

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 332

Conversation Series, Part 4

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Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Guests:

Jeremy Fort (JF)

Scott Miller (SM)

David Harrison (DH)

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 fourth of a series in that regard. Join us as we listen to 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 332: Conversation Series, Part 4. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! What's going on?

MH: Well, it's *still* hot here, Trey. [laughs]

TS: Still? It may be raining. I don't know.

MH: Kind of some upheaval, too. One of the new buildings that Celebration was building for office space and also studio space and stuff like that (because we want to do more video) is wrapping up. So my office is kind of torn apart. I've got to move again. But we knew this was going to happen six months ago. So here we are. So a little bit of upheaval. I guess that's new. And hopefully that'll get taken care of pretty quickly.

TS: Yeah, yeah. Can you speak about that (more video and things like that)? What you all have planned?

MH: They want what began in their heads as “mini courses” (these are like one-hour things). So the length of a Naked Bible Podcast (60 minutes on some topic). So the more we talked about this, I realized that, “You know, what you’re really asking for is adult Sunday school on video.” So when I brought that up, it’s like, “Yeah! That is kind of what we want.” So we’re going to be in the process. Probably another few weeks and we’ll jump into this—just recording some real basic stuff. And I told him, “Here’s how I’m going to approach it. If I was tasked with teaching an adult Sunday school at this church, this is what I’d do.” So we’re starting real basic, out of the gate, like an hour on “What’s the Bible?” An hour on “Hey, what happens in the Old Testament?” (Just the flow of history.) “What happens in the New Testament?” So we’re going to start there and eventually it’ll be introductions to all sorts of things, like doctrine and whatnot—that kind of stuff. So I think it’ll go pretty quickly to produce that stuff. But it’s not going to be at the level of really even what we do here, and what I would do in an institute for *this* audience. It’s not at that level, or really anywhere close to it. But it’s a good place to start. You’ve got to have an entry point. So this is another entry point, just generally, into Bible content that we’re going to be creating there.

TS: We’ll be looking forward to that. Well, Mike, with that, we’ve got some great interviews. We’re going to continue the conversation of talking to people out there that are using the podcast and your books and the materials that you’re producing, to repurpose them for their audience. And we’ve got another round of those.

MH: Yeah. Just in the last week or so, I got a couple of emails asking, “Hey, how do I present this in church?” Like the books... Like a new reader, somebody that just read through *Unseen Realm*, happened to be a pastor. So it was nice to be able to direct them to the podcast and say, “Hey, look, we’re doing a series of people just like you. You’re responsible for teaching a church or a Bible study or a youth group and you’ve run into the book and read it and like it and you have this question. Give them a listen.” So I’m really glad that people stepped forward and enabled us to do this series. It was a good idea then. It’s going to be something really useful in the future. And I’m sure we’ll do more of them too (down the road). But they’re already getting used, is the point. So it’s just really good to have them out.

5:00

Well, we’re excited again to have three people in ministry with us who have used *Unseen Realm* in their ministry in some way. So that’s what we want to talk about today (what they did, what the reactions were, the dos and don’ts kind of thing). We have three. We’re going to start with Jeremy Fort. So I’m going to ask each of you guys as I give your names to briefly introduce yourself, tell the audience where you’re at geographically, what you do in ministry, and then what the

connection point to *Unseen Realm* was. So we'll start with you, Jeremy. Jeremy Fort. And you are in Utah, correct?

JF: Actually, I am *near* Utah. I'm in southern Idaho (Twin Falls, Idaho). So we're all kind of in the same neighborhood, out here in the Northwest. And I'm a pastor with Valley Christian Church in Twin Falls. I'm a bi-vocational pastor, so I have a real, full-time job that puts food on the table and clothes on the back and a roof over the head. We're a small church. It's denominational, but we have the freedom to operate like a nondenominational. I would say we are a fairly conservative group, but it's wide mix. We have newborns to people in their 90s. Married, divorced. Many former LDS folks that are in our church as well, and former atheists. So we're kind of a hodgepodge of folks. And the way I discovered the material was really... I had been to a conference where I saw Joel Richardson give a talk. And so when I got home, I had been searching for a few things from him on YouTube and he showed up on SkyWatch with Derek Gilbert. And then months later, your video of your interview with Derek at SkyWatch was promoted through YouTube, and I watched it. And I thought, "This guy is filling in the missing gap that I had always suspected was in Scripture but had never been able to put my finger on." And from that moment, I discovered your book. I got that and devoured it. And years later, here I am, another person who was able to exit Middle Earth.

MH: [laughs] That's well-put, actually. When I saw... I did see the link. It said *Utah* in my note. But Idaho obviously is really close. But my first thought was that I wondered if you had been to the Salt Lake City event. I was out in Salt Lake City at a Calvary Chapel two or three years ago. So I had wondered if that was the entry point. But obviously it's not.

JF: No, I had seen you were there, but unfortunately, I was traveling for work. (I travel quite a bit.) And was not able to make that one and was bummed. But I was able to catch the videos later.

MH: Okay. Well, good. That's really interesting. I'm sure we'll loop back to the LDS thing. But next on our list is Scott Miller. Now my note says that you are in Colorado. Is *that* correct? [laughs]

SM: Yes, that's correct. [laughs] I'm actually a pastor at a small, rural church out on the eastern plains of Colorado in a little town called Kersey. So it's about an hour north of Denver. You're about an hour from everywhere. You can get to the Rocky Mountains. You can get to Cheyenne, Wyoming. You can get to Denver. So we're kind of out in the plains there. But yes, we're out in Colorado, so you have it correct on that one.

MH: What was the entry point. How did you hear about the book or the content?

SM: Honestly, I'm kind of into the apologetics piece. I teach a Sunday school class every Sunday morning at my church. And I'm always looking for deeper

content—things I can really feed my class that's going to challenge their thinking and take them a little bit deeper, and a lot of that revolves around apologetics. And I want to make sure they're prepared. So we spend a lot of time in apologetics-type stuff, and so a lot of my content that I absorb comes from those sources. And so I happened to be listening to Frank Turek on his podcast.

MH: Oh! Okay.

SM: And you were his guest. And some of the things you were saying were things I had never heard. So I probably had that look that you describe. Many people look at you with the "What is this heresy?"...

MH: [laughs] Yeah, two heads. [laughs]

SM: Yeah, the two-headed look. So I couldn't turn off the podcast. I was really intrigued by what you were saying. So it kind of incited me when he referenced the book to get the book. And so I immediately ordered it. And (I think kind of like Jeremy) I could not put the book down. It was intriguing. It was information I had never heard. And so I immediately was just on an investigation project myself to try to figure out what this was all about.

MH: Mm hmm. Well I'm going to loop back to you today because I want to know how quickly you discerned the apologetic value. But let's move on to David. David Harrison is our third guest. So David, tell us a little bit about yourself.

10:00

DH: Hi, Mike. I live up in Fort Collins, Colorado, which is north of Denver. And my regular job is a carpenter/handyman. I'm a former graphic designer and art teacher. I've worked with youth three years full-time (with the youth group) and then pretty much as a passion—as a hobby—high school through college for the last six or seven years, with Colorado State University and different churches in the Fort Collins area. My first exposure, I think, was an article you wrote on the serpent of Eden (the *nachash*). And that was probably six or seven years ago. And my area of interest is origins apologetics. So everything from the Mountain of God, why is there pain and suffering... And when I read about the *nachash* being a supernatural being... That always kind of bugged me growing up in the Christian world. And I'm like, "That just doesn't make sense." So when I read that article, it put a lot of pieces together, and began my journey of exploring more of that in a supernatural biblical worldview.

MH: That's interesting. Are you and Scott close then, geographically?

DH: Yes. Yeah, he's probably just an hour drive from me, I think.

SM: Yeah, where I currently live, I'm just a little ways away from the church where I pastor. So I'm probably 20 minutes away from Fort Collins. So we're really close.

MH: Did you guys know that? Do you know each other?

DH and SM: No, we don't. [laughter]

MH: Well, you do now.

DH: We'll have to exchange emails after this podcast.

MH: Yeah, we'll get you the email addresses and all that. That's interesting. I'm always interested in what the entry point is for how people discover either the book or get drawn into the vortex (so to speak). So that's kind of interesting. On this end, you never know if this thing you're doing is... Like, "Is anybody really going to read this [laughs] or watch this or listen to it?" But people do. And that becomes an entry point for them. Which is why I do things like FringePop or the *Stranger Things* book—because you never really know what's going to get somebody into the content at any given point. I'd like you guys to share your experience. And we don't have to... I'm not going to say first, second, third here. But we have enough of a feel for you. One, we have Jeremy's heavy LDS turf. So I imagine that had some impact on the feedback or the experience of getting into the content with people. And for the both of you guys (Scott and David), apologetics is the angle there or the connection. So any one of you can just jump in here. I'd like to know what you specifically did with the content, and what the response was. And was there a fear factor as well. Because one of the questions I'm going to ask in a few minutes is, give advice to a fence-sitter, a fence-sitting pastor ("I don't know if I should teach any of this stuff in my church or not."). So if you went through that, that might be instructive as well.

JF: Well, you've got three pastors here, so I think any one of us will be willing to jump in, right? [laughter]

MH: Right. [laughs]

JF: Never at a shortage for words. But for me, when I was introduced to the material, like I said, it filled in an immediate gap. But I did take some time to really understand it. And because I travel quite a bit, it affords me an opportunity to listen to a lot of audio. So when I would be on flights from here to Washington, D.C., and back in traveling, and in the car, wherever it may be, I spent probably a year or more catching up on all of the podcasts, from number one through current...

MH: Wow.

JF: ... which was going through Acts, was going through Leviticus, was going through everything. And that really helped set a context for me, to understand that and be comfortable then with discussing the material. So when we first began to present this to the church... My brother is also a pastor in our church.

He leads our small group studies. So I introduced it to him and a few of our elders, just to set the stage that this is something that we wanted to cover. And then *Supernatural* (the book) popped up. And I got that and went through it and thought, “You know, this would be easy to turn into a series. And that’s essentially what we did. We bought a copy of the book for everybody in our congregation, and then we began to go through that book, just slowly. And my approach was to say, “Hey, folks. This is new to me, too. I’m still digesting this. This has answered a lot of questions.” And to your point of, from an LDS perspective, it immediately, instantly, I could see how... I could see that very minor twist, that tiny variation, that was made from some of their belief systems. And then was able to argue that a little more effectively when we were in front of folks. And I think Psalm 82 was another one that was fairly... It’s a good launch point—not necessarily to start with “God in the midst of the gods,” but most people know verses 2, 3, and 4. They know those verses. And I was able to bridge that from an action standpoint to say, “Look, the tasks of Psalm 82:2-4 apply to us. And if God took this so seriously with the other gods, he’s going to take it seriously with us, too.” And it marries up across the New Testament. So I used that as a bridge point to say, “All of creation is designed to bring the love and the mercy, the kindness and the grace of God, to his creation.” And it was a way to step into that. And for folks from the LDS church, they are fully embracing of that concept of taking care of others. And so it became an easy bridge to open up conversation to say, “Maybe there’s a God above this god that you believe in.” And that really did open some doors for us.

MH: That’s interesting. Anybody... Either of the other two?

SM: Yeah, I can jump in here. My approach was much of, I had no idea who Dr. Michael Heiser was when I first heard the name. [laughs] So my approach was, “I’ve got to investigate him to find out if this guy is legitimate when it comes to just telling us the truth. So I’ll be quite honest. My first investigation piece was to look into more content related to you, Dr. Heiser, and what you had thrown out there in other places and other publishings. I actually ended up getting most of your books so that I could get a well-rounded concept of your kind of overall picture and how you presented things. And so when I took *Unseen Realm* and I felt like I was at a comfort level that I could go ahead and present this to a class, I actually took your other books and kind of combined everything into one giant presentation, which took many, many weeks. I think the last slide count when I had completed the presentation on slides was over 600 slides that we went through [MH laughs] to go through all of the content that you had produced. And I wanted to give a very detailed (but also background and complete) picture of what the *Unseen Realm* was trying to relay. And I think you covered a lot of that in your other books, with your *Angels* book and *Reversing Hermon* and some of these other pieces you’ve published. So I was able to take those, to kind of fill in... I don’t want to say *the gaps* that were in *Unseen Realm*, but maybe those pieces that were somewhat difficult to comprehend because they were so new, that I wanted people to be comfortable enough with them that they were

legitimate statements—they were legitimate positions—that were not heresy and they weren't just someone pulling it out of the sky. This is a backed position that's well-rounded in the history of Scripture as well as the worldview of the Bible writers. And so in presenting that, I felt like it just gave people more of a confidence in the content that *Unseen Realm* presented. And it gave them the ability to walk away saying, "I feel confident that this is actually the truth and that I can really hold on to this" versus just being another passing perspective or a passing comment that someone threw out there to kind of challenge their thinking. I wanted them (and myself) to really know whether or not if this was a factual piece of the spiritual puzzle when it comes to the unseen realm and what it is in reality, versus just speculation and such. And so it took a lot more involvement with other resources that you had produced so I could paint that full picture all the way through that. Because I'll be honest. I gave the book to a few people (including *Supernatural*) and a lot of them came back to me and were saying, "Uh, can you explain this to me?" Because I think some of it was so new.

MH: Sure.

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SM: It wasn't that they didn't understand what you were saying. It was just trying to put this into a perspective and trying to line it up with their current worldview, and how does this all fit. And I think that was somewhat of the reason I had to go further back and go to the content that put it in context as broadly as we could so everyone could see that.

MH: Mm hmm. David?

DH: Yeah. So as I said earlier, my first exposure... I love origins. And when I work with youth, I find their [view of their] origins informs their identity and then their purpose. And so my goal is to give them a robust supernatural worldview, whether that's with creation origins, the supernatural worldview of the Bible, or their destiny as rulers and reigners with Christ. So some things that really resonated... I spent probably two years watching every video I could find (the Two Powers in Heaven, the Godhead, all of them). And then I read your first two novels (*The Façade* and *The Portent*), *Supernatural*, and then *The Unseen Realm*. So that's maybe a bit of my journey. But working with youth, I have to have hooks to kind of pull them in. So some of the hooks are, when you talk about the UFO stuff and people with supernatural beings (supernatural experiences), I tell the students, "Our education is in the natural world (naturalism), but our entertainment is in the supernatural." And so that resonates with them. Superheroes, demigods, all this stuff. So I've created a talk called The Supernaturals, where I just go through biblical history and show the supernatural part of it.

MH: Mm hmm.

DH: Everything from creation, the Tower of Babel, the mountain of Eden, and take that into Israel, into Jesus' ministry, and then finishing with their destiny to rule and reign with Christ. And why is there pain, suffering, and evil? Because that's a big question youth are struggling with.

MH: Sure.

DH: And how that fits with a good God and this whole story we're in. And so I found so much of your material applied to that—the Jewish perspective of “Why is there so much evil?” Well, it's not just one being who fell. There have been multiple rebellion events. And I've had some brave pastors and youth pastors who I've built rapport with who have let me bring this content to some of their youth. And instead of it making it *more fanciful*, it makes the Bible *more real*, which is something you've talked about. That the church in general has tried to make the supernatural very safe.

MH: Yeah.

DH: But it's made it boring for youth, you know? And especially in the apologetics area. And especially the creation world, where I have friends who are Young Earth Creationists, Old Earth Creationists, Theistic Evolutionists, but hardly anybody's interacting with the supernatural element of origins. And that's something you brought to the table that I love to synthesize and bring in. As long as I can have those kids have a firm biblical foundation first and then bring in some of the elements I've learned from your material.

MH: That's really interesting, just the approach. One of the things... We've done a couple of these discussion groups with pastors already. We've recorded some. And the theme of “Take your time with the content” [laughs] always comes clear. All three of you were patient with it. And even though you were enthusiastic about it, it's like, “Okay, I need to really... not just have the content points in my head, but kind of like where's the bigger picture here? Like what is the role of this book or that book, just to get a... and the podcast, obviously, to get more of a holistic set of thoughts and how it connects to other things that aren't even mentioned in *Unseen Realm*. But that's a big theme: Take the time with the content. I'm wondering, just generally, what was the response? Painful for anybody? Enthusiastic? We've already had Jeremy mention that for LDS folks, they could see some real connection points right off the bat. But I'm just wondering, did any issues come up? What was it like?

JF: I'll take a shot at that. We didn't really experience many issues. Maybe just a handful. But if I were being honest, those tended to be folks that had a handful of issues regardless of what you were doing. So I sort of excluded them from the evaluation [laughs] because of that, [MH laughs] so to speak. So for us it was actually well-received. And to your point of knowing the material, I did that because I wanted to be able to have an answer. I wanted to be able to know

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where to go with some things and not have to have the answer always be, "Let me look that up for you."

MH: Mm hmm.

JF: But we took it slow. I mean, we went through every chapter of *Supernatural*. We spent close to 16 weeks going through that. And the sections at the end that have that "Why does this matter for me? What does this mean for me?" were very helpful. It was easy for people to read. So they embraced it. And now every year since then, I will find... We'll do a series of sorts that tries to connect it. So we took... A few years ago, I took the fall and we went through Genesis 1-11, now with the context of the Divine Council view, which played within that, and kind of walking through it. And just this last year... In fact, we just wrapped up... Right before the virus hit, we wrapped up going through Carmen Imes' book.

MH: Mm hmm.

JF: *Bearing God's Name*. In fact, we gave out copies of that as well. And again, with the Divine Council worldview within it. And so about once a year, I'll try to take a section, a topic, a portion of Scripture, and move through it and show them where they can see it. And so for us, the reception was actually very positive. People were open to that and responsive to it and it's made its way into all of our studies. So anytime we have a small group study, it's something that people just will look at and say, "Now, I'm reading this. Does this... It's talking about a mountain" or "It's talking about a tree" or "It's talking about this god." And that seems to relate well. And one of the entry points was, I did a survey one Sunday of how many people knew the name Zeus or Hercules and Yahweh. And so few people knew the name Yahweh! And I just simply looked up and said, "Isn't it interesting that you don't know the name of the God that we serve, but we know the names of the other gods?" [MH laughs] And it was a trigger point to kind of say, "Why don't we spend some time looking at this. Maybe there's a reason he has a name." And so for us, the reception was good, and especially in the LDS side of the house. Once they could see that minor twist on the truth, it's like the key was unlocked for them immediately and they couldn't go back. They couldn't un-see it, so to speak. No pun intended.

SM: And I'll jump in with my response from the group I had. I probably had between 30 and 40 people every week, and they were dying to come back. They didn't want the classes to end. We had to keep them at an hour, and they couldn't wait for the next one because it was just so intriguing to them. But when it comes to the pushback piece, I really didn't get a whole lot of pushback from people, but I did get *good* questions. I mean, when you start dissecting a person's worldview, there's usually... I would expect a response of somewhat of... I don't want to say a defensiveness, but somewhat of a skepticism. You know, "What do you mean by this?" type of thought process. And I would say that the things that I got the biggest pushback or questions on was the whole idea of

“sons of God” versus “sons of Israel.” In those two pieces, I would say were probably some would almost say the sticking points, but what generated the most skepticism. “Why is this one correct and why is this one not?”

MH: Mm hmm.

SM: And that’s what really incited me having to go back and gather information to be able to say, “Here’s the cases for this.” And to some degree, I had to put it in their hands to say, “You guys have to make the decision, weigh the evidence as you see it.” But it did incite a lot of conversation and we spent a lot more time with the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint text and the different things that could go back to the source material so people could see how interpretation has influenced our Bible and how interpreters have done that. But I really wouldn’t say I had a whole lot of pushback. I will say I was quite surprised at the number of people who were just really blown away. They ate it up. And I had people from 20s and 30s all the way up into 80s in this class. And our church is a fairly... We would probably qualify it as... It’s a community church, but it’s conservative, I would say. So it probably follows more of a Baptist line in the tradition mark. And so when you start to throw worldview-altering information into a more conservative environment, you typically run into a Berean mindset. “We’re going to hear this, but we need more information before we can really settle in on whether we buy this or not. And it’s a great thing. It just requires...” From my angle, it required me going with a presentation, which I had with your book, but then I had to go get whole lot of backfill. The book of Enoch... To bring that up in front of a group of people that some are going, “What is the book of Enoch? I have never heard of this before. How does this fit into our Bible? Why is it not in our Bible?” Those are questions that required me to go gather more information, so people could say, “Okay. I’m getting the big picture now, that this is a whole lot bigger than someone just handing me an Old and New Testament and putting it in front of me and saying, “Here. This is all there is. Interpret it as it’s been given to you. Don’t look at it in the ancient context. Don’t look at other sources that might give you some context of how it was written and who wrote it.” And so this was mind-blowing for people, when they realized how far-reaching the content was, when it comes to the biblical perspective, and just how much outside content is there that can give you a proper mindset. And so a lot of people were looking at me like I had two heads when I started talking about Enoch in a Sunday school class. And I think I even said before we started, “Okay, I’m going to bring up Enoch, but let me give some disclaimers before we do.” [MH laughs] And I even had a disclaimer slide in my presentation [MH laughs] so that people wouldn’t think that I was trying to say, “Enoch is inspired.” But I wanted to give them that piece. So a lot of people looked at me a little strange. And when I did that, I kind of took that as a, “You need to go back and you need to get more information and you need to bring that back and so the next week, you could clarify it.” And so to some degree, my experience was very much learning with them. I had read the book and I’d watched the videos and gathered all I could, but until you start walking through this with 40 people...

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MH: Yeah. That's true.

SM: ... I realized I'm doing as much, "Well, I don't know the answer to that." And so I couldn't possibly answer everything. I had to say, "You know, we're going to talk about that next week. Give me a week to go and gather the information and we can answer these questions." So it was almost like a step-by-step, taking hands and jumping off the bridge together, to some degree, so that we could cover the questions that really mattered to the people that were hearing this. Because this was... It's worldview changing information when it comes to how we have always heard the Bible preached. So your sons of God piece was a big one, and I think that fits right into the Psalm 82 stuff that started your whole journey. Those were the two things I used to launch with. "Let's talk about what we understand these two pieces to mean, and then let's break them down and figure out if it's possible we could be off in some of our perceptions and interpretations of these things as we've always known them." And when you start to get people to question their own thought process, it's not me telling them to change. It's them saying, "Maybe I have misunderstood this." And they're open then for the content to be laid before them. And then they can come to their conclusions based on the evidence you present. So that's kind of how I approach it with them. And they didn't really push back on that, because they felt like... You're just giving them information and they're coming to their own conclusions.

MH: Mm hmm. I have a particular question, before David tells us about working with the youth. We had one pastor a couple of interviews ago that deals with youth a lot. And one of the things he did was he actually created a... I'm trying to think. Was it actually...? I think it was a website or something, where it was... He created a resource for parents, anticipating that he would present this to young people, they'd get really excited about it, and then they'd run home and say, "You're not going to believe what I heard in Sunday school today!" And then kind of get it wrong. [laughs] Or state it in such a way that it would actually alarm parents. So he was very conscious of that. And he created this resource that, the proper answer was, if the parents asked, "What does that mean?" The answer was, "Well, go to this website and go to this resource, and then you can see what we did today." He actually had what he presented in class available to the parents. So I'm wondering, was that an issue with working with the youth? Or did it come up? How did you handle it? I'm just curious.

DH: Yeah. So one thing... because probably 80% of the time, I'm a guest speaker to the youth group.

MH: Okay.

DH: And so they haven't spent a couple of years with me. But I try to spend at least six weeks with the youth groups. And I've learned a couple of lessons the hard way. But I've made a book called *The Supernaturals*, which is a free pdf download for students and parents that's on my website, so they can see the

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Bible verses. They can see where I'm taking the students through. So that has been important. I would have to say, my approach... I very seldom mention a Divine Council. I'll mention supernatural beings, God's first family from Job 30, when it says, "The sons of God shouted for joy." So I kind of introduce it as, there's this other world that... It's kind of like the Matrix. "You think it's there, but you haven't really been paying attention. And here's how it's affecting us. Here's how it shows up in your video games and our movies, and how it's going to play out even with the end times. But it's about how God partners with us to overcome evil and the evil one. So I've really had to sit down with youth pastors first and work through some of the material. Some of them have said, "Don't bring up Genesis 6—the sons of God coming down." Or they're very uncomfortable with some of the elements of the Divine Council worldview. So I present kind of what I can. And I really try to also gauge the maturity of my students. And we might just go as deep as "What's an imager?" And you've hit that several times, you know. It's the verb. It's an action. It's more than just a part of you. And so how does that play out, to be an imager? And then I tie it in... I've got a talk called "The Guardians of the Galaxy", tying in to pop culture stuff. But how that's...

MH: Do you have a talking raccoon in there? [laughs]

DH: [laughs] I wish. [MH laughs] But really just how God wants to partner with us. And our story's just beginning. You know? Some of these dudes are, like, "Space and the universe is so huge." And I'm, like, "Guys, we're at the *beginning* of our story. We're not at the end. We're at the beginning of our story as we become glorified, ruling and reigning with Christ. And it gives them this picture of their destiny, their future, what they're fighting for. And that's really important. So there are some elements I would love to present to them, but I really hold off on certain elements that are still, as you could say, controversial, to bring them into that supernatural world and how it affects them. And even a bunch of them have questions on "What are aliens?" And we get into that, which is great. And bringing that supernatural world, the Bible, back to their world. And making that alive to them.

MH: What would the three of you say to fence-sitters, then? Let's say you go out for coffee with a fellow pastor or somebody who works with youth. And it's like, "<sigh> I just read this book." Or "I saw this video and I'm thinking about this content. But I just don't know. I don't know if I should do this." What do you say to that person?

DH: So if I could jump here real quick. So I've had to develop areas of commonality. So almost every Christian believes in the Godhead. But they've never really heard the Two Powers in Heaven—the visible Yahweh of the Old Testament. And that resonates with so many people. So I can bring in certain elements of that Divine Council worldview that build bridges with them, that resonate with them, before I present some of the areas they haven't ever been exposed to.

40:00

SM: I'll jump in. The fence-sitters that I've talk to, and I've probably talked to a few of them regarding this... My advice to them is going to be the same thing I'd probably say on any content that they're exposed to, which is, "Do your research. Get a complete picture of this. And don't just take someone's word for it." When I preach, I tell people, "Don't take my word for it. Go verify it for yourself." I would probably give them that same advice. Until they get to a spot where they can say they have exhausted the resources out there (as much as they reasonably can), don't just accept it. "Go until you're confident that this is in fact the truth." And usually you can guide them by saying, "I've done this research. Here's how I've come to these conclusions that this is good information. You don't need to sit on the fence anymore." I think a lot of times, it's just a matter of, a person reads the book. They go, "Eh, I'm not quite sure how to process this." I believe truly that a book like you've produced requires a deeper look, even beyond the final pages.

MH: Yeah.

SM: You have got to go deeper. And that's why I think it's important. I would tell people, "Don't just read *Unseen Realm*. Go get *Angels*. Go get *Reversing Hermon*. Go get the *Enoch* books. Go get the content so that you can take and create this entire picture in the context of how it's presented so you can be confident what you're telling people is the truth. I think that gets people to jump off the fence, because they no longer feel somewhat unequipped. They feel like, "I can answer a lot of the questions, but I can also be confident that the information I'm presenting is actually true," versus speculation or assumption.

MH: Yeah, that's good. Even for scholars, there's really no substitute for having a command of the data. And if you feel like, "Well, I don't quite understand this one point." Or "I haven't looked at that thing yet," and it's always in the back of your mind, there's the creeping doubt, like, "Do I really understand this? Should I really jump in or write this article or do this presentation?" So I resonate with what you just said. It's really worthwhile spending the time to have that internal confidence, that "if I get a question, I can say something intelligent here." Or I will be able to say, "I'll get back to you," in such a way that they know that I have thought about that. But I'm being honest with them. "I'm not completely sure how to answer your question." So I think that's really...

SM: One thing I was just going to add on to that was, getting people to jump off the fence in regards to content like *Enoch*. When you tell somebody, "Hey, go read the book of *Enoch*. It might give you a context of this." Getting people to just jump off *that* fence is tough enough because "*Enoch's* this heretical book and it's not part of our Bible and it shouldn't be read or touched or looked at." So to try to... I think there are several fences, when you bring this type of a worldview in, that you've got to get people to have the confidence in their faith and in what they know to be true, to be able to say, "I can wade into information and be able to discern it and look through it with a biblical worldview, that's new information that

maybe I've never approached before." So anyway, just wanted to add that on there.

MH: Yeah, I still would get... Go ahead, Jeremy.

JF: You hit on something there that I think has been very important with people that we have spent time with in our context. My wife and I work with Fern and Audrey. We're on the board of Discovering MErcy there and we help. And something I learned that is really valuable is just the art of the approach. If you are willing to sit on the fence with them, to say, "Yeah, I don't have every part of this figured out." But just sit with them in that. Allow them room to work through this patiently. I think I had to learn a long time ago that I wasn't in charge of the pace at which people came to understanding, which was really frustrating to me, that people just couldn't get it. But that approach, I think, is everything. In our world, approach is everything. And that has been more helpful in helping people cross the fence. Really come over and join that and say, "Is it safe to walk on this other side?" And it is. But we even see that through the Gospels. Jesus is constantly dealing with people who were sitting on the fence. They're not sure what to think about him. They're concerned about which direction to go. The ones that are off the fence are the ones that see his mission as being... They don't see it correctly. So we can learn a lot about that approach, when we open up this material. And we've learned a lot of that over the last year and a half or two years we've worked with Fern and Audrey, to see how this really helps identify your identity. That theology really does matter in what you believe about yourself, what you believe in those moments, and how you wrestle through that. And I think that's an aspect of the Divine Council that most of us who are nerds, it's easy for us to overlook how this really does apply to every human being and what it really means for them in the here and now and in the not yet. And so for us, for fence-sitters, that's what we do. We just try to sit on the fence with them and gently work with them until they're ready to hop off the barbed wire.

45:00

MH: Mm hmm. Yeah, I still get emails... And on one level, I'm not surprised. And on another level, I'm still surprised, that I still get emails that essentially ask the question, "Why would I bother getting into all this background material so that I can read the Bible like ancient people did? Why would I even bother to..." They don't put it this way, but "Why would I care about reading the Bible in its original context?" Like "Why can't I just pick up the Bible and read it without any of that, and just read it?" So there's even this fundamental disconnect with the notion that you might... If it were you as the writer, wouldn't you want your readers a thousand years from now to understand you? To understand your times and what was going on and what prompted you to write this? What you were thinking? How your culture thought about XYZ? If it was them, then they'd get it. But since it's not them and it's this thing that they just culturally, I guess, or by experience, that they're familiar with this thing called the Bible, it doesn't really occur to them [laughs] to sort of do that. And I think your comment about "You're not in charge of the pace people take through it," I'm reminded of that. But you

put it really well. I actually wrote it down here. [laughs] I'm reminded of that when I get those questions. Because I'm so far into this that that question still kind of jars me, even though I understand why they're asking it. Because it seems so self-evident. "Well, of course you'd want to understand the author of something to know what he was trying to communicate." But that's not intuitive for a lot of people.

SM: One thing I was going to say was I think that one of the reasons you get that (and a lot of people get that) is... Because I was asked that question a couple of times. "Why cover this?" And I think some people... I just call it this interpretive fatigue psychology out there, [MH laughs] where everybody is just tired of every other interpretation. And so when it's, like, "Oh, sons of God. Sons of Israel," there's just been so much back-and-forth that no one can ever land on a solid place where there's this universal, "Yes, this is it," that people just get to the point where they say, "I don't want to look anymore. Just give me the Bible as it is. Don't have me look any deeper. Just give it to me. Give me the bottom line and let me move on." And I think it's, to some degree, a challenge for pastors and teachers and professors to get people to kind of rejuvenate—that this is a book we can get deeper into, and we can get to those "here's the reality of it" truths in the pages. And not have to just take this surface stuff that really just gets passed along as... I don't want to say "sermon material", but makes for great points on a Sunday morning for 20 minutes. But it's deeper. And it's more... There's just so much to it. And I think that context piece you have to have, to really understand it. So people just get burnt out on that stuff.

MH: Yeah. "Fatigue" is a good word. Because just this week, again, in conversation with people, I get the question that essentially... Not the question, but sort of... You can sort of read between the lines in the discussion where what they really want to say, but they won't say it, is, "Look, I don't want to think about this. Just tell me what to believe." [laughs] And if I were evil, that's what I would want to hear. [laughs] You know? "Well, I'll fill your head with all sorts of stuff." But that shows a certain fatigue. That's actually a good way to put it. I think it's dangerous to have people at that point that just, "I don't want to think about this. Just tell me what to believe." So I don't go down that road with them. But yet I do see that. And I think... I'm not sure exactly what the cure is, other than as Jeremy suggested, they're at some point on their journey timeline. Just let it be where it's at and be patient. But I do get that. I do get that. They just want to be told.

50:00

JF: Yeah, and we need to keep in mind what we're asking people to do. I'm envious of David, who gets to work on the youth side, because they're not carrying 15, 30, 40 years of life experience based on a belief system that they've had. They're young with that. What we're asking people to do is to unwind so many of their long-held beliefs. And for people who take faith in Christ seriously, we need to remember that is a really big ask that we're making of someone, to set that aside. And some people come there right away and some don't. I'll qualify my patience statement. For the people that we work with—that I work

with—I have seemingly unbounded patience with them. What I’ve found is that (I’m going to steal a line from you, Mike) for many people that I’ll listen to or even watch in other sources (YouTube and otherwise), I’ve lost all patience for teachers who should be willing to understand this, but they can’t. You say where you’ve become apathetic with certain things, [laughs] like end-times stuff. I’ve become apathetic to so much now. Because I can look at them and say, “You *should* be able to understand this. You’re just choosing not to.” But when we’re dealing with people who have “regular” lives, the ask of them is so big. We’re asking them to set aside a creed that maybe formed their life that led to decisions in marriage or children or careers. And that’s a big ask of a human to help maybe reshape that identity into something that it was meant to be.

MH: Yeah, you know, for people listening, there is a “set aside thing” about your traditions (your denominations, creeds, and whatnot). But people don’t realize that on the other side of it, you’re basically going to pick those things back up again. But you’ll understand why they are what they are so much better. And then you will add things to it. But you’re right. It’s a nerve-wracking... It is a big ask for some people to do. But at the beginning of this, I had a conversation this week (I can’t quite remember what the context was)... But I was sitting in Wisconsin yet, toward the end of my doctoral program, when I had started the manuscript that would eventually become *Unseen Realm*. I had no inkling that “this is going to matter for things like evangelism and discipleship.” [laughs] You know? That wasn’t in my head at all. But now, the magnitude of it is so much clearer. And the other thing I didn’t have in my head was, “Well, you need to write something that just sets aside all this denominational stuff and really focus on the metanarrative so that Christians can unite around the story—that Scripture has this amazing, colossal story that’s really the centerpiece of all of it. And you don’t have to pick at people’s distinctives and their community identity.” I wasn’t thinking about any of that consciously. I actually was thinking of the reverse. Like, “Is there going to be anybody left that will be my friend after this?” [laughs] I figured people would just be dropping like flies—that I was the Equal Opportunity Offender. But what it’s turned into is, if you do focus on the metanarrative, it helps believers of all these traditions to focus on the things that are really important—the things that drive the bus theologically in Scripture. But even having said that, since that isn’t the way truth has been presented to many people... It has been presented to them as a creed or as a set of denominational distinctives. Your observation is correct, that it feels really uncomfortable. It is a big thing to ask for. So I...

JF: We’ll always be your friend, Gandalf. We’ll go with you.

MH: [laughs] Right. I can sit there... “Am I going to belong anywhere?”

SM: One thing I can say, Mike, is that you have got people with this book really blowing up and rebuilding worldviews. And I think that regardless of how they take the content, the bigger picture (I would say even bigger than the book itself)

is people having to come to grips with the idea that what they have always accepted might need to be revisited and evaluated and looked at deeper. Because we just accept these things. And you bring information in this and... When I present it to my class and say, "Let me give you Dr. Heiser's credentials..." And we're all sitting here going, "We don't know Hebrew. We don't know Greek. He's clearly got a foot up on us. Is this valid information?" It makes people stop and say, "Is this true or is it not true?" And I don't think a lot of people ask that about their worldview. Like you said, they just kind of accept it and move on. And if this has done anything, it gets people to stop and say, "What is it I really actually believe about God and about this Divine Council and how things have come to be and the world as it exists?" And having to rebuild that. They take the Lego pieces apart and they put them all back together in a better picture, so that they have a deeper understanding and a more complete view of the overall piece. And so I want to tell you, I just give you total kudos for getting people (regardless of the book) to get into the depth of what it means to be a Bible-believing person. And the Word of God is more than just reading and memorizing a few verses. It is understanding it in a context that even goes beyond the pages, so that we can understand why it's saying what it says, and how deep it goes through the fabric of everything, ultimately.

MH: Yeah.

DH: Yeah. And real quick, just on that, I love to invite youth into the story, that you present a bigger story and how our history informs our identity. And I love how you use the material to ask people to pull them into that bigger story. And just with your regular life, you know? It's like, "Okay. What am I doing today? Well, I'm a son of God. I get my identity straight. And whatever I do is worship. And helping the students understand that learning this amazing biblical worldview *is* worship. And connecting dots with their Creator in a better, deeper, more supernatural way.

MH: My last question that I ask these groups is, "What would you like to see produced? In other words, is there a thing that just pops into your head, like, 'Oh, if I had had *this*, this would have been easier?' Or 'I'd still like to see *that*. This would help in some way.'"

JF: I feel like we've been very well equipped for our time, and some. The last thing I want to say is I remember Trey (I don't know how long ago, could be several years ago) making a comment on the podcast that he really felt like this was a movement. This was really... I think that was the day that we heard the term "Naked Nation" (or Nekked if we're in Texas). [MH laughs]

MH: Get it right. [laughs]

JF: Right, get it right. And look at where we are! And I think he was correct in that, that there is a movement afoot by people who care about the content and

the material and care about people. And it's going forward. So I will reserve the answer to that question for perhaps a future response for you.

SM: And Mike, one more thing. I don't want to pile on you. I know you've got a lot to do, so I'm not going to keep asking you to put more and more content out there. But one thing that might be helpful, I think, just from a counseling standpoint with this particular book would be a spiritual warfare Bible study. I think there are a lot of people that would benefit from understanding who their enemy is and how to combat their enemy and what that really looks like in a biblical sense versus this idea that "you've got the problem and it's your issue" and "it's not these entities over here that are hammering me; it's my problem." I think there's a lot of freedom that can be realized with people coming to grips with the idea and the fact that there are these bad entities out there who are afflicting and attacking. And so a Bible study that might be geared towards the spiritual warfare (how to engage it, what it is) is something that we could really use to free people up from some of these lies they're believing about who their enemy is.

1:00:00

MH: You know, that's an interesting idea. And I'll tell you (and for anybody else listening to this), what would help to create that is a grocery list of bad thinking that you all run into in this regard. In other words, what are the things that need to be analyzed and corrected or just tweaked a little bit so that it's a good understanding of this thing as opposed to something that really maybe not is harmful to the person, but it just doesn't take them anywhere in their spiritual life. It's just sort of a D.O.A. thing or it just takes them down a road where they get distracted or whatever. So a grocery list of things (of thoughts) that you've run into that really need to be addressed or corrected would be real helpful in being able to think through that.

Well, I want to thank you guys for being with us. This is good. This is good to get feedback and have a conversation with people who are in the trenches. We do podcasting, we do lots of things, but I'm not in the trenches like you all are. So this is something that needs to happen, not only for me to just hear and maybe not directly respond to immediately, but just to sort of put in the hopper and think about, let some ideas percolate here. So it's really helpful, and I know our audience is going to be really helped, too. I think they'll be encouraged, if they haven't taken the plunge. I think you guys gave good advice and your experiences have been quite positive. In other words, it's worthwhile. If you're out there thinking, "Should I bring this up in church? Should I preach a message on this or that?" Well, again, you've had good advice here. And at the end of the day, when you feel the time is right to do that, there's going to be a good payoff to it. There really will. People who are hungry for content will embrace it. You give them content; they're going to appreciate it. So thanks for being here with us.

JF: Thank you, Mike. Thank you, Trey.

SM: Thank you. Appreciate it.

MH: Alright. Thank *you*, guys.

DH: Yep, bye-bye.

JF: Bye-bye.

TS: Alright, Mike. Again, it's always interesting to see how people are using this content. And what's cool is everybody's taking this. Now we have so much content and they're able to take it and repurpose it and mold it to how they want to tell it. It'd be super interesting if you could see everybody's slides and take on it. And you know, maybe...

MH: I know. [laughs]

TS: Maybe we should make a repository for everybody to share. Something like that. Because it's a daunting task. But I think you have to go through it. I think you *have* to go digging and find the answers so you do gain that confidence, where you can have that confidence. When you're teaching this material to other people, you can't be shaky or seem... "I don't know." You know? So you really have to take the time and dig in to grasp this content.

MH: Yeah, you do. And it's actually an idea we can think about. We should have a conversation about creating a repository. I mean, I'd throw my slides in there. I'll bet other people would. It might be worth doing. I mean, when you get slides, they lack contexts, and not everybody puts... Basically nobody puts all their content on a slide. But you never know. But having said that, I still agree with your second thought, that you've got to spend the time working through the content yourself. We're not going to be able to just give slides and, you know, you can sort of cheat your way through it. That's not going to work. I mean, everybody we've had on for one of these conversations has basically said the same thing on that point. They just had to take time and really understand the content and feel confident in it, that they could not only understand what was being said by me, but to be able to field questions and talk intelligently to people who had questions.

TS: Yeah. And really, Mike, all we need you to do is *Unseen Realm 2*, please. [MH laughs] Don't do anything other than let's get the MoreUnseenRealm.com material out there. You know. Let's... You've got more than enough. You've got a road map. So let's get that stuff out, would be my...

MH: Trey, if you only knew... [laughter] It's just this list of things people want me to do.

TS: I know. That's what I'm saying. Forget all those other people. Forget all those other people.

MH: [laughs] Right.

TS: Alright, Mike, well, we want to thank again Jeremy, Scott, and David for coming on. We appreciate it. And with that, Mike, I want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.