

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 336

Begotten by the Spirit

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### Episode Summary

In Matt 1:20 the gospel writer describes Mary's pregnancy to Joseph this way: "do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." The wording is unusual for several reasons, most notably that the Greek verb translated "conceived" in the ESV means "fathered" or "begotten," something the Old Testament never has the Spirit doing elsewhere and only rarely has God performing in any context. In this episode of the podcast, we talk about Matthew's word choice in this verse and its theological implications.

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 336: Begotten by the Spirit. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you doing?

**MH:** Well, you know, I'm doing better. A lot of our listeners will know, because they subscribe to the MIQLAT newsletter, that my mom passed away July 24<sup>th</sup>. So it'll be easy to remember, not only because it's my mom, but it's the day before my anniversary. But I was in Delaware for... My wife and I took a trip, and then we came back home, and then I left a few days later to be my mom's caregiver, which we thought... I was slated in there for two weeks. I had to be back here in August because of the start of school. But just to keep it brief... She passed away during that time. I guess it's everything you'd expect. Just not a pleasant experience. But fortunately, it was brief when it really got bad as far as pain. She only had really maybe two days of that. So I feel relieved and thankful. I think it's a blessing that she went as quickly as she did. It's interesting, when she went in to... She chose home hospice really because of COVID. If she had chosen the normal, institutional hospice, no one would have been allowed to see her. So under that circumstance, the decision made sense. Other circumstances I would say, "Don't do that," because I am not a health care professional by any means and you're kind of handcuffed when it comes to pain management. But at any rate, it was only *really* bad two days. So we're all just thankful. But according to their prognosis at the beginning, she was pretty much spot-on what they told her, when they told her she had a month left. She had two or three days shy of that prediction. So you know, they knew. They knew and tried to convey all that

to her. But I'm just glad it's over. By the time listeners get this episode, we will have had the funeral, which we're going to do something in Delaware and we did something (I'll use the past tense here)... We did something in Delaware and in Pennsylvania, with my dad's remains as well, so that they could be interred together. So we're on the other side of it by the time people get this episode. And you know, it's rough. But they're both believers. They were both believers. They're with the Lord. None of us have to watch them suffer any more. Of course they don't have to suffer anymore. So in that sense, yeah, I'm doing much better than I was a week ago (ten days ago).

**TS:** Yeah. I know she took comfort [Norman the pug snorts] in making the decision, that you were there with her. [To the audience] And that snorting you hear, that's not Mike. [MH laughs] That's actually... He's got the pugs with him. [To MH] So at least you got some comfort there, I assume...

**MH:** Yeah, Norman's a little stressed.

**TS:** Oh, is Norman in your lap?

**MH:** That was Norman. He's on my lap. Because they had to... I don't want to get too goofy here, but we had to put him in the kennel because my wife had a trip for some different context at the same time all this was happening, so it was just sort of a maelstrom. But yeah. He's a little clingy. Let's put it that way. So I have him on my lap.

**TS:** I'm sure he's glad Mom and Dad are back.

**MH:** They're like babies. [laughs]

**TS:** [To audience] So if you hear some snorts throughout the episode, just know that's not me or Mike. That's Norman. [MH laughs] There's my dog. I don't know if you heard that one.

**MH:** There you go. [laughs]

**TS:** Well, alright, Mike. What are we talking about today?

**MH:** We're going to do Matthew 1:20 as our focus. You know, we've been doing this series on connections between Old and New Testament. And the title of the episode is Begotten by the Holy Spirit. That title is drawn from Matthew 1:20. So I'm going to read this. And again, this is one of those passages that you would read and you'd think, "Okay. What are the issues here? It doesn't sound like there'd be any issues here." I don't know if the word *issue* is right. There are just some interesting things to think about because of Matthew's word choice in one particular place. So in Matthew 1:20, this is what we read in ESV:

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**20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”**

Now that’s a pretty traditional translation that I just read from ESV. But there are some issues (I guess I’ll use that word) that the translation produces. Another way to put that is there’s some things to think about, because the translation choice in ESV is kind of inconsistent when you look at the word that’s being translated. And that takes us back into the Old Testament backdrop for this. I’ll try to unpack this and explain a little bit.

1) First off, the Greek verb used in Matthew 1:20 is *gennaō*, which means (or at least gets translated typically) “to beget.” In more modern English we would say it means to father (a child). So when you get this in genealogies, it would be “so and so fathered (*gennaō*) so and so.” So it refers to being a father, fathering a child. Now this Greek word (*gennaō*) is the dominant Septuagint verb used to translate one particular Hebrew term, and that is *yalad*, which means to father (a child). Now interestingly enough, if that’s what we’re talking about (*fathering* a child), then a translation like “conceived”... Is that really what’s going on? Well, it’s not really good, because...

2) Second thought. Since the verb *gennaō* is the dominant Septuagint verb used to translate Hebrew *yalad* (in other words, to father a child), that means it’s *not* the dominant Septuagint word used to translate the Hebrew word that we get in the Hebrew Bible for *conceiving* a child. In other words, these are actually two different terms in the Hebrew Bible. Like think of Hannah. When she’s praying for a child, it’ll say something like, “Hannah became pregnant,” or “Hannah conceived.” And that’s the word *harah*. But when it speaks of the male or the act of actually delivering the child, it’s going to be *yalad*. So these are two different terms. And interestingly enough, *gennaō* (which is what we get in Matthew 1:20) is never used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew verb for conception (*harah*). The Septuagint translator just doesn’t do that. Rather, the Septuagint translator uses *gennaō* (the word in Matthew 1:20) for *fathering* a child.

So the other way the Septuagint will express becoming pregnant, when the Septuagint translator runs into *harah* (to conceive), it’ll use *sullambanō* or the phrase *echō ev gastri*, which means “to have in the belly” or “to have in the womb.” In either of those cases, *gennaō* is not the normative word you would use to express the idea that a woman has conceived or has something in her womb now. You would use *gennaō* from the father’s perspective to say fathering a child.

You say, “Well, it seems like... Is that a distinction without a difference?” It actually is a distinction that has important theological ramifications, which is why we’re doing this episode. But let’s just continue. There’s another thought.

10:00

3) If this is all true... If *gennaō* isn't the term that you would use to describe a woman conceiving... In other words, we would use *sullambanō* or this phrase (to have in the belly). If that's true, then why does ESV make this choice? Why do other translations, instead of saying... Let's go back up to Matthew 1:20. Why don't translations have something like this? "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for *the father of what's in her womb*," or "*that which is being fathered*" or "*has been fathered*," why don't they use that terminology? Why is it "that which is conceived"? It's difficult to know why the translator picks "conceived" and uses... When he's looking at *gennaō* when an experienced translator should know that, "Well, *gennaō* is never really used for a woman conceiving in the Old Testament." But nevertheless, they do. So there's a question there. Why is it this way in English?

4) If *gennaō* should be translated "to beget" or "to father" or "fathered," Matthew 1:20 has the child in Mary's womb being fathered by the *Holy Spirit*. Pretty obvious. But what isn't obvious is there's no Old Testament counterpart to this. The Holy Spirit is never said to father anything or anyone in the Old Testament. That is, *ruach* (the word for spirit) is never the subject of *yalad* (the Hebrew word for fathering). Never happens. So this feels unprecedented. It feels like, "Why didn't Matthew say *God*? ("That which is conceived" or "God has fathered what's in her womb"... ) Why doesn't Matthew use normal terminology here, or something that you'd expect? Why his word choice? Why is Matthew doing what he's doing?"

5) And lastly (I'll just make this comment), it's rare (but it does happen) that God is said to father certain things (Hebrew *yalad*)—that the Septuagint has this *gennaō* word. You will find that. We're going to go through some of those. Actually pretty much most of them, because there aren't that many. Although it's rare, you have a handful of passages that do this. And it would seem a good idea for translators (but more so, interpreters) to look at those passages and ask if Matthew had any of them in mind. Well, perhaps, maybe he had *all* of them in mind. Any one of them, all of them. And if we do that (and that's what we're going to do in this episode), it'll open up some of the theology of Matthew to us. So here we have what seems to be kind of an "Okay, it's a virgin birth. 'That which is conceived in you... the Holy Spirit.'" And we move on. But because of Matthew's word choice and how rare it is, there's a lot to think about here and a lot to notice, but because of the way English translates these things and doesn't give us the more awkward "fathered" or "beget", we might not stop here and pause and think, like, "Well, what's going on here? This sounds a little odd. So what's the word?" And you start to do word study. There's nothing here that would really prompt you to do a word study. There's nothing unusual, it seems, to see. But there is. There is something unusual, because it's rare.

So what I want to do in this episode is I want to talk about Matthew's word choice and, again, the theology that that conveys. Word choice implies intention. It's not

accidental. There's something deliberate going on here. I mean, after all, Matthew could have written things like, "The Lord appeared to him (Joseph) in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is in her is from the Holy Spirit,' or 'the child in her is from the Holy Spirit,' or 'the Holy Spirit has given her a child.'" He could have said it... He could have conveyed the same thought in a number of ways without using the verb *gennaō* ("to father"), but he did. He did use that verb. And if you go back in the Hebrew Bible, it's really rare... I mean, you never have the Holy Spirit... You do have God occasionally bearing or begetting or fathering something. So Matthew's choice ought to alert us to the fact that Matthew wants us to notice something back in the Old Testament. And I'm going to say he wants us to notice several things back in the Old Testament that will inform us as to how Matthew was thinking about Jesus and how, consequently, we ought to think about Jesus—what our theology of Jesus should be. It should be what Matthew was angling for.

So why the word choice? Matthew is famous for tying his ideas to the Old Testament. His Gospel is considered (this is kind of an awkward way to put it) the "most Jewish" of the Gospels. I mean, all the Gospels are tied into Second Temple Jewish texts and Jewish contexts and Jewish literature. We know all of that. But scholars typically say this about Matthew because he spends the most time connecting things to the Old Testament. It's not that the other ones don't. It's just that Matthew does it with more frequency. So he's very attentive to the Hebrew Bible. And that is important. Again, why the word choice?

15:00 So I want to look at several things. We're going to look at the rare instances where God is said explicitly to have "fathered" someone or something. We're going to look at how those instances are treated by the Septuagint translator. (Do any of them use *gennaō*?) Of course, I've already tipped my hand that the answer to that is "yeah." We also want to look at how the Hebrew Bible would answer the broader question, "Who is God's son? Who is God's child?" And that'll take us into passages that may not explicitly use "begetting" verbs but will use phrases like "my son." So we want to consider all these things (look at these things) in tandem.

So let's just start at the easiest place: Whom or what does God explicitly father? And there are actually three of these. And then there's a fourth that doesn't have the explicit verb but conveys the same idea. But there are three things or entities (persons) that God is explicitly said to father. The first one is one many of you in the audience might be thinking of: Israel. So if we go to Isaiah 1:2... I'm going to read that to you. This is ESV.

**<sup>2</sup> Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;  
for the LORD has spoken:**

**“Children have I reared and brought up,  
but they have rebelled against me.**

The second part of that (“brought up”) is *rwm*. It means to lift up or bring up. Reared is *gadal*, which is, “to make great, make large.”

So here we have an idea where God specifically produces Israel. Now he doesn't use *yalad* here. However, the Septuagint translator actually takes one of those verbs and he uses *gennaō* (“fathering”). So the Septuagint translator interpreted that language as “fathering”. We get a little more explicit if we go to Deuteronomy 32:18. Here we are in Deuteronomy 32 again—Deuteronomy 32:18. Here we do have something more explicit. God is speaking to Israel... Moses is, in his song here, rehearsing the history of Israel.

**You [MH: people] were unmindful of the Rock [MH: That's a reference to God]  
that bore you [MH: that's *yalad*—“that fathered you”] and you forgot the God  
who gave you birth.**

So there we have an explicit reference with Israel. Isaiah 1:2 says God produced Israel. Okay, we get that. The Septuagint translator interpreted that as *gennaō* (fathering) but the Hebrew text doesn't have *yalad*. But if we go to Deuteronomy 32:18, the same subject (Israel), we do get explicitly *yalad* (“God fathered Israel”). And the Septuagint translator read that and chose *gennaō*. Okay? So here we have Israel clearly as something that God fathered, brought into existence, at least in the human realm here—the idea of fathering.

Now more broadly, if we widen the net here and less explicitly, the same idea is affirmed in Exodus 4:22 and 23. And this is a passage we've referenced a lot. Plus we did the series on Exodus. But this is when part of the scene right... Sinai (the burning bush) is Exodus 3—Moses and God having this conversation. So this conversation spills over into chapter 4. And God is telling Moses what to say. Pharaoh objects. So on and so forth. In verse 22 we read this:

**<sup>22</sup> Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn  
son, <sup>23</sup> and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.”’**

So Israel is called the son of God there. The more important one, though, is Hosea 11:1. It's going to say the same thing, but you all probably already know why this one's more important.

**When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.**

20:00

This one's important because Matthew quotes this one. In the very next chapter... Now we're talking about Matthew 1:20 today. But if you go over to Matthew 2:15, he quotes Hosea 11:1, where Israel is God's son [inaudible], called out of Egypt, and Matthew [inaudible] to Jesus. Matthew therefore equates, by virtue of his citation of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15, that probably ought to influence how we look at Matthew 1:20. Because that's referring to Jesus as well. Jesus is God's son in Matthew 2, by virtue of Hosea 11:1, so Jesus is God's son, as well in Matthew 1:20. And this notion that Jesus is God's son and Israel is God's son (they're both God's son). It brings the two together.

So Matthew's word choice of *gennaō*, going back to... Let's just use Deuteronomy 32:18 (where the Septuagint has *gennaō*), where Israel is fathered by God. So is Jesus. He's fathered by God. His word choice seems to be in concert with (and I'd say is driven by) his theology, that Jesus the messiah is God's son and representative of the whole nation. The individual son of God represents the corporate son of God.

Now a little rabbit trail here. That reflects something we see in Isaiah. If you get into the later chapters of Isaiah (40-55, specifically—the so-called servant songs), you have the individual servant... And we as Christians are familiar with the individual servant, because when you get to Isaiah 52:13 on into Isaiah 53, the individual servant is going to suffer for the sins of the nation. Well, what we don't realize often is that the individual servant in Isaiah... In a lot of these passages in Isaiah 40-55 that talk about the servant, it's not an individual; it's the nation. It's the nation itself. So you have both. You have a corporate servant and an individual servant. They're both God's servant—Israel and whoever this individual servant is that's going to do something really important. I'm just going to read you a few of these. Isaiah 41:8-9, to give you a taste of this. God is the speaker.

**<sup>8</sup> But you, Israel, my servant,  
Jacob [MH: another word for Israel],  
whom I have chosen,  
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;**

So it's a very clear reference to Israel being the corporate servant.

**<sup>9</sup> you whom I took from the ends of the earth,  
and called from its farthest corners,  
saying to you, "You are my servant,  
I have chosen you and not cast you off";**

“You (Israel, corporately) are my servant.” So on and so forth. You go to Isaiah 44. You have the same sort of thing going on. Isaiah 44, the very first verse.

**“But now hear, O Jacob my servant,  
Israel whom I have chosen!  
<sup>2</sup> Thus says the LORD who made you,  
who formed you from the womb and will help you [MH: you get that fathering  
idea again];  
Fear not, O Jacob my servant,  
Jeshurun whom I have chosen.**

So there's this corporate sense. But you also get individual servants, and sometimes they're right smack-dab in the middle. They're both in the same neighborhood in Isaiah, which is really kind of interesting. I'm going to go to Isaiah 49. And you actually have both in the same passage. Incidentally, if you have a Jewish friend who wants to argue that the servant in Isaiah 53 is Israel, it would be a very good idea for you to study the servant terminology in Isaiah 40-55, because sometimes it is Israel and sometimes it clearly is not. So Isaiah 49, I'm going to start at the beginning.

**Listen to me, O coastlands,  
and give attention, you peoples from afar.  
The LORD called me from the womb,  
from the body of my mother he named my name.  
<sup>2</sup> He made my mouth like a sharp sword;  
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;  
he made me a polished arrow;  
in his quiver he hid me away.  
<sup>3</sup> And he said to me, “You are my servant,  
Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”  
<sup>4</sup> But I said, “I have labored in vain;  
I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;  
yet surely my right is with the LORD,  
and my recompense with my God.”  
<sup>5</sup> And now the LORD says,  
he who formed me from the womb to be his servant,  
to bring Jacob back to him;  
and that Israel might be gathered to him—**



25:00

See there, in that verse (verse 5), the servant cannot be Israel, because Israel is the one being gathered *by* God's servant. So you actually have both things going on in the same passage. You're going to get this sort of mixture. But for our purposes, the important point is this notion that you can have an individual be identified with a corporate entity and have them... They're both the same in some sense, and then of course in some other sense they're not. One's individual; the other's corporate. That's very clear in Isaiah with his servant talk. But it's also clear in the son of God talk in the Old Testament. "Out of Egypt I have called my son." Well, in Hosea, it's clearly the nation. But Matthew sees the analogy with Jesus. Well, might Matthew in Matthew 1:20, when he talks about Jesus being fathered by the Holy Spirit... Maybe he sees an analogy there, too, back to Israel. Because Deuteronomy 32:18, *gennaō* is the Greek verb in the Septuagint of Deuteronomy 32 and also in Matthew 1:20. So it could be that Matthew wants his readers to think of *Jesus* as the individual son of God who represents the corporate son of God. Because he's going to do that in chapter 2, when he quotes Hosea 11. He's going to do that. So Matthew's got something going on here. He's got this representation stuff.

Now a little rabbit trail, again, before we go to the second thing that God explicitly fathers. This whole thing about fathering Israel. Here's a little rabbit trail for Divine Council fans [laughs]—Divine Council geeks, I guess. So I'm going to go to Isaiah 44. This is part of this whole complex about servant language. And it's kind of interesting. God is speaking to the Israelites.

<sup>24</sup> **Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer,  
 who formed you from the womb [MH: there you get that fathering talk again]:  
 "I am the LORD, who made all things,  
 who alone stretched out the heavens,  
 who spread out the earth by myself,  
<sup>25</sup> who frustrates the signs of liars  
 and makes fools of diviners,  
 who turns wise men back  
 and makes their knowledge foolish,  
<sup>26</sup> who confirms the word of his servant  
 and fulfills the counsel of his messengers...**

Now messengers... Many commentators will say, "Ah, you know, those must be the prophets." Well, could be. It's the word *malakim*. ("Angels" is another way you could translate this.) I would suggest to you (and we're going to see some other things here in this vein) that this might be another instance where God, together with his council, has determined to send his servant to redeem his corporate servant. You say, "Well, maybe that's a stretch, Mike." Well, if you go to Septuagint in Isaiah 9:6... And I have mentioned this passage before. We've

never done an episode on it. But this is the famous... I'm going to read it in ESV, because the ESV is going to follow the traditional Hebrew text. The Septuagint does not. Here it is in ESV, following the traditional Hebrew text:

**<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

Here it is in the Septuagint.

**Because a child was born to us, a son was given to us, whose leadership came upon his shoulder, and his name is called Messenger [MH: the Greek word is angelos—"angel"; it is nowhere close in the Septuagint] of the great council."**

The word for council is *boule* in Greek. And again, it may be significant that that same word is used in the Septuagint in Psalm 88:8, which corresponds to the traditional numbering—the traditional Hebrew text for Psalm 89:7, which is a classic Divine Council passage. I'm going to read it to you. Those of you who have read *Unseen Realm*, you probably have this thing memorized by now. I'll start in verse 5.

**<sup>5</sup> Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,  
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones! [MH: the *bene elim*, the sons of God]  
<sup>6</sup> For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD?  
Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD,  
<sup>7</sup> a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones...**

The Septuagint translates that council word there *boule*, which is the same word in Isaiah 9:6, where the messenger who is the servant... Remember Isaiah 44—the servant God sends with the approval, in concert with his messengers, to validate his messengers? Maybe this is a reference to a decision—God and his council.

For those of you who are new listening to the podcast, I should probably throw out a reminder here. God does make decisions in concert with the assembly of the holy ones—the so-called Divine Council. It's biblical language (Divine Council). You go to Daniel 4, you have a decree against Nebuchadnezzar that comes from the Most High, but also it is a decree of the Watchers (plural). A

Watcher is one of the holy ones of the council—the heavenly host. Daniel 7, you have a decision: what to do with the four beasts of the earlier verses in Daniel? The court (the council) sits. There's a number of seats there, and they're going to decide with God (the Ancient of Days) what to do with these beasts. First Kings 22:19, God lets his council participate in how to get rid of Ahab. I mean, you have these passages. And what I'm suggesting is, "Well, maybe we've got something going on here with the heavenly servant who also is God's son, in this same sort of vein.

End of rabbit trail, but I thought, for this audience, you might find that interesting. So whom or what does God explicitly father? Well, Israel was our first one. The second one... This is probably going to be something you could guess. The second one is the Israelite king. The Israelite king. This is Psalm 2:7. So let's look at Psalm 2:7.

**<sup>7</sup> I will tell of the decree:  
The LORD said to me, "You are my Son;  
today I have begotten you.**

In Hebrew, it is *yalad* (the verb for "father"). "Today I have fathered you." And in the Septuagint, that is rendered by *gennaō*, the word Matthew uses in Matthew 1:20. Now that passage (Psalm 2:7) is cited in Acts 13:33, cited in Hebrews 1:5 and Hebrews 5:5, of Jesus, because he is the king. He's the son of David. This is who he is. And if you're thinking of Jesus in these terms (and Matthew certainly will, in the course of his Gospel), it would make sense to use the word *gennaō* in Matthew 1:20. Because for the literate reader, someone who would be studying their Bible or know it really well, their mind's going to be taken back in the Septuagint to Psalm 2:7. So when Matthew has Jesus being "*gennaō-ed*" by the Holy Spirit (by God), that's a message. It's a message of kingship. "Because who else does God *gennaō*? Oh, Israel. Oh, the *king*." And the king is a representative of the nation. This just makes sense. So we can already see in two examples where just the simple word choice takes us down certain paths to reveal how Matthew is thinking about Jesus and how, if we're getting our theology of Jesus from the New Testament (that would be nice), how we should be thinking about Jesus, and how the early Christians would've been thinking about Jesus. And I put it that way because we... We spend a lot of time here talking about, well... Look at some of the stuff you run into, either in church (unfortunately) or the internet. "Oh, who's Jesus? The Bible's ambiguous about this. It never really calls him this." These are simplistic (and in some cases I'd be willing to use the word "stupid") arguments against the characterization of Jesus. Because the more you look into the layering of this kind of stuff, you realize how in tune the New Testament writers were with things like "God's son" language, kingship language. This is not just a peasant that all of the sudden had delusions of grandeur and thought about himself in certain ways, but he was just a whack

job. Okay? All of this is very carefully laid out for anyone to see, if they will just spend time in the text.

Now I want to take a little rabbit trail here, again on a Divine Council path. We talked about God's [inaudible]... how there's this individual/corporate thing going on, just like there's this individual and corporate thing going on with the servant, and how there's Isaiah 44 sort of loops in God's councilors—his messengers (*malakim*). Might that be an indication of Divine Council? I think it could be. But here we go again, with the king, there's a Divine Council connection.

I'm going to quote from my dissertation here. (Which I rarely do, because, honestly, it's not as interesting as *Unseen Realm*.) [laughs] But I'm going to quote a little bit from it. And this is some material that is not in *Unseen Realm*. So pay attention, for those who've read *Unseen Realm*, this is just kind of like what we do here. This would be new stuff, unless you've read my dissertation, which I don't imagine anyone in the audience has. But here we go. In my dissertation, I spent some time talking about Psalm 89, specifically 37-38. Now let's go to Psalm 89 before I jump into this quotation here. You have some obvious references here to the king. Let's just go back up to verse 20.

35:00

- <sup>20</sup> **I have found David, my servant;  
with my holy oil I have anointed him,  
<sup>21</sup> so that my hand shall be established with him;  
my arm also shall strengthen him.**
- <sup>23</sup> **I will crush his foes before him  
and strike down those who hate him.**
- <sup>24</sup> **My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him,  
and in my name shall his horn be exalted.**
- <sup>25</sup> **I will set his hand on the sea [MH: his hand will be over *yam*]  
and his right hand on the rivers. [MH: *naharim*]**

Both of those terms are ways of describing the co-regent of the Ugaritic Divine Council (the Baal Cycle stuff) deities. Basically, God says, "My king (my choice) is going to be superior. He's going to rule all the nations."

- <sup>26</sup> **He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,  
my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'**
- <sup>27</sup> **And I will make him the firstborn,  
the highest of the kings of the earth.**

He will be Elyon, which again is a title of Baal in the Ugaritic. So Psalm 89 is not only a repetition of 2 Samuel 7 (the Davidic covenant), it is a direct slam against Canaanite religion—Canaanite authority—in terms of how they viewed divine authority working out on earth. So all this. And you keep reading. So it's obviously about kingship. And you get to verse 37. Let's go to verses 36 and 37. We'll loop them both in.

**<sup>36</sup> His offspring shall endure forever, [MH: David's. In verse 35, David is mentioned specifically. "I will not lie to David."] his throne as long as the sun before me.**

**<sup>37</sup> Like the moon it shall be established forever [MH: sun and moon, they're always there], a faithful witness in the skies."**

Okay? That's verses 36 and 37. You think, "Well, that's kind of weird. What's going on there?" Now in the Hebrew text, these are verses 37 and 38. But I wanted you to hear it in English. And now I'm going to quote something from my dissertation that actually connects kingship to the Divine Council—the earthly king to the Divine Council. And the key idea is this "witness in the skies," this "witness in the clouds." The word "skies" there is *shachaq*, which is the same word as "the council." The council is in the heavens—in the skies, in the clouds—in Psalm 89. So I'm going to read here.

Ps 89:37-38 [MH: those are the Hebrew verses] has received a good deal of scholarly attention. At issue is the identity of the faithful witness in the clouds of verse 38. E. Theodore Mullen...

I'm going to intrude on myself here. Mullen is the guy who, as part of his own Harvard dissertation, first published a work on the Divine Council in English. It's very hard to find. But if you can find it, get it.

E. Theodore Mullen argues that the witness could be an unidentified member of the divine council, whereas P[aul] Mosca, rejecting Mullen's thesis, contends that the witness is the Davidic throne itself. T. Veijola [MH: that's another scholar I'm quoting] believes the witness is Yahweh himself.

So there are basically three views here. So I go on to discuss this in my dissertation.

Veijola marshals several convincing arguments against the position of Mosca...

I think Veijola really eliminates what Mosca is saying. And that leaves Veijola and Mullen. Is the witness Yahweh himself or is it a member of the Divine Council? Now...

Mullen appeals to Job 16:19-21 as a conceptual parallel to understanding the cloud witness as a divine council member. That passage has Job referring to his "witness" ('ēd) [MH: the Hebrew word here is 'ēd; it's the same one here as in Psalm 89] in the heavens, his "guarantor" on high who mediates his thoughts to God.

So let's just go to Job 16. I'm going to read this passage to you. It's kind of interesting. Job 16:19-21 says this:

**<sup>19</sup> Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven [MH: my witness is in the heavens],  
and he who testifies for me is on high.  
<sup>20</sup> My friends scorn me;  
my eye pours out tears to God,  
<sup>21</sup> that he would argue the case of a man with God,  
as<sup>Ⓜ</sup> a son of man does with his neighbor.  
<sup>22</sup> For when a few years have come  
I shall go the way from which I shall not return.**

40:00

So Job is mentioning this idea that he has an advocate—that he has a witness in the clouds. And if you've read my *Angels* book, you know that Job does this in several other passages, where he has members of the heavenly host being mediators between him—humans generally—and God. We actually did a whole episode on the podcast on this—the one on Heavenly Books. So this is a very familiar idea. So I get into this. And then later in the dissertation, I compare Psalm 89 with Daniel 7 (a Divine Council scene) because I want to compare the Son of Man in Daniel 7 with the witness in the clouds in Psalm 89. Now we know that the Son of Man in Daniel 7 is an obvious deity figure. We know about the Son of Man—how that works out to connect with Jesus, so on and so forth. And so I'm trying in my dissertation to connect these two. Here's what I wrote:

An identification of the Son of Man as a deity in the clouds is possible in view of the fact that, like Daniel 7, Psalm 89 is a passage that concerns the divine council and follows the flow of the Baal Cycle's establishment of everlasting dominion. In Daniel 7 Yahweh-El and his council decreed the death of the fourth beast (or kingdom) and the removal of the dominions of the other three beasts so as to elevate the Cloud Rider to vice-regent status. In Psalm 89, at least prior to 89:39, the high God Yahweh-El, incomparable in council ([according to] 89:7-9) and

holder of all power in heaven and the earth (89:10-19), decrees that the line of David will have an everlasting rule over Israel, the chosen people (89:4-5; 20-37). After 89:39, the line of David is seen as "fallen" (89:45), but the promises cannot fail completely. The covenant of eternal rule is still guaranteed by a faithful witness in the clouds (89:38). Thus Psalm 89, like Daniel 7 which ignores the Davidic line, does not require a human Davidide to fulfill the promise of global sovereignty. In Daniel 7 the high God and his council grant everlasting rule to Israel by means of a divine being in the clouds whose power to rule can never be taken away, but who in turn shares dominion with Israel in 7:21, 22, and 25. The difference between the two is that in Psalm 89 a divine cloud [MH: or cloud witness] acts... [MH: to validate] the covenant, whose original Davidic referent has been lost in the wake of exile, whereas in Daniel 7 the divine cloud figure becomes the covenant's fulfillment to a people who have long understood the demise of David's dynasty. [MH: This is well after the exile is a fact.]

Comparative data for divine "cloud witnesses" testifying to ancient covenants are extant. Mullen's work on the cloud witness argues persuasively that the language of Ps 89:37-38 is that of ancient royal-grant covenants.

**Then I quote Tate in the *Word Biblical Commentary*. It says the same thing. So just to move down a little bit...**

Mullen, citing the reference to the divine assembly in Ps 89:6-9, argues that the expression *b-shachaq* [(in the clouds)] in verse seven brings the witness into the heavenly court... The function of the cloud witness in Ps 89:37-38, as with the royal grant treaty, is to guarantee the terms of the covenant, which specifically concern the creation of a dynastic line from David...

**Now, again, the argument here is that this role of the co-ruler should be considered (in the Ugaritic sense, it's Baal)... And Daniel 7 and Psalm 89 both pick up on this language, but of course substitute Yahweh and whoever this witness is, his own choice.**

The argument here is that this role of Baal should be considered in the backdrop of Psalm 89, and thus the cloud witness's guarantee of the dynastic succession to David and thus Israel. If this relationship be noted, the correlation of Daniel 7's Son of Man with the cloud witness argues anew that Daniel 7 and Psalm 89 are contextualized in complementary ways.

**Now what all that boils down to is this. We're talking about the king. The king is begotten (fathered) by God. Well, whoever this king is is going to have to follow the terms of the Davidic covenant guaranteed to David. We have that promise reiterated in Psalm 89, even though by the end of the psalm... Part of it is probably written after the exile. (We have a big problem here, because there's no**

Davidic king ruling now.) But God says, “Look. This covenant is guaranteed specifically by one member of the Divine Council who is my co-regent, my co-ruler.” Again, if you’re familiar with *Unseen Realm*, you already know that this “slot,” as it were, is the second Yahweh. It’s the Two Yahwehs idea, the Two Powers in Heaven, the Two Yahwehs of Judaism. They noticed passages like this, and it equates the Davidic ruler of Psalm 89 with the second Yahweh of Daniel 7. They just call him the Cloud Witness in Psalm 89. It’s the same figure. And if the Son of Man is Jesus to Matthew, well, then the Witness in the Clouds is the same thing.

So Jesus being begotten speaks to his kingship. It also speaks to his status as the king in heaven as well (the co-ruler). For the Jewish reader, who knows the importance of the word *gennaō* (the begetting, the fathering idea) and knows it’s used of the king will know where the Davidic king is talked about in the Hebrew Bible. And that’s 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89. And so the kingship has been guaranteed. This dynastic promise will not only not fail, but it’s going to be fulfilled by a king that God himself begets, God himself fathers, God himself brings forth. And when Matthew uses this terminology, it connects Jesus to that king to the council, by virtue of these other passages.

Now some of you out there are going to be wondering, “Well, that sounds like he had a beginning.” Well, lo and behold, now we come to the third thing that God “fathers.” And this will be a little bit mind-blowing. But the third thing that God fathers is wisdom, believe it or not, in Proverbs 8. [laughs] Proverbs 8 actually has this terminology. Proverbs 8:25. This is wisdom speaking:

**<sup>25</sup> Before the mountains had been shaped,  
before the hills, I was brought forth.**

That verse in the Septuagint has *gennaō*. “Before the mountains were settled, before all the hills, he *gennaō*-ed me”—he produced me. You say, “Why is this important?” If you’ve read *Unseen Realm*, if you’ve read even my website (TheDivineCouncil.com)... If you go to TheDivineCouncil.com, in the right hand column, there’s a little free pdf on Jesus and Wisdom—the relationship of Jesus to Wisdom. Wisdom is the co-creator in Proverbs 8. She (it’s Lady Wisdom because the word wisdom—*hokmah*—is grammatically feminine) is God’s agent of creation. Whereas in the New Testament, it’s Jesus. And of course... “Oh, you know, Jesus was a woman.” First of all, [grammat]ical gender isn’t about biological gender, either in modern languages or ancient languages. You can read the pdf to get all this stuff. I’m not going to go through it here on a podcast episode. But what you have here is you have wisdom, who intertestamental Jewish texts have as an occupant—a co-occupant—with God on his throne. She occupies that part of the throne or, like, the right hand of God [laughs] position, using this familiar language used of Jesus. Wisdom is a Divine Council member and a co-ruler.



50:00

I'm going to just read you some things from this pdf and you'll get the point of connection. But we need to start off by saying wisdom was not a created being. So the whole reference in Psalm 89 to a member of the Divine Council guaranteeing this covenant... And we have the *gennaō* (the fathering) language... That doesn't mean "point of origin" when it comes to God and his attributes or the second Yahweh. Because if wisdom is an attribute of God, it *must* be eternal, because God is eternal. It has to be. There is no time when God lacked wisdom, else he would not be God. So we have wisdom, an eternal character, put in this position and is said to have been begotten, as opposed to created—brought forth by God. I'm going to read you a little bit from this pdf I wrote.

There are several instances in the New Testament where Jesus is identified in some way with Wisdom. 1 Cor 1:24 is considered by some an explicit statement to that effect since Paul refers to Jesus as "Wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). However, it is not completely clear that Paul meant to identify Jesus with the Wisdom of Proverbs 8 in that statement in light of his wording in verse 30: "And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption." The wording here seems to simply list wisdom among a number of other attributes and theological concepts. Since it is also possible that Paul could have derived his notion of Jesus as co-creator (Col 1:16; 1 Cor 8:6) from other lines of thought, scholars are hesitant to affirm a "Wisdom Christology" too firmly with respect to Paul.

But we're talking about Matthew in this episode.

Much more striking is Luke 11:49-51. This text refers to the wisdom of God in personified terms as in Proverbs 8.

I'm going to read you the excerpt. This is Jesus confronting the scribes and the Pharisees.

**<sup>46</sup> And he said, "Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. <sup>47</sup> Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. <sup>48</sup> So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. <sup>49</sup> Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,'...**

Now again, if you actually look up an Old Testament reference there, it's God saying this thing—God sending the prophets and apostles. And Paul... That's

what you get in Ephesians 4. But here, Luke says that the Wisdom of God said, “I will send them prophets and apostles.” Which one is it? Is it God or Wisdom? And of course, the answer is yes, because they’re both Yahweh. They’re inseparable. The passage is pretty straightforward. But what gets really interesting is when you go over to Matthew. Matthew has the same scene. And here’s what Matthew says. (Jesus said:)

**<sup>29</sup> “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, <sup>30</sup> saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ <sup>31</sup> Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. <sup>32</sup> Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. <sup>33</sup> You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? <sup>34</sup> Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify...**

Do you realize what Matthew has just done? Matthew has put Jesus in the God slot—in the Wisdom slot—of Luke. He has co-identified them. Jesus is now the sender. This is first-person language. If you go to the book of Hebrews, the first three verses identify Jesus with Wisdom. It says this:

**Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.**

Okay, he created the word through his son. [Quoting verse 3:]

**<sup>3</sup> He is the radiance...**

The Greek word there is *apaugasma*.

**... of the glory of God...”**

He is the *apaugasma* of the glory of God.

**...the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.**

Here’s the noteworthy point. The Greek word *apaugasma* appears only here in the New Testament and it occurs in only one other place in the Septuagint—one place in the Septuagint. It occurs in the Wisdom of Solomon. The passage is chapter 7, verses 24-26.

For wisdom is more mobile than any motion, because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. For she is a breath of the power of God, a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty. Therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her, for she is a reflection. She is the [apaugasma] of eternal light [MH: *eternal* light]. A spotless mirror of the working of God and an image of his goodness.

55:00

When the writer of Hebrews quotes or uses the word *apaugasma*, he can only have one source for it, and it's that passage I just read, where Wisdom is eternal. And in the book of Hebrews, the language there is talking about Jesus. So you have these instances where Jesus is connected with Wisdom. And if we go back to our topic, wisdom is one of those things that is said to be *gennaō*-ed in the Septuagint.

So you have three things... Backtracking to the beginning of the episode, we're asking, "Why does Matthew use this word (*gennaō*) when it doesn't really refer to, from a woman's perspective, the act of conceiving?" *Gennaō* isn't used by the Septuagint translators to translate *harah* (to be with child) or that expression. Rather, *gennaō* speaks of the origin of the father. The father is the point of origin—the fathering of a child or of something. And God, in the Old Testament, fathers three things explicitly with this verb in the Septuagint: Israel, the Israelite king, and Wisdom. Those are the three things. When Matthew picks this word, *he knows what he's doing*. He wants his readers to think of Jesus as the representative of Israel, the king, and the co-creator. The co-occupant of the throne of heaven. Wisdom. Eternal. All of that theology rides along the word choice, which is really kind of amazing, when you really get down to it.

We could actually loop in Adam here. There's no verb of begetting for Adam in the Old Testament. You don't have *yalad* (God "begetting" Adam) because that's the language you would use, like, in the genealogies. There's a male/female relationship there. But in Luke 38, Adam is called the son of God. The *son* of God. Adam's origin is still God. If you look at Matthew's genealogy, he's obviously drawing on Genesis 5. And that has *gennaō* all over the place for the other individuals in the genealogy. Luke, of course, is going to be very careful about how Jesus is only from Mary through the grammar that he uses, but we have Adam as the son of God.

So we could loop Adam into this. (For Paul, Jesus is the second Adam. We get all that.) But I want to focus on these three items. Matthew's choice takes the minds of his readers back to all three of these things. So whatever is in Mary's womb is identified corporately with Israel—the individual to the corporate. There's that identification. And if his readers understand the individual-to-the-corporate symbiosis there, they're going to think of the servant, because that's the other place where it occurs very explicitly. They're probably going to think of Isaiah 44, which loops in the whole council idea. They might think of Isaiah 9. All of these

things have points of connection with them. Because Isaiah 9, that's a child. "Unto us a child is born." This is what New Testament writers do with the Old Testament. They take data points. They take dots and they connect them for their readers. They steer their readers to dots that they want connected in the heads of their readers. And in Matthew's case, this one simple word choice takes us to Israel, the Israelite king, and Wisdom (the co-regent, the co-ruler, the eternal co-ruler with God). And that's what's in Mary's womb.

One last thought here. We should throw this in. God, of course, is the subject of *gennaō* in all these passages in the Old Testament. He's the one *gennaō* -ing (if I can say it that way). But Matthew ascribes the fathering of Jesus to the Holy Spirit. That doesn't have a precedent, *unless Matthew thought that the Spirit was equivalent to God*. Then it makes sense. The Spirit is equivalent to God the Father. What you have here is... In Matthew's head, the Spirit of God is thus personified in a manner similar to what's going on in these similar instances.

1:00:00

What I'm getting at is that I think if you walked up to Matthew and you said, "Hey, I get this God stuff—God and Jesus and all that. But the Spirit of God, obviously that isn't God," I think Matthew would look at you like you were an idiot. What he does here... This is a good example where a New Testament writer who is part of the Second Temple Jewish world, who is *very* familiar with his Hebrew Bible, feels very free to take a verb (*gennaō*) that rarely has God as its subject, and he feels free that instead of using G-O-D (*theos* in Greek), he has the Holy Spirit. You know, if you asked Matthew, "What are you doing here?" he's like, "What does it matter? They're the same thing. I know what I'm doing." [laughs] You know? In other words, Matthew wouldn't have thought that he'd committed a theological *faux pas* here. He's telegraphing an idea.

These are the kinds of passages, honestly... I've said this before. I said it in *Unseen Realm* where I talk about where trinitarianism really comes from. It doesn't really come from the formulaic expressions, even those are supportive (Father, Son, Holy Ghost—those kinds of things that you get in the New Testament periodically). Where it really comes from is a firm knowledge of the Godhead stuff in the Old Testament (the Two Yahwehs thing), and then how the second Yahweh figure (Jesus) is talked about both in relationship to God and also in relationship to the Spirit. We have "Spirit of God" and "Spirit of Jesus" interchanged in a few passages in the New Testament. Paul refers to Jesus as "the Lord, who is the Spirit." Twice he does that. And he's not denying a physical resurrection because Paul affirms that elsewhere. What he's getting at is that these are all interchangeable in terms of who they are, their essence. *This* is where the Christian Trinitarian Godhead thinking comes from. It comes from (drum roll please) what the New Testament writers are doing with data points in the Old Testament.

You know, we don't have to wait for Constantine or some other dude in the early church to invent this idea. What they're doing in these early councils is they're

trying to understand the data. They're trying to articulate what the data is telling them. And it ain't telling them Aryanism. It's not telling them there was a time when the Son was not. But they have to figure out how to express that, how to articulate what the textual data are saying. And this is another indication. When Matthew does this, he knows what he's doing. And he doesn't consider it a theological misstep. He knows what he's doing. He knows his Old Testament well.

Here we are, in this episode... One word—one word—that sets you... If you ask a simple question like, "How's this used in the Septuagint?" instead of just elsewhere in the Greek New Testament... That's typically what we think of as word study. "Where else does the New Testament use this?" Which... You need to do that, obviously. But a second step is, "How is this used in the Septuagint?" Because this is the Bible of the early Church. It's also the Bible of the apostles and Jesus, for the most part. This is what they used most of the time. And part of that is because the New Testament's written in Greek. We understand that. But this is the kind of thing you need to do. Because look at this: one word, and we've gone down, like, three roads here. And lo and behold, they actually have Divine Council connections, which is a pleasant surprise. It's not necessarily where we were really focused on today. But it's an element of this. But look at where it takes you. How does Matthew think about Jesus? Well, Matthew can answer that. "Here, I'll give you one word. Go chase it down. That'll tell you what I think about Jesus." [laughs]

So again, what we're trying to do in this series (if you can call it a series, because it's kind of random—I'll admit that) is how does the New Testament utilize and repurpose the Old Testament? And in this case, it's very revealing theologically as to what was in Matthew's head. And so when we try to do Bible study, and when we try to stick to the primary sources (the biblical text), we need to loop the Septuagint in here, because this is what the New Testament writers are often drawing on, and it can really be instructive, really help give us a textual basis for the theological points that we hold.

**TS:** Alright, Mike. We appreciate Norman helping you through that episode. [MH laughs] He did a good job.

**MH:** He is wasted. [laughter]

**TS:** Alright, well that was a good one, Mike. Alright, Mike, I think next week we have a Q&A planned, so we'll get... We've got a lot of questions about the Exodus and John 3:5 episode.

**MH:** Oh, okay, yeah.

**TS:** So we'll tackle some questions. Alright, Mike. We appreciate it. And with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.

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