

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 371

Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus

April 10, 2021

Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Guest: Dr. Seth Postell (SP)

Episode Summary

According to Acts 15 the Jerusalem church concluded that Gentile believers do not have to keep the Law to be in right relationship with the God of Israel. Nevertheless, many Gentile believers today wonder whether their love for Yeshua (Jesus) and faithfulness as his followers ought to be expressed by observing the Law. What of Jewish believers in Jesus? Does Acts 15 assume that Jewish believers in Yeshua must be Torah observant? Did not Jesus and Paul teach believers to “do and observe” the Law? What about New Testament passages that suggest believers are not under the Law, and that the Law became obsolete with the making of the new covenant (Heb. 8: 6– 13)? Dr. Seth Postell joins us today to answer these and other questions. The conversation focuses on his important (and highly recommended) book, *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus: How the Torah Fulfills its Goal in Yeshua* (co-authored with Eitan Bar and Erez Soref). His thesis is straightforward: The purpose of the Torah, Genesis through Deuteronomy, is that it is an historical narrative whose purpose is to lead Israel through the broken Law and beyond, namely, to Yeshua, the Messiah. Dr. Postell is a key leader at One for Israel, a multi-faceted non-profit ministry with the express goal of reaching Israelis and Arabs with the good news of Yeshua. He is also Academic Dean at Israel College of the Bible, the only Hebrew-speaking evangelical Bible college in the world.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 371: *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus* with Seth Postell. I’m the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he’s the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! What are you doing?

MH: Well, staying busy as always. I have to admit, I’ve really been anticipating this particular interview. So part of my week has been not only reading Seth’s book, but also going back and looking at some of the source material in my library that’s behind it. So it’s been nice. It’s actually a nice change of pace, other than the normal busyness.

TS: Yeah, and you really, really like this book. So you're going to put your foot down and kind of force people to read this book.

MH: Yep. [laughs]

TS: Which is good. I think when you can find a definitive answer on something, and you can say, "Hey, this is my answer. Go," it's always a good thing.

MH: Yep. That's true. Yeah, this is going to be my go-to reference. I know Seth's waiting to come on, so there you go. It's not going to be the only time I say that during this interview. But it's a wonderful book and I'm really, really happy that we can land on this topic and give it to our audience.

TS: And before Seth comes on, we have a 30% discount code. You can go to NakedBiblePodcast.com to get the link to Seth's book. You can get 30% off. It expires at the end of this month (April 2021). So...

MH: Yep. The Christian and the Law. This is the book.

Well, it's an understatement to say, I am thrilled to have Seth Postell on the podcast today. Those of you who happened to have been with me in Israel a couple of years ago, we tried to get Seth to come over for one of the evening sessions. And basically, it was the worst day of the year to possibly try [laughter] because of the whole movement of the embassy and the big crowds. And it just didn't work out. But I've known Seth for a few years. I'd read his *Adam and Israel* book, and I've talked about that on the podcast before and chatted at ETS and things like that. And I wanted to bring him on specifically to talk about the believer's relationship to the Law, whether it's a Jewish believer in Jesus or a Gentile believer in Jesus. And he has a book with two co-authors called *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus: How the Torah Fulfills its Goal in Yeshua*. And Seth is an author along with Eitan Bar and Erez Soref. And I'm going to start here by briefly asking Seth to introduce himself to you. And Seth, when you do that, I want you to include not only your academic credentials (what you do, what you teach), but also other ministry efforts that you're involved in.

SP: Well, it is definitely a great privilege and pleasure to be with you. It's this evening already here. It's the end of the day here; it's the middle of the day there. But it's a great pleasure to be with you. And thank you so much for having me. So yeah, I'm Seth Postell. I've actually lived in Israel since 1993. I grew up in a Jewish family. My wife grew up in a Chinese Buddhist family. We met in Israel. And so yeah, so I had the privilege actually... My PhD was with Dr. John Sailhamer. I studied with him. I started at Southeastern Seminary and then went to Golden Gate and returned to Israel in 2012. And I've been serving with Israel

5:00

College of the Bible ever since. And so some of you may not have heard of Israel College of the Bible. People know us usually as One For Israel. One For Israel is a gospel-centered ministry. We have really two arms. We think in terms of evangelism and training. And so on the evangelism side, you can actually go to YouTube or our website (OneForIsrael.org) and you can see our videos that we do. We actually do videos in Hebrew, in Arabic, and in English, with the desire to promote the gospel. Here in Israel, we are one of the most connected nations on the planet. And so if your message is not in a three-minute soundbite in HD quality on YouTube, it's not that you're irrelevant; you don't exist.

MH: Right. [laughs]

SP: And so we've just... The climate has changed over the last several years here in Israel, and in large part because of media. And so that's on that side. And then I'm the dean of Israel College of the Bible. Israel College of the Bible is the only accredited, Hebrew-speaking, evangelical Bible college in the world. We are Jews and Arabs who love Jesus and come together to study God's word. As the dean, obviously I lead the academic department, but also love to teach. I kind of teach a lot of different subjects, depending on the need. I think probably my biggest passion is the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. I'm also one of the lay pastors of a congregation called All Nations Congregation that meets in Petah Tikvah. In fact, last week was our first physical meeting since Corona. And we're meeting out in the grass there. And that's been just an amazing privilege and pleasure, and we've seen several people in the last couple of years come to faith, and Israelis that have been baptized and discipled. And that's been really exciting. And yeah, I'm married and have three amazing children. My daughter's actually in the army right now (mandatory service). So yeah.

MH: Wow. That's a great story. How old were you when you became a believer (a follower of Jesus)?

SP: It kind of comes in several parts. But I would say that my first introduction to Jesus was just before my bar mitzvah. And it was just before my bar mitzvah that I couldn't deny... when I started reading the prophecies, looking at the Old Testament Hebrew Bible. I grew up in a Reformed family, so it wasn't like we were carefully studying the Bible. But I was going to Jewish school every week. And I just will never forget the experience of reading passages in the Old Testament and thinking, "Who put Jesus in my Bible?" [MH laughs] So it was just really, I mean... In fact, funny story: my mom was the first to come to faith. And she started to share the gospel with my dad. It took about three or four years. My dad was very angry at first. He was furious that she had betrayed our people. And about three years later, my father finally said, "Okay, I see that you're different. I see that you've changed. Why do you believe in Jesus? Tell me why you believe in Jesus, but I don't want to read the New Testament. Don't tell me about the New Testament." Because the assumption was always that the New

Testament was an anti-Semitic book. So my mother read to him Isaiah 53. And he got really angry. And he said, “Lorraine, I *told* you I didn’t want to hear the New Testament!” [laughter]

MH: Oops. [laughs]

SP: Exactly. And I mean, funny stories... My dad a couple of months later ended up going to a black Pentecostal church. And he was with a whole row of Jewish believers who brought him to this church. And the pastor was preaching. And a lady got up to sing a Gospel song. So my father is an artist and so he’s very emotional. And so as this song was being sung (a Gospel song), my dad apparently broke down and started crying so loud... I wasn’t there, but they say he sounded like a wolf howling, he was crying so hard. He was so emotionally moved. And so my mom and two other Jewish ladies grabbed my dad and pulled him down to the altar to the pastor. And the pastor saw him coming and got so excited, he yelled out to his entire congregation, “We got another Jew!” [laughter] He meant well.

MH: Right. [laughter]

SP: He was all heart. Anyway. But for me, it was kind of a process, I’d say. In fact, the very reason why I ever pursued biblical scholarship was because in my late teens and 20s, I was zealously trying to share the greatest thing that I’d ever discovered as a Jewish person: that Jesus is in my Bible. And one of the objections again and again that I faced was, “You’re relying on a Christian translation. If you could only read the Hebrew, you’d realize that Jesus can’t be the messiah.” And that was really the beginning of a lifelong pursuit of studying the Hebrew Bible and understanding my faith and understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testament—understanding as best as I can how the New Testament authors were reading the Scriptures. And so that challenge to me that Jesus can’t be the messiah based on the Hebrew Bible kind of gripped me. And it’s never let me go. And it’s pretty much a driving passion and something that wakes me up every day.

10:00

MH: Hmm. Wow. That’s great. You know, I have to be honest with you and my audience. Oh, how can I get into this? Generally... I get a lot of email from either people who have some attachment to messianic Judaism (or they’re in it)... I have friends who are congregational leaders (pastors). But then there’s this mix of email that I get that I can tell that the person is (for lack of a better word) informed. I mean, they have a pretty solid knowledge of Scripture and whatnot. But then there’s always this mix of really odd theories about Hebraic stuff. [laughs]

SP: Yeah.

MH: And so in my head, there's this whole spectrum of, when I hear "messianic Judaism," a spectrum pops into my head. And I realize it's a lot like Christianity. And the email I get from Christians can be a really insightful question (really sincere question) and then it can be some really crazy theory about something. So I have the same spectrum on that end. But when it comes to messianic Judaism, I've become a little leery because I don't feel like I could navigate those waters well, because it's just not my environment. So you're one of the people that I have never felt that about. [laughs] And so in my head, you're like this touchpoint of sanity...

SP: Ah, praise God.

MH: ...within this little world. And so when I finally got around to this book (*Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus*)... I just want to tell my audience, "Look, obviously we're having Seth on. And I want everybody in this audience to get this book. Okay? Now if you do (and you should—shame on you if you don't), [laughter] you're going to run into things that are not going to sound like what you'd read (or my take on things) in *Unseen Realm*. There's going to be that here and there. If you let that distract you, that is just foolish. This is... I'll tell you how I feel about this book. The next time I get an email that asks me about the Christian's relationship to the Law, I'm just going to send them the URL to this book. That's it. That's the answer. "If you really want to know, you'll get this book and read it." If I were your dad, I would force you to read this book. If I were your pastor, I would urge you to read this and probably put it on my checklist of things if you don't do you might be subject to church discipline. [SP laughs] Okay? It's getting a little silly here, but if I could take the thesis of this book and how Seth unpacks it (and we'll get to the thesis in a moment) and append it to *Unseen Realm* (just steal it), I would do it. [laughter]

SP: Wow.

MH: Okay? This, to me, is *the* book for this question. So I hope that there's no ambiguity left in these... They're not really disclaimers. I don't really know what to call them. But "endorsement comments."

SP: There's not too much left to say. [laughter]

MH: Because I get this all the time and it's an understandable question. It's not even only from the perspective of Jewish believers in Jesus, but just generally, because we consider the Old Testament the Word of God. It's three quarters of our Bible. I mean, most people get that. And so this question is a very normal one for either of these contexts (Jew or Gentile believer). Now what I'm going to do here is I'm going to read a few excerpts from the acknowledgements. This isn't even getting into the guts of the book. But I want people to get a feel for what you're doing in this book. And then we're going to

just jump into a few chapters here and let Seth take it away. So the acknowledgements open this way:

15:00

We open this book with the honest confession of three Israeli Jewish followers of Yeshua (Jesus). Being Jewish is not easy! Being a Jewish follower of Yeshua is even more difficult. As Jews, we have to deal with growing anti-Semitism worldwide. As messianic Jews, we are often rejected by our own families. Spiritual leaders in the Jewish community tell us that we are no longer Jewish if we believe in “that man.” Within the body of Messiah [MH: the Church] we are often misunderstood by our Gentile brothers and sisters who may not have a clue about our acute identity struggles, struggles that Gentile believers typically do not have to face.

The early church wrestled with identity issues from a completely different perspective. Since the messianic faith was Jewish, the challenge came when Gentiles were added to the early messianic community. The very first church council (Acts 15) dealt with how Gentiles fit into an essentially Jewish faith and culture. They concluded that Gentile believers do not have to keep the Law (though many Gentile Christians today are sincerely wondering whether or not their love for the Jewish Savior ought to be expressed by observing the Law).

But then what about Jewish believers in Yeshua today? Doesn't Acts 15 assume that Jewish believers will continue keeping the Law? Paul goes out of his way in Acts 21:23–24 to prove once and for all that he lives “in observance of the law.” Yeshua declares that “whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5: 19). Our Messiah tells us to “do and observe whatever they [the scribes and the Pharisees] tell you” — the Law along with the rabbis' oral interpretation of it (Matt. 23:2–3). Moses tells us the commandments of the Law are eternal (see, e.g., Exod. 12:14, 17, 24; 27:21; 28:43; 29:9, 28; 30:21; 31:16). Case closed! Jewish believers, in obedience to our Rabbi Yeshua and our teacher Moses, and by following the example of Paul, must obey the Law as good and faithful messianic Jews.

Though the logic of the previous paragraph is compelling, we are still faced with a big interpretive dilemma. Why? Because as clear as those passages may seem, other passages in the New Testament lead us to believe that we are no longer “under the Law.” For instance, the apostle Paul tells us the Law was added to earlier promises made by God, not to replace those promises, but simply to guide us as a tutor who will lead us to the Messiah (see Gal. 3:1–24). But now that the Messiah has come, we are “no longer under a guardian” (Gal. 3:25). In addition, Paul says, “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a

shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col. 2:16–17). The writer of Hebrews makes very clear the fact that Yeshua’s priesthood necessitates a change in the Law, since He is not a descendant of Aaron, and not even from the priestly tribe of Levi: “For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well” (Heb. 7:12).

So that’s all set-up. The book’s thesis is this. And then we’re going to jump into a few chapters here. Seth and his colleagues write:

Many people read the Torah through the lens of rabbinic Judaism, in which the Torah is understood to be a law book: to follow the Torah is to keep the commandments of the Sinai covenant. We disagree with this common assumption. Rather, our thesis about the purpose of the Torah, Genesis through Deuteronomy, is that it is an historical narrative, whose purpose is to lead Israel through the broken Law and beyond, namely, to the Messiah who, Moses assures his readers, will come in the last days. To be faithful followers of the Torah, in our view, is to believe in Yeshua (see John 5:39-47)! We defend this thesis by looking at several key passages in the Torah.

So this is what the book is about. And if I can summarize that, Seth... You can begin to riff on this. Because chapter 1 is a look at the Torah’s introduction (Genesis 1-11) and its conclusion (Deuteronomy 29-34). And your thesis is essentially that the Torah (the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses) anticipates (foreshadows, predicts, any number of these terms) Israel’s failure to be in right relationship to God through the Law. That was never the point. And the Torah itself tells us a story that gives the discerning reader the distinct impression that there’s something beyond the Sinai covenant that Israel was destined for, and that everyone who wanted to be in right relationship with the Most High (the true God) is also headed for. So let’s just start there with the general thesis about what the Torah does and what it doesn’t do. What it is and what it isn’t.

20:00

SP: Well, I really actually appreciate the fact that you emphasized the fact that we were defending the thesis by looking at the Torah. I think that that was... Actually that shows me the extent to which you actually mastered the point of the book. And that was, we felt that... Part of the motivation for the writing of this book (believe it or not) was many of the questions we were getting from Gentiles about the Law and some very heartbreaking stories about people that had started down the road of feeling the need to be more Torah observant (whatever that means), and actually saying, “Now my husband has denied Jesus and he’s joined a synagogue.” And so we felt that we needed to write this book. And what we didn’t want to do is to read the New Testament back onto the Old Testament.

MH: Mm hmm.

SP: Of course, once you see the New Testament, it’s impossible to unsee it. And that’s a wonderful thing. I can’t not but see Jesus, of course. But what we wanted

to do was to work through the Torah exegetically, and to try to show that the New Testament reading of the Torah is very consistent with the literary structure of the Torah itself. And so you mentioned the introduction and the conclusion to the Torah. And one of the things... I'm very fascinated by the way that movies work. And the whole... I always talk to my students. I say, "Imagine you bring your child to a movie theater (before Corona, obviously) and you know that at some point in the movie he's going to pull on your sleeve and say, 'Daddy, I gotta go to the toilet.' [MH laughs] So at which point in the movie... You have to choose. At which point in the movie do you want him to pull on your sleeve?" And they think about it and they say, "Well, sometime in the middle." And I say, "You're absolutely right. But absolutely not in the beginning and the end." Because the beginning typically is the teaser. It foreshadows, introduces the key themes of the movie, introduces the conflict. And the conclusion kind of wraps it up. What I find to be really interesting is that both the introduction and the conclusion to the Torah are very focused on exile.

MH: Mm hmm.

SP: Genesis 1-11... You just think about the narrative flow. Exile to the east, out of Eden, until the people end up in Babylon. That ought to sound familiar, because that's really the story of Israel in Joshua through 2 Kings. Right? God brings Adam into the land—into this garden.

MH: Yeah, the descendants of Adam wind up in exile. Who would've thought? [laughs]

SP: Well, think about how much focus... Deuteronomy 30 is all about exile. Deuteronomy 31 takes it for granted. "I know your hearts. I know your *yetzer* (your fabric, what you're made of). I know that you're going to forsake me. I know..." In fact, it says very clearly in Deuteronomy 31, "I know you'll break the covenant." Deuteronomy 32 is the song of Moses, which clearly takes for granted total disobedience, and yet God at the end conquers the heart of the people. And what's even more remarkable, not only does he do so, but there you have this group of Gentiles praising God together with them. And so the point being, if you take the Torah as a law book that's promoting Sinai obedience, it kind of goes against the introduction (and the conclusion), which assumes certain disobedience to the Torah.

MH: Yeah, it's not the story it tells. Yeah, I hope everybody's catching this. If the point of the Torah was, "Obey the Law," and, "This is the whole point of Moses giving us these books," "The Law is the end point," it sure doesn't end that way. It has a very bad ending. [laughs]

SP: Also consider the start. So let me... Imagine I'm trying to encourage you, Michael, to keep 613 commandments. And here's a story I tell you. This is how I prepare my argument to encourage you to keep 613 commandments. "Well, a

long time ago, there was a perfect world. And a man and woman who had no issues and no problems received one commandment. And guess what? They failed. Even though all the odds were in their favor, they failed, and they were exiled, and died in exile. Good luck.” [MH laughs] I mean, it just seems like, if Moses is a salesman, if he’s selling the Law, if that’s what he’s trying to do, then he’s a terrible salesman.

MH: Yeah, and like you said, he even tells them, “Yep, not only do I know you’re going to fail, but I’m going to presume it.” [laughs]

SP: And it’s really presumed all throughout. In the literary structure of the Torah, it’s presumed all throughout. It’s just a consistent theme of disobedience and the grace of God.

MH: Well, let’s take it a little further. In the second chapter... And again, I like your work because you’re a literary guy. I was more of a... Gosh, I don’t even know if I have a label. I’m very eclectic. I tend to be a dot-connector. There’s really no fancy academic term for that. But when I see literary relationships in work like yours and Sailhamer... Tim Mackie is another literary guy, which I think is why the Bible Project does so well. He (they) can retell the story very effectively visually. So when I see these sorts of things, they’re just so helpful. And you have a discussion here about the account of the giving of the Law at Sinai, which of course runs from Exodus 19 (the first verse) all the way through Numbers 10:10. It’s a long stretch of the Torah (the Pentateuch). So we have the giving of the Law situated between the Wilderness Narratives that lead *to* Sinai, and then *away* from Sinai. And you write this:

We see a direct relationship between the giving of the Law and a breakdown of Israel’s faith, the result of which is death (Rom. 7: 9– 10). This textual data provides yet more evidence that Moses’ purpose for writing the Torah could not have been simply to lead us to the Law, but rather, through the Law and beyond [MH: the Law].

So talk about the relationship of the things leading up to Sinai and then when they leave Sinai—how we get this mirroring effect.

SP: Yeah. So if you can kind of imagine, Sailhamer used to call this “parallel stories.” And what’s remarkable is that when you look at the things that happened to Israel on their way to Mount Sinai (before they received the Law), it’s as if they relived these same experiences after Sinai. As soon as they leave Sinai, after having been there for a year, they’re complaining on their way to Sinai, when they leave Sinai. They break the Sabbath on their way to Sinai, after Sinai. God provides water and manna before Sinai, after Sinai. But there’s a fundamental difference which is quite shocking. If you look at the Sabbath violation before the giving of the Law and Israel’s rebuke, there’s no punishment.

But this same Sabbath violation after the Law results in death. Complaining on the way to Sinai goes unpunished. *After* Mount Sinai, it leads to thousands of people dying. And so what you see is, the storyline... And there are so many literary parallels...

MH: Yeah, what changes the outcome?

SP: Exactly. You have to ask yourself, “What actually happens? Why is it that before Sinai there was no punishment, but after Sinai there was severe punishment?” One of the most significant things I find in the structure of the Torah is in Numbers 11. In Numbers 11, which comes right at the edge (it’s at the seam) after the Sinai narrative... And so Israel has just left Mount Sinai. They’ve been a year at Mount Sinai (Numbers 10), they pick up in Numbers 11, you have once again a narrative of Israel’s complaining. And Moses says, “These people are too heavy for me,” and God takes of his Spirit. And you remember the story of Eldad and Medad and the giving of the Spirit, and Joshua’s upset. And, “You’ve got to stop them.” And Moses says, “Don’t be jealous for me. Would that all God’s people were prophets,” which sounds an awful lot like Joel 3 in the Hebrew text. Right? So that one day, God promises that all people *will* be prophets. One day God promises that all people *will* have the Spirit. So I just find it interesting that at the very edge—at the very seam—of the storyline, Moses breaks in with this... It’s almost like Moses says, “I long for Acts chapter 2.” [MH laughs]

30:00

MH: Right. “Don’t we wish we could have this now?” But yeah, it’s like, as you continue reading, this is going to be a disaster. Because the thing that does change the story is... What brings the death outcome? It’s the Law. And this is where Israel’s at. And you’re right. It’s almost like, “Boy, I wish we could skip everything that comes after this. It’s just going to turn out badly.” And the reader knows, if they’re paying attention to the parallels between Israel and Adam and the descendants of Adam, the reader already has a sense... And he’s going to get it when you get to the end of Deuteronomy, like you said a few minutes ago. This is going to lead to exile. This isn’t a solution. This is sort of an explanation of a problem, the solution to which lies further ahead—further beyond.

SP: So in Judaism, the rabbis talk about the *yetzer hatov* and the *yetzer hara* (the good inclination and the bad inclination). Right? But interestingly enough, the Torah only teaches that we have a bad inclination. The word *yetzer* appears three times in the Torah: in the introduction and in the conclusion. And when it describes the *yetzer* (the inclination) of in verse 6, I believe, of Genesis chapter 8, and then in chapter 31 of Deuteronomy, and basically we have a *yetzer* that’s continually bent on evil. And you look at the fact that the way that the introduction and the conclusion present the human heart, it is unbelievably pessimistic. And you come to Deuteronomy 30, and what is the solution to the problem of the *yetzer* (the problem of this inclination to constantly choose evil)? It’s the circumcised heart (Deuteronomy 30:6), which sounds incredibly like Jeremiah.

MH: Yep, I was just going to say, that's new covenant stuff right there.

SP: Well, in fact, I published an article elsewhere, "The Old Testament Use of the Old Testament." If you look at the way that... The language Jeremiah uses, scholars are agreed that Jeremiah leans heavily on Deuteronomy and constantly alludes to Deuteronomy. Well, what's really interesting is if you look at the way that Jeremiah introduces the new covenant... You know, you've got this letter in chapter 29 to the exiles, where he's quoting from and alluding to Deuteronomy 4 (which is about the last days) and Deuteronomy 30 (which is about the regathering). And then he introduces the new covenant. And I would argue that for Jeremiah, his whole understanding of the new covenant was based on a careful reading of the Torah. He got it from Moses.

MH: Mm hmm. Yeah, I mean, where else would he get it? You know? [laughs]

SP: Exactly.

MH: Seems like a logical place to get it. Now you spend some time early on talking about... We've already hinted at how the Torah foreshadows—anticipates—some key concepts. There's how the Law brings death (that sounds very Pauline). Like, "Where did Paul get that?" Well, he probably read the Pentateuch. He probably read the Torah. [laughs] So we have this anticipation of exile and this anticipation of death (separation from God, i.e., exile). And we have this circumcised heart anticipation as the solution, which again is tied to the new covenant in several passages in the Prophets. So we already get a hint that the Torah itself... And again, we're going back to your thesis here. The Torah *itself* gives us both positively the things that the Law can do for us... Paul didn't have a totally negative view of the Law, obviously. So we see good things there, which you'll get to in another chapter. We're not denying that those things are there. But the Torah itself anticipates this sort of thinking, that the Torah is essentially going to reveal the deeper problem. It's not going to be the solution to the problem. It's going to reveal the problem by virtue of the standards that it lays out and so on and so forth. And Moses actually uses this language of "in the last days" or "in the latter days" or however we want to translate that. That this is where the Torah is pointing. It's pointing to a time future, beyond the Torah, both chronologically and theologically. It's pointing to something in the future. So can you say a little bit about this "last days" language and how that reveals the goal of the Torah?

SP: Sure. So in fact... And here I just have to absolutely acknowledge my wonderful mentor, John Sailhamer. We say in Hebrew, "May his memory be blessed." As many times I wish I could spend some time with him, looking forward to one day spending more time with him in the kingdom. And I'm sure he's explained a lot of passages to Moses that Moses didn't understand. [laughter]

MH: "That's how it turned out." [laughter]

35:00

SP: “So *that’s* what I meant!” [laughs]

MH: He’s seen the end of the movie. You know? [laughter]

SP: But for me, one of the most amazing things, in reading John Sailhamer’s book, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, I think that that was probably the most amazing thing that I’d actually realized. And he did the compositional analysis of the Pentateuch (the Torah). And he showed that you have these poems—these major poems—that show up in key transitions in the narrative. So you have the end of the patriarchal narratives, the blessing of Jacob, you’ve got the end of the wilderness wanderings, Balaam’s oracles, you’ve got the end of the Torah (the end of Deuteronomy), you’ve got the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, and the blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 33. Gunkel actually highlighted something very interesting that I think is pretty crucial. He talked about these “blessings” that deal with... these “blessings” that are poetic, that are scattered throughout the Torah. And what’s really interesting is you think about the relationship between Deuteronomy 33 and Genesis 49, you’ve got the last will and testament of Jacob and Moses. Okay? Now here’s what I find significant. I would argue that one of the central themes of the Torah is blessing. So Genesis 1:1-2:3 talks about blessing. Deuteronomy 33 talks about blessing. So the Torah begins and ends with blessing. But you’ve got the inner tube, which is the curses, so Genesis 3 and Deuteronomy 28. And so what’s interesting is you’ve got an outer circle and an inner circle. The inner circle are the curses that come through disobedience. But the blessing—this structure of blessing—swallows the curses. But the question then becomes, “Where does this blessing come from?”

MH: Yeah, what’s the basis?

SP: Where does this blessing come from? And that’s why it’s so significant. If blessing is such a crucial theme in the Torah that you have these macro-structured poems, where you have a figure that blesses... And it’s always put in the context of the “last days.” And so Jacob says, “Gather and I’ll tell you what will take place in the last days.” Balaam: “I’ll tell you what will take place in the last days.” Moses in Deuteronomy 31:29 talks about the last days. And so it’s pretty clear within the macrostructure of the Torah that the blessing that God intends is for the last days. And then what’s also interesting, in Genesis 49, you’ve got this focus on a king from tribe of Judah. In Numbers 24 you’ve got this focus on this conquering king. In Deuteronomy 33, there’s an interesting textual variant in verse 5. In Deuteronomy 33:5 the Masoretic Text says *va-yehi*, right? *Va-yehi melekh* (“there was a king”).

MH: Mm hmm.

SP: Okay? But the Septuagint obviously reads that with a different vocalization: *vi-hi melekh* (“there will be, or “let there be”). I personally think that the

Septuagint preserves the better reading in light of the macrostructure. So what I would argue is that all of these major poems of blessing... Our eyes are turned to the coming of the seed of Abraham, this king who will bring blessing to both Israel and the nations, which he promised Abraham.

40:00

MH: Yeah, I hope listeners are getting this. There are these things that just seem disparate or random (these poems), but if you look at where they're placed [laughs], they're juxtaposed in such a way where the content associated with them in the near contexts, you get the blessing, you get this king figure, you get the phrase "the last days," and it's not just one time. This happens several times in the Torah itself. So the Torah itself obviously... *That's* not the last days. So again, it's something that transcends the time of Moses, the time of the Torah, basically the story arc here. And just look at that. Look at what you have. You have a predictive foreshadowing nuance to these passages, that again, if you ask Paul, "Where do you get this idea that the Law was a precursor or a tutor (or whatever) and it brought forth death? It was incapable of giving us life, and we need Jesus for that. We need the messiah king for that. Where did you get that, Paul?" Again, what you're arguing in this book is that Paul was a very close reader of the structural elements of the Torah. Paul's theology is Torah theology about the Torah itself—about the Law. And I think for our listeners here, this is why... In the book, there are some charts and things that illustrate this real nicely—these points.

But going back to the way you jumped into the topic today, the effort is not here to just say, "Well, read the New Testament, because that's better now." Or, "Don't look at the Old Testament. We're Christians, so we're doing New Testament theology." That isn't the point. The point is, once again (and on this podcast, this is a drum we beat basically every week), that you can't possibly understand what's going on in the New Testament unless you have a reasonable command of the Old. You can't do it. And there are lots of different reasons for that. And here we go *again*. We have a question as fundamental as, "What is the believer's relationship, now that we're in the new covenant era (we'll just call it that), and that seems like the old covenant is this thing over here?" And people want to drift back to the old covenant. And they're doing this on the basis of pulling out this or that statement (like I read in the acknowledgements where you list a few of these) and completely either not noticing, or forgetting, or not even really having a sense that it's a question of, maybe there's something actually in the Old Testament (in the Torah itself) that gives the New Testament the theology that it has [laughs] about the Law. Maybe it's not just events in the 1st century. Maybe there's something older and earlier in the Hebrew Bible.

SP: What's interesting is, John Sailhamer used to love to talk about the book of Acts and the New Testament Church. And he would say, "Have you ever considered the fact that the New Testament Church was the New Testament Church before the New Testament? [laughs]"

MH: Mm hmm.

SP: But they *had* the New Testament! It was called the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. And even by virtue of the fact that we call the Old Testament the Old Testament, it's kind of a mislabel. And when I say it's a mislabel, does that mean that the Abrahamic covenant is the "old" testament? Does that mean that the Davidic covenant is the "old" testament? In other words, the Hebrew Bible certainly is *about* the old covenant, but it's also about the new covenant. It's also about the Davidic covenant. It's filled with God's promises. And so this was for the early Church (and it ought to be for us) Scripture—our Scripture—about our faith. It's about our messiah. It's about God's promises. It's about God's purposes for Israel and the nations. This is Scripture. And even if you look at the argumentation of Hebrews, people want to talk about kind of a Philonic kind of an approach—a dualistic approach—to reading. When you look at the writer of Hebrews, what I see is a guy that has really carefully understood the argumentation in the Torah itself. There's no question that the tabernacle is a shadow. When you read the Garden of Eden narrative and you look at the fact that the Tabernacle is a copy of the Garden of Eden, that the real cherubim in the Garden of Eden are copied, so that the cherubim in the Tabernacle aren't real; they're copies. And so this whole notion of understanding the Tabernacle as a shadow of the better things to come is a careful, close reading of the Torah itself.

45:00

MH: Mm hmm. Yeah, and the whole point being that you can pick out these objects (cherubim, Passover lamb). These are the ones that are the easiest to see, that foreshadow. There's typology here of something to come. And I think most people who've been exposed to the Bible or maybe have read through a good bit of it are going to pick up on things like that. But again, what Seth is trying to get us to realize here is that the foreshadowing analogies are bigger than just objects and maybe a story or two. The structure of the Torah itself, the thing that believers keep asking about ("Should I keep the Law and be Torah observant?")... The structure of the Torah itself, the way the story is told, the way it's laid out, the way Adam parallels Israel, and Israel with the people of God, where they're given the Law but they end in exile... The whole story, the way it's laid out, telegraphs that there is something yet to come. This is a foreshadowing. It's a set-up. It's a precursor to something yet to come. The Torah itself gives you the answer to your question. It's harder to see because you have to become a really, really close reader of the structure of it. And I think that is one of the major contributions of this book, that a lot of this is based on really serious academic research (Sailhamer and others, other research that you've done, people that you've interacted with that you bring up in the book). This is serious academic stuff. This isn't a bunch of people sitting in a room, a messianic congregation, "How do we get our message out? How do we market ourselves?" No. This is academic research. This is peer-reviewed, good, solid content. But again, the sweet spot here on this podcast is, it is made accessible to people who aren't going to go out and get degrees—the whole general audience. And the book does this beautifully—lays out structurally what the Torah is trying to accomplish.

Now Seth and his co-writers do this for seven or eight chapters. And then you hit chapter 9, and you pop the question (but you really popped it in the acknowledgements), “Why then the Law?” [laughs] Galatians 3:19. So talk a little bit about, if this is how we’re to read the Torah, and we get its messaging, how do we live this out? And what was the Law... Does the Law have anything positive to contribute to our lives? And ultimately, you’re going to answer the questions in chapters 9, 10, 11, and 12. What should be the believers’ relationship to the Law? How should we “observe the Law,” either as Jewish believers in Jesus or Gentile believers in Jesus. So let’s jump into that, the deeper end of the pool. Well, I think that’s actually the shallow end of the pool. [laughter] Let’s go there.

50:00

SP: I don't know. This is actually really why we wrote the book. And you know, as I understand Matthew 5:17-19, it seems as though what Jesus is saying is that we will love the jots and tittles because it's Scripture to be fulfilled. It's about Jesus. In other words, what I love about this kind of a reading, which looks at the Torah according to its literary genre (which is narrative) and it learns to be sensitive to the way that the narrative hangs together and the meaning of the storyline... What ends up happening is you start to really love every aspect of the Torah. You love it as Scripture, including the Law. And so when you look at the different functions of the Law, it's very multi-faceted. You can't just simply say, “What's the purpose of the Law?” and give *one* purpose. Paul talks in Galatians about the Law being a tutor. So for instance, in Numbers 15, the people of Israel get the command to wear tassels so they won't follow after their eyes. Well, that comes immediately after the story of the spies, where they actually followed after their eyes. And so they get the first WWJD bracelet. They get the tassels. [MH laughs] Right? That was a tutor. And the Scripture... Numbers 15 presents the tassels as a tutor, not as something that's ideal, but as something necessary. It was God's loving response to a teenager who was staying out past midnight. He says, “Okay, you've got a problem remembering that this is not good for you. I'm going to give you a reminder.” But that reminder also points to an immaturity that needs to be eventually solved. If you *always* have to wear the WWJD bracelet, that's not the ideal either. And so the Law is a tutor. And so you've got many narratives where laws come in response to sin and therefore there are temporary measures put in place to lead Israel to the inheritance. The Law is a shadow.

And I mention this, that if you look at... Again, I think one of the most important connections is the connection between the Garden of Eden and the Tabernacle. The moment you see that the Tabernacle is a copy of Eden... It's this longing. The very fact that God once walked with Adam and Eve in the Holy of Holies—the Garden of Eden... And now you've got Aaron that can only go in once a year. So the longing that at some point the curtain would be torn, at one point a better priest and a more perfect priesthood...

MH: Yeah, who grants access to everyone. Yeah.

SP: So the Law is a shadow. And in fact, interestingly enough, if you look at Isaiah, Isaiah's interpretation of the Exodus... Read Isaiah 40-55 and you can see that Isaiah's been carefully studying the story of Exodus. And in fact, I would argue that in Isaiah 53, which is introduced by very strong Exodus imagery in Isaiah 52:10-12, you can see that Isaiah actually understands the Passover instructions in Exodus 12 as a foreshadowing. And he presents the servant of the Lord as a lamb. And so the Law is also a shadow, and these shadows are still important. So we talk about the feasts, the Sabbath. I'm not under the Sabbath, right?

And maybe I can say something really quickly that might be controversial (I hope not), but I don't believe that the Sabbath has changed. I believe that the Sabbath is still Saturday. Just like I don't believe that the Passover has changed. It's the 14th of Nissan. I don't believe Yom Kippur has changed. But what *has* changed? Our *relationship* to those days has changed because of Jesus. And so those days will always be shadows and will constantly point us to the reality. And so we cherish the Sabbath, not as a law to be kept, but as Scripture that tells us about Jesus. We cherish the sacrificial laws, not because I want to go out and kill a sheep in my front yard, but because they tell us about Jesus. The Law is theology. We understand as we meditate on these laws about the holiness of God, about the zealotry of God: the Law is love. As we meditate on the Scriptures, we learn some of these laws were culturally appropriate ways at the time for loving our neighbors. A parapet on a roof was how we loved our neighbors. Right? On a flat roof, it was a good idea to build a parapet. Then you've got the Law as wisdom (Deuteronomy chapter 4). And I think that's many times what you see in Proverbs, is a wisdom reflection—that these laws are wisdom to be pondered and meditated on. And of course, the Law is a prosecuting attorney. In Romans 2 and 3, Paul really shows very clearly how the Law functions as a prosecuting attorney. But I would argue that when you start to read the laws in these contexts, we actually cherish every single bit of Torah as Scripture. All of it is there for us. All of it is there to enrich and encourage our faith. And ultimately to help us to fall in love with Jesus.

MH: Right. You can cherish it all, but that doesn't mean you cherish each portion for the same reason.

SP: Correct.

MH: There are lots of different reasons why the Law is a wonderful thing. So Paul can say what he says positively about the Law, but he can also be equally clear that it has this insufficiency over here. And again, that insufficiency is still in line with the purpose of the Law.

SP: Correct.

MH: It still accomplishes that particular purpose.

55:00

SP: Correct. And again, as I understand the Law, for believers today the Law is not covenant. But it's Scripture. And there's a big difference. And so I'm not under the Law. But I certainly meditate on the Law as Scripture and understand the functions of the Law as it enriches my faith. But I thoroughly believe that when you think about the train, the direction of the train, the Sinai covenant, the direction... It goes to Sinai covenant to Jesus to the new covenant. Unfortunately, many believers try to take the train in the wrong direction. So they come to Jesus, and now they want Jesus to take them back under the Law. And I think that just is a poor reading not only of the New Testament, I think it's a poor reading of the Hebrew Bible.

MH: Yeah. You know, in chapter 11, you talk about the impossibility of keeping the Law of Moses in very practical terms. Can you unpack that a little bit?

SP: Well, obviously right now, you think about... Even if we claim to be keeping the Law, the question is so many... The feasts. So many of the feasts are based and contingent upon the sacrificial system—a priesthood. Well, we have a change of priesthood, so obviously by virtue of the fact that we have a change of priesthood, well then how are you under these festive laws when there's no longer a Sinai priest or when there's no longer a temple? There's an impossibility. And I think that that's how God designed it. In other words, once again, as I understand, these laws are beautiful. And as a Jewish believer... We just had Passover here. And I think for Jewish believers here in Israel, for me not to commemorate the Passover would be a lost opportunity to share the gospel, to show how the Passover points to Jesus. But for me it's missiological. But I can't keep the Passover. And nobody can as well. It's impossible to keep the Passover because there's no temple. There's no functioning system.

MH: Right. And you'd be violating the strictures of Deuteronomy's description, which presumes of course a temple—a central location. It doesn't have a footnote in Deuteronomy that says, "Oh, when you don't have a temple, go back to Exodus." [laughs]

SP: Yeah.

MH: Yeah. So for our listeners, the whole point with... You can say you're observing the feast, you're observing Torah, you're doing this or that. But what happens typically is that people either forget or they overlook or they just don't look at little places in these celebrations (or these ritual events) that actually connect to in the Old Testament in a necessary way to the Levitical priesthood or the temple. Okay? There are these things. These are component parts of these celebrations. And you might think that you're observing these things, but you actually sort of aren't. I mean, if you were back in the days when there was a temple and you skipped those things [laughs], well, "Sorry, that doesn't cut it." So

why would you be obligated now to do that without some of these necessary elements? That's the whole point of this impossibility idea.

SP: Well, hopefully too, though, in the book we try to correct an opposite extreme as well.

MH: Completely ignore them. [laughs]

SP: And that is, "Well, we're no longer under the Law, so we don't even need to study it. We're a New Testament Church." I don't know how many times I've heard that. "We're a New Testament Church." [MH laughs] Right?

MH: Yep.

SP: And I think the point that we were trying to make is that only by carefully studying and meditating on all of Scripture do we really get a deep understanding and appreciation for our faith, for what Jesus did, that by virtue of the fact that as Jews and Gentiles, we can come boldly in to the throne of grace. You know? This whole... The creation of the Church—an amazing miracle. I mean, we celebrate it constantly at Israel College of the Bible/One For Israel, Jews and Gentiles as one new man. In fact, we have one guy that came to faith whose name is Jihad. [laughter]

MH: Oh, boy. [laughs] There's a conversation starter. [laughs]

1:00:00

SP: I have a brother named Jihad. And you cannot believe... We actually... He testified to our church. And he said, "Listen, I grew up hating Jews." And he was very... I can't tell you where he's from, but he hated the Jews. And now he's just overwhelmed with the fact that Jews and Gentiles are one new man—that we are together in the body of Messiah. And God's given him an incredible love for the Jewish people and his Jewish brothers and sisters in the faith. And so again, my point is, we don't really understand these things without cherishing all of Scripture. And I hope that this book... This book was also an attempt to show people what it means to really love the Torah (if that makes sense). In other words, to cherish the Torah as Scripture that needs to be meditated on and reflected upon in order to appreciate all the more the personal work of Jesus.

MH: Mm hmm. Well, I was just thrilled to have you on. And I'm serious... I kind of made up some silly examples at the beginning. But the one I'm serious about (since I'm not everybody's dad and I'm not everybody's pastor) [laughs] is the next time I get a question, "What about the Christians' relationship to the Law?" I'm going to answer, "Here's the link." [laughter] I don't need to say anything else. "Here's the link. If you really want to know, then you'll take time to read this book." It's short. It's accessible reading. It doesn't have academic jargon in it, thankfully, but it's based on very serious scholarship. Seth has dropped some names. And some of you are already going to know who John Sailhamer is and

Gunkel and some of these people. Again, this is not an idiosyncratic, random, self-serving, “Oh, I’m going to come up with a new position to essentially carve out and have a Facebook fight.” That’s not what this is. This is real scholarship made accessible to people who don’t have the time or really the interest or the patience for academic jargon. But it’s solid stuff. And again, that’s the sweet spot for this podcast, as my audience is going to be quite familiar with. We always get new listeners, so I have to occasionally repeat that. This is what we do. We look for scholars who are trying to do something for evangelism, discipleship, to teach people Scripture, to get them to love Scripture in its own context, not filter it through something else—something modern. So when I find that, those people go on my radar, and Lord willing, we’re able to have them here.

So Seth, is there anything you’d like to just conclude with? Anything that you’re really burdened with as far as either the book, maybe something that has come out from the book since it’s been released, or anything that really isn’t related to the book? I’m going to let you have the last word here.

SP: Oh, you’re very kind. It’s been such an honor to be here and to talk to you and to be on the podcast. You know, I think one of the things that we’ve noticed, and I guess the heart of the book, is that in our theology, so many times Jesus somehow gets pushed out of center. And we get excited about the wrong things. And I think that that’s just... Over the years, especially as I’ve served as a pastor now for the last several years (almost ten years), as well as a lay pastor, just the realization that if Jesus is not the core of our theology, we’re going to have some serious issues. And I think that *that* was really the message of the book, that we study the Torah and we love the Torah because we want to know Jesus. And that’s our hope with the book.

I do have a “P.S.” And that is maybe to encourage the listeners. And I want to say this, that over the last several years in Israel, we’ve really seen an amazing work of God. And the Church went from about 3,000 believers in 1993 to I think we’re at 30,000 or 40,000 believers right now in the land of Israel—Jews, Arabs. God is really at work. And I’m just really encouraged. So we like to joke and say, “We’re not have a *revival* in Israel yet, but we’re definitely having a “*vival*.” [MH laughs] So I just want the listeners to know and be encouraged that God is at work in the land. And not just among the Jewish people, but among Arabs, among Muslims who formerly hated the Jews and hated the Christians, that now love Jesus and are together with their Jewish brothers and sisters. And so be encouraged and keep us in your prayers.

MH: Well, thanks for that. And again, thanks for spending an hour with us. And Lord willing... I just encourage everybody listening to this... It’s not an expensive book. It’s not a long book. It’s not something that’s dense and filled with academic jargon. This is just something that ought to be not only on everybody’s shelf, but really in your head and in your heart, because this is a fundamental question everybody has. And you’re going to hear it. You may even have been

asking it. This is now for me the go-to resource. So again, the title of the book (and we're going to have a link on the episode page as well) is *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus: How the Torah Fulfills its Goal in Yeshua*. So Seth, thanks for being with us.

SP: Thank you so much.

TS: Alright, Mike, another great interview. It's always nice when you have a reference podcast. So when people ask you a question, you can just say, "Hey, here's this podcast." Or, "Here's this book. Here's your reference. Go get it."

MH: Yep. Yeah, it not only saves me time, but it's the best answer I can give. So yeah, you're right. I'm happy when we can do that.

TS: Absolutely. And don't forget, you can get 30% off Seth's book, *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus*, from Lexham. If you go to NakedBiblePodcast.com, you can get the link and the discount code for 30% off. And that runs until the end of April (and, of course, this is 2021). So for you future listeners who listen to this way, way later, I'm sorry you missed the discount code. Alright, Mike, well we're going to get back into Revelation next week (Revelation 7). And we're going to have two parts to that. So be looking forward to both of those. And with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.