

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

**Episode 319**

**Conversation Series, Part 1**

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**Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)**

**Guests: Trey Roberts (TR)**

**Jamin Bradley (JB)**

**Kevin Hammer (KH)**

**Ken Brown (KB)**

### **Episode Summary**

Recently Dr. Heiser reached out to his audience asking whether pastors who follow the podcast had tried teaching the content of his book, *The Unseen Realm*, to their congregations. The response was amazing, with close to 150 responses. The interest in sharing the experience of teaching the meta-narrative of Scripture to congregations stimulated the idea to have guest pastors and teachers on the podcast to tell us their stories. This episode is the first of a series in that regard. Join us as we listen to four pastors of diverse denominations and congregations talk about the impact of teaching biblical theology in its original context to their people.

### **Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 319: Conversation Series, Part 1. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! What's going on?

**MH:** Well, it's just a crazy world. I think everybody knows what's going on with all the news, and the Coronavirus thing. We're having those conversations down here in Jacksonville, even though it's not like Seattle. But boy am I glad not to be in the state of Washington right now.

**TS:** Yeah, seriously.

**MH:** But yeah, it's been a crazy week.

**TS:** And y'all have enough toilet paper, I'm hoping.

**MH:** [laughs] I think we probably do, but we are not among the toilet paper hoarders (at least right now). But yeah, I think we're okay there. You know that

Celebration just had a team in Europe that has come back, right from the cusp of this. So that's what's stimulating a lot of conversations about response and what to do. Because they got to see some things over there. I haven't sat in on any of those, but I'm sure I'll get updates.

**TS:** Alright, Mike. Well, we also got some sad news. We decided to cancel this year's conference due to the current health situation.

**MH:** Yep. Under the circumstances, we really don't have a realistic alternative.

**TS:** Yeah. We just didn't think the economy and people wanting to travel would recover. We foresee this going deep into the summer. And so we just didn't feel like August would be enough time to make it happen. So we decided to forego this year. But we've always got next year.

**MH:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, things will eventually return to normal. So yeah. If you think about it, how many people are really going to want to travel? A number of them won't be able to travel. Or the cost. The impact economically is hitting a lot of people. So it just seems like under the circumstances, even if the lockdowns go away and people actually *could* make the trip, I think a lot of people would be hesitant anyway. So it just seems like the logical thing to do.

**TS:** Absolutely. And again, we've decided to cancel this year's Naked Bible Conference, but next year (2021) is still on. Hopefully, Mike, this goes away. I can't imagine that this is the new normal. This is crazy.

**MH:** Yeah, we'd have to come up with something different. But yeah, I think if it's the new normal, then a lot of people would be having their mental concentration on lots of other things. But Lord willing, things will get back to normal for next year and we'll go back to what we were doing. So the first two conferences were great. We expect to have more conferences, but not this summer.

**TS:** Well, Mike, we're going to do something new here. We're going to start a whole little conversation series here, where we're talking to listeners and pastors and teachers and people who use the *Unseen Realm* content, the podcast content, and teach other people. And we're going to hear about their experiences.

**MH:** Yeah, what worked and what didn't. Yeah.

**TS:** So why don't we get started with Part 1 here.

**MH:** Yeah, absolutely.

**MH:** Well, we're thrilled to have four pastors and Bible teachers with us today on the podcast. This is actually going to be the first of several installments like this.

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A lot of you out in our audience will know (because you're MIQLAT newsletter subscribers) that I sent out a message to the email list asking, "Hey, is there anybody out there who has tried to teach the content of *Unseen Realm* in your church?" And I was hoping to get seven or eight responses. But it just sort of mushroomed into almost 150. So Trey and I more or less decided, "We can't just do one of these. There are so many of them." And a lot of you included little ditties about who you were and what you did. And there was something in there that made it really sound interesting in some context. So we decided, "We're just going to take 15 or 20 and we're going to break it up into several shows." So this is the first of those. And with us we have Trey Roberts in New Orleans; Jamin Bradley in Jackson, Mississippi [actually Michigan]; Kevin Hammer (I'm not sure where you're at, Kevin, but you can tell us when we get to introductions for each of you); and then Ken Brown in Florida. Now all four of you tried to teach content of *Unseen Realm* in your churches in some context. But before we get into "Hey, how'd that go?" [laughs] (which I know our audience wants to hear, because we have a lot of people who just ask, "How do I introduce this to my church? How do I tell my friend in church this or that?")... Before we get into your advice (your do's and don'ts) I'd like to have each of you just tell our audience a little bit about yourselves and your church just generally. And then we'll bring it back and get into what we want to talk about today. So Trey, let's start with you.

**TR:** Thank you. Glad to be on the program. My name is Trey Roberts and I'm a staff pastor at White Dove Fellowship here on the west bank of New Orleans. We're part of the metro area here in New Orleans. Our senior pastors are Mike and Elaine Millé. They've been in ministry for going on 40 years and White Dove for about 33 years. We are a nondenominational church and we're probably closer to a charismatic/Pentecostal/Full Gospel tradition. Our pastors came out of the Assemblies of God and went nondenominational. We do a lot of things internationally, support missions and missionaries in close to 40 different countries around the world right now as well as different organizations that support lots of missionaries. And one of the programs we've had here for a while now is a program called the Civic Outreach Center. It's basically a residential rehabilitation program for men dealing with all different types of addictions. And that's really where I've had the opportunity to most interact with it. I teach a three-hour class on Sundays with the people who are in the program. The program ranges from as few as ten to upwards of 25 people trying to kick some sort of addictive habit. So that's how we've been able to introduce the material here at our local fellowship.

**MH:** Jamin, how about you? Tell us a little bit about yourself.

**JB:** I pastor a church out in Jackson, Michigan.

**MH:** Oh, Michigan. I thought it was Mississippi. I got my abbreviations wrong. [laughs]

**JB:** Ah, that's fine. We're the smaller of the Jacksons. [MH laughs] But it's an urban church. We try to make a different kind of service to reach a different kind of people group every night of the week. Right now we're at two. On Sunday nights, we host a Dinner Church, which reaches a lot of the homeless and impoverished people in our community. The first hour is food; the second hour is the service. And they are welcome to come and go at their own convenience. And then Monday nights is what we like to call Nerd Church. [laughter] We launched the advertising campaign at the city's Comic Con.

**MH:** [laughs] Okay.

**JB:** So we showed up there, like, "We're Christians. But we care about the same kind of things that you care about. We'll get into all kinds of topics that you guys care about. Love Sci-Fi. Love all these things." So those are two that we currently have going. And actually, a lot of that (believe it or not) felt kind of inspired by you. When I watched some of the aliens and demons stuff, I thought, "Oh, I can actually talk about this stuff?!" So it was like, "I know the kind of audience that would love to pick people's minds about that." So those are some of the thoughts right now. There are other possibilities of different kinds of church we would use to reach other people. We're a Free Methodist church. But we do, like Trey, have a charismatic blend to us. Tomorrow we host a conference on spiritual gifts that will feel is a lot different than a lot of conferences on that, because we're starting with the Divine Council worldview as our grounding and moving out from there. So the *Unseen Realm* comes up constantly in my messages. And whether you're homeless or a nerd [laughs], you've pretty much heard me talk about it. So it's been fun to see how to bridge those contexts no matter who I'm talking to.

**MH:** Yeah. Well, Kevin, tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do.

10:00

**KH:** Sure. I'm in beautiful Anaheim, California. And I'm a Roman Catholic. I converted about ten years ago. I was raised Calvary Chapel. And I'm a huge advocate of Chuck Smith's expository style of verse-by-verse study of Scripture. For the past five years, I've been teaching a Bible study at my parish. I'm a catechist there as well. And there is a hungry remnant of people there that want the Word of God. They want permission to believe the Bible. And I started teaching in Genesis. We've made it to 2 Samuel so far. I became aware of your work about two years ago and really started wrestling with it. A year ago, I really began incorporating the material into my weekly study. And I only wish I had done it sooner. I need to go back and redo the whole Pentateuch at this point. [MH laughs] I was in Joshua or Judges before I really started to grasp this new perspective and incorporate it. But it's critical to be able to speak to people... Especially, there's an older crowd that remember Orthodox Catholicism and the spiritual character of what's happening. And they're kind of afflicted by this modern, "Satan-isn't-a-person," "there are no real enemies" kind of anti-spiritual perspective that's pervasive in many of the mainline Christian denominations, including the Catholics. So they want permission to believe it again. And this

Bible study has had a huge response and it's just growing by leaps and bounds. I'm really grateful for all the energy that you put into it.

**MH:** Wow, that's fascinating. Lastly, Ken Brown in Florida. Ken, tell us about who you are and what you do.

**KB:** Well, I'm one of the pastors at Calvary Chapel in Jupiter, Florida. When we first started... I'm the only one on staff by the way who is bi-vocational. I have a day job. And I also do that as well, which makes it kind of interesting because I bring a different perspective when I teach. But we've been a growing ministry. We went from... I love how Pastor Dan Plourde, who is our senior pastor, puts it. He started off with 13 people and half of them were family members. And now we've got a church that is probably about 2000 families that say they're part of our church. And we're growing so fast we've run out of room. We're doing four services now.

**MH:** Where is Jupiter?

15:00

**KB:** If you go south from... If you look at Lake Okeechobee and you go due west from the center point, that's where Jupiter is. We're right on the coast, north of West Palm Beach and south of Stuart. And everybody looks at it and goes, "Well, where are you?" Well, that's kind of where we are. We're the last portion of civilization until you go into the swamp for about 15 miles. So it's kind of a suburban area. In fact, the church is in an area we call Jupiter Farms, which is a rather suburban area. But we've been teaching... I teach on Wednesdays or Thursdays (midweek Bible study). And we've been teaching through the Old Testament. And the more... Then I read your book. And it answered questions for me that I'd had since I'd been in Bible school. I was one of those people who, I went to a Bible school and I wasn't real satisfied with some of the explanations that I was getting. I'd read my Bible and I'd listen to one of the professors and I'm going, "Eh, that's not what it says in the Bible." And your book tied everything together. So we started mixing it into the study, because we were working our way through the Old Testament. We started in Genesis and got all the way up to 1 Samuel. And everybody after we started talking about this said, "Why don't you do a study on this?" So we did a series just on the *Unseen Realm*. I thought it was going to be three or four weeks. We went for six months. [MH laughs] About an hour and 15 minutes. And when we do a Bible study, it's serious Bible study. So we went that long for about a half a year, and we were already mixing it into the other studies. And Pastor Dan was mixing it into his as well. And then I was asked to do an additional study on Sunday where we did that and presented it. It was an interesting topic. I just said, "Help me. There's something weird in my Bible," which I got from you. [MH laughs] And then we made available copies of *Supernatural* after the teaching. And we thought we had enough, and we didn't have enough. People just... I'm still answering questions from that, and we did that 2 ½ years ago. So now we're still teaching through the Scriptures (chapter

by chapter, verse by verse, like a Calvary Chapel does) but now we're mixing everything in as we go along.

**MH:** All four of you... It's a no-brainer. This is exactly what I was hoping would happen with the book once it was out—once I got over the hump (and there's a story behind this) that it would actually get published. Initially I did this first draft of what I was calling *The Myth that is True*, and I just figured nobody would ever publish this thing because it was too different. So I put it out on the internet and then one thing led to another. My friend here at Logos (he's retired now), Dale Pritchett, who was the CEO's dad and Executive VP, got a hold of the draft and read it five or six times and then convinced our CEO, Bob, who had just started a print/imprint along with Logos (the software company) and decided to go into print. And so that was where this whole thing began. But once it was out and I thought, "Okay, people are actually going to read this now. And I hope [laughs] that the content filters down and that people take it and work it into churches and whatnot." So this is exactly the kind of thing that was in my head, hoping to see. But you never know at the beginning what it's going to be like. So all four of you, thank you for the effort that you put forth into this. And I really would like to... There's all kinds of things that I would want to know. So I'm just going to jump in here. Listening to the four of you, even for that little bit, there are a lot of different demographics. So I guess I'll start this way, and any one of you can jump in and we'll take turns and try to navigate this. But do you think there is a particular demographic for whom the lights turn on either sooner or more often? Let's just throw that out there, because I'm actually kind of curious about that.

**TR:** Yeah, I'll jump in and say, I think this is going to appeal (and I don't mean for this to sound like a joke or to be sarcastic in any way) to people who are trying to read their Bibles. We know about the Barna Group and Lifeway who always come out with these illiteracy reports. And the people who are reading their Bibles are trying to decipher a book that, quite honestly, isn't written for children or to be understood by children. It's a difficult thing to understand—to work to understand. So people who are trying to manage and go through their Bibles... (I think you may have said it. I don't remember where.) Basically, you know who's reading their Bibles because they're asking questions. And if somebody's not asking questions, they're probably not reading their Bibles. So that's a big demographic—someone who's already trying to open up the Scriptures and read them and understand them and make sense of what they're reading.

**MH:** Would the rest of you concur with that?

**KB:** I would agree completely with that. Because as we started doing this, we found that, of course, being a church that already goes through the Bible chapter by chapter like we do... I always sit out between services and answer questions. And nobody would ever ask me questions. And now I'm *busy* for four hours every Sunday.

**MH:** [laughs] Wow.

**JB:** Yeah, I think I'd agree. I think almost what's intriguing is teaching this kind of stuff (like what Ken was just saying), is it makes people *want* to actually read their Bible to understand it more. So I don't know.

**MH:** Let's hop on that. Because you have a lot... (I don't know any other way to say it.) But you have a lot of people in church that really aren't that interested in the Bible. This is one of the great lessons I had to learn in life that I was dragged kicking and screaming toward, that "Hey, a lot of people in church just aren't into the Bible like you are, Mike." [laughs] So I had to learn that. How did you stimulate that? How do you rope these people in or flush them out? Jamin, how do you do that?

20:00

**JB:** I just think... Sometimes when you preach... I don't know. After I read your book, I'm like, "Okay, I need a year to not only understand this better, but I need to figure out how to preach it without saying heresy by accident." [laughs] And when I finally started doing it and articulating it, I was just surprised. Like, no one has ever been fazed. No one has ever come up to me and been, like, "I can't believe you said that." If anything, they're just (like they said) asking questions and wanting to learn *more*. And I've got, especially in Nerd Church, I feel like there are plenty of people there who are like, "I never was given the answers that I wanted growing up, so I don't really read the Bible much. I don't really catch on to these." And now I'm pointing out scriptures to them and showing them what they're saying. And they're, "Okay, this actually may be... This book actually *is* interesting. I'm not just force-fed all these stereotypical answers and I get to look a little deeper." I don't know. You just see something kind of go off in them, like they want to know more and they want to ask questions. And they want to dig deeper. And I guess for me, I've seen it across the board. If you're not into your Bible, it starts to get you into your Bible. If you're into your Bible, it makes you want to know more about it. And surprisingly, I've seen that whether you're educated or not, you seem to be able to grasp this pretty well and go with it. So I've been surprised just how applicable it's been to our differing communities here.

**KH:** I just want to pile onto that, if I could. I think that the message is not even our message. We don't have much of a responsibility for what to say. It's the narrative of the Bible that's so...

**MH:** [laughs] That's what makes it easy?

**KH:** ...easily compelling, right? Grab your Bible, read it, find things you don't understand, and start digging. Done prayerfully, done in faith, it's the greatest adventure you'll ever have. And people respond to that. And then you add to this, "Look, there are spiritual beings. Please be aware of them. Many are good. Some are really bad. The church and the Bible teach explicitly about them."

There's a war going on. You can't afford to be oblivious." People react to that. Because I think the pendulum is swinging away from rationalism, materialism. There's a lie floating around, like I said, "The devil isn't even a real person. It's symbolic." There are some exorcists that the church would like to introduce you to that would beg to differ. But God is talking to other spirits throughout Scripture. And some of them once had power over the nations and abused it. But since the Resurrection, this Divine Council now has humans joining it. And that resonates with people. The story doesn't need any help. It just needs telling.

**TR:** And Mike, to put on top of that as well, when we're dealing with these men who come out of just the most chaotic situations, these guys are coming in at rock bottom. A lot of them come into the program, they literally leave the detox facility and come to us. So their life is filled with chaos. And one of the things for us and the *Unseen Realm* material is that this great cosmic enemy of God—chaos—seen from the beginning and all the way through, that that's really one of the key spiritual warfare (minus the paranoia) aspects that we're able to offer the guys, that the chaos that they're coming out of isn't the plan. That God has overcome that. And the material tends to be interesting to guys who are coming in from just crazy situations. And the message isn't the all-too-familiar sin management or behavior management model of teaching Scripture or teaching the text.

**KH:** That's great.

**TR:** We use the material to show them who they are in Christ and what it means to be imaging God—what your destiny, your mission, your purpose is. We're trying to forecast to them through this incredible love story that is this arc and this narrative that we see weave throughout the entire text, and we get to use the example of how God wants a family, and he's always wanted you in his family, even while you were out there living in the chaos that was oppressing you. You've now been translated to the kingdom of light and you're out of the darkness. And it's all because of what Jesus did for us. That message is able to be weaved into and they can start to see themselves in this story that is in front of them. And a lot of them who have never read the Bible or are unfamiliar with it, or come from low education backgrounds agree, they now start to desire to be able to do something when they get out of the program. Now they think, "Wow. I really think maybe I can tackle this thing and I can continue in my spirituality moving forward, beyond the safety and the confines of this program."

25:00

**MH:** Yeah. I want this to be practical. So you brought up a few very specific ideas. And, like, when I'm on an interview... Let's say it's a short one. Because you get these interviews (especially if they're live, on the drive-to-work crowd), where you have to break everything up into seven- or eight-minute increments. I try to focus on identity, mission, and destiny. So there are three ideas that align with what you just said. But I want it to be practical. If you're... Based on your experience, if you were to talk to a pastor... Let's say you've got a pastor in front



of you who just read the book. And they're in this process of "how do I preach this without accidentally saying something heretical?" (which is a line I love, so I'll probably steal that at this point) [laughter]... But you're having a conversation with this guy and he says, "How do I do this?" So you tell our audience, what are some key concepts or ideas that you would use as entry points to get your people into the content and stimulated for more of the content?

**KB:** I do some counseling at the church. And one of the things, after reading the book and teaching through it and doing everything that we do, is that when I'm counseling with folks who are struggling with this kind of thing in their life (and we've got a group that is actually working through getting away from being hooked into pornography), that all of a sudden there's a realization that, "I'm listening to somebody else. It's not me." (Of course, it turns into me because the heart is desperately wicked.) But it suddenly hits them that "there's someone who wants me to fail, and it's a real, intelligent evil that's out there that wants that failure to take place." And the number of people I've seen, when the light goes on to that, they suddenly realize, "Just like the Lord wants me *to* succeed, there's another side of that particular unseen realm that wants me to fail." And once you start letting folks know that, "But you have the Holy Spirit if you've given your life to Christ, and everything is on your side. But you need to understand..." And I actually have people who come up afterwards saying, "Well, have you seen this person on TV?..." You can't go that direction. But it really is interesting to use it in counseling environments like that.

**TR:** Correct. And also... Go ahead.

**KH:** I think that's powerful when you tell people that there are personalities in this invisible world that God also created. But there are personalities that are there to thwart you. And that is important to know. You're in a fight. And if you don't know it, you're going to lose. Another thing that's been a practical application for me in my Bible study at the Catholic parish I'm at is, I've started to have a nose for cosmic mountain/walled garden kind of language in Scripture. When somebody goes to a tree to do business with the supernatural world (the unseen realm), it's because that's the tree of life, and the stories start to make a lot more sense if you know how to tell them and you know the mindset that they're being told in. And so I've found that what didn't work for me was doing a Divine Council overview in an hour. [laughter] What *did* work for me was subtle, steady doses of "there is this other worldview and I'm inviting you into the world of the Bible." And that's been super-effective for us.

**TR:** What I was going to jump in with is... One of the things that you can start with is the Great Commission. If you ask the average person the Great Commission, they'll tell you, "Go into all the world..." But pointing out to them, "How about we read the verse right before it, where Jesus says, 'All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. *Therefore* go into all the world...' " So when we think about that one time God gave the sons of God authority over the

nations, but that in Christ being exalted, resurrected, seated at the right hand of power, now Jesus says, “All that authority is now mine. The gods of the nations have been delegitimized.” And the way Paul says it, that Jesus has a name above all names. He’s King of kings, Lord of lords. There’s no power in heaven, earth, or below the earth that is greater than Jesus. So if you’re in Christ, I think one of the things that we tend to do, or I try to help these guys to see is that, listen, you’re in a battle, but not really. Because Jesus has won the battle. The powers are delegitimized. You’re free now to go into enemy territory (if you want to continue with the military metaphor) but your weapon is the Good News that everyone is welcome back now into the family of God. No one is separated from God. Everyone is welcome to approach God now on sacred space. Because in essence, he’s made you sacred space and indwelt you with his presence through the Holy Spirit. So the idea that you’re not going to have to go out there and scream at the sky... You don’t have to go looking around every corner expecting a demon. You need to obviously live in wisdom and make wise, godly choices. But the bigger thing is, let’s not delegitimize what Jesus did in his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation by coming up with an idea of what spiritual warfare is. Let’s walk in the victory that Christ won for us and achieved for us. And let’s use the weapons that we know are not carnal, that are spiritual, for the tearing down of every stronghold that’s out there. So that gives them this sense of confidence, that even if you’re a brand-new Christian you have the mandate—you have the victory, the power, the ability, because it’s been done for you in Christ. So we use those concepts to say that yes, you’re going to interact with these cosmic forces when you go out, but they’re systems. They’re large other religions. They’re governments. They’re much bigger than just the boogie man behind every corner.

**JB:** And we use it... I guess when I think practical... Like if you go to some churches, their announcements are super-scripted out [laughs] like they’re going to read it or they’ve memorized it a certain way. I do the same thing when I get into Divine Council, that I’ve now said it so much that it’s like, “Jamin, how are you going to say this in four seconds?” Because if you go on too long, everyone is going to be like, “Oh, he says this every week.” [laughs] And if you go too short, people are going to be like, “Oh, there’s a bunch of different gods.” So I’ve learned shorthand to be, like, “Hey, we all know that there’s only one God. Of course, the Bible tells us that he made these other spiritual beings, gave them power, and the Bible refers to them oftentimes as the gods (with a little g). They’re not the one true God, but they are not nothing at the same time.” That might be just like, “Okay, I took five seconds. Everyone who already knew that heard what I had to say. Everyone who...”

**MH:** Yeah, you’ve got the elevator speech down.

**JB:** Yeah. So I place that in there. And then we try to find other creative ways to do it as well, such as in dismissal, like, “Okay, you’re dismissed from our building, but of course *you are* the church. Go out and turn the rest of Jackson into

heaven.” Or with Nerd Church, one of the ways we found to do it was to... We have Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) the first week of every month. And some people would say of course, “Don’t play that.” And I actually agree that it can be played the wrong way. But we add the Divine Council worldview into that system. So the world that we’re creating is trying to paint a biblical one. So as they play a game, they’re starting to think about the game in biblical ways and it gets them practically thinking, “What does my everyday life look like if I were to try to take on this worldview?” Things like that.

**MH:** Yeah, I don’t want to get into that *now*, but I do want to loop around before we’re done here with pop culture connections. So I want to come back to that point. Now anybody else, what are the key ideas? And again, if you’re having a hypothetical conversation and your pastor wants to know, “How would I do this?” What if they come back to you and say, “Hey, is there a resource that I could just use to help me encapsulate it, help me produce the elevator speech?” Is there a resource? Is there a method? Can you suggest tactically... What did you do to distill this stuff in your head? Let’s add that to the mix. How would you respond to that?

**JB:** Lots and lots of practice sitting in my office trying to restate it. Actually, one of the things that helped me is I’ve written books, and in now four of them I’ve gotten into this concept. Every time I write, I have to learn how to say it at a different pace. And it’s really kind of helped me ingrain in my mind, “Okay, I can say this out loud. I can write this down. If someone asks me a question, I’ve got answers.” Eventually just all that practice...

35:00 **MH:** So you’re actively sitting there, as it were, anticipating questions.

**JB:** Yes, yes.

**MH:** Okay. And then, “Okay, can I answer that in a sentence or two?” And actually noodling that. “How would I say it in a sentence or two?” That sort of thing.

**JB:** Yeah. And let the questions that I *think* they’ll ask force me to say it the first time already addressing what I think they would have said. So just a lot of practice for me.

**TR:** Yeah, and I tend to learn by actually teaching. So for me personally, getting the material even a little bit before I feel a great level of confidence in understanding it myself, talking it and hearing myself go through it... So working with the guys here in our program has allowed me to really solidify it. You’re not going to be able to just take the book, go through it one time, and then think you’re going to go out there and be an expert. If you just think about how long it took, Mike, for you to even *write* the book. So there’s a lot there to it, and it’s going to take some time. Be patient. But just one more thing. You were asking

about... A way you can talk with a pastor about the content of *Unseen Realm* is apologetics. So Jesus tends to be the problem with all apologetics. If you're talking to a Muslim who believes in Jesus the prophet (just not the Jesus of Christianity), or if you're talking to a Jewish person, obviously they don't regard the New Testament. If you're talking to a Mormon or a non-Trinitarian, the issue is always around Jesus. So remove Jesus from the conversation and tear out your New Testament (to kind of anti-Andy Stanley the conversation). Tear out your New Testament. And if only having the Hebrew Bible, *could* you make a case for Christianity and for Jesus? And it's sort of a different way to the Trinity through the Two Powers in Heaven, the Angel of Yahweh. But you can have those conversations. Because in all of those people that I just mentioned, the common ground that you have is the Hebrew Bible, is the Old Testament. So if you have that common ground and you take away the biggest point of contention, then the unseen realm, if you understand the Angel of Yahweh, the Two Powers in Heaven, if you start at understanding and can pinpoint the places, the verses. If you can go to Isaiah 14 or Ezekiel 28. If you can hit up Psalm 82, Deuteronomy 32, Deuteronomy 4. If you know where those places are... If you want to go to 1 Kings 22—those Divine Council scenes. If you know kind of right where they are, chances are, just like Psalm 82 was your watershed moment, it's going to be that for them, when you point to that verse and say, "Hey, read this." And they go, "Where did you find this?!" And it's like, "It's been in your Bible, too." And so it's a great jumping-off point for conversation that then lends itself very easily to the content of *Unseen Realm*.

**MH:** Anybody else?

**KB:** Yeah, Mike. I get the chance to answer questions every Sunday. If there's a question on what the pastor's been teaching or what I've been teaching, I'm sitting out there with my Bible. And if there's a question, they come up and ask. And trust me, they do, constantly. And when you learn to start mixing the change in the worldview that's necessary and the Divine Council setup and all of that, and you start sharing all those different Scripture references, it's like watching lights go on. Once they're looking at me like, "Oh, this is real," instead of like, "You've got horns growing out of your head," then it's... And because I get asked different questions all the time, I've learned how to distill it into a two- or three-minute elevator speech just like we were hearing before, it's actually reached the point that when I do teach it on a midweek study, I've actually got a slide that looks like the motion picture slide that says it's rated PG or whatever. My slide says, "H: Hazardous to your worldview." [MH laughs] And then everybody knows, "Oh, he's about to talk about that stuff again."

**MH:** Right, a visual cue. [laughs]

**KB:** Yeah.

40:00

**MH:** Let me see if you guys think this is fair. What I'm hearing is, there's really no substitute for practice, i.e., experience. In other words, you just do it and you get a sense of, "Okay, that was really a good line. That really helped. I said it really well this way and it was short." As opposed to what doesn't. And my response to that would be, "You know, that's a lot like... Everyone who is in ministry had to start teaching the Bible even before they ever heard of *Unseen Realm*." This is how we all started. I mean, I remember my first... I was given the chance to teach an adult Sunday School class when I was 19. I was a freshman in Bible college. And so I came back and I was handed this class. Well, when... You basically learn what you know and what you really don't know well when you're thrust into the experience, when you have to field questions. And you kind of get a sense of, "Alright. That felt good. That feels like a good answer. It was well received. It made sense." And then the other ones where when that didn't happen. There's just no substitute for having to go through that. And so the way I would assess this is if pastors want to know, "What should I do to start incorporating this content," well, you've got to start trying. You've got to start doing it. And you'll eventually figure out how to say things. But it's going to take time. It's going to take practice. Do you think that's fair?

**KB:** Oh yeah.

**TR:** Yeah, absolutely.

**MH:** And the analogy, too. In other words, this shouldn't intimidate you any more than when you started out teaching and preaching X number of years ago. It's really the same process.

**TR:** Mike, you asked for resources. And so if a pastor has read *The Unseen Realm* and they're feeling a little bit overwhelmed by the big book version of this, then of course the resource is to immediately step back to *Supernatural* and you're going to hear the same content in a little bit different presentation. And then you even have, if you're doing this in a small group or if you're doing it in a smaller setting, you have Ronn Johnson's study guide. So there is a little bit of a step back with resources there. And then long after you had *Supernatural* and *Unseen Realm*, as everyone knows, you have *What Does God Want?* And so you have a way to build people to *The Unseen Realm* if a pastor wants to do that. But the resources are there in *Supernatural*, the study guide, the catechism of *The Unseen Realm* (the 190 questions or whatever). So you've put some of those resources in place over the last couple of years to build your way up to leading a group of people to *The Unseen Realm*. If, as a pastor, the first thing you're exposed to about this material is *Unseen Realm*, yes, it's going to seem kind of "where do I start?" but that's where I would recommend you go, is go back to *Supernatural* and *What Does God Want?*

**MH:** Yeah, I would throw in FaithLife Study Bible there, too, a little bit. I didn't write *all* the notes for that, but I wrote most of the notes for the Torah and then

Joshua and Judges. And I wrote a lot of the sidebars. My intention was to seed the content with some of these ideas so people could graduate to *Supernatural* and then *Unseen Realm. What Does God Want?* didn't exist at that point. So I'll throw that into the hopper as well. Anybody else have... Did you just sort of wing it? Did you just sort of experiment with something that just happened to work?

**KH:** Let me comment on that. I think you need an ancient Near East frame of mind. And I kind of got it by osmosis by listening to the podcast (I think that's an *amazing* resource) where I hear you wrestle with these issues and figure out how to say them out loud. I've got a family of eight (six kids and my wife)...

**MH:** It's nice you caught that. [laughter]

**KH:** Right? But it's good practice to hear *you* say it. And I tried talking about it with my family. And I've got teenagers at home and real young ones. I have a lot of demographics just under my roof. And I can practice explaining it. And that's super-important. And I think that in general, outside of just even limiting ourselves to just the *Unseen Realm* kind of content, we need to know more about the Old Testament. And I've been a huge fan of your Exodus series that you guys just concluded. We've got more information at our fingertips than the Church Fathers ever did. Our study today can have so much more scope. Discoveries like the Library at Nineveh, the city of Ugarit and the Baal Cycle, the Dead Sea Scrolls... Who has a clearer view on the ancient Jewish worldview?

45:00

**MH:** Yeah, than ancient Jews? [laughs]

**KH:** Yeah, right? I think we've got an amazing, historic opportunity here to look at things with new data, new truth, and fresh eyes. And I think the biggest lesson, if I may, that I got from the podcast is how you engaged the opposition. You read to us from what I might call heretical scholars' writings. But you can even show that the writings of unbelievers have value if they're talking about facts and truth. That's amazing, right? We need to be exposed to all the data that's available. And we're not going to win souls by hiding from facts. The conclusions that liberal scholars draw from the data, that needs skepticism. It takes real wisdom and knowledge of good and bad to sift through it properly. But ignoring these writers and the data that they're bringing out is a huge blind spot for believers. And I think there are a lot of Christian communities out there that are willfully plugging their ears when they get a whiff of something that they aren't in full alignment with. To them it's all bad fruit from a bad tree. I think avoiding the controversy at the expense of truth is bad and I think we need to engage controversy. It actually fosters unity. Pope John XXIII said that in 1959. We need to engage that controversy. And so the JEDP document hypothesis is the biggest thing that I'm facing in the Catholic Church right now. It's taught as fact and it's just circular reasoning and poor theory. And you gave me tools to engage with it.

**MH:** Yeah, I think we make a really big mistake... I mean, here's what we think is going to happen. "I'm going to shelter my people from this idea that is a flawed idea. And I'm going to make sure they never hear about this." And then of course when they hear it, we..." I'll just say it. Leadership often lies to itself that, "Oh, when they come across it, they'll understand why we didn't get into this."

**KH:** [sighs] Oh, that's so dangerous.

**MH:** It is. Because no, a lot of people are going to conclude, "Well, what else are you hiding?"

**KH:** Or "how ignorant are you, really?"

**MH:** Right. "Maybe there's something you *did* tell me that really *isn't* true." They're going to approach you with the hermeneutic of suspicion, a lot of them, and maybe even most. So I think it is really tactically unsound.

**KH:** Right. It's bad strategy. You're going to lose that fight. The hermeneutics of doubt (or suspicion)... I like how you said that. It's my main challenge. But you can't fight the facts. Yet you can't let them take simple Bible quandaries and make them insurmountable contradictions and start saying, "Well, therefore, did Moses really write the Ten Commandments? Assuming there *was* a real Moses? Did the Israelites actually just make up this Moses legend and borrow or steal texts from all their neighbors?" That's where it leads. You've going to be able to engage the same data and say, "Here's a simple explanation for these problems that they're trying to throw at you as insurmountable contradictions."

**MH:** Let me shift gears a little bit. For any of you: How did you handle either moderate pushback or people just freaking out? How did you handle the negative feedback? I have to assume that you ran into this at this point. How did you help somebody (talk them in off the ledge or whatever)? Let's hear some of that.

**JB:** Just as a quick starter. I've been preaching this now I think for two, maybe three, years, and still haven't run into pushback yet, which has been very surprising to me.

**MH:** Wow.

**Uncertain:** I'd have to say the same thing. I haven't had any pushback either.

**MH:** You guys are ruining my questions. [laughter]

**Uncertain:** We don't even need this podcast! [laughter]

**KH:** I didn't have pushback, but I did have glassy eyes when I started trying to explain the Divine Council worldview from the top down.

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**MH:** When you say glassy eyes, is it that you knew it was just not registering? Or it was the “Well bless your pointed little head, Pastor. We’re going to be polite and listen to you”? [laughter]

50:00

**KH:** You know what, as painful as it is, it’s a little bit of both. People were just losing me, and some people were like, “Oh, how quaint. This guy believes in the Egyptian god Osiris.” [laughter] But yeah, I was losing my audience. And it wasn’t an effective communication strategy for my demographic, at least. But I didn’t get pushback. I agree with the other guys here. I just got... They checked out.

**JB:** Yeah, I probably got the glassy eyes in the sense that, “Hey, I want to biblically explain this to you so you don’t think I’m crazy.” And now I’m pulling up all these passages everywhere, and people are like, “Uh, okay.” Whereas if I just tell them straight, it’s like, “Oh, yeah, sure. Okay.” [laughs] But I’d dig in real deep. Some of them can tune out a little bit because I just got real scriptural all of a sudden.

**KH:** It works better to bring it up incidentally. [laughter] Explaining the passage as you’re going.

**MH:** Yeah, I’ve often told people, “Try to find a way where the content helps solve a problem. Or that reinforces something people already hold dear, just adding a layer (like the Two Powers in Heaven thing). “Hey, the New Testament writers didn’t come up with this Godhead thing. That has a history. It’s back here.” So that’s something they already embrace theologically. And if you can help them with that and dip into the content, that has often been the short answer that I give.

**TR:** Yeah, at first I had elders who were listening to my excitement in talking about what I was learning about the Bible and how it works and trying to make arguments for things that it’s not and letting the Bible be what it was intended to be. And conversations like that, they would hear it and they would give me this pitiful look. [MH laughs] And I would get offended early on. Like, “No, you haven’t even read the book. You don’t even know... How can you critique this? You don’t even know what the Bible says about this, least of all what this author is saying about this, who happens to be a biblical scholar.” So there was a little bit of anti-intellectual pushback. But then, rather than be offended by it or get into a contentious moment, I just grew into this understanding that when the looks and the pushback comes, they’re only doing it out of a (at least people who are close to me and who know me) desire to make sure I’m protected. They don’t want me going too far “off the deep end.” And so rather than get offended by it, I just kind of saw it as, “Well, they’re unaware, and so you can’t really be upset with them. Because ignorance isn’t a virtue, but sometimes people would rather remain in it.”



**MH:** You've got to be patient.

**TR:** Correct. That's exactly right. So you really... It created more work and growth in *me*. Rather than me walking around feeling puffed up because I know something that everyone doesn't, it actually drove me to humility to be like, "Hey, I put in several hours just trying to understand this content." So it had a reverse effect. The more that I learned, the more that I realized I didn't know, and there was no amount of life that I have left in front of me to be able to know it all. So I just became grateful for what I was learning, and it created more humility in me personally.

**MH:** Yeah, that's important. Because... I'll just use myself as an example. I have to tell myself all the time, "Just be patient with people who want to judge either the book or the content. Because good grief, look what happened to you." [laughs] You've got to be patient. But you also have to... You want them to be patient with the content and give it a shot. You also have to be patient with that process. It's going to take them a while. So there's a lot of value to that rather than just, like you said, reacting to it or basically just looking at them, or God forbid saying, "You just don't know what you don't know." That's not going to win anything. That's going to be really, really counterproductive and honestly just arrogant as well. So patience is a big deal. Why does this work? Why does the content grab people (whether they're pastors or people in the pew) across denominations? I have said this a number of times on the podcast. And you guys are a living testimony to it here, just in terms of your contexts. I have emails from both pastors and people in churches from more than a dozen different denominations. And they all are grateful. They all say the same thing: "This just energized my Bible study. I can understand the story better." So I know how I would answer this, but I want to hear how you guys answer this. Why does this work? Why does it take hold, regardless of denominational contexts?

55:00

**JB:** Well I was just quickly going to say, I think one of the things that this does that a lot of other sources don't... You guys (Naked Bible) and The Bible Project both aim to tell that unified story from Old Testament to New Testament where suddenly Eden, at the beginning of the Bible, didn't just matter *then*. It's mattering *now* for the mission. And it's ultimately there at the end. Like, all that content from the *Unseen Realm* continually pulls it all together and shows that it still matters for today and it still matters as to where we're headed. Whereas a lot of disconnected biblical studies, just like, "Here's a cool little thing about this verse in the Bible." And, "Alright, that was a long time ago. We'll see you later." You know? This makes a difference for the whole timeline.

**KH:** The Divine Council is not something that's in Catholic vocabulary. And it's not how I've seen our church talk about it. There's not a lot of awareness or talking about it in this way. The Greek Orthodox actually seem to be catching on to using this framework. You can find blog articles that it seems like they're reading your books. [laughs] But the Divine Council framework doesn't violate

any dogmas I'm aware of. It actually helps tie dogmas together more harmoniously. And I think it's because it's so deeply embedded in the Christian DNA. It's just part of the faith that we've been given by Jesus and the Apostles. Teachings like the communion of saints. I'd love to hear how that, in your mind, connects to the Divine Council—teachings like the mass being the liturgy of heaven and earth and how we're actually stepping into the Divine Council. These teachings make a lot more sense when you start to use this vocabulary. And so I think there's already a built-in acceptance for the faithful, because it's just a deep and embedded part of what we believe.

**TR:** Yeah, I think also too, if you're from a charismatic tradition, there's a lot of experiences that you have difficulty explaining line by line, verse by verse. But then all of a sudden the content shows up and you start to learn what your Bible says about the unseen realm. And if you come from a non-charismatic tradition, where you don't put a lot of credence into some of the experiences of fellow believers, all of a sudden this vibrant, spiritual realm jumps out of your Bible. So in those two categories, it fits right down the center as this place of almost, like... We have a phrase here in New Orleans. It's a neutral ground. It's where people from different sides can come to this one place and be sort of together. And then it fits throughout church history, which only seems to make sense considering that church history is grounded in interpreting and in trying to understand the original context of the Bible. So if you come from a tradition that's hard inerrancy and inspiration, you sort of can't turn away from the material because it's what the Bible is saying. And if you come from a more (I guess you would call it) text-critical, where you're open to context and genre and all these different things (poetry and so forth), then it still fits as well. So it doesn't ever conflict with anything except what you're unwilling to hold loosely in your hand in terms of your theological presuppositions. So if you're willing to kind of just follow the breadcrumbs where they lead, picking them up one at a time, and figuring out "how does this incorporate into the Bible, into Christianity, into what I'm commanded to do by Jesus as a follower of his?" and be willing to follow those breadcrumbs, this material is going to lead you along that path, really better than anything else that's been out there. And it doesn't have to be a part of your commitment to any sort of confession or theological bent. And it's a great uniting force.

1:00:00 **MH:** You know, I obviously... I can see where it would connect in different ways, in different groups. Kevin brought up the mass. And the way you had that sentence "entering into." Well, you can see that if you're of a liturgical orientation, a concept like sacred space or the notion that believers are going to be the reconstituted council, you can see where that would connect almost immediately. And then there are other things that would sort of glom onto it. Kind of the entry point in my head, it seems, just based on talking to people, depending on where you're from (what your context is), your entry point might be different (the thing that grabs you first). But then as you get drawn into it, you start to see this ripple effect. So intentionally... You guys listen to the podcast and you read the book

obviously. I wanted this to be denominationally apathetic. (That's probably not the right word.) To transcend the denominational distinctives. Because I was focused on story. And I didn't really know what that meant. To me, the Bible Project stuff (what they're doing) helps *me* actually think about what I'm doing better. [laughs] Because it's so visual and so story-oriented. Just the delivery system, how they do what they do, has made me think, "Yeah, you know, we're kind of doing the same thing here. But you didn't really realize it." But I really think that that has a lot to do with it. The metanarrative focus I think has a tremendous amount to do with this.

Alright, well hey, thank you guys for taking the time and just having a conversation. I know, I'm quite confident, that there will be other people who teach in church or who have a pastoral role or they're just out doing something... (You know me well enough to know that I love to find people off the radar who are just doing stuff that needs to be done.) So I think this is going to be really useful just to hear some story about, "Hey, we tried this. It worked people were encouraged." Even the part about not getting a whole lot of pushback, to me that will actually encourage people. Jump in. Yes, you're not going to be able to please everybody, but the goal is to grow the interest of the people under your care in terms of their interest in Scripture. You can get most of them to at least move them to a different place and grow that interest. So don't worry about the one that just doesn't want to come along. [laughs] I think that will be encouraging to them. So thanks for sharing your experience with us.

**All:** Thank you.

**MH:** Yeah, absolutely. You're welcome.

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**TS:** Alright, Mike. Well that was a great conversation. That's going to be a reoccurring series we do where we reach out to people out there who are repurposing your content and talk to them about their experiences. So this is one of many to come. So we're looking forward to these types of conversations.

**MH:** Yeah, absolutely. I think this is going to be really helpful just to have people on who have experience. "This worked. This didn't." Strategies. So I'm glad we're doing it. I'm glad we had such a response to the email that really put this on the radar.

**TS:** Yeah, absolutely. I remember when we met Trey. He actually flew up from Louisiana to Boston when we did our first meet and greet in Boston.

**MH:** Yeah.

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**TS:** And he flew up there and took part in that. So that was many years ago. So I know he's been listening for a long time.

**MH:** Yeah, yeah. I remember that too.

**TS:** Alright, Mike. We appreciate Trey, Jamin, Kevin, and Ken coming on to the podcast. And we look forward to speaking to more of you all out there. And with that, Mike, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.