

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

### **Episode 408**

### **Jesus and the Old Testament with Chad Bird**

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**Guest: Chad Bird (CB)**

### **Episode Summary**

Naked Bible Podcast listeners are familiar with concepts like Hebrew word studies and the centrality of Christ in the biblical storyline. Two recent tools for the layperson in both these areas have recently emerged to help Bible students begin working in both areas for personal Bible study. Both have been produced by our guest on today's episode, Chad Bird, who podcasts and teaches regularly on biblical studies, particularly the Old Testament. Join us as we discuss Chad's two books, *Unveiling Mercy: 365 Daily Devotions Based on Insights from Old Testament Hebrew* and *The Christ Key: Unlocking the Centrality of Christ in the Old Testament*

### **Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 408: Jesus and the Old Testament with Chad Bird. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you doing?

**MH:** Pretty good, pretty good. Again, glad we can move in some interviews here in the podcast schedule. You know, I've been looking forward to this one for a while.

**TS:** Yeah, absolutely. And before you tell us what we're talking about, I just want to remind everybody or let everybody know that we do have a discount for Chad's books. You can get that link and the code on our NakedBiblePodcast.com page. So go there, get the discount, and get his books. And with that, Mike, what are we going to be talking about today?

**MH:** We're going to be talking with Chad about two of his books. One is called *Unveiling Mercy: 365 Daily Devotions Based on Insights from Old Testament Hebrew*. And then the second book is *The Christ Key: Unlocking the Centrality of Christ in the Old Testament*. So both of these are going to be resources that I think this audience would benefit from a lot if they were used in small group settings, personal Bible study, that sort of thing. Because there's a lot of good content in both of them.

**MH:** Well, we're so glad to have Chad Bird on with us on this episode of the podcast. And of course, as we've already hinted, we're going to be talking about two things that he has produced that are going to, I think, be really, really useful for this audience—just a general lay audience—who wants to get into biblical studies. I mean, you never know where people are starting in their journey toward really engaging Scripture—studying Scripture, and making it part of really an everyday sort of thing for them to think about and meditate upon. And so both of these things that Chad has produced, I think, are going to hit a good sweet spot with a number of people in the audience. And as we get into both of those books, you'll find out why I sort of thought that. We had made an effort to try to get Chad on a little bit earlier, when only one of these was born. But Providentially, now we've got a two-for. [laughs] So that actually worked out pretty well that we could have him on at this time.

But I'm going to ask him first, as I always do, to introduce himself to this audience. I know Chad through the 1517 Project through some friends there, which is part of the Lutheran tradition. We have a good group of people there who listen to the podcast and recommended our podcast. But Chad has his own podcast and writing ministry. So Chad, why don't you just give us a brief overview—a bird's-eye view—of who you are, where you went to school, what you teach when you teach, your podcast. Just let us know who you are.

**CB:** Well first of all, thank you guys for having me on the show. I really appreciate this chance to visit and talk about the books. I'm with 1517. I'm what they call a scholar-in-residence. I'm not truly "in residence." [laughter] I live in Texas. We're kind of scattered all over the place. But I produce all kinds of content for 1517. My background is in the Old Testament, and so everything that I do is in one way or another connected to that. Our podcast (*40 Minutes in the Old Testament*) has been at it for five or six years. We work our way episode by episode through Genesis all the way to... We're in 1 Kings 4 or 5 now. So we've been at that, just taking it chapter by chapter, verse by verse, for several years now. And I write books for 1517 and do a couple of other podcasts for them. We also have a 1517 Academy, where we have free courses on biblical topics, apologetic topics, theological topics, historical topics. So I'm active in all of those. Doing some teaching. I travel around, speaking at conferences and congregations. So they keep me busy for sure. [laughs]

**MH:** Yep. And you have a co-host.

**CB:** I have a co-host, yeah. Daniel Emery Price and I have been working together really since the beginning. He was kind of the one who came up with the idea for the podcast. We actually didn't even know each other that well when we

started this. We've become really good friends, brothers in Christ, over these past few years and we both work full-time now for 1517.

**MH:** Wow. Good for you, yeah.

5:00

**CB:** So that's been a great blessing. Yeah, great blessing to me. I was doing my writing and speaking and everything part-time for a while. I was actually a truck driver for about 12 years after I left the academy and started writing and speaking. And so I kind of felt like I had two full time jobs, most of the time.

**MH:** Yeah. Well, you did. [laughs]

**CB:** I did. Yeah. It was a busy time for me. I was burning the candle at both ends. So I'm very grateful for 1517, giving me the chance to do this.

**MH:** I remember in grad school I was kind of in that situation. You know, you're forced to do it. Because I worked full-time through grad school. And having a job, (like you mentioned truck driver), I spent most of my time doing either security or as a custodian. And honestly, I loved the ability to just sort of go on autopilot for awhile. [laughs]

**CB:** Yeah. [laughs] I know what you're talking about.

**MH:** You know? And it actually helps. I did some of my best thinking while I was cleaning toilets. You know?

**CB:** Absolutely. [laughs] Yeah.

**MH:** Your mind has to work in a different way, and you get practical and things just pop in there that... You're not sort of performing in your head for a professor anymore. You're just thinking. You know?

**CB:** Yeah! Yeah.

**MH:** It's good stuff.

**CB:** Yeah. It is. So I did enjoy those years of doing that, still keeping my toe in the academic waters as well. My educational background is, I went to seminary. I went to a Lutheran seminary in Fort Wayne, IN. Ended up teaching there after I served in the ministry for a few years. So I taught biblical Hebrew and your typical Old Testament classes there at the seminary for a while, and then studied at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati for about three or four years during that same time. And for me that was really pivotal, as far as getting me to know the rabbinic approach to interpretation. One of the things I took away from my time at Hebrew Union is just how much fun the Jewish interpreters often had with biblical

texts. [MH laughs] It was a joy, you know? Just a real joy to be able to wade into those waters. And I think some of that wore off on me. Because I really do... I think the Scriptures are hilarious in spots. Just so much fun to do exegesis to be able to engage in these wonderful texts.

**MH:** Well, they're liberated, too, in Jewish tradition, from having to be right about everything all the time.

**CB:** [laughs] Yeah, this is true.

**MH:** But it is! It's part of their tradition.

**CB:** Yeah. Yeah.

**MH:** Like, this freedom to disagree and kind of monkey around. And, "Okay, you've had your say. Now here's mine." And I'm sure there always were historical rivalries, and there are going to be rivalries within the interpretive community, just like there are. Because it kind of goes with the turf. But there is that element... Even like in their oral tradition, it gets codified in the Mishnah and the Talmud, they're frequently disagreeing with each other.

**CB:** Oh yeah.

**MH:** It's just the way it is.

**CB:** "Rabbi So-and-so said this. But Rabbi So-and-so says *this*." [laughs] And so you'll have a whole string of opinions. And a lot of times, it's just not resolved.

**MH:** Yeah. It's liberating from that point of view, that respect, if you've never... If you're always under pressure to "get it right" so that the professor gives you the good grade, you know, all that sort of thing is just kind of out the window. You can experiment a little bit.

**CB:** Yeah, you can be creative. You can try some things that maybe are not broadly accepted. It's a great chance for give-and-take with other interpreters. And it pushes your boundaries a little bit. And just gives you a chance, I think, to instead of just accepting whatever the interpretive orthodoxy might be on a particular verse, to experiment with what else might be there.

**MH:** Yeah. Well, that's good stuff. Now we do want to talk about your books, of course. There are two of them. And we're going to start with *Unveiling Mercy*. This is your *365 Daily Devotions Based on Insights from Old Testament Hebrew*. So when I got this months ago, I thought, first of all, this was a really good idea. Because I don't usually... On this podcast we don't usually gravitate toward devotional material, although there are times when, I'll confess, I get preachy. It

does happen. But I try to [laughter] not let it happen. It does happen. But when I saw this, it's like, "This is a really good idea for getting people sort of having to dip their toes into this thing we call word study." To take 365 readings and orient them around a Hebrew term, I thought was just a really good idea.

10:00

So that's where we want to start. And I'm just going to jump into it that way. So this book, *Unveiling Mercy*, has a two-fold nature to it. So you've got the short reading plan—the short devotional reading plan—for each day of the year. But it does so by making the observations on the use of the Hebrew words. So it's practical but also can launch people down this trajectory in their own personal Bible study. So who thought of the idea? Was this your idea? Did your co-host have a role in this? Where was this born?

**CB:** It was really my idea. I do a lot of posting on my public Facebook page. And I actually will try things out there sometimes just to see what kind of positive or negative reaction they might get. And I don't know when it was, maybe three years ago, I posted something about the verb *radaf*, which is used in Psalm 23 (I believe it's verse 6), usually translated "goodness and mercy shall *follow* me all the days of my life." And that particular verb, I've always argued, has a bit more of an active flavor to it than simply following along. As you know, Mike, it's used for, like, persecute, pursue, chase after. So I wrote a little something up for my Facebook page about that. And it ended up just kind of exploding. It really took off. People were excited about that nuance of the verb that, of course, they couldn't see in English.

**MH:** Is that what you think did it, just the fact that... This is going to sound a little odd, but you're going to catch the drift here. You know, when you teach languages and when you're in the midst of taking them, the realization that, "Oh, this word has a range of meaning." I mean, what could be more obvious? But we don't think about the way we use our own language. So when you introduce people to that thought, sometimes that just really... It's like discovering something totally new, even though they actually partake of it every day of their lives. Did you think that was kind of what was going on there?

**CB:** Yeah, absolutely. I do think that unless you've taking the time to learn another language, you don't really pause a lot to think consciously about the fact that there is a multiplicity of meanings to almost every English word, and the same applies, of course, to other languages as well.

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**CB:** So yeah, just the sheer fact of bringing that out to biblical readers, I think, is helpful. Not in any way to undermine their trust in translation, but instead to point out that every translation is going to have its limitations, just by definition.

**MH:** Sure.

**CB:** So knowing that, for instance, that particular word can mean any number of things and ordinarily is used in a more active sense, that resonated with a lot of people. And it just got me to thinking that I could do the same thing with a lot of other words. And so I actually began to experiment, put some other posts out there about some other Hebrew words, and those also were received well. And then my co-host in *40 Minutes*, Dan Price, actually did suggest that I, instead of writing a few of these, just write a whole year's worth of devotions. That's what I did. [laughs] That was part of my 2020 Covid work. [laughs]

**MH:** Yeah.

**CB:** I was stuck at home, so I wrote a lot of those during that particular time.

**MH:** Well, it was time well spent. Again, just this discovery. I mean, and as you read things about how scholars and Bible teachers, professors, talk about words, that... I'm not going to say it's an osmosis method, but you get to pick up on what we mean by *contexts* (plural) to help you navigate the spectrum of possible meanings. Because context is always king. Usage in context is what's going to trump everything else. But it's easy to say that and talk about context, and if you're not used to thinking about it or doing it, you really don't have any good examples. Well, this book is going to give people... They're not in-depth studies. They're 365 readings. But they are going to give people some guidance as far as how you would contextually approach (or could approach) a particular term in the Hebrew Bible. So I just thought it was a really good idea.

**CB:** Yeah, it's ended up being by far my biggest selling book. People like devotionals just to begin with.

**MH:** Yeah.

**CB:** And this one does take a very different approach than what is ordinarily taken with the topics that devotions deal with.

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**CB:** And you know, I wrote it for... There are some devotionals out there for people who already know Greek and Hebrew, but I wrote this with the audience in mind of those who don't. I mean if you know Hebrew, of course you can profit from it as well.

**MH:** Sure.

15:00

**CB:** But it's not written with *any* assumption that you know even the alphabet. There is a Hebrew word in each devotion, but I have it transliterated into English. So there's no problem with people actually being able to read along and catch the flow of the argument.

**MH:** Well, let's go through a couple of examples. I'm just going to pick out a few of them. You could more or less pick on any page here. But this is page 30. This is January 30<sup>th</sup>, where your word is "the unfruitful earth": *ra'av*, which, okay, "unfruitful earth," that defines it. But the interesting thing in the reading bit for me was comparing *ra'av* (famine), which is how it's typically going to be glossed in an English Bible, with its opposite (abundance). So again, that's part of word study. It's not just what a word means; it's what are its antonyms. You know? Because that's going to tell you an awful lot about how you should be thinking about this word. Another one is the very next day, over on page 31, when God "punches," which I thought was a great title: *nagah*... And it's about affliction. And again, how you relate that to the chastisement—the affliction—of the messiah. Because the word is used of the servant, and so on and so forth. So I don't know if you have some favorites, or maybe you could talk about either of those two. But when you were approaching that, is this stylistically what you're aiming for in each entry? Because a lot of them you're going to be bridging the gap between the testaments, which is the other valuable thing that I would say about the work.

**CB:** Yeah. Yeah. I had multiple purposes in doing it, besides kind of the general reasons we've been talking about. A lot of my work revolves around trying to demonstrate the continuity (and some of the discontinuity, but primarily the continuity) between the testaments, and not having this huge gap between the two. So what I tried to do with almost all the devotions is to some way make that bridge from the Old Testament (the Hebrew word, the context, what it means) to some New Testament verse or theme. And I do that, for instance, in the *nagah*, where I talk about Isaiah 53. And he's the one who is *nagah*-ed, who's stricken, smitten by God and afflicted for us.

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**CB:** And I do that in a lot of the other devotions as well. I'm trying to get the reader to grapple with the Old Testament in its context and get to know this one Hebrew word a little bit. And then to ask the question, "Okay, this might be cool. It might be interesting. But where is this going to lead me as I think about the Gospels, as I think about Christ, as I think about the Christian life?" So, you know, as devotions are going to do, they want to lead you in that particular direction. So sometimes it's pretty obvious—the connection there. Sometimes really what I'm try do with these is Intertextuality.

**MH:** Yep.

**CB:** To demonstrate through a couple examples that, hey, this particular word or phrase is used in these two contexts in such a way that we can see the second author was meaning to point us back in that direction. I've got a lot of examples of that. One that kind of comes to mind (and I can't tell you what page this is on) is in Exodus 12, when the Israelites are to eat the Passover "in haste," in Hebrew that's *hippazon*, and then that particular word (in haste) is then picked up by Isaiah, I believe it's Isaiah 52, when he's talking about the coming exodus, the coming repatriation.

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**CB:** But there, the cool thing is, he says that they will *not* go out in haste. [laughs] So...

**MH:** It's a reversal. Yeah.

**CB:** Yeah, it's a reversal. There won't be any rush. Because the idea is that you don't have to get away in a hurry.

**MH:** Yeah, there's no death destroyer.

**CB:** Yes. Precisely. So that's kind of a neat intertextual feature there. Because you can see how there's a purposeful reversal in the mind of the biblical author, using intertextuality, using a previous narrative and a particular word within that narrative to demonstrate the superiority of what is to come and God's future work.

20:00

**MH:** Yeah, and even in these two examples that I plucked out, with *ra'av*, we spent a lot of time on this podcast... I mean, our love here is biblical theology. And just to get across the concept of what chaos is. Because scholars throw this term around a lot. And my default is "anti-Eden." Everything that isn't what Eden is supposed to be. And even in a simple term like "famine," that's not a word you associate with Eden. [laughs] Okay?

**CB:** Mm hmm.

**MH:** It's the garden of Eden, alright? There is no famine. But the fact that that word is going to be picked up (this lack, the unfruitful earth), and then repurposed in visions of where things are headed eschatologically, it explains the Eden metaphor. It explains the chaos metaphor. It just explains what the two opposing points are, just by a simple observation in the words. And then with *nagah* over on the next day, you point out that that was used of the plagues with Pharaoh. So God is busy *nagah*-ing Pharaoh—giving him what he deserves (hardening his heart and so on and so forth). But then that turns around to be this word that's used to describe the servant (Christ) as stricken.



**CB:** Hmm.

**MH:** You know? It's a pretty dramatic juxtaposition, when you really think about it.

**CB:** Yes.

**MH:** Because Egypt was the primary chaos agent early in Israel's history. It gets replaced by Babylon, obviously. But they're the dominant threat. And then all of a sudden, you have God doing the same thing to his servant—his own Son—and the people. Well, why? Why would that be? I mean, it just stimulates really good interpretive questions, with a very simple observation.

**CB:** Yeah. The famine, too (back to that), you can see how that gets picked up by Isaiah, for instance, in chapter 35, with the image of the deserts becoming these places that are just turning into gardens.

**MH:** Oh, yeah.

**CB:** You have this complete reversal happening there. And that's another one of those that's another Eden theme that comes up. I'm sure we'll get into this when we talk about *The Christ Key*. But yeah, that's a... It's the redoing of the loss of Eden, where God is "Eden-izing," as it were, this place of death and he's bringing it alive again. And then when you see that Jesus points to Isaiah 35 when the disciples of John come to him and ask him if he's the coming one or not, and Jesus basically summarizes Isaiah 35 and says, "Yeah, that's what I'm doing," then everything comes full circle. You realize that is what the ministry of Christ was all about—the Eden-izing of the world by means of his own ministry.

**MH:** Mm hmm. Do you have a couple of favorites from *Unveiling Mercy*, a couple that you thought, when you wrote them (and this is okay—this is not a sin), "Well, that's pretty good stuff"? [laughter]

**CB:** Yeah. Well, you know, I think the ones that got me most excited were the ones where it was something that I learned, you know, it was something I was building on that I already knew, but in the process of learning about the words and maybe the context in which they're used, I realized things that I never knew before. The one that sticks out for me is, it's usually translated "gnashing," as in the gnashing of teeth (*haraq* in Hebrew). And that's used several times in the Old Testament. And of course, then this image is picked up by the Gospel writers as well. Now I don't know if it's because I'd been taught this, or if I just grew up with this assumption, but I always thought that gnashing of teeth was indicative of just simply a pain.

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**CB:** So when you were hurting, you gnashed your teeth. Well, when I was writing the book and investigating this particular verb and looking at the various uses of it, and then on into the New Testament where it's picked up as well, I realized that most of the time (if not all the time) when it's used in the Old Testament, it's indicative not of pain (maybe pain's involved), but it's really indicative of *anger*.

**MH:** Hmm.

**CB:** It's this idea of almost of a snarling that's happening here. When they gnashed their teeth at someone, it's not like they're somehow in pain.

**MH:** Yeah, there's a contempt or anger there.

**CB:** Yeah. So if you take that and you go into the Gospels where Jesus talks about weeping and gnashing of teeth, very often those who are gnashing their teeth are those who think that they're *in* (that they're in the kingdom) by virtue of whatever (their own righteousness or something) but they're *out*, then they're gnashing their teeth. The same Greek verb was used by those who stoned Stephen. They were gnashing their teeth at him. Of course, in that context it's for sure not pain.

**MH:** Sure.

**CB:** It's just fury at Stephen's sermon. So that one was fun, just because I ended up learning a lot, and ended up realizing that my assumption all those years had actually been wrong. And it was like that with several of these others.

25:00

**MH:** Yeah, it is interesting, though, because you think when Jesus delivers the message about being outsiders that the reaction's going to be overwhelming sadness, when it could be fury. [laughter]

**CB:** Yes, right. Yeah.

**MH:** And that kind of changes the scene a lot, if you were going to dramatize it or something like that in your head, that changes the dynamic of what's going on a lot. And of course, then the reaction to him. Like, "What do you mean?" Like, "Who are you?"

**CB:** "Who are you?" Right. "Who are you to say that...?" Yeah. Another one that comes to mind where I learned something was the Jeremiah 16 quote where God talks about how he's going to send fisherman and hunters to search out his people. And that, I believe, is the background of Jesus calling his disciples to be fishers of men.

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**CB:** However, in context, that verb for “fish” and its related verbs quite strikingly to me... Most of the time in the Old Testament, that’s in kind of a negative context. You have enemies hooking or netting or fishing for the people that they’re wanting to take into captivity. So when you have that background and you go into the New Testament and you hear Jesus say, “I’m going to make you fishers of men” (echoing what is said in Jeremiah 16), my takeaway from that is that those who are fished for—those who are hooked or netted—their lives will be radically altered in ways that they did not expect. And in that way, it really does echo what is described in Jeremiah 16, where those who are caught by hook or crook, if you will, their lives will be fundamentally altered as well by the divine work.

**MH:** Yeah, it takes the passivity out of it.

**CB:** Yeah! Yeah, it sure does. And it accents the radical nature of what’s happening when Jesus sends them out as fishermen. It’s not a peaceful image. It’s when he’s sending them out in the midst of a holy war of the right variety.

**MH:** Yeah.

**CB:** But this really will be a conflict in which they are engaged.

**MH:** “You’re going to cause a lot of consternation here.” It’s not just, you walk into a room and then when you leave, half the people have changed their minds about something. Well, okay, maybe they have, but it’s a lot bigger than that. It’s a lot more...

**CB:** Yeah. So don't get the image of the guy on the riverbank with a cold beer and just kind of chilling then when he’s fishing. [laughter] This is a very different kind of image that Jesus is using from the Prophets.

**MH:** Yeah, I’ll tell you, when you say that, the thing that pops into my head is the reaction I still get... I mean, we’re heading into our sixth year of *Unseen Realm* being out as a book. And I still to this day (and I understand it) get people that are angry, not at the content of the book, but they’re angry after reading the book because they feel cheated. Like, “Where has this been all my Christian life? I’ve been a Christian for 30 years and nobody ever taught me this stuff.” And they’re angry. They’ve actually been provoked [laughter] in a good way, you know? And so that’s what pops into my head when you mention that. The disciples are going to have conversations with people that are really going to matter. It’s not just this passive, intellectual, “Oh, you convinced me now. What’s the next topic?” It’s confrontive at the same time, both in a good way, but also in a challenging way. You know, they have to deal with where they were at. They were lost, but now they’re found. You know? It’s a lot more dramatic.

**CB:** Yeah. Absolutely. And I mean, that dovetails with all of the language Jesus uses when he's talking to his disciples about the trials and tribulations that they're going to face. He's not sending them out on some sort of peaceful mission. They are engaging in a true war.

**MH:** It's sabotage. It's subterfuge. [laughter]

**CB:** Yeah. There's an Australian theologian, John Flanagan, who refers to Christians as "secret agents in the kingdom of God." I always loved that particular image. And that really is kind of descriptive of what's going on. A secret agent, but also those who are very actively engaged in (to use the imagery of the Psalms) a militaristic kind of battle, because there is a lot of warfare that happens when you're fishing and hunting for the lost...

**MH:** Or if you like World War II, it's like the French Resistance.

**CB:** Yeah.

**MH:** It's there right in front of your eyes every day, but you don't know it.

**CB:** Exactly.

30:00

**MH:** That's good stuff. Well, let's transition over to second book, *The Christ Key*. Now what appealed to me about this was, most people I think within our churches, we have two opposite exaggerations about the Old Testament. And I think this is, sadly, even more true today in modern preaching and media. And when I say media, I mean Christian media. And one is that everything in the Old Testament is "about" Jesus. Like laws on where to put your excrement, that has something to do with Jesus. You know? Or, "We've got to make it about Jesus because otherwise we have to study and figure out what in the world's going on there." [laughter] So there's that oversimplification. And then the other side is the more academic, where you have a lot of people who either they're academics or they're not believers. They want to pass themselves off as more enlightened consumers of things like the History Channel, where you get the impression that the messiah of the New Testament, Jesus of Nazareth, somehow doesn't conform to what Jews expected. And so there's this wedge that people try to drive between the Old and New Testament in terms of its authority, and just trying to mess with the simplicity of the gospel, to be honest with you.

But this book is going to avoid both of those sorts of things. Obviously, you write from the perspective of somebody with a high view of Scripture, so #2 isn't going to be such an immediate issue. But for the lay community—the people who consume Bible stuff out of the Christian bookstore—I think this is the kind of book that will add some depth. In other words, it avoids the oversimplification of everything being about Jesus and actually gets into biblical theology. So your first

chapter introduces your take on Christ and the Old Testament by characterizing the Bible as “layered,” which is a good word. But I’m going to ask you what you mean by it. And if you have an example handy, that would be great, too. What do you mean by the Bible being “layered,” to prepare us for what you have in store in *The Christ Key*, this second book?

**CB:** One of the things that I accent quite a bit, especially in that first chapter, is how (and this is probably part of my training at Hebrew Union College) the Torah is the foundation of everything. I keep going back to the Genesis, then Deuteronomy. Especially the first three chapters of Genesis. But that is what I refer to as the first layer. And then you’ve got all of the other Scriptures that are, as it were, layered upon that. And what happens over time is that you have biblical authors who are echoing, quoting, alluding to earlier Scriptures, with the expectation that their hearers will make the connections to those earlier Scriptures.

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**CB:** And in so doing, they will have a much richer, fuller understanding of what is being communicated. So this continues, of course, all the way into the New Testament.

**MH:** And they assume a lot, too. They assume a lot... I’ll tell you. [laughter]

**CB:** Yes, they do assume a lot. Yeah. [laughs] What’s fun is when you’re working your way through a text and you discover something that was there all along, and maybe you didn’t see that kind of intertextuality before. I mean, I’ve had that happen multiple times to me. And I think the more that you sink yourself into the Scriptures, into its images, into its themes, into its language itself, the more that you’re going to be able to discern all of those web-like connections between the various parts of the Scriptures.

**MH:** Yep.

**CB:** The one that comes to mind for me (this is my go-to for an example of that) is the Transfiguration. It is just... It’s almost impossible to talk about in a short amount of time all of the various connections that the Transfiguration has to the Old Testament story just in general, and then to various narratives as well as verses within the Old Testament that are picked up on in the Transfiguration.

**MH:** Give us a couple.

**CB:** Yeah. One, I guess... Well, the most obvious for is the fact that this is happening on a mountain.

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**CB:** I often like to point out that in the Bible, geography is theological. And theology is very often geographical. And so you can't pretend as if it's happening on a plain or a valley. Because if it were, the meaning would be different.

**MH:** Or a tennis court. [laughter]

35:00

**CB:** Yeah. Yeah. So you're already ready for a theophanic experience as soon as you hear that they're on a mountain. And then when God shows up in a cloud, of course, this takes us all the way back to the exodus and the glory cloud and all of those particular narratives—especially Exodus 40, where the cloud fills the Tabernacle. And then when God speaks, “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased; listen to him,” you've got metalepsis—this reference to earlier passages going on there. You've got an echo of Psalm 2 and Deuteronomy 18 and Isaiah passages. So when you're reading the Transfiguration account, you almost have to have the whole panoply of the Old Testament in your mind's eye so that as you're watching the events unfold and hearing what is happening, then you can look at this relatively brief narrative through this extremely broad narrative that informs what is the fullness of what's happening in that encounter.

**MH:** Yeah, you have to know the story and know it pretty well. Like I said, the writers assume a lot of Old Testament knowledge of their readers. It's kind of remarkable. But they present it... So much of the content of the Old Testament is presented as story, which means by definition it is memorable. It's more memorable than reading a textbook or something like that. So they should be able to do it. They should be able to track with it—these features of the story.

**CB:** Yeah. I like to use the analogy of a movie watcher. You know, there are certain movies that people are, you know, they just love them, so they'll watch them 10, 20, 50 times. And if you get two friends together who are both like that with the same movie [MH laughs], they'll just be dropping lines left and right. And if you're not a watcher of that movie—a lover of that movie—you're just going to miss all of the nuances of the humor or whatever, whatever they're talking about with the movie. And I think the Scriptures are like that very often. If you're not watching the movie of the Bible all the time, then you're going to miss all of these things that, like you say, they assume a lot—expect a lot—of the reader.

**MH:** Yeah. You mentioned you discover things. I mean, it's... I'd say within the last year, one of the things that I could kind of plunk myself in the head for, for really not paying attention to for years, and it has to do with this mountain motif, is the Sermon on the Mount. You just made the comment, you're prepared for a theophanic experience if you're reading along and you get to the Transfiguration scene and they're on a mountain. Why is it that we don't default to that when we get to the Sermon on the Mount? Because it's still the cosmic mountain idea.

**CB:** Mm hmm.

**MH:** And I just... When I ran across something that hit me between the eyes with that, I thought, “Mike, you’re just kind of a dunderhead.” [laughter] Because it’s like... I mean, it’s sitting there right in the text. [laughter]

**CB:** Right.

**MH:** You know? And you can go back into the academic discussion about how, “Oh, this wasn’t really a mountain. It’s a plain.” And, “The synoptic accounts...” And, “What’s the elevation?” You know? When really, none of that stuff is actually the point. The point is that we have revelation dispensed from a mountain. It’s a theophanic experience.

**CB:** Mm hmm.

**MH:** You know? And it goes back to the original cosmic mountain, which is the divine abode—Eden. And here we go again. It’s just... It’s a biblical theology train ride, just by virtue of the setting of the scene with very simple language. But again, had I known the story better or been thinking about the story better, that should have occurred to me a long time ago, but it didn’t. You know?

**CB:** Well, I told... That’s one of the joys, too. We’re always learning, right? That’s what keeps us going back, is there’s always... You can always dig a little deeper. Always discover something new that keeps us Bible study exciting.

**MH:** Right. I mean, Matthew’s not thinking, “Well, Luke wrote this other thing over here. Mine needs to sound a little bit different. So what do I do?” [CB laughs]

**CB:** A little diversity there. [laughs]

**MH:** Yeah. No, it’s not... They’re prompted by the Spirit to do what they do. And the Spirit lets them be who they are. And out comes this material. And it’s just laced with the Old Testament story. I mean, that’s the constant touchpoint. Even Luke writing for a Gentile... They’re assuming the Septuagint. “Everybody reads this. You’re not the exception. You’re going to be familiar with this.” It’s really good stuff.

**CB:** Yeah. And back to the Transfiguration, it’s only Luke, of course, that tells us what Jesus, Moses, and Elijah are talking about on the mount of the Transfiguration, and it’s the Exodus. So he drops that loaded Greek word that all of the sudden, it’s like a little bitty keyhole—that one word—that which you look, and all of the sudden you’ve got the entire theme of exile and return that is staring you straight in the face...

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**MH:** And if people are wondering what you're talking about there, look, the glory cloud parts, okay? And we forget that one of the details of the exodus is the wind that parts the sea. And it's really, really... I mean, there is a lot of layering in that. That's a really good example to use the Transfiguration. Almost every word can dovetail with something back in the exodus and the crossing accounts and whatnot. Yeah.

Now we're already into Christophanies here, but your second chapter's actually devoted to that, which in the case of this audience, people are going to be familiar with the concept of God as man in the Old Testament, with theophany and Christophany. Can you give us a couple of examples of maybe Old Testament individuals who are... I don't know if I want to say a little less referenced in this regard, but maybe scenes or individuals that prefigure or telegraph Jesus and his ministry in maybe an unexpected way.

**CB:** Yeah, you know, the one that comes immediately to mind is... And I think the reason it does is because this was an exciting discovery for me years ago. I was working my way through the book of Isaiah and was dealing with all those verses—those well-known verses in chapter 9. And I came across that fourth verse that talks about God breaking the yoke of the burden, and the staff on his shoulder. And then there's this seemingly passing reference to the day of Midian. And I just remember all those years ago stopping and asking myself, "What in the world's he talking about—this day of Midian?" So I started digging a little bit. And he refers again to the day of Midian in chapter 10, but more specifically, allowing us to pinpoint this as the time of Gideon—so all the way back in that fun book of Judges. [laughter] So I started kind of comparing what was going on in Isaiah 9 with what was happening in Judges 6-8 with the life of Gideon. And it's pretty fascinating, when you look at some of the language that's used in Isaiah 9, especially the military language and some of the light/darkness motifs... So he explicitly refers to the victory that Gideon had over the Midianites. But in chapter 9 of Isaiah, he seems to weave in language that itself is lifted from some of the themes in Gideon's victory over the Midianites. And then, of course, Isaiah 9 is all about leading up to the son of David and talking about who he is. So for me, anyway, it's pretty cool if you take who Gideon is and how God used him as one of the deliverers of Israel and how he used him in this very unexpected victory over a superior foe, and then you use that intertextually to talk about who the son of David is going to be, (which I think is what's happening in Isaiah 9)...

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**CB:** So Isaiah is, as it were, taking this particular story from a most unexpected book (the book of Judges, not where you would go looking ordinarily for some image of who the son of David was going to be). And he uses that to talk about who David is. So it leads to this idea of looking at Gideon and his office in particular and this unexpected victory as something of a prototype or a



foreshadowing, if you will, of who the messiah is going to be and what he's going to do.

**MH:** Yeah, and Isaiah 9 is also really interesting if you ever get into it in the Septuagint, because it's quite a bit different. And it actually says, "He shall be called the messenger of the Great Council."

**CB:** Oh, yes, yes. Yeah.

**MH:** You know, because you've got Divine Council stuff in there, and who's the messenger of the Lord in the Gideon episode? Well, it's the Angel of the Lord, obviously.

**CB:** Yeah.

**MH:** You know? There's... Gosh. [laughs] You know...

**CB:** A lot of paths to go down there for sure. [laughs]

**MH:** I know, I know. It's just really such good stuff.

**CB:** Gideon himself almost comes across as a sort of Moses kind of figure, too. So it's almost like an Exodus 3 burning bush encounter there because he downplays his own significance and abilities.

**MH:** Yep.

**CB:** And he's engaging with the messenger.

**MH:** Later he refuses to set up a kingship.

**CB:** Yes, yes, precisely. So that really is kind of... He's... We'll have a lot of characters who are Mosaic in nature, but Gideon is one of those that I don't think people ordinarily think as a Moses kind of figure. But he really is, when you begin comparing how he was called, how he reacted. But that's side by side with what was happening in the book of Exodus.

**MH:** Yep. No, there are commonalities there, for sure. In chapter 4, you get into the older creation account and the vision of the new creation. So you're doing old and new creation in that chapter and how they inform the portrait of the messiah. Can you unpack that a little bit? How do you think that that's accomplished?

45:00

**CB:** Oh, yeah. That was one of the most enjoyable chapters to write, and challenging at the same time. Because as you know, there's just so much to try and work in there.

**MH:** Where do you even start?

**CB:** Yeah. Where do you even start? So I just pick up a couple of things that were significant for me. Of course, you take what's happening in Genesis 1:1-2 and then you begin to see how that is either alluded to or used kind of thematically by the prophets to describe what's going to happen in even the eschaton. And my favorite passage there is in Ezekiel's vision at the end of his book, where of course he sees this trickle of water coming out from underneath the side of the temple, which deepens and widens as it flows down toward the Salt Sea. And then you have, of course, it desalinates the Dead Sea.

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**CB:** There's the trees growing along it. And it's a picture, of course, of the cosmic mountain with the temple there—the presence of God.

**MH:** Yep, here we are again.

**CB:** Yeah, here we are again. So just like the river flowed out of Eden, so now this river flows out of the sanctuary, which is, of course, what the garden was. And everywhere it goes it brings life because it flows from God—the very source of life. And then... So you jump from Genesis to Ezekiel. And then, of course, you go all the way to the end. You go to Revelation 21-22, where John, as he's wont to do, just simply borrows what's happening in the Old Testament to describe the new heavens and the new earth. So we end up coming full circle, where the beginning foreshadows the end, and the end is reflecting the beginning.

**MH:** Yeah. And the lynchpin figure of the transition is a person. So it makes perfect sense that your New Testament writers are going to have the person of Christ be central to creation/new creation talk. In other words, yeah, it's about nature and transforming anti-Eden back to Eden, and those sorts of things. But it's a person that accomplishes this, ultimately, in the end. So it's just, like we said a few minutes ago, where do you even start? I mean, there's so much of this talk in the Old Testament about the restoration of what was lost (Eden). And then when you get to the New, it's like, well, here we are. We're right in the middle of the program. And to cast Jesus in light of these passages that talk about the transformation of creation *should* make complete sense to us, *if* we have the story floating around in our heads.

**CB:** Mm hmm. Yeah, it's what I referred to earlier with the whole Matthew 11 scenario, where John's disciples come and say, "Are you the coming one?" And Jesus basically says, "Well, look at what I'm doing."

**MH:** "Aren't you watching?" [laughs]

**CB:** Yeah. [laughs] “Pay attention to what I’m doing.” He doesn’t say, “Yes,” which is what you would expect. But he says, “Just look. Okay? Now you see what I’m doing. Now go read Isaiah 35 and see if the two line up. And if they do, you will see that I AM the one who comes to restore what was lost, and to bring about the new creation in myself, in the very things I’m doing now.

**MH:** It’s one thing for him to just say, “Yeah.” It’s quite another for them to see things and be convinced in their own mind. In other words, as they watch, they can’t draw any other conclusion. I mean, that’s really what he’s shooting for.

**CB:** Yeah, he’s wanting them to understand who he is, not simply on the basis of who he says he is, but everything that he’s doing, all that he is. When understood through the prism of the prophetic portrait of who the son of David is to be, then that’s the conclusion that you come to. He has to be that coming one, and no one else.

**MH:** Now you spend a lot of time in the book (really a couple of chapters) talking about the sanctuary (tabernacle, temple, cosmic mountain material) and the furniture (the furnishings, the design, the outlay) of sacred space in these things. Can you give us a couple of examples of how just the way sacred space is laid out or treated or described and articulated in the Old Testament and how that becomes useful material for presenting the person and work of Jesus?

50:00 **CB:** Yeah, you know, what I’m riffing off there is basically the book of Hebrews, taking chapters 9-10, but he talks a lot about the sanctuary—some of the furnishings, the Day of Atonement, all of those interrelated aspects. And so what I tried to do is kind of picture that we’re walking up to the sacred space.

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**CB:** And what do we see first? We see the altar, and then we might see the bronze sea, and then inside the holy place we see this and this and this. So as you picture yourself walking toward each of these, what’s their purpose? Why are they where they are? And how does this architecturally inform our theology? Just to give you a couple of examples of that (and this actually dovetails with what we’ve just been talking about, with new creation)—the lampstand.

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**CB:** It’s pretty much universally agreed among scholars that the lampstand’s shape is intended to be indicative of the Tree of Life in Eden. So here we have the new tree whose fruit is light itself, right here in this garden sanctuary (just like, of course, the Tree of Life was in Eden). And if you go to Revelation, you see how it’s a multivalent image. You’ve got the lampstand associated, yes, with Eden, but you also have it associated with the Spirit of God, and then you could

bring Zechariah 4 in, where you have the whole lampstand vision he has there. You can see how this just one lamp is going all these different directions.

**MH:** Right. And it's supposed to be kept perpetually burning.

**CB:** Perpetually burning, yeah.

**MH:** Yeah. Darkness will not overcome it. You know. Yeah. There's a lot going on.

**CB:** Yeah, so you've got the Church, Messiah, the Spirit. Yeah, there's a lot going on with that. The one other example is usually translated "mercy seat"—the *kapporet*. I always like to point to what Paul does in Romans 3:25, when he identifies Christ as the *hilasterion*, which is translated a number of different ways in your English translations, but *hilasterion* in the Septuagint is the translation for the atonement cover or for the mercy seat. So when Paul says that Christ is put forward "as our *hilasterion*," then if you know your Septuagint, it's impossible not to hear that as Christ being that very seat of atonement, that very place where our atonement was effected.

**MH:** Yeah, how could you possibly miss it?

**CB:** Yeah, I don't know why English translations (a lot of them, anyway) don't translate it as mercy seat or place of atonement. They often will choose other language. But when you're hearing it as a first century, Greek-speaking Jew, when you hear *hilasterion*, that's the immediate connection that you're going to make with the Holy of Holies.

**MH:** It is. I think... This is just me now, so I'll editorialize here. It's my podcast, so Chad Bird had nothing to do with the comment that ensues. [CB laughs] I think scholars... There's a propensity toward not wanting to be judged as naïve by their own pecking order. And I got into this when I interviewed David Mitchell, who we spent an episode with talking about Messiah ben Joseph. There's this whole stream of messianic tradition about the line of Joseph. And if you trace that stream you have a dying messiah from Galilee, which is pretty startling. Okay?

**CB:** Mm hmm.

**MH:** And I asked him, "Why do you think this doesn't get talked about more, even in the Jewish community? That might be a little more obvious. But just the wider academic community. It's because they don't want to sound "fundamentalistic." They don't want to create too much of an impression that it's supposed to make sense. [CB laughs] "So we have to do what scholars do and murky the waters a little bit and leave questions in the minds of people." And I sort of put this in the same vein. It's more in vogue—it's more trendy—to neutralize the vocabulary as

though there's a mystery here as to what the New Testament writers are doing. "Are they doing something innovative? Are they being clever? Are they just propagandists, to prop up what they believe about Jesus?" No, it's actually there in the text. [CB laughs] And it was written by a Jew, okay? The guys who did the Septuagint were *Jews*. Can we spell that term? J-E-W-S. You know? They're not pre-Christian Christians who aren't Jews. So I tend to think that scholars do a little bit too much to muddy waters that are honestly pretty clear. [laughs]

55:00 **CB:** Yeah. Well, I know that was your own editorializing, but I fully agree. [laughter] Yeah. I encounter that quite frequently. There are things which are pretty straightforward and pretty simple in biblical texts, which with scholarship is yeah, quite often guilty of kind of making more confusing than it really ought to be. Things are a lot more straightforward often than scholarship lets on.

**MH:** Last question here. You spend a good bit of time on the Psalms. Can you give us a good example of how a psalm would inform not only Jesus' own understanding of his own ministry, but how a psalm is going to be used by Jewish writers who are producing the Septuagint (and, of course, the New Testament) to have the Old Testament inform us about the centrality of this person—this Jesus of Nazareth—and God's salvation plan?

**CB:** Probably the best psalm for that... I mean, there's a lot we could choose from. We could talk about Psalm 2. We could talk about Psalm 41. But I think Psalm 8 is increasingly the one that I turn to for illustrating this. Psalm 8... You just kind of read it quickly and don't think too much about it. You think, "Oh, this is about creation and how small we are. 'Look at the heavens, moon and stars. What am I?'"

**MH:** That's the preaching point, yeah.

**CB:** Yeah. "What's the son of man that you care for him?' I'm this little human being. But you've done great things for me." And if you kind of leave it at that, okay, you can find a couple takeaways from that. But you kind of just stay on the surface. Well, when you take that and you look at it in its Old Testament context and you see how it's poetic interpretation of Genesis 1-2 (the creation account), who humanity is...

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**CB:** So you take that and then you go to the New Testament. You look in Hebrews 2 and you see what the author of Hebrews did with it. And all of a sudden this seemingly pretty straightforward psalm all of a sudden is bottomless. You keep digging and digging and digging and you realize that in many ways these nine verses are an entire biblical expressed in poetry.

**MH:** Yeah.

**CB:** You've got... Yes, you have creation. But you also have humanity. But you also have now the author of Hebrews identifying this "one who was a little lower" as Christ himself. So you have this Last Adam theology that is at work there as well.

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**CB:** And you have his humiliation, you have his exaltation, you have his reigning at the right hand of the Father. And I'm only touching on kind of the basics that you can draw from this. It is one of those psalms that...

**MH:** You're right. I mean, it's God wanting a human family so badly that he would condescend to become the thing that we question, "Why in the world would you want that?" [laughter]

**CB:** Yeah!

**MH:** "What's the point?"

**CB:** It's a great revelation of the mercy of God, that he would take on our humanity in the incarnation. And I mean, go so far as to call us, as Hebrews says, brothers...

**MH:** Siblings.

**CB:** Yeah, siblings. Siblings with Christ. It's both a shock to us as well as just an incredible joy that God would go that far to make sure that he has us as his children and siblings with Christ.

**MH:** Well, this has been a good chat, and for my audience, I hope that all of you who are listening are catching the drift. If you're in a situation where you're looking for something to do in your own personal Bible study, or maybe you're in a house church situation or a small group Bible study, I would recommend either and both of these books. You can get a lot of mileage out of both of these efforts that Chad has produced for the believing community here. *Unveiling Mercy: 365 Daily Devotions Based on Insights from Old Testament Hebrew* and then, of course, the second volume, *The Christ Key*. It's really going to focus, again, on how the Old Testament enlightens the presentation of Christ. *Unlocking the Centrality of Christ in the Old Testament* itself. So these are great tools that you can use personally. But again, I get email still consistently from a lot of people who feel either unchurched or under-churched, and they're looking for content. This is the kind of thing you can take into a small group or form a small group Bible study and just spend, I mean, a lot of time in it. You could spend a year in

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either of these books and go through and you'd learn a lot to connect the dots between the two testaments. And so that's something we always look for here. So Chad, thanks for being with us so we can talk about your work and its value.

**CB:** Well, thank you for having me on. It's been a real joy.

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**TS:** Alright, Mike. Another great conversation. And I'm glad we could get Chad on this time, since we got two books. And again, we have a discount code and link on our [NakedBiblePodcast.com](http://NakedBiblePodcast.com) page. So feel free to go there and get that link, where you can get his books with a discount. And that was a good conversation, Mike.

**MH:** Yeah, I'm glad we were able to have him on. This is the kind of thing that if you're looking for content in a small group or just on your own, this is why these things are created. So I'm hoping that people will take advantage of them and use them and plow through them. There's a lot of good stuff in both of these.

**TS:** Absolutely. Alright, Mike. Well, with that I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.