

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

**Episode 232**

**Colossians 2:13-23**

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### **Episode Summary**

Our preceding three episodes in large part set the table for the remainder of Colossians 2. Paul revisits some familiar themes: the superiority of Jesus to Jewish mystical teachings about angels (stoicheia), food laws, and the Sabbath. The new element here, and focus of this episode, is Paul's link between the cross event (in particular the resurrection) and the defeat of the powers of darkness. Because of the cross, the rule of the gods over the Gentile nations, set up by God himself as a punishment at Babel (Deut 32:8-9; cp. Deut 4:19-20; 17:1-3; 29:23-26) has been nullified and de-legitimized. This is the underpinning of Paul's mission to reclaim people among the nations for God's everlasting family.

### **Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, episode 232: Colossians 2:13-23. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing this week?

**MH:** Pretty good. You know what we should mention, Trey...

**TS:** About how good my team is?

**MH:** No, about how Yahoo rated your draft worse than mine. [laughs]

**TS:** Oh, yeah. That's because you always go by the analytics and stuff. I don't do that. I go by gut feeling. That's why

**MH:** My gut tells me that your team's not as good as last year's.

**TS:** Oh, boy.

**MH:** That's what my gut tells me.

**TS:** Oh, those are fighting words, sir. [MH laughs] I didn't get everybody that I wanted, but I'm pretty happy with my team. Of course, everybody that's listening, we had our Fantasy Football draft. Again, Mike has predicted to do the best, only because he just uses the analytics.

**MH:** No, it's because Mory was in an altered state throughout the entire draft, so that was helpful. Whenever he would twitch, I'd pick the person's name that I was looking at when he twitched.

**TS:** Well, that's perfect. [MH laughs] I'm excited. I'm looking forward to Sunday this weekend. This is probably my... I don't know what you'd call it—vice or whatever, but I watch the games. It's a good down time.

**MH:** It is.

**TS:** I'm so glad that this time of the year is here, because now I can just veg and watch football. I don't have to think about everything.

**MH:** That's exactly right. You just sort of... That's how I feel about it. You just sort of put your brain in neutral.

**TS:** Those alpha waves (TV) calm you down.

**MH:** [laughs] Yeah, I don't check my scores until the end of Sunday night, so I don't let it stress me out at all. Like I said, I just put the brain on neutral.

**TS:** Oh, I love the stress. That's part of the fun. Well, switching gears here, Mike, Colossians... What have we got?

**MH:** Colossians, yeah. We *are* going to finish the chapter. I'm telling the truth. [laughs]

**TS:** No, trust me, Mike. Everybody wants one episode per verse, so we're good.

**MH:** Well, they're not going to get that today, because most of what remains has already been discussed. There's one significant exception, and that's where we're going to camp for this episode. I can telegraph it this way: the major theme of this episode (if we can use that word—*theme*) is going to be the cross event—specifically the resurrection, the ascension, and the demise of the gods over the nations. That comes up in this chapter, specifically in verse 15. From verses 13 all the way to 15 (and beyond 15 to the end of the chapter), we find a lot of that stuff we've actually hit on in the previous two or three episodes. So we will do some summary.

In fact, let's just start with a little bit of summary, just sharing a few thoughts in Colossians that lead up to this point (this point being defined as verse 13

because we ended last time with verse 12). The first point, just by way of a summary review, is that Paul has been talking in this chapter (and we'll include chapter 1, as well, but specifically in this chapter) that salvation was something done *to* the Colossians, and therefore to us, in response to or in connection with belief (that is, trust in the gospel) that Jesus was the messiah. And you had to have a change of heart about that. He was the messiah; he was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of God. You get that nugget—that summary thought—from verses 6 and 7 that says:

**<sup>6</sup>Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup> having been rooted...**

We talked about how that was a perfect passive—something done to the speaker from an external source (that source being God, of course).

**...and being built up [passive] in him and established [passive] in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.**

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Again, this is something done *to* you. Salvation is not about something *you* do yourself or for your own benefit. It's something that, when you believe, God responds in a certain way and gives you a certain status. Later in the chapter we're going to talk today is about forgiveness of sins, nailing your debt to the cross, all that sort of stuff.

Secondly, salvation is procured by and is based on the work of one who is superior to every other heavenly power. It's a big theme in Colossians 2. So Paul warns people about getting mesmerized by claims of access to God through some other supernatural agent. Specifically, his talk about the *stoicheia* is what I'm zeroing in on here. Verses 8-10, Paul says:

**<sup>8</sup>See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world [*stoicheia*], and not according to Christ.**

Why is Christ better? Why should we pay attention to Jesus and be fixated on him and not these elemental spirits? Well, Paul answers that in verse 9:

**<sup>9</sup>For in him [not in the *stoicheia*] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have been filled in [Christ], who is the head of all rule and authority.**

Again, a reference to Paul's vocabulary of spiritual powers there. So that's a big theme: don't get distracted or mesmerized by other supernatural agents and what is claimed about them, because Christ is preeminent.

Third, your completeness in Christ isn't obtained or supplemented by baptism or anything else. You're either complete, as Paul says in verse 10, or you're not. The statements of verses 9 and 10 precede the baptism talk in verses 11 and 12. That matters. Our conversion (the circumcision made without hands that Paul talks about in Colossians 2:11, the circumcision of the heart—in other words, our change of heart) was accomplished in him (in Christ) when we were buried in him by spirit baptism. That's my take on it. I think that's the most coherent reading of this—that we're not talking about water baptism here, we're talking about spirit baptism. People can go back and listen to the previous episode for that.

But the circumcision of the heart was accomplished in him when we were buried in him. We were put into Christ's body by spirit baptism. You can cross reference 1 Corinthians 12:13 for the same language from the same author. It is because we are in him (we are in Christ because we were put into his body) that when he rose from the dead (to quote Paul in Colossians 2:11-12) we were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God who raised him from the dead. Our resurrection is because we are in him.

So all of that being the case, now we move on to verse 13, which we did mention last time in our discussion of the putting off of the body. Verse 13 is going to use crucifixion language. I think that the putting off of the body is best understood not as a repentance of ours, but as a reference to Christ surrendering his own body on the cross. I think it's a reference to the cross event. And people can listen to the previous episode for why. So in verse 13 here, Paul says (addressing the Colossians here at the beginning of the verse):

**<sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses...**

The "uncircumcision of your flesh" is an obvious reference to people who are uncircumcised—to Gentiles. "You Colossians Gentiles out there, you were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh. You were outsiders. God made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses." That's an interesting change of pronoun there.

So he's talking about nonphysical circumcision or uncircumcision. He's talking about their status as Gentiles, which was in part a physical thing, but it's also a spiritual thing because they don't have access to the truth of God. They are enslaved by the gods of the nations (the whole Deuteronomy 32 Worldview). If that's an unfamiliar concept, I'm sorry, but I can't keep repeating *Unseen Realm* content in all these episodes. You have to read the book, or at least read the shorter version in *Supernatural* or something, and we'll get into Deuteronomy 32 a little bit later in this episode, so you can pick up some thoughts there. Or go to

the podcast homepage, and where it says, “Are you new? Click here.” There are videos there that explain this, as well.

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But he’s speaking to Gentiles. They were outsiders. They had been put under the lesser sons of God by God at the Tower of Babel event as a punishment. That’s a spiritual status. It’s not just a physical thing. And it’s not even primarily a physical thing, because circumcision wasn’t an issue when God did that act at Babel. It’s only going to come later, when we get into Abraham and his descendants. It becomes the sign of God’s covenant with them. But that all postdates the punishment at Babel—probably not by a great deal of time, but it still postdates it.

So since Paul is talking about really a spiritual condition, it’s consistent to view verses 11 and 12, in my head, the same way—that what he’s talking about there is a circumcision made without hands. He’s talking about a *spiritual* baptism. He’s not talking about literal rituals there. But for that, you can listen to a previous episode. Paul says they were “made alive” (it’s an aorist) “with him.” It’s a reference to the death, burial, and resurrection. We were made to participate in that when we were put into the body of Christ. Spirit baptism is a key thought here. Now, I want to focus a little bit on Paul’s change of pronouns here because it is kind of interesting and commentators (serious commentators) have taken note of this and have some good thoughts on it. But Paul says, “You Colossians, this was your condition,” and then he talks about that, “God made you alive together with him,” and then he switches and says, “having forgiven *us* all *our* trespasses.” So he includes himself, and he’s a Jew, in this. So what’s going on here? Well, Marcus Barth, in his Anchor Yale commentary, writes this. He says,

The change of personal pronoun from “you” to “us” is noteworthy. [MH: He had begun his comments about Gentiles, and now he switches]... Paul the Jew seems to include himself expressly in the proclamation concerning the forgiveness of sins. He thus says expressly that there is no forgiveness of sins for gentiles without forgiveness for Jews. The former is a shareholder with the latter. The share which non-Jews have in the inheritance of Jews finds expression in the change in the personal pronoun.

I’ll just read you what Dunn says in his commentary, his NIGTC commentary. He writes,

The significance of [this pronoun change] should not be lost sight of, especially in view of the indications, some of them already noted (see on 2:11), that the most likely threat from an alternative philosophy in Colossae was perceived to be basically Jewish in character (see also on 2:16–18, 21–22 and pp. 29–35 above). The significance is that Paul does not attempt to avoid such a Jewish characterization and perspective; he makes no attempt, as it were, to outflank the alternative philosophy by ignoring or striking clear of the Jewish character of

Christianity's message. On the contrary, he reaffirms the Christian-Jewish starting point, that Israel was in an advantaged position over other nations by virtue of God's choice of Israel to be his special people. The difference is that the disadvantaged state of "uncircumcision" has been remedied by a "circumcision not performed by human hands" (2:11) rather than by "circumcision in the flesh."

That I like actually better than Barth's because Paul includes the Jew in this, and in so doing, he has already reminded or told his opponents, who are... Basically, there's some Jewish mysticism going on here. The cure for this, and the cure for both Gentile and Jew, was a circumcision made without hands. That's the segue into the talk about the cross. It's just noteworthy. We don't want to miss the fact that Paul doesn't have two paths of salvation. He has *one* path of salvation. He has *one* salvation trajectory. He includes Jews in what he says about the salvation of those enslaved under the gods of the nations. Let me be more blunt here. The faith—Christianity—that the New Testament writers are communicating... their aim is not to make it as Jewish as possible, as though to suggest or imply that there's some sort of Jewish path and Gentile path. What Paul says right here, just by this simple switch in pronouns, is that the way of salvation is exactly the same for Jew and Gentile. So any notion that we have to do Jewish things to either assist in our own salvation or to achieve our salvation or that salvation just generally is connected to Jewishness is false. It's specifically denied here by Paul. Just in that little switch of pronouns, you can see that Paul is not allowing for this two-path kind of situation, two-path talk.

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Now Paul expands on what he's talking about here, as far as the cross, as he keeps going in verse 14. He says, "All this in verse 13 happened to you. We were made alive together with him, God has forgiven us all our trespasses," in verse 14, "by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands." Dunn, in his commentary... I like what he said here. He says,

[This metaphor] is drawn from the legal world. ["the record of debt"; *cheirographon*], only here in the New Testament, meant literally a document written by the person responsible, a holograph, so "receipt," as in its only occurrence in the LXX (Tob. 5:3 and 9:5). But here it has the further sense of "a certificate of indebtedness, bond" [MH: It's essentially a bill. There's a bill to be paid here.], as in *Testament of Job* 11:11 [MH: a Second Temple pseudepigraphical text]... The metaphor is probably adapted to the earlier Jewish idea of a heavenly book of the living (Exod. 32:32–33; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Rev. 3:5) as developed in apocalyptic circles into that of books wherein deeds of good and evil were recorded with a view to the final judgment.

We did a whole episode on this way, way back, about the Book of Life, and if you just Google "drmsb.com" or "NakedBiblePodcast.com" and "Book of Life," you're going to find that episode. And Dunn's saying that that idea of God's recordkeeping, which was both good and bad, and it's not... You have to listen to

the episode. I can't rehearse the whole thing here. But it's not about storing up brownie points. It's just the idea that God notices everything. Nothing gets forgotten here. God has a record of everything. And that becomes the basis for condemnation. And if you have that record of debt (to borrow Paul's language here) cancelled out by the cross, then you will be saved. The only people who are judged by God's records are those who are not in Christ. You can listen to that earlier episode. But I like the way Dunn tied this statement in here with the whole "heavenly record books" idea. I think he has a good point there. So it's essentially a bill. So God has cancelled this bill that stood against us with its legal demands. Then the rest of verse 14:

**This [bill] he set aside, nailing it to the cross.**

Just a side note here. I don't want to interrupt the flow of thought too much, but I'm going to throw this out because this has been in the news in the last year or two. So just a side note. There's been a lot of talk recently about how the crucifixion of Jesus didn't include nails. Nails aren't specifically mentioned in the crucifixion scenes, but holes in the hands from nails *are* mentioned in the gospels (John 20:25). I'm not sure why this is a big deal. It's probably click-bait (what I call "archeo-porn")—the mass media doing biblical archeological stuff to get you to click on something so they can show you something else, or trying to say, "Oh, you didn't realize that this idea isn't in the Bible," just to get people to question what they've been taught. I have a very low view of the pop archeological media, as anyone who's read my blog knows. So I'm not sure why this is a big deal, just generally. But if nails weren't used (here's the point), this wording in Colossians 2:14 wouldn't make any sense. "This he set aside, nailing it to the cross." I'm sorry, folks, but even though nails aren't listed in the description of the crucifixion scenes, there were nails! Paul surely would have been (pardon the pun) nailed for saying something that everyone hearing it would have thought, "Well, that never happened." Again, it's just a sidebar. The wording here would make no sense, and of course you do have the reference in John 20:25 about the holes in the hands and so on and so forth. They didn't get there by accident. So on to verse 15, continuing the thought. When God did this whole cross event:

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**<sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.**

Now this is where I want to focus today, so I'm going to skip it for now and then come back to it. On to the rest of the chapter, but we're going to park on verse 15 in a moment. In verses 16-23, there are some thoughts I want to highlight here. He writes:

**<sup>16</sup> Therefore in light of all this...**

All this stuff in Colossians 2, the first 15 verses here. And we did our little summary review to begin the episode, and now these new thoughts about canceling the bill and whatnot. Paul says:

**<sup>16</sup>Therefore in light of all this let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.**

That's verse 16. Now, the context is clearly Jewish. Sabbath can't be anything but Jewish. The other items *could* have a Gentile orientation, and a little bit later in this section, Paul's wording (and commentators have pointed out)... food questions and festivals... Gentiles did that kind of stuff, too. But the reference here to the New Moon and the Sabbath is clearly Jewish flavoring, at least at this point in this verse. Now Moo in his commentary has some good thoughts on this section. I want to share them with you. This is Doug Moo in his Colossians commentary in the Pillar series. He writes:

Paul enumerates two sets of issues on the basis of which the false teachers are "passing judgment": food and drink, and the observance of special religious days. These are also just the matters dividing the "strong" and the "weak" in the Roman community (Rom. 14:2, 5). And in both passages, there is considerable debate about the source of such regulations. While Paul does not directly say so here, his reference to "rules" such as "do not handle" and "do not taste" (vv. 20–21) make it clear that the false teachers were advocating abstinence from some kinds of food and drink. Similarly, it is virtually certain that the teachers were advocating (rather than, e.g., criticizing) observance of special days. Our text gives no information about just what foods or kinds of drink were being prohibited. (In Romans 14–15, the "weak" were avoiding meat [14:2] and perhaps also wine [14:21].) The Old Testament law, of course, prohibits the eating of certain food deemed "unclean," but it does not generally prohibit any kind of drinking.

Now, he has a footnote here I want to read to you. He says,

The law prohibits drinking only on certain specific occasions: the people are not to drink contaminated water (Lev. 11:34–36); the priests are not to drink wine when entering the tent of meeting (cf. Lev. 10:9); and those who take a Nazirite vow are to drink no wine for the period of their vow (Num. 6:1–3). The Rechabites (Jer. 35:1–19) also abstained from wine.

So Moo quotes this just to say, "Well, we don't have real specifics here, and the Jewish law doesn't really forbid drinking wine, except in some really narrow instances." But he still believes this is (pardon the pun) Jewish flavoring here and he continues with this thought. He says:

However, both the Old Testament and Judaism reveal that many Jews living in Gentile environments chose to abstain from all meat and wine in order to avoid possible ritual contamination. This is probably the rationale for the prohibitions in Romans 14–15, and, with explicit allusion to Jewish festivals later in this verse, it is natural to think that it is the same here.

Now, I'll just stop with Moo at this point. This is a legitimate observation because if you were a Jew living in a Gentile world, you couldn't necessarily know what you were eating and how it was prepared, and all that sort of stuff. And so many of them would just not do it, even though they *could*, just to be on the safe side. That makes some sense here, in terms of what Paul might be picking up on and what the Jewish leadership might be insisting on. Back to Moo, he says,

Nevertheless, what is missing in Colossians, in comparison with Romans, is any direct reference to the Mosaic law or to divisions between Jews and Gentiles.

So this context about being Jewish and living in a Gentile world... You'd think if that was specifically the point, Paul would have quoted something here, so Moo's like, "Well, maybe, maybe not. We don't have any specific reference to the Mosaic law here."

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These omissions are especially significant in light of the fact that Paul explicitly mentions just these matters in some passages in Ephesians that are closely parallel to ones in Colossians (cf. esp. Col. 1:24–29 with Eph. 3:1–13 and 2:14–15 with Eph. 2:11–22). [MH: Remember, Ephesians and Colossians are twin epistles.] We should therefore at least keep open the possibility that the Colossian false teachers' abstinence from food and drink had its origins elsewhere, since many ancient Greco-Roman philosophical and religious traditions also featured prohibitions of meat and wine.

Although there is, then, universal agreement that the false teachers' insistence on observance of days was influenced by Judaism, dispute remains over the degree and nature of that influence. Some interpreters think that the false teachers were representing what we might call a "mainstream" Jewish viewpoint. Noting the importance of the observance of special days in the Dead Sea Scrolls, others have thought that a "sectarian" Jewish viewpoint such as found at Qumran might be the background [MH: to all that Paul's saying here]. Most interpreters, however, persist in thinking that the false teachers had integrated the observance of Jewish special days into a larger syncretistic system...

On the whole, then, it seems best to view the practices in v. 16 as basically Jewish in origin and perhaps even orientation while still recognizing that they have been taken up into a larger mix of religious ideas and practices.

The Qumran reference there draws interest because of the other elements of Jewish mysticism that we've talked about that had some connection to these sorts of ideas found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, specifically with astral spirits and the *stoicheia*. We talked a little bit before about how there was a certain asceticism at Qumran and there was obviously Jewish mystical teaching at Qumran, so this idea that maybe a Qumran sect or something like it is in view here, or something that borrowed from non-Jewish ideas and mashed them with Jewish ones that kind of look like what's going on at Qumran... That's worth having on the table as far as what might Paul specifically be shooting at. The larger point, of course (going back to our very first episode on Colossians) is that you don't need the book to be written after Paul (and hence be non-Pauline) to have this stuff in view. It's already in the context of Paul's own lifetime, his own environment.

Now, Paul will add to what he just said there about "Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism, worship of angels," all that... He's going to add a little bit of that in a moment in verse 18. But he says something that's kind of interesting when you get to (in verse 17), "these things are a shadow"—this consistence about food and drink laws or rules, and then the New Moons and festivals and Sabbaths.

**<sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.**

Now, we've talked about this language before. It should also sound familiar if you listened to the series on Hebrews because the writer of Hebrews uses the same "shadow" language there. These things (food laws, feast days, Sabbath) are a shadow of heavenly things (things to come, things that we're going to experience in glory when we are exalted with Christ). That's when we're going to experience the *realia*—the full reality—of what these earthly, temporary things were pointing us to.

Now Hebrews 8:5 refers to this kind of thing this way: the Jewish system there (the priesthood and whatnot):

**<sup>5</sup> They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."**

This whole idea of "this stuff is a shadow"... Maybe I could use the phrase, "a dim reflection"—a good but incomplete or insufficient copy (because the book of Hebrews uses that word, too) of the ultimate reality. But here's the kicker. In verse 17... Let me read it to you again. All this stuff that people might pass judgment on you about (the food and drink, the festivals, New Moon, Sabbath):

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**<sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.**

The substance belongs to Christ. In other words, the things that these shadow items represent... the fullness of that is Jesus. So Jesus is, by definition, superior to these things. There are not two paths of salvation. There is one, for Paul, and it is Christ. Christ is superior to the *stoicheia*; he's superior to this law stuff. "Let no man deceive you" is his message.

This is also why, in the book of Hebrews, for instance, the writer equates belief in Jesus with the Sabbath rest of God. You can go back and listen to episode 182 for that portion of Hebrews. It's Hebrews 4. *Christ is our Sabbath*. He *is* the ultimate rest of God. This is what you get. So, observing the Sabbath... There's nothing wrong with it, unless you make it superior to Christ. "Jesus needs some help here," or "I need some help completing my salvation." If you make it a salvation issue, if you somehow suggest that the cross event was inadequate in some way and now we *need* the Sabbath to be right with God, then you're wrong. You're just wrong. If you want to observe it, fine. If it draws you close to God, good. But as soon as you start doing the bait-and-switch, you're wrong. And Paul was pretty blunt about it. He's as blunt as the writer of Hebrews was. In verse 18:

**<sup>18</sup> Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind...**

Here we go with mystical visions, the asceticism, the worship of angels. If you want to go back and listen to the specifics of that in this series (in Colossians), go to episode 229.

**...and not holding fast to the Head...**

This is the problem. You're not holding fast to the Head: Jesus.

**...and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.**

To summarize it, your faith can't grow unless it's fixated on Christ—unless it holds fast to Christ. Don't get sidetracked with the shadow, with the temporary, with the copy, with the dim reflection of the ultimate reality. Get fixed on the ultimate reality. Get fixed on the ultimate point of reference, which is Jesus. I don't think he could really be much clearer on this. Now, let's go to verse 20.

**<sup>20</sup> If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— <sup>21</sup> “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” [referring to things that all perish as they are used—they’re temporary] <sup>22</sup> —according to human precepts and teachings? <sup>23</sup> These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.**

As noted above in our little food laws and feast days comments, Gentile thinking could be included in this here. Above, you get a specific reference to the Sabbath. So Paul’s language here (and I think one of the indicators that he might be looping in Gentiles in this) is in verse 20, when he references the elemental spirits of the world. You could say, “Jewish mystics... they would have assigned spirits to the elements of the world.” We already covered that in episode 229. But it’s kind of interesting, because earlier (and this is where we’re going to camp) in verse 15 he referenced the rulers and the authorities, putting them to an open shame. He is referring there to the gods of the Old Testament (the Deuteronomy 32 Worldview) that are in control of the nations of the world. So maybe we can take this “world” language and include Gentile things, Gentile ideas. That has to be on the table. There’s no way to conclusively exclude it, despite the Jewish flavoring here. This is why I read to you Moo’s comments about, “We probably have some kind of syncretistic thing going on here—a Jewish sect mixed in with maybe some Hellenistic ideas, Gentile teachings, that sort of thing. Some group in Judaism at some point either took something from Qumran (the Jewish mystical stuff) and then married it to Hellenistic or Greco-Roman ideas, and this is what Paul is fighting against. Or they made up their own view of some sort of mystical encounter—mystical beings, whatever.

Really, the point of origin of all this and where all the strands come from isn’t really important. We have both a Jewish and Gentile flavoring here. Those items are both on the table, which makes it even more significant that for Paul there is only one path of salvation that loops in both Gentile and Jew. He doesn’t talk about two tracks. He talks about *one*: “You who were dead in your trespasses and sins, your uncircumcision...” All that kind of stuff. “You Gentiles...” and he includes himself in the switch of the pronouns that we noticed earlier in verse 13. Everybody’s included. Everybody’s included, Jew and Gentile, and the solution’s the same.

Now, I want to use this as a jumping-off point into this whole subject matter that’s brought up in verse 15, so let’s go back to the victory statement in verse 15 (the victory over the rulers and authorities). This is a good place to summarize the passages where Paul connects the resurrection and ascension (the cross event—let’s be as broad as we can here) to the defeat of the powers of darkness. Now, I’ve commented on this before in Q&A. I’ve commented on it

before in a couple of other episodes, but I'm hoping this will be sort of the episode that I can reference in the future as far as this subject matter. I have a whole chapter on this (this idea of the demise of the gods, the nullification of the gods) in my forthcoming book on *Demons* and what the Bible really says about the powers of darkness. Now that's not the *Angels* book. The *Angels* book is its own thing, and the *Demons* book is a separate book. It's a companion to the *Angels* book. I have no idea when the *Demons* book is going to be out, but I'm going to read you an extended portion of it because of this topic. I'm not going to give you *all* of it. You're going to have to get the book, whenever it becomes available. Who knows when that's going to be, but at some point in 2019. And you can get the whole treatment. But the major passages on this are covered (or touched on) in that book. The major passages for this idea in Paul are 1 Corinthians 15:20-24, Colossians 2:13-15 (which is where we are), Ephesians 1:15-22, Ephesians 3:7-10, Ephesians 4:4-8 (and I actually have an extended discussion of that in *The Unseen Realm*, so you could go and read that), 1 Peter 3:18-22 (that's also *Unseen Realm* turf), and Romans 15:8-12. So there are a number of passages that I don't discuss specifically in *The Unseen Realm* that are relevant to this topic. I'm going to read you a lengthy excerpt here from the *Demons* book and I'm going to skip the Ephesians 4 stuff for sure, since that's in *Unseen Realm*. So let's just jump in. This comes right after I talk about Ephesians 4 in that book:

[In Eph 4:4-8] the New Testament draws on cosmic geographical thinking [MH: draws on Psalm 68, specifically] to portray Christ's victory over the powers of darkness. Mount Hermon [MH: which is the mount of God in Psalm 68] that was being reclaimed as Yahweh's possession. Jesus provoked darkness in Bashan and at Mount Hermon to set the circumstances of his death in motion [MH: that's the gates of hell stuff in *Unseen Realm*]. The provocation was essential because his sacrificial death was essential. One cannot have a resurrection and an ascension without a death, and the resurrection and ascension are central to the re-enthronement of Jesus above all powers (Rom 8:34-39; Heb 1:3; 10:12-13; 1 Pet 3:22).

In Eph 4:8 Paul read Psa 68:18 as describing the conquest of supernatural evil (Bashan) which in turn led to the coming of the Spirit and the subsequent gifts to the Body of Christ. The coming of the Spirit was, of course, contingent on the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ to the position of rule, the right hand of the Father. Paul more explicitly connects the finished work of Christ and the defeat of evil spirits—in this case the hostile gods enslaving the nations (“rulers and authorities”)—in passages like Col 2:8-15...

In verse 15 the cosmic forces, the “rulers (*archē*) and authorities (*exousia*)” are disarmed and put to shame. The lemma *archē* is used of divine beings in New Testament (Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 15:24; Eph 1:21; 3:10; 6:12), including earlier in the

same letter (Col 1:16). The same is true of the lemma *exousia* (Col 1:13; Eph 2:2). Paul is writing to a Gentile church and clearly has Gentiles in view when he describes his audience as “dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh” (v. 13). Jews of course share the problem of being estranged from God because of sin. Paul makes this clear with language like “our trespasses” and “against us,” including himself as a Jew in both the problem and the wonder of forgiveness. But Israel had no supernatural “rulers and authorities” to be disarmed. The nations did, per the Deuteronomy 32 worldview.

Two climactic accomplishments are noted here by Paul. First, the “record of debt” that stood “against us” (Jew and Gentile) was “canceled” or “set aside” (v.14). Second, the “rulers and authorities” were “disarmed” and “put to shame.” The resurrection (v. 12) was the causative agent to both, for if there was no resurrection, the debt against us would still stand and we would not be “made alive together with him.”

Scholars have been puzzled by the word choice in v. 15 (“disarmed”; lemma: *apekduomai*). It is found only here and in Col 3:9 (“put off, remove, strip off” the old self). It is obvious that the term would not point to the destruction of the rulers and authorities, as Paul elsewhere has the powers of darkness actively engaged against believers (e.g., Eph 6:12).

Now, the key word there is *destruction*. I’m going to argue that they’ve been nullified, delegitimized. They’re not destroyed yet, because that comes at the end. There are still principalities and powers that Paul has to fight, and that we are in conflict with.

Scholars find the idea of removal or stripping (of something) awkward, and it is—if one lacks the Deuteronomy 32 framework as a reference point.

Paul uses the same verb in Eph 4:22 when he reminds the Ephesians that they have “put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self.” The “putting off” and “putting on” speaks of turning from the old way of life to something new. The cognate noun (*apekdysis*) occurs only once in the New Testament, in this very passage (Col. 2:11): “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off (*apekdysis*) the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ”)...

What are we to make of this metaphorical term [MH: that essentially talks about *removal*] applied to the rulers and authorities in Col 2:15? The idea of “removal” captures the nuance. While not destroyed, the supernatural rulers and authorities have been displaced or removed from the authority they held over the Gentiles. Who was it that removed this authority? The Most High himself, on the basis of

the death and resurrection of Christ. Lohse [MH: who is a commentator in the Hermeneia\* series] comes close to this idea when he writes that the rare verb “means ‘to take off,’ ‘to put aside’... The middle [voice], however, can also be used in an active sense. Then it means ‘to strip.’ God through Christ “put aside” the old order of the rulers and authorities; he “stripped” them of their authority.

I like that grammatical observation from Lohse there. I think it’s useful and it helps frame the meaning of the term in relation to what actually happened to the powers of darkness.

The point of Paul’s declaration is that the ruling authority of the gods allotted to the nations (Deut 32:8; cp. Deut 4:19-20; 17:3; 29:23-26) was declared illegitimate and null by the work of Christ. In the past, prior to Christ, the Most High had allotted the nations to the sons of God. Their authority was legitimate because they had been appointed by the true God. They were supposed to be in their positions. Psalm 82 tells us that those gods, “sons of the Most High” (Psa 82:6) rebelled and became corrupt. Instead of ruling their people according to the sort of justice God desired, they enslaved them, ultimately becoming the objects of their worship and seducing Yahweh’s own people into idolatry. Now, because of the cross, their rule has no legitimacy.

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Gentiles would have understood the implications, as early writers like Plato understood the gods had been allotted to the nations. I’m going to read a little section from Plato here:

*In the days of old, the gods had the whole earth distributed among them by allotment.*

[laughs] I’m going to read that sentence again. This is Plato. This isn’t Deuteronomy 32. This is Plato.

*In the days of old, the gods had the whole earth distributed among them by allotment. There was no quarrelling; for you cannot rightly suppose that the gods did not know what was proper for each of them to have, or, knowing this, that they would seek to procure for themselves by contention that which more properly belonged to others. They all of them by just apportionment obtained what they wanted, and peopled their own districts; and when they had peopled them they tended us, their nurselings and possessions, as shepherds tend their flocks, excepting only that they did not use blows or bodily force, as shepherds do, but governed us like pilots from the stern of the vessel, which is an easy way of guiding animals, holding our souls by the rudder of persuasion according to their own pleasure;—thus did they guide all mortal creatures. Now different gods had their allotments in different places which they set in order. Hephaestus and Athene,*

*who were brother and sister, and sprang from the same father, having a common nature, and being united also in the love of philosophy and art, both obtained as their common portion this land, which was naturally adapted for wisdom and virtue [speaking of Greece]; and there they implanted brave children of the soil, and put into their minds the order of government; their names are preserved, but their actions have disappeared by reason of the destruction of those who received the tradition, and the lapse of age.*

I'll end it there. That's from the *Dialogues of Plato*, the Jowett translation in 1892, Oxford. The Gentiles know this stuff. It's amazing that about the only people who don't get this worldview are people who are Christians [laughs] in the modern world, but this is important for understanding the supernatural framework of scripture. This is why I wrote *Unseen Realm*. If you haven't read the book, you need to read the book. But they get this, and Paul's declaration in Colossians 2:15 about the rulers and authorities being stripped of their authority, stripped of their power, is important, and Gentiles would have picked up on what Paul was laying down. They understood the context. So back to my book here.

Consequently, part of the good news of the gospel to those under the gods' dominion was that they were free to turn from those gods and embrace Jesus. In fact, God was demanding their return to his family. The breach caused by the Babel rebellion had been closed; the gap between them and the true God had been bridged.

That the authority of the rulers and authorities was nullified by the Most High does not mean that the supernatural forces of darkness allotted to the nations surrender their charges. Paul knew his Old Testament, specifically that the final judgment of the gods was eschatologically connected to the Day of the Lord. Nevertheless their demise is in process. Paul's language about the cosmic rulers runs in parallel to what we saw in the gospels with respect to the demons. Jesus's announcement that the kingdom of God had come was accompanied by exorcisms (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:18-20). The point wasn't that there were no more demons. Exorcism accounts inform us quite clearly that both the demons and Jesus knew the fate of the powers of darkness was yet future (Psa 82:6-8; Isa 24:21; 34:1-4). For example, in Matt 8:29 the demons cry out to Jesus, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" The phrase "before the time" points to a definite, future destiny. Hagner [another commentator] captures the idea succinctly:

*The demons' subsequent question, "Have you come here to torment us before the time?" (πρὸ καιροῦ), is interesting from at least two aspects: first, in it the demons recognize that at the eschatological judgment they will experience God's judgment and the end of their power (cf. 1 Enoch 15–*

*16; Jub. 10:8–9; TLevi 18:12); and second, they recognize that that καιρός, “time,” has not yet come; Jesus has in effect come too early and threatens their realm too soon (for the eschatological judgment of demons, cf 1 Enoch 55:4; T. Levi 18). This, of course, fits in with Matthew’s perspective of realized eschatology: the kingdom has come, but in advance of its fullest and final coming (cf. 12:28; 13:30).*

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In like manner, in declaring to Gentiles that the Most High had invalidated the jurisdiction and dominion of their gods Paul did not intend to claim their eschatological hour had come. Paul linked his mission of evangelism of the Gentiles to the restored spiritual fortunes of Israel. The final “mystery” of God’s salvation plan would be known when “the fullness of the Gentiles” had become part of the kingdom of God, leading to the salvation of Israel (Rom 11:25–26). Only when the full number of Gentiles was saved would the nations and their gods be finally judged.

This is me breaking in here on myself. It’s in process. Their authority has been nullified, and as the kingdom of God grows, their sphere of dominion diminishes and shrinks. The issue with triumphing over the rulers and authorities in Paul’s thought in Paul’s day is that they have no more legitimate authority over the nations. The Gentiles have every right and God earnestly wants them to switch sides. There’s no argument, and it’s important because a Jew could say, “Well, they’re supposed to worship those other gods. Don’t you remember Deuteronomy 32, Paul?” This two-track salvation, or the Gentiles could never be saved because they’re under these other gods, all that kind of stuff... Paul says, “No. No. There’s one path, and because of the resurrection, their authority has been stripped by the same Most High who gave it to them. We’re done with that.” By delegitimizing their authority, Paul legitimizes the authority of Christ and his own ministry. Now I have a footnote on this, and I want to read this specifically because I like... If you’ve read *Unseen Realm*, you know it isn’t just Mike. There are just hundreds, maybe we’re in the thousands, of footnotes. I don’t know. But again, I’m not making stuff up. It’s not just me. This isn’t just my idiosyncratic reading of the Bible. That’s the dirty little secret of *Unseen Realm*: there are no original thoughts in the book; it’s all under peer review. Go check the footnotes and the sources. But I have a footnote here that reinforces that. I wrote:

The full task of reclaiming the nations in Paul’s mind meant the gospel had to reach all the nations listed in Genesis 10 that had been divorced by God at Babel. This was what lay behind his urgency to reach Spain (Tarshish; cf. footnote 11), the most remote of those nations. Jewett and Kotansky take note of this point:

*“At the end of time all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:26) but this cannot occur until “the fullness of the Gentiles” has been achieved (Rom 11:25). Reckoning backwards from this apocalyptic climax, Paul infers that current*

*Jewish resistance against the gospel provides time for the Gentile mission. This is the reasoning behind the Spanish mission project that this letter seeks to advance, for if the gospel can be brought to the end of the known world, the climactic conversion of Israel can occur and the parousia can come as promised."*

That's the *Hermeneia* Romans commentary, which is a significant scholarly commentary. This is biblical theology. It's just that we have such gaps in the way we think about scripture that to some listeners this might sound really new and even kind of odd. It's not. It's your Bible. Back to my *Demons* book:

Other passages in Paul's letters and other New Testament books connect the de-legitimization of the authority of the allotted supernatural powers of the nations to Christ's resurrection and ascension. Note the juxtaposition of the two themes in the following instances:

#### **1 Corinthians 15:20-24**

<sup>20</sup>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead [MH: that's the resurrection], the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup>For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup>Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule [*archē*] and every authority [*exousia*] and power [*dynamis*].

#### **Ephesians 1:15-22**

<sup>15</sup>For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, <sup>16</sup>I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup>that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup>having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup>that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule (*archē*) and authority (*exousia*) and power (*dynamis*) and dominion (*kyriotēs*), and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to

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come. <sup>22</sup>And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

#### **1 Peter 3:18-22**

<sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup>in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. <sup>21</sup>Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God [MH: If you've read *Unseen Realm*, this idea of a loyalty pledge to God] for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Not surprisingly, Paul's theology linking a rising messiah to the release of the Gentiles from their false worship [MH: from the gods that enslaved them] is anticipated in the Old Testament. Romans 15:8-12 is suggestive in that regard:

<sup>8</sup>For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, <sup>9</sup>and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles,  
and sing to your name.”

<sup>10</sup>And again it is said,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”

<sup>11</sup>And again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,  
and let all the peoples extol him.”

<sup>12</sup>And again Isaiah says, [MH: and here's the one I want you to focus on]

“The root of Jesse will come,  
even he who arises to rule the Gentiles;  
in him will the Gentiles hope.”

The key item in the passage is found in verse 12, which has the messiah (the “root of Jesse”) “arising” (lemma: *anistēmi*) to rule the Gentiles. Paul’s source is Isaiah 11:10 from the Septuagint (LXX). In the context of the Deuteronomy 32 worldview, assuming the rulership described by Isaiah requires withdrawing the authority of the sons of God allotted to the nations at Babel.

Of the two Greek verbs (*egeirō*, *anistēmi*) used to describe the resurrection in the New Testament, *anistēmi* (and especially its cognate noun, *anastasis*) has received concentrated attention for its use in describing the resurrection of Jesus:

Now I’m going to quote the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* [NIDNTTE] here. That entry, in part, says:

*The [verb] anistēmi occurs in the NT over 100x, but almost always in the Gospels and Acts (the only exceptions are Rom 15:12; 1 Cor 10:7; Eph 5:14; 1 Thess 4:14, 16; Heb 7:11, 15); Luke-Acts accounts for more than 70 instances. In approx. three-fourths of the occurrences the meaning is general, not connected with the concept of resurrection... All occurrences in John but one (John 11:31) have to do with resurrection (6:39–40, 44, 54; 11:23–24; 31), whereas Matthew never uses it this way (he prefers egeirō; contrast Matt 16:21 with Mark 8:31). Such a meaning occurs a handful of times in Luke and is a bit more freq. in Acts (e.g., Luke 16:31; Acts 2:24, 32), but in the Epistles it is found only 3x (Eph 5:14; 1 Thess 4:14, 16). In contrast, the noun anastasis, which occurs c. 40x (incl. 17x in Luke-Acts, but 15x in the Epistles and Revelation), means “resurrection” in virtually every case (the only exception is Luke 2:34)...*

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*Some have thought that egeirō, esp. in the pass., is used predominantly for what happened at Easter, i.e., the wakening [sic] of the crucified one to life, while anistēmi and anastasis refer more esp. to the recall to life of people during the earthly ministry of Jesus and to the eschat[ological] and universal resurrection... There are, however, too many exceptions; e.g., egeirō is applied to John the Baptist (Matt 14:2 par.) and to the dead generally (10:8; Mark 12:26; John 5:21 and freq.), and Paul applies it to both Christ’s resurrection and the future resurrection of the dead in the same context (1 Cor 15:15–17). It would be more accurate to say simply that egeirō occurs more freq. than anistēmi in the sense of resurrection.*

In other words, both of these verbs can and do refer to the resurrection, and the noun form (*anastasis*) is almost always (one exception of 70) referring to the resurrection. So the *anistemi*, *anastasis*—this language—is important. In the Septuagint of Zephaniah 3:8, we also see the combination of “resurrection

language” (this kind of verbiage, these lemmas) with the reclaiming of the nations. It says this:

**<sup>8</sup>Therefore wait for me,” says the Lord,  
“for the day of my rising up (*anastasis*) for a testimony,  
because my judgment is for the gathering of nations,  
in order to gather the kings,  
in order to pour upon them all my fierce anger,  
because in the fire of my zeal all the earth will be consumed.”**

Zephaniah actually combines both the resurrection... If we’re applying this to the messiah specifically, that’s going to be the catalyst to gather the nations. And then that gets combined with the final resurrection—the final judgment of the nations and their gods. Back to the book:

Lastly, Psalm 82 itself is part of the matrix of ideas that contribute to Paul’s theology of the abrogation of the authority of the allotted powers. Recall that, after castigating the gods (vv. 1-5) and sentencing them to die like humans (vv. 6-7), the psalmist closed the divine council scene with a plea: “Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit the nations!” Scholars have drawn attention to the fact that the Septuagint translator used *anistēmi* for this plea (“Rise up, O God...).

It takes little imagination to see how these passages could be read in hindsight by Paul. After his dramatic encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus and his call to be the apostle to the Gentiles, the resurrection of the messiah would be forever intertwined with the reclaiming of the once-rejected nations.

That’s the end of the section in my *Demons* book. I know that was long, but I wanted a place (and this seems like a good one) for the podcast’s sake, to get that theme addressed because it just pops up in Paul’s letters in a number of cases, and who knows when we’re going to get to those other instances.

So as we wrap up this episode on Colossians 2:13-23, our focus has been this theme. A lot of the other stuff we’ve hit before. Paul’s reiterating the supremacy of Christ, the preeminence of Christ, the shadow, the temporary, the copy, things of food laws and New Moons and Sabbaths and feast days. Whether he’s hitting at Jew or Gentile or both (I think it would be certainly both, especially when you factor in the Sabbath reference there), there are not two ways of salvation. There is one. And the one way is Christ, who is the substance. He’s the ultimate reality of these shadow things. And he is superior to every other exalted power in the supernatural realm. And in fact, both Jew and Gentile will understand this when Paul says it. The cross event stripped away the authority of the rulers and the

authorities over the nations. Now, the Jews should have heard that and thought, “Okay, Deuteronomy 32. I guess we’re wrong. I guess they’re not locked in. The same Most High has just nullified their authority—the authority he gave them as a punishment, to punish them, to estrange them. He has just nullified that authority, and so, yeah, Paul can take the message of our messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, to the Gentile. The path of salvation is exactly the same for them as it is for us.” Of course, this is part of the matrix of ideas that Paul’s opposition just didn’t want to hear. They’re trying to deflect attention away. They’re trying to rebut it. They’re trying to substitute something for it. And Paul’s just having none of it. He’s having none of it, and he takes them right back to their own scriptures to deal with the idea that there’s one path—Jew and Gentile—one means, one salvation. And everything that holds the Gentiles (either in their own mind or the mind of a Jew)... Everything that them at a distance has been stripped away.

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**TS:** Okay, Mike. Well, we’re going to take a break from Colossians next week. We have an interview with David de Silva, and then another interview after that. But then after that, we’ll jump back into chapter 3 of Colossians.

**MH:** Yeah, it’s a good breaking point.

**TS:** Sounds good. Alright, Mike. With that, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.