

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 387

Q&A 47

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Episode Summary

Dr. Heiser answers your questions:

- Does Ezekiel 3:17-21 show that if someone witnesses to unbelievers they will believe the gospel and go to heaven, but if no one witnesses to them they will go to hell? Is their fate my fault? [Time stamp 2:30]
- What does the phrase “yet imperfect” (*golem*) mean in Psalm 139:16? [10:20]
- Do numerology and name codes indicate that the writers made up events to fit theology, or did these people and numbers actually reflect reality? [16:50]
- Where are Satan and the fallen angels now? Were there two separate falls? Was Satan their leader before the flood? Why are some in prison now, and how do you explain fallen angels and Satan on the earth now? [21:55]
- When David was killing Philistines and telling Achish otherwise, was he possibly working under a kharem idea of continuing to wipe out those directed by God to exterminate? [25:00]

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 387: Our 47th Q&A. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you?

MH: Pretty good. Pretty good. Although I've been a little... I've spent more time at doctors' offices this year than my whole life up to this point. [laughs]

TS: Uh oh. Are you falling apart?

MH: Nah, I don't think I'm falling apart. I've got some back issues. I've got some gastrointestinal issues. So it's just, these things are irritants right now. So I've had kind of one of those weeks. But you know, it is what it is.

TS: Nothing major, though, right?

MH: No. I mean, not that I know of, or not that I've been told. Just one of those things that becomes a part of life that just nags you.

TS: Yeah.

MH: But it's new. So you asked. You know? [laughs]

TS: That's true. I did. But you'll have to let us know. Now I'm worried. So now you've got everybody worried, Mike. [MH laughs] Everybody that just heard that is worried. So you're going to have to keep us informed.

MH: Alright. I'll keep... There'll probably be more updates to that than there are to the "did Mike go in the pool" question. So yeah.

TS: I'm rattled now, Mike. [MH laughs]

MH: Yeah, well think about the pugs. Think about the pugs in the pool. That'll help.

TS: Alright, Mike. Well, I don't know how to transition... That's just bringing me down. I've got to transition to some questions here [MH laughs], because now you're making me think about my own health, and it's just like, "Oh my gosh. I've got to go to the doctor." It's a downer, Mike. It's a downer. I don't appreciate you bringing that up.

MH: Do we have, like, a Sheol question in here? [laughs] That'd be a good transition. [laughs]

TS: Seriously. Uh, no. All we've got is our first question, Mike, and that's about Ezekiel 3:17-21. And Jordan says:

2:30

I often hear pastors quote passages like Ezekiel 3:17-21 to try and motivate Christians to evangelize more often. Does this passage actually show that for at least some unbelievers out there, if someone witnesses to them, they would believe the gospel and go to heaven, but if no one witnesses to them, they would go to hell? In other words, is their fate my fault?

MH: This question, it almost... It's going to sound a little odd. But it reflects kind of a poor theology of God. And that might sound, like I said, a little bit odd. But let me try to unpack it. I'll just say, first of all, that I don't see how the passage applies specifically to evangelism at all. And I should probably read it, just so people are aware of what it is we're talking about here. So this is Ezekiel 3:17:

17 “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. 18 If I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. 19 But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.

5:00 So it’s the watchman passage. Again, some people probably kind of knew where this was angling for right away. But it’s good to just read it. The passage doesn’t specifically apply to evangelism, if we want to read it in context, anyway. So there’s that. And God doesn’t... Why would we think God puts all his eggs into one basket? You know, God is not so inept to tie his own hands, as it were, in regard to someone’s salvation or even someone’s repentance. What I mean by that is, he’s not going to bind something he desires... God is not going to bind something he desires (the salvation of a lost person) to *one* Christian’s obedience. Why would we even think that? It’s like, do we really believe that God says, “Oops. Too bad. That one Christian failed. You’re toast now. We’re done here. Welcome to hell.” I mean... Really? I mean, is this how we think about God’s interest in humanity—that any person’s eternal destiny is tied to *one* individual Christian, and perhaps *one* encounter, and if there’s a failure there, then there’s no hope for that person? I would suggest to you that if somebody’s thinking that way, you should look back on your own life and realize that that isn’t the way God drew you, either. You know, it’s never this “one and done” sort of thing. But that’s why I said, it kind of reflects poorly on the doctrine of God, or how we think about God.

Now I’ll be more charitable here. The thought at least counts. You know, a pastor who would be trying at least to preach from Ezekiel 3... And okay, as a point of application from Ezekiel 3, yeah, we should speak to lost people. But again, the circumstances here overstate the context of the passage for sure. And you know, it could descend into something manipulative or at the very... I hate to say it this way, but at best, it’s just teaching a theology that limits God, which is pretty bad.

So what the passage means is actually answered in verse 17:

17 “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel.

So there’s the context. It’s right in the verse. Now some commentators like Dan Block (and we used his commentary a lot in our series on Ezekiel) take this statement as retrospective. Sort of like, “Son of man, I *made* you,” or “I *did* make you,” or “I *had* made you a watchman for the house of Israel.” Because Ezekiel,

you remember, is in Babylon. He's there with the captives. And so some scholars take it as the job that Ezekiel was doing before he himself was taken captive. So those who take this perspective would say that the words reflect what Ezekiel was doing before Jerusalem fell, before his own captivity. That's probably a better way to say it because Jerusalem's going to fall while he's in captivity. But this was what Ezekiel was supposed to be doing. He's doing the job of warning the people of Judah to repent. Now he's in Babylon with everybody else.

And others say, "Nah, nah, no. It's not retrospective." Other commentators will say, "The wording here reflects his mission *in* Babylon." And honestly, this one actually makes more sense to me. The way we would understand it is something like this. Ezekiel's message, now that they're in Babylon and he's with this bunch of captives, is simply, "Don't defy God or you'll die, just like the people I was warning back home before all this happened to us." So yeah, Ezekiel was responsible for them back in God's land. He was God's prophet. There were no other prophets among the captives by the Chebar Canal once they got into Babylon.

So yeah, Ezekiel had a responsibility back home. He has a responsibility here. He's God's mouthpiece. He was, in his circumstances, the only link that people had to God. So is it really fair, though, to put *ourselves* in that situation? Are you really the only person that is a person's link to the truth? Or something like that. It's kind of hard to say in a modern (especially American) context. Ezekiel, sure. He was speaking for God, so people better listen. Because if you got lazy then the people wouldn't get forewarned, and yeah, it would be his fault.

But again, that's a little bit different than a Christian today. Though we *all* ought to speak for God, we all ought to play that role. But at the end of the day, we can't assume (like we can for Ezekiel because we have Ezekiel 1 and 2 leading up to chapter 3) that we're the only means by which a lost person will hear what they need to hear. But so what? We should still tell them anyway. It's our job to do evangelism. It's our job to do discipleship. It's our job to warn people when they're doing something self-destructive. This is how you treat people well.

But at the end of the day to me the real problem here is not applying this to evangelism. Okay, I'm fine with that, if we tell our congregation what the passage actually meant in context and make it clear that this is an application. Fine. The real problem to me is how this trajectory ties God's hands, as though... Like God's depending on you so much that if you fail, then that person's eternal destiny is sealed and God's just had enough. God just, "Stamp that guy's ticket to hell." That's just absurd. That's absurd. God is going to be interested in the lost because that's his nature. And if you disobey, he's going to bring somebody else along. He's going to still be trying to do what he wants to do, trying to get done what he wants to get done, and that is to save people from this destiny. I think it says far too much to sort of tie God's hands.

TS: William was wondering:

10:20

[Would] Mike go over Psalm 139, highlighting verse 16? Looking at a parallel Bible online at about all possible [translations], some add “yet imperfect” in the verse. Would this phrase “yet imperfect” make it more about David himself? And also can you touch on the word *golem*?

MH: Okay, yep. Yeah, I'll read Psalm 139:16. This is ESV.

**¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.**

So if you compare translations here, they are going to differ. Some will say something like ESV has (“my unformed substance”). Others will use this “imperfection” language. And the alternatives really derive from the same place (the same Hebrew word), which the question included—this word *golem*. So if you actually look that up in a lexicon, the fundamental meaning to this is something like “unformed” or “not having shape,” “shapelessness,” or something like that. So when a translator is looking at this, they could choose “imperfect.” In other words, it's imperfect. It's not what it's supposed to be because it's unformed. So they could choose between a word like “imperfect” or “unformed.” Or, in the case of the question, they could actually loop them both into the translation to try to communicate the idea that what is being talked about here is not fully formed. It's not what it is destined to be. It's not what it's supposed to be or what it *will* be. So this idea is about the contents of the womb. It has nothing to do with David's father or mother or even David himself, in a moral sense. It has to do with, “Hey, when I was conceived, I wasn't, like, fully con....” And we know this. And an ancient person would know this, because they did have stillborn children. Or they did have miscarriages. Or again, a woman could be killed in battle or something like that, and then the contents of her womb exposed or something like that. Or again, a miscarriage situation. They know what the inside of a woman's womb looks like at basically all stages, or various stages, anything you can see with the naked eye, anyway. And so they know that when a child is conceived in the womb, it's not like it's going to look when it's birthed, okay? [laughs] And that's what the verse is talking about. And *golem* actually reflects that.

So the NET Bible, which I am want to recommend, has a nice, succinct note here. And the NET Bible is a free resource. I highly recommend it. Because it'll get into stuff like this. It says here:

²⁶ Heb “Your eyes saw my shapeless form.” The Hebrew noun גֹּלֵם (*golem*) occurs only here in the OT. In later Hebrew the word refers to “a lump, a shapeless or lifeless substance,” and to “unfinished matter, a vessel wanting finishing” (Jastrow 222 s.v. גֹּלֵם).

This citation is Jastrow’s lexicon. And I think you could actually get this for free online because it’s an older resource. I think you can get this in pdf. I actually have it in Logos, which I of course recommend because of the searchability. But Jastrow... Here’s the entry for *golem*. I’m looking at it right now. And like the NET Bible note, it says “shapeless mass—lump or shapeless or lifeless substance.” That sort of thing. It is interesting that the word will be used for anything that’s sort of unfinished or that needs to be completed, more broadly than the contents of a woman’s womb.

15:00

So NET Bible brings up the example of a vessel. You have here... He quotes something rabbinic about the word being used for an unmarried woman being a “unfinished vessel.” Well, obviously an unmarried woman who’s long out of the womb is physically complete. But again, in the culture she’s not complete because she doesn’t have a husband yet, doesn’t have her own family, so on and so forth. So there’s a little bit of a use of the term there for something more abstract. So something that isn’t completed yet is really the fundamental meaning here. Again, this has nothing to do with moral character or sinfulness or anything like that. It just refers to the fact that it’s not what it’s intended to be yet.

And so how translators communicate that idea is going to vary. They could opt for something a little more succinct, like “shapeless,” or they could add “imperfect” to that, combining words. This is what translations... They just try to communicate what’s actually there. The translation I think here... Let me just take one look back at ESV just to see how they did this. “You saw my unformed substance.” A more dynamic rendering would be something like adding “when I was in the womb.” This is just for sake of illustration. I’m not thinking of any particular translation. But even though the words “when I was in the womb” aren’t in the verse, a translator could add that just to clarify what’s going on. But again, translations differ. The effort is to try to communicate something specific, or at least as specific as can be communicated. It’s going to come down to translation philosophy. If your translator thinks that their job is word-for-word correspondence and no more, well then you’re going to get something like “unformed” with no elaboration. If they’re looking at something that’s more... If the translation philosophy is dynamic equivalent, where “we can use however many words we need to in English to communicate the idea,” well then you’re going to have some elaboration.

TS: Patrick wants to know:

16:50

Does the biblical numerology and name codes indicate that the writers made events up to fit theology? Or did these people and numbers actually reflect reality?

MH: I'm not going to do it, but I would personally reword this question. Because I'm not sure what Patrick is specifically thinking of. When he talks about name codes, I have to guess that he's thinking of gematria. We just had this with "666," of course, in the Revelation series. Biblical numerology... okay, gematria is a form of that, but there are other things going on with numbers. So I'm not specifically sure what he's angling for. But let's just go with gematria here. I would say that when gematria *is* actually used (which is rare in the Bible), the circumstances and people are real or intended as real. And when I say "intended as real" I'm talking about like with eschatology or some conditional statement. In other words, there's... Like in the 666 thing. The number's given. It's the number of a name. It's a mark. So on and so forth. Well, it's describing a person yet to come. So the description is intended to convey a thought about a real person, but he's not real yet, because he's not here yet. Because we're talking about eschatology. That's all I'm saying about "intended as real." So when the Bible does use gematria, it is trying to communicate something specific, either in some episode or about some real person, or again, projecting out in the future some circumstance that will come about—come to pass. So there's no necessary contrivance or irreality that is necessarily tied to the use of gematria.

20:00

Now let's pick another example. Maybe it'll illustrate it a little bit better. And again, gematria's rare. But there are these that I think are pretty reasonable. In the case of the Gospels, the 153 fish (after this post-resurrection appearance when the disciples encounter Jesus again—and this is the very famous episode)... But John actually gives us the number of the fish they caught: 153. Like, did you just get out and count them? How do we know this is real time? Well, in that case, he could just be using gematria to communicate a specific idea. But the people about whom he is relating the idea are real people. My view is that the 153 fish... I don't know if I've actually written about this or not. I use this in my second novel. But the 153 fish by gematria *can* be spelled out as "sons of God." And so when Jesus repeats, he reiterates it, "I'm making you fishers of men," and we have this account with the disciples now, the relationship's restored with Peter, and all this sort of stuff going on—this post-resurrection appearance... You would use this to communicate the idea that "you are my children, we're still in relationship, and now you're tasked with going out and finding other children of God." Basically it's the Great Commission. Well, it's a cryptic gematria way of referring to these ideas, but they're spoken in a real circumstance to real people (the disciples). We know Peter and Jesus were real, okay? So for that reason, the question I think kind of connects two things (irreality and gematria) unnecessarily.

Another episode: I personally think that at the baptism of Jesus, the reference to the dove is probably gematria. The 153 fish you'll find in commentaries. The thing with the reference to the dove, that's a little more obscure. You're not really going to pick that up in too many commentaries. Or I don't know any. I just came across that idea from a different source. And the issue is that the Gospel writers used a particular word for "dove" (*peristeran*) when they could've used another word for a dove, or some neutral word that could be any bird or whatever. But *peristeran* is the one used. And by gematria, the letters in *peristeran* add up to the same total as the first [and last] letters of the Greek alphabet (alpha and omega). So here you have at Jesus' baptism a sign from the Holy Spirit that the one being baptized is the Alpha and the Omega. Again, I just don't think that's a coincidence. It really suggests to me that there is some of this kind of communication going on. But again, it's Jesus. He's real. He was really baptized. So the connection with irreality is not a necessary one, or in these cases even a coherent one.

TS: Mark in Irvine, CA, has our next question, and it is:

21:55

If the fallen angels that fell before the Flood are imprisoned under the earth, then where is Satan and the fallen angels now? Were there two separate falls? Also was Satan the leader of the fallen angel rebellion before the Flood? Why are some in prison now, and how does that explain fallen angels and Satan on the earth now?

MH: Well, I'm going to answer this question with the answer that's probably creeping into the minds of thousands of people listening to this, and that is, "Read the *Demons* book." [laughs] I mean, all of this is dealt with there in detail. So I'm not going to repeat all that information here. But the short form is, Satan is the lord of the dead (the underworld). So that's (if I can use this phrase) his living space now, as it were. That's where he was banished at his own rebellion back in the Garden. He can come and go as he wants. Yes, there were separate falls. There are really three falls (three rebellion events is a better way to put it) in Genesis 1-11 that explain evil in the world in the biblical worldview. So on and so forth. So yep, there are separate falls. There's no indication in the Bible that Satan had anything to do with the Watcher rebellion, or the rebellion of Genesis 6:1-4. There's no verse that ever says that. Now there are reasons to conclude that Satan would be perceived hierarchically as the rebel par excellence or the archetype or the rebel that gets the most street cred among all other rebels. There's a reason why he's sort of talked about or cast in certain passages as having preeminence over the other ones. And again, read the *Demons* book for all that.

Now I will say, *1 Enoch* flirts with the idea of Satan having some role in the Watcher Genesis 6 rebellion because the leader of that group in *1 Enoch* is referred to by several names, but two of them are Asael and Azazel (they're used

interchangeably) for the lead Watcher. Now those two terms become terms that applied to Satan and the domain of Satan being the wilderness—the place that’s un-Eden, the place that’s anti-Eden, the place that is antithetical to what Eden was in biblical thought. But again, all the details for this are in the *Demons* book as to why these thoughts would be sort of chained together in Second Temple Judaism and how they sort of seep into the New Testament in certain places (at least a few of the ideas) later on.

TS: Alright. Becky has a question about 1 Samuel 27:8-10.

25:00

When David was killing Philistines and telling Achish otherwise, was he possibly working under a *kharem* idea of continuing to wipe out those directed by God to exterminate?

MH: Well, you know, it’s an interesting question. Certainly, Israelite readers of 1 Samuel 27 in this case (this is the Achish situation) would have connected those dots because of Joshua 11. Recall Joshua 11 around verse 22 says that Joshua proclaims victory by saying, “There’s no more Anakim in the land. Well, except for the ones that got away and went to the Philistine cities.” And he lists a few Philistine cities. Of course, one of them is Gath and that’s where we find Goliath later—Goliath the Gittite. He’s one from Gath and, of course, his brothers. And so anyone who’s aware of that story or its inscripturated form—its written form... If they had read the story, they’re going to be thinking along these lines because some of the Anakim wind up in Philistine territory, and lo and behold, Goliath and his brothers are giants. Okay? Now the text never actually explicitly makes that connection, though, even though it’s sort of understandable how someone’s mind would go there.

So I think at least with respect to Goliath and his brothers (because they’re giants) the idea is probably legit, that this is part of the picture of David’s conflicts with the Philistines. It’s a reasonable supposition, even though the text doesn’t spell it out specifically. But 1 Samuel nowhere uses the *kharem* vocabulary generally of conflicts with the Philistines. So you can’t just say that they were thinking this with respect to *all* of the Philistines. But certainly if you have a few giants kind of stumble onto the battlefield, well, okay, “It’s the Anakim again. Here we go.” Again, it’s a reasonable supposition.

Now 1 Samuel *does* use *kharem* vocabulary for the Amalekites. And this is 1 Samuel, I think it’s chapter... Let me just take a quick look here. So in 1 Samuel 14:48, you’ve got the Amalekites mentioned. But in chapter 15 is when you have kind of an important passage with respect to this question. So you have here 1 Samuel 15. I’ll just read a couple verses here.

And Samuel said to Saul, “The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD. ² Thus says the LORD of

hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. ³ Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction [MH: there's the *kharem* vocabulary] all that they have.

So you have this language used specifically of the Amalekites. And if you remember in our series on Exodus (this is Episode 283), the Amalekites more broadly than just the Philistines... Because again, this language isn't used broadly of the Philistines, but it is used of the Amalekites. The Amalekites descended from a giant clan. Okay? And you can go listen to Naked Bible Podcast Episode 283. And they were cursed under Moses. So as a clan (as a people group) they have roots in terms of where they come from to one of the people groups that are associated with the conquest that are specifically associated with giantism. The connection's there in the case of the Amalekites. But it's not specifically there in the case of the Philistines except for the vestiges of the Anakim that fled there. So I think that's why there's a difference in the vocabulary here between these two people groups. But even having said that, like I said, I think for Goliath and his brothers, yeah, this is probably a legitimate trajectory of thought with respect to the whole enterprise of *kharem*. Because it was about eliminating the giant clans in the first place. Here you have some vestiges among the Philistines, and so it kind of fits. It kind of makes sense there.

TS: [over-pronouncing] Kharem. Khar-em. [MH laughs]

MH: Like you're going to spit. [laughs]

TS: Kharem. Alright, Mike, just like that. A short and sweet one. That's all we have for this week. We appreciate everybody sending in their questions, and Mike, for you answering those questions. Well, stay healthy. Eat your vegetables. And get plenty of sleep. [MH laughs]

MH: Right.

TS: Because I have a feeling... What time do you normally go to sleep?

30:00

MH: Yeah, I'm a night owl. I'm a night owl.

TS: Yeah, alright. Alright, well, eat your Wheaties. And stay healthy so we don't have to worry about you. Well, with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.