

Blogging with Dr. Barry, Part 2 (Michael Heiser Responds)

Contributed by Administrator
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Blogging with Dr. Barry, Part 2

Michael Heiser

As before, I'll preface my comments with "MSH" and indent them. Everything else is Dr. Downing's.

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One way to respond to this kind of charge is to take the texts that Heiser mentions, and show why I think my hermeneutics is not as radical or serious a violation of the text as he charges. But when he does not mention a single biblical text, or any of my work in his condemnation, what am I to say?

MSH: Uh, I think you or anyone familiar with either of us could manage to pick one I wouldn't agree with. Basically ANY text in the biblical material that has aliens in it would be far afield for any hermenutic that any biblical schoalrs would recognize. If I had to pick, I'd have to blog through your whole book . . . wait a minute, there's an idea now that I have this blog . . . yes, it would be painful, but perhaps it might be useful. . . .

He does not even define hermeneutical rape. It was not a term used when I was in seminary.

MSH: Read: "Terms I didn't hear in my classes at seminary are illegitimate." Come on. Do you really think I *learned* a method of interpretation called "rape exegesis" or some other circumlocution in graduate school? I don't know about you, but neither my vocabulary or my thoughts were entirely molded by classes in graduate school. Anyway, I defined it in the last post for those interested.

One meaning of his charge might be that I have used the text violently, as he says, that I have "read into the text" what is not there. (The technical term for reading something into the text that is not there is eisegesis, as opposed to exegesis.) Now this seems to be a strange thing for him to say in light of other things he has said.

MSH: Yep - that's what I meant.

Heiser has published at a blog called "The Naked Bible." (I guess in Heiser's world, hermeneutical rape is some kind of sexual sub division that goes with Bible nakedness.)

MSH: Gosh, you're funny, Barry! Folks, how silly is this? No, the blog title has nothing to do with sex. And guess what? Nakedness per se has nothing to do with it either. See, when you're "naked" you are "without" clothes. So, by "naked" Bible I mean "the Bible with nothing else added." It isn't hard to parse, especially if you read the blog.

He has written an article entitled, "End Times Questions for Left-Behinders: How Everyone Cheats on Eschatology." He discusses how everyone tries to make absolutely certain claims about eschatology, when the hermeneutics of biblical eschatology is very uncertain. He says, "The Bible didn't come with a handbook with the 'right' answers to these [eschatological] questions."

MSH: True; it doesn't.

The view that hermeneutics has an objective part (Scripture), and a subjective part (Interpretation) has always been true. One definition of hermeneutics is "whose meaning is the meaning of the meaning?" (Oxford Concise Dictionary of World Religions, ed. John Bowker, p. 240).

So, when Heiser is doing the interpreting, he admits there are no right answers. But he has full authority to pronounce that I have given the wrong answer, and he does not even tell me what the question is. This used to be called hypocrisy, but in the current UFO debate, it is called the voice of seminary trained wisdom.

MSH: Readers at this point are directed to the end of the first post on Blogging Through Barry. The question isn't about certainty, Barry. It's about coherence. For those who don't want to click through to the first post, let me excerpt it here:

Anything is possible, right? We can't infallibly say this is nutty. Yeah, everything's possible. Yeah, we aren't omniscient so we can't say we're infallible. But is it reasonable? Just because I can think a thought doesn't mean it's coherent. Like I've said many times on the radio to the question about ancient astronauts ("It's possible, though, Mike, isn't it?"): sure, it's possible, and it's also possible that I could be the next American Idol. How seriously should you take that "possibility"?

None of us can claim infallibility. But your approach can't claim coherence, either. You can hide behind the notion that anyone who'd say your ideas are unreasonable is pontificating or being a Popette. But that's a misdirection of the real issue. It's about coherence and data that exist, not anyone presuming infallibility.

Hope that's clear. When you try to claim that you may be right because nothing can be ruled out, you hide behind our lack of omniscience. A poor defense for sure, as my first post explains and illustrates (I encourage readers here to read that). It isn't about infallibly knowing everything; it's about your proposal being quite silly and incoherent. People *can* make that judgment. No omniscience required.

Inconsistency in his definition of the flexibility of hermeneutics is only part of the issue. We usually think of rape as a violent male sexual act, and I believe Heiser intends to use the term in this way. But hermeneutics is really more like a female sexual act than male.

MSH: If you believe that then you are mistaken - perhaps willfully. Do some thinking about the word (readers are again directed to the previous post, where I go through the word's meaning in Webster).

The Word of God (logos) is always understood in the biblical tradition to be like seed sown in a field. Seed is a male property, and understood to be a God property. This is why the God of the Bible is thought of in male terms.

MSH: something abstract like the word of God isn't thought of in male terms. This is to commit the hermeneutical / linguistic blunder of transferring real gender to grammatical gender. Grammatical gender has nothing to do with biology. Looking at any inflected language will tell you that. For example, in German the word for "little girl" is mädchen, which is grammatically NEUTER. The incongruencies between a language's grammatical gender and biological gender could fill a book (in each language). I'm not sure where Barry is going with this, but this exegetical fallacy is so common that I thought it needed a bit of attention.

understanding is developed in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew chapter 13. People go to seminary to study the Word of God, the semen of God. The church as the bride of Christ is seeking to be faithful to—;in sexual terms—;only go to bed with the God of Jesus Christ, not some other god. "You shall have no other gods [husbands] before me." (Ex. 20:3) Thus men and women are both female in relation to God. (Modern feminist theology has messed up this understanding a lot.) The hermeneutical task for me is to receive the Word of God into myself, and have it impregnate my soul with faith so that a new life springs up inside me, a child of God that more or less lives inside and co-habits with the first-born me, as Jacob, the second born twin son of Rebekah and Isaac, struggled with his first-born brother Esau in the womb, (Genesis 25:19-34). This struggle between the laws of the spirit, and the laws of the flesh, is the battle ground of the Christian life. (See also Rom. 9:6-13; Heb. 12:16) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the spirit is spirit as Jesus said (Jn. 3:6), and as Paul later confirmed (Rom. 7:4-25). (What I have just done in this paragraph is an example of my biblical hermeneutics.)

MSH: Well, that last line says something. I don't want to be hard on Barry here, though. Despite the grammatical gender fallacy from which this (slightly) allegorical take flows, we get the idea. This hermeneutic is kind of weird, though, on another level. The parable of the sower's analogy is *not* like sexual reproduction (the seed idea Barry strikes). Why not? Because when sexual reproduction among mammals occurs, there is life planted. When seeds are planted they must first DIE for life to be produced (cf. John 12:24).

But I don't want to quibble about analogies. It just seems an obvious oversight. My point is that the sexual / impregnation analogy isn't as sound as it might appear. It's not a big deal.

If I have sinned in the above paragraph, what kind of sin is it likely to be? It is likely that instead of interpreting the Scripture to glorify Christ (the Jacob figure in me), I interpret Scripture to glorify the Flesh (or Satan, Esau) in me. Because the lusts of the flesh are always there, as Paul says in Romans 7, they tempt me even to use the Law of God, the Semen of God, to promote my own lusts for success, sex, food, money, fame, power, all the forms of the gods of this world. [The devil used this form of temptation with Jesus, quoting scripture to him. (Mt. 4:1-11)]

MSH: God doesn't have semen; he has no body; these are simply analogies. I think Barry knows that, but I confess I don't have total confidence there.

Thus the most likely form of sin for me is not hermeneutical rape, but rather hermeneutical adultery.

MSH: Yeah, that works, too.

As the bride of Christ I am tempted to take the seed of God into me during the day, but at night to let the seed of the flesh be sown in my soul by an Evil One, an Enemy of God. (Mt. 13:25) The Law forbid interbreeding of cattle, and of sowing two different kinds of seed in a field (Lev. 19:19), a law which reflected the commandment against adultery (Ex. 20:14). Idolatry represented a sexual analogy to spiritual unfaithfulness, a mixing of good and bad spiritual seed, and so our whole modern idea of religious pluralism, suggesting all religious values are to be tolerated in some kind of egalitarian stew is not biblical. (Ex. 20:4; 2 Cor. 6:14)

In my book *The Bible and Flying Saucers*, I have dealt extensively with the Word of God, the Bible. Christian conservatives know this, and that is why they condemn me so violently. But my sin, if it is sin, is spiritual adultery, hermeneutical adultery, not hermeneutical rape. My sin is that I have mixed the Seed of God with the Seed of UFOs, and if UFOs are demonic, as my critics charge, then I have claimed that the "UFO Faith" in me is of Christ, when in fact it is seed sown of the devil.

MSH: Again, pretty abstract, but we get your point. Hope you get my point (see the first post). What you do to the text is "to inflict great harm" or "do violence to" the text. I'm guessing people are wondering at this point how allegorical interpretation allows you to say aliens parted the Red Sea. Maybe that's later in what you wrote and I haven't gotten to it yet.

This would be a serious sin, I recognize that, in fact I worry about that. But my faith is that I am right, and furthermore, my faith is, that Christ knows I want to be right.

This is an interesting sentence on several levels. I assume Barry is being honest here; I have no reason to think opposite. But it's flawed thinking to say that because we feel sincere about something that means it's coherent. Just because you want to be right doesn't mean you are (or, again, are even coherent). At some point, it ought to strike Barry that, given that no one in the history of the faith has used his hermeneutic (that's 2000 years - longer if you count Israelite history), that ought to be a little clue that his confidence shouldn't be as high as it is.

I trust Christ is merciful, and will forgive me in the day of judgment if I am wrong. Christ forgave a woman caught in adultery, he died to forgive his church, I have had the courage to present my UFO faith in spite of almost universal rejection by the church because I trust the mercy of Christ toward me.

MSH: You are to be commended for the courage to do that; I'll give you that. But what about Christ's word gave you the confidence to go out on this limb? Perhaps you had some experience that prompted that — but that would be placing experience over the Word and claiming some sort of "private interpretation," something not praised in Scripture (II Peter 1:20-21).

But I may be wrong about my UFO faith, and I do not want to be guilty of leading the church, the bride of Christ, astray. But if I am right, the church needs to repent of its blindness, and the quicker the better.

MSH: I would agree with Barry here - God will indeed forgive him. And I accept his sincerity again. But this is sidestepping things a bit. Here's what I mean. If his content amounts to reducing Jesus to less than the incarnate, uncreated Christ of the faith, then his error is quite serious (and that's just one example). The apostle John said that those who reject the incarnation is actually an anti-Christ (not *the* antichrist, mind you). I haven't read enough of Barry's work to know if he crosses that line, but maybe I'll blog through the whole book at some point. But if he does, Jesus isn't going to take it lightly. (And being an incarnate alien isn't acceptable on several theological levels).

So here is my defense to the church that condemns me of hermeneutical rape, blasphemy, or ignores me as someone who is crazy (or has a demon, see John 7:20).

MSH: For the record, I don't think Barry is crazy, or that he has a demon. I just think his exegesis is awful, having no foundation in any sort of text analysis that anyone else on the planet would do. And, I would add, that his hermeneutical filter - so far as we know - doesn't even conform to reality (it depends on an intelligent ET reality). In the first post, I asked him to give the ufological community the evidence that they've been wanting for decades - whatever it is that makes him so confident that he can interpret the Bible through that filter. If he has none, he has no hermeneutic that is in any way coherent. And to inflict that upon the text with zero justification is to do great harm to it.

<http://michaelsheiser.com/UFOReligions/>