

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 426

Q&A 52

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Episode Summary

Dr. Heiser answers your questions:

- Why is the tetragrammaton missing from the New Testament? [3:05]
- How did the minor prophets become scripture? [4:45]
- Could the writer of Genesis have had the serpent from The Epic of Gilgamesh in mind? [8:10]
- Why don't some translations put Revelation 1:8 in red letters? [10:45]
- How do you answer the objection to the Divine Council Worldview that says it's a wrong interpretation of Isaiah 40 because John the Baptist didn't say those words? [12:30]
- What is the Serpent Well in Nehemiah 2:13? [16:45]

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 426: Our 52nd Q&A. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! What's going on?

MH: Not a whole lot, Trey, not a whole lot. Just working on projects, sticking with the program here to try to get better.

TS: Yeah.

MH: Pretty much the same old, same old, but I like routine. I kind of thrive in routine.

TS: Oh, yeah, yeah, you've told us several times before. Is part of that routine listening to baseball?

MH: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I have it on every day. I can't help it.

TS: Do you actually watch it or just listen to it? How's your Fantasy baseball team going?

MH: Oh, no, I watch it, too.

TS: I'm being generous. Yeah, I'm being generous by asking about your Fantasy baseball team so here's your chance.

MH: Well, my team in the Naked Bible League isn't doing very well, but I'm in two leagues that my brother runs. In one of those leagues, I'm near the top and then I'm in a Rotisserie league and I'm in second place. So it's going to take a lot of effort to get out of second and move to first, but that's what happened last year. I won that league last year. About two-thirds of the way through the season, my guys just started to hit and it pushed me over the top. So I'm hoping for the same thing this year.

TS: Well, that's great, Mike. I apologize I fell asleep there.

MH: Isn't that refreshing?

TS: Yeah. I'm starting to feel like everybody else out there who loves it when we talk about Fantasy. But we didn't talk too much about Fantasy this season.

MH: No, no, we've taken a break from it so there you go.

TS: Yeah, well, a break from talking about it; certainly not playing it.

MH: Right.

TS: So our audience, you're welcome.

MH: They can breathe a collective sigh of relief if we tell them we're not going to get back into it for a while.

TS: Although I do get emails talking about how they appreciate the sports talk. It makes us more macho, Mike. We're pretty macho guys.

MH: Right.

TS: We have to maintain some macho-ness.

MH: And I don't know. It makes me feel a little sad.

TS: What's that?

MH: It makes me feel that we would need that to push us over the top to appear... I don't know. Instead of macho, what's the right word? Manly?

TS: Yeah, manly or manly-like.

MH: Catering to the stereotypes here.

TS: Yeah, well, that's alright.

MH: Which is fine.

TS: Yeah, that's fine, yeah. I'm okay with that, Mike. I'm confident in my manliness. Alright. Well, we've got some questions here. Why don't we just tackle the first one now? And the first one is from Ivraym:

3:05

What does Mike think about the name “Yahweh” in the New Testament? Why is the tetragrammaton missing from the New Testament? Is the name Yahweh only for the Jews and not meant for all nations? And what does Mike think about the term “hallelujah” in Revelation 19:1? Is it considered only for heavenly beings and not for the rest of the church?

MH: Yeah, I'll take that last part first. I see no reason or rationale that the term can't be used by any believer. There's no prohibition there.

Why isn't the tetragrammaton in the New Testament? Because the New Testament is written in Greek. It is not written in Hebrew. The deity name likely *is* in the New Testament because you have certain (especially in the Gospel of John) “I am” passages or “I am he” statements. And those are legitimate translations of the tetragrammaton from the Old Testament. So it actually *is* there even though it's not transliterated. So we have to remember just because it isn't transliterated and it would look like I-A-O (something like “ya-ow”). In the Greek text, the transliteration of the divine name... That is typically how it's rendered, something like that or “ee-ah.” Just because that doesn't show up in the New Testament doesn't mean that it's absent from the New Testament. So you have the “I am” or the “I am he” statements that (at least some of them in the Gospel of John) do directly draw on the divine name.

TS: Our next question is from Craig.

4:45

How did minor prophets become scripture? What is known or theorized for how the minor prophets gained their credibility, their following, in order to be preserved as scripture?

MH: Well, I would say... First of all, the question is asking me to speculate because we aren't given precise answers to these questions about how Amos got to be known, got to be respected, so on and so forth. So I'm not going to speculate or guess. There is certainly no historical doubt about the inclusion of Amos in the canon. So it's safe to say the community recognized his status as a prophet. You know, prophets... There's such a thing in the Old Testament

called... Some translations actually put it this way and some scholars put it this way: "Schools of the prophets." Prophets had followers [audio breaks up]... the New Testament equivalent here, the rabbi-master relationship. That was true of prophets as well. They would learn... People would follow prophets, learn from their teachers. They would learn how to preach and how to minister. But again, in the academic world, this term is usually employed to describe a prophet's followers who would eventually codify or write down his sermons. In other words, these were the guys who would actually produce the written book that bears the prophet's name. Let me read one passage in 2 Kings 2:3. This is part of the Elisha story and it said here:

³ And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he said, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet."

It's not a nice verse. Elisha's basically telling him to shut up. But there's this reference to the sons of the prophets. Again, other translations might have something like "school" of the prophets there, but "sons of the prophets" doesn't refer to physical offspring. It refers to these groupies—these people that would follow the prophets around and listen to them and eventually be responsible for codifying what they preached. There's another reference in 2 Kings 4:1.

Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves."

So on and so forth. So there you have "sons of the prophets." Same thing in the same chapter, 2 Kings 4:38.

³⁸ And Elisha came again to Gilgal when there was a famine in the land. And as the sons of the prophets were sitting before him, he said to his servant, "Set on the large pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets."

Again, so there are a number of these references to these groups. They're important because we could speculate (if we're going to speculate and we have to) that Amos was a member of such a school or such a group of the prophets and he emerged as a respected speaker that way, despite his vocational occupation as being a... Let's just put it, "in the agrarian industry." That didn't so much matter. If he had the time (and again we're speculating)... If he had the time to go follow a prophet around or learn from them, he could do that. And again, he just emerged from the group of those who did and became a prophet himself.

TS: Alright, Paul has our next question.

8:15

I just wanted to ask if you think it's possible that the writer of Genesis had the serpent from the Epic of Gilgamesh in mind when writing this account of the fall of man? I would assume that the snake that took the flower/plant of eternal life in the Epic of Gilgamesh benefited from its effects. In translations of Revelation 20:2, the serpent from the garden is referred to as "the old serpent," which also may lend credence to this idea. Your thoughts?

MS: Yeah, Revelation 20:2 would not be an allusion to a Sumerian epic. I mean, it would be an allusion back to Genesis 3, so we have to keep that in mind. But just generally I think it's possible, but Gilgamesh isn't the only candidate. The Adapa tale might be a better parallel. Adapa was the first man in this text and so there's a story that, again, involves a serpent figure in that story. So that might be what the allusion could be to as well, other than Gilgamesh. I also think... Just to be clear, I think that we're dealing with a serpent. We're dealing with more than a literary allusion, but since the question is oriented to the literature, we'll just keep it at that. Let me just read a little section I have here. *The Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* (ZIBBC). And it has little section on this. It says:

10:00

In the Gilgamesh Epic, after Gilgamesh acquires the magical plant that will rejuvenate him, it is stolen by a snake. In the story of Adapa, one of the guardians of Anu's palace (where Adapa is offered the food of life) is Gizzida, which equals to Ningishzida, "Lord of the Productive Tree". Ningishzida is serpent-shaped or accompanied by horned serpents, again, depending on the text, and he is guardian of the demons who live in the netherworld.

So if you want to make a connection between the serpent figure and a sinister supernatural being, Ningishzida in the Adapa epic is actually a better candidate, but again, I wouldn't rule Gilgamesh out as far as an allusion here either. It could be one of the other or none. It doesn't have to be one of these options, but they're definitely possibilities.

TS: Mason wonders:

10:45

Do you have an opinion on why a fair amount of translations will not red-letter Revelation 1:8?

MS: What's Revelation 1:8 here? I'll look it up quickly.

⁸ "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

The verse actually answers your question. It's not red-lettered because the statement isn't from the mouth of Jesus; it's from the mouth of the Lord God. So the red-letter strategy can't quite cope (or at least it has some difficulty) with instances like this, where the line between God and Jesus is so blurred. Since the text explicitly has "says the Lord God" and not "says Jesus," they opt to not make it red, despite the fact that the description "the Alpha and Omega" will be later applied to Jesus. So, again, the whole red-letter strategy has some difficulty here, but that would be why they do not red-letter it. The text is very explicit. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God." It doesn't say "says Jesus," or "says the Son of God" or something like that. So that's why it's not red-lettered. Generally, I think red-letter editions are a bad idea anyway. The words of Jesus aren't any more important than any other words of scripture. It's not that they're specially inspired and the rest of the stuff is lesser inspired. It's all inspired. So again, I tend to shy away and discourage the use of red-letter editions, but that wasn't part of the question, so I'll stop there. [laughs]

TS: I can see that quote already, Mike. Marshall from Seattle has a question about the reading of Isaiah 40.

12:30

A college professor friend says that he doesn't agree with Dr. Heiser and his case for the Divine Council because, "No account is given for the New Testament identifying the voice as John the Baptist speaking to Israel in the wilderness and how that plays into how we then read Isaiah 40. I am uncomfortable having the New Testament give an interpretation of an Old Testament text that is completely different to an interpretation we give that Old Testament text." What are Mike's thoughts?

MS: Mark 1 clearly has the messenger preparing the way of the Lord as John the Baptist. Messengers say things. Messengers speak. So I'm not saying that the plural commands of Isaiah 40 are John the Baptist speaking. I've never said that. So I think there's a little bit being misunderstood there. It's God speaking to a group (his Divine Council) in Isaiah 40. The commands are all plural. They're not singular. I don't write the text, but I know how to read it. So there you have it. It's speaking to a group. John turns out to be the fulfillment in human terms of this divine decree. I mean, that's Mark 1. It's plain as day, but I've never said that Mark is mouthing the words of Isaiah 40. So let's not make me say things that I don't say. There's nothing unusual with my view either. It's common in scholarship, and many scholars want Isaiah 40 to be a second call narrative. (The first one would be Isaiah 6.) So a lot of them consider Isaiah 40 to be kind of mirroring Isaiah 6 because of the similarities between the two, but even those who don't say Isaiah 40 is a second call narrative (and I'm thinking of somebody like Christopher Seitz here), even those who don't see it as a second call narrative know that the Divine Council is present and is oriented there.

15:00

Now what I've decided to do here in light of this question is I'm going to include Christopher Seitz' article in the protected folder where I upload articles that I mention in the podcast periodically. So if you're a newsletter subscriber to the Miqlat Newsletter, you can get access to this article. But the article is entitled, "The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah." It's a great article. It's pretty awesome, and it's all about the language of Isaiah 40. It's somewhat technical, but I don't think you need a graduate degree to read through the article and appreciate what's going on there, but it's excellent and establishes very well the presence of the Divine Council there. There are other articles, too, that I quote in *Unseen Realm*. Frank Moore Cross from Harvard years ago did a really nice article on the plural imperatives of Isaiah 40.

Among scholars, there is little question here that you have the Divine Council in view. But again, I've never said that John the Baptist is going around saying the words of Isaiah 40. He just happens to be the way things play out in fulfillment. And if you listened at all to our series with Matt Halsted on Paul's use of the Old Testament in Romans, you should know very well at this time that... You know, oftentimes when the New Testament repurposes the Old, you don't get these one-to-one correspondences; you get thematic or topical correspondences—typological correspondences. Again, we don't want to press Mark too far, and I don't. I've never said John the Baptist is speaking the very words of Isaiah 40. He just turns out to be the fulfillment of it. He prepares the way for the Messiah. Who else would it be? Again, it's clearly John's role. So I don't know what the beef is. I would suggest that your professor needs to read and digest Seitz' article. If he has a problem with the Divine Council part of it, that should cure him.

TS: Marshall from Seattle has another question and it is:

16:45

What is the Serpent Well in Nehemiah 2:13?

MS: Yeah, this one interested me because I've never actually noticed this in Nehemiah. I'm not into the geographical features like wells and such of the Holy Land. So I went and looked this up in Israel Loken's Commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah, and his commentary is from the *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary Series* put out by Lexham Press, which is not only a good series, but this is an excellent commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah. But to start off, let me just read Nehemiah 2:13. It says:

¹³ I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire.

So this is part of Nehemiah's initial reconnoitering of the situation that this journey back to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls, and he points out a few of these

features. So let me read from Loken's Commentary. It's kind of lengthy, but it covers a lot of the bases as far as what this is. He writes:

The valley gate was probably located near the southwest corner of the city, opening into the Hinnom Valley, otherwise known as Gehenna. This gate had been fortified by Uzziah [in 2 Chronicles 26:9]. Allen, a minimalist, locates the Valley Gate at the midway point of the Western Wall. According to this view, the Valley Gate would have opened to the central valley, the Tyropoeon. A gate has been discovered at about this spot; however, its date is uncertain. According to Kenyon, it may date to the time of Nehemiah... Nehemiah and his men traveled from the Valley Gate to the Refuse Gate, a distance of a thousand cubits [That's according to Nehemiah 3:13, about 1,500 feet]. The Refuse Gate, also known as the Dung Gate, was probably the southernmost gate, leading to the trash dump in the Hinnom Valley. It is probably to be identified as the Potsherd Gate mentioned in Jeremiah 19:2. The trash dump outside the Refuse Gate takes on great theological significance in the New Testament, as it is associated metaphorically with the place of the eternal punishment of the wicked [for example, Matthew 5:22, 29, and 30; Luke 12:5; and James 3:6].

As the group traveled from the Valley Gate to the Refuse Gate, it passed by the Well of the Serpent. This well is also known as the Jackal's Well or the Dragon's Well (The Hebrew word can mean "serpent," "jackal," or "dragon"). It is possible that the site took its name from the jackals that haunted the Hinnom Valley to consume the dead bodies that were thrown there. Clines believes the Well of the Serpent is to be identified with En-rogel. Williamson correctly calls this view "most implausible." Braslavi identifies it as the Pool of Siloam, an identification equally unlikely. Another remote possibility is the major spring of Jerusalem, the Gihon. According to this view, the name Well of the Serpent derives from the serpentine course of the waterway from the spring to the Pool of Siloam, the most probable identification of the King's Pool.

20:00

That's the end of Loken's quote. So there you have it. There are a number of possible locations, possible things that could be identified with this particular gate and the well and so on and so forth, but there's a lack of certainty there. But those are all the good possibilities.

TS: Alright, Mike. That was our last question. So we appreciate everybody that has sent in questions and we appreciate you answering those questions. And don't forget you can email me your questions at treystricklin@gmail.com. And Mike, we hope you and everybody else is enjoying their summer as it is about to start, and I hope everybody else has fun swimming in their pools and going to the beach, other than Mike [laughter]. So with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.