading the excuse possibility... Loewenstamm, for instance, doesn't refer to other statements made by biblical writers, including Moses in Exodus 4. He doesn't examine those for reasonable conclusions that are quite reasonable, even though we don't have a verse for them. So he doesn't really do the work there to test his approach. But other than under-reading the excuse possibility, I think what we have here is an over-reading of the parallel. Because the Baal parallel has no human factor in it. That's what it's missing. It's a scene and an item that appears entirely in the spiritual world of Ugarit. The golden calf episode says Aaron made the calf. He's a human being. This is happening in real earth time. It's not in the spiritual world like the Baal Cycle idea is. So the parallels aren't actually that good. One is in the spiritual world; the other's in the real world. (The *physical* world. Let's put it that way. We don't want to say the spiritual world isn't *real*. But you know what I mean.) One is in the spiritual world; the other is in the terrestrial sphere, where the Israelites are, where *people* are. Those are two entirely different contexts. You can say lots of things about what's going on in the spiritual world that you really wouldn't expect to be going on in the physical world. And I think that needs to be considered. Loewenstamm does not consider that. And I think he underplays the excuse trajectory per Aaron.

So with that, I'm going to wrap this one up. (I told you it was long.) But some scholars will say, "Yep. That's what we're supposed to read here." But I don't buy it. I just don't buy it, for those reasons.

**TS:** Yang has our next question.

50:00

**About two decades ago I read a commentary on the Golden Calf account. Unfortunately, I can't remember who the author was so can't give credit. This person concluded that the Levites armed themselves for protection as they took their fellow Hebrews to the end of the camp (gate). They didn't "kill" them but had them repent of their wrongdoing. If they didn't repent it was speculated that they were kicked out of the camp. There is still the implication of the Levites becoming priests. The biggest difference is the "killing" narrative. Is there any room for this possibly meaning "repent?"**

**MH:** Well, we just had a really long answer to the previous question, and here's a really short one: *No*. [laughs] In other words, I don't see there's a possibility here. Because the simple question is, "Where is the repent language? There is no repent language in the story. Nobody repents of anything. *Harag* (the verb translated "kill") is the normal world for kill. "Three thousand men *fell*" which is the standard expression in biblical literature for dying. So I just don't see where this has any basis. So short answer.

**TS:** Alright, Mike. Well that's it. That's all the questions we have for this week. And we are again going to split this up to four Q&As. We have enough questions to cover four parts. So we lied to everybody and said only two at first, and then



three, and now four. So we've got one more to go, and then we'll be completely done. So we appreciate everybody that sent in their questions. And we appreciate you answering our questions, Mike. And we want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.