

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 283

Exodus 17, Part 2

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### Episode Summary

Exodus 17:8-16 chronicles the battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites. The episode contains odd elements. So long as Moses' arms were raised, Israel did well in battle. When they dropped, they did not. What is the point of this action? Why is there a reference to the "throne of Yahweh" associated with the altar built to commemorate the victory? And above all, why was Amalek cursed by Yahweh for elimination?

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 283: Exodus 17, Part 2. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike. How is your summer going?

**MH:** It's actually going quickly. I'm just surprised at how fast it's really gone. I thought, since I'm working at home, that the days would feel longer and that summer would go more slowly. And nah, not so much. It's just not working out that way.

**TS:** And you did some traveling in July. I think you recorded some FringePop. Did you do anything else?

**MH:** Yeah, I spoke at the Awakening Conference in Jacksonville. And we went out a day early to do the *Stranger Things* nerdy stuff and drove down to Jacksonville and spoke there, and then off to FringePop in Dallas.

**TS:** I think we're far enough removed from the premiere of *Stranger Things* that we can talk about it. I did finish the season, so I can get your thoughts. What was your initial thoughts on it?

**MH:** I liked the season. It started out a little more slowly than its predecessors. But after you hit about episode 4, it was a mile a minute. So I think it delivered. I was happy with it.

**TS:** Yeah, I agree with that. It started off slow but I liked the ending. It was good. I heard season 4 is going to be even stranger. So that's good. I like the weird stuff.

**MH:** They're out of Hawkins so that frees them up to do lots of things. I had to binge-watch it because Lexham wanted me to add a chapter with my thoughts on the third season, so I did that. And I didn't want to put out too many theories that I have about season 4, but I hinted a little bit of what I think is going to happen. To me, there was a very distinct pattern through all of season 3 that I think is going to carry into season 4. So it was good to add the chapter. And it was fun to binge-watch it. My kids were through it two or three times. But I spot-watched certain scenes after I was through it once, just for the sake of the chapter. But it was good. It was fun to visit the places where this stuff was filmed, too. And they're just there. You just go and, "Hey, here's this house. Here's that house. Here's the middle school. Get your picture taken there." Because they're all just people's houses or public buildings. So that was kind of fun.

**TS:** I'm sure they appreciate all the extra people. [laughter] I'm sure they appreciate that.

**MH:** Yeah, yeah.

**TS:** Note to Hollywood. Just don't ever use my house for anything, because I don't need people coming and taking pictures. But I enjoyed the Hopper character. He was my favorite.

**MH:** Yeah, and I'll go on record. I don't think he's dead.

**TS:** Oh, yeah.

**MH:** I just don't think... There are two different possibilities. But I didn't want to speculate in the book. It's not that kind of book. But I dropped a few things that will let people know that I have my suspicions.

**TS:** But how in the world is *Stranger Things* going to tie into Exodus 17, Mike? That's your job for the day.

**MH:** Well, the monster was really big [laughs] in season 3. These are all spoilers, obviously. But the upside-down monster thing was giant. So there's our segue right there. We're going to meet some giant clans today.

**TS:** Good enough.

**MH:** It's a bit lame, but it's good enough. [laughs]

**TS:** That's alright.

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**MH:** Yeah, the second part here... I telegraphed what we were going to do here at the end of Part 1. And the focus is Exodus 17:8-16. So we might as well, as we begin, just read those verses again. This is the Amalek incident. Earlier in the chapter, we had the incident at Rephidim, which is close to Sinai proper. We had the Massah/Meribah incident, and we talked about where these things are geographically. We have a cluster of terms now by the time we hit Exodus 17 (Seir, Edom, Paran, Teman, Rephidim, all these different places)... Kadesh was an important one that we talked about last time. That cluster... Midian is the outlier, as we said before. You'd have to go way back to the episodes we did on Midian and the location of Sinai. The only way you could really factor Midian in is that it's bordering this area. But the places that are known here are *not* in Midian proper. So that's a big problem for that view of Sinai.

But we talked about the geography last time and where this happens, basically to make the point that, "Look, if all these places are associated regionally with Sinai, then you have some cosmic geography going on. And when you have in verse 8, "Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim," you have these people coming into what could very well be (since Rephidim and Massah and Meribah are associated with Kadesh, and Kadesh with Paran and Teman and Seir and Edom and Sinai)... You could have essentially an infiltration by these outsiders of what's going to be (or would be conceived of) as holy ground—the environs around Sinai, very close to it. And we asked the question, "Who is Amalek?" Amalek has a history that we will repeat in this episode (just to get us into it) that is associated with all the giant clan stuff. So let's jump in here to verse 8. I'm going to read 8-16.

**<sup>8</sup> Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. <sup>9</sup> So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." <sup>10</sup> So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. <sup>11</sup> Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. <sup>12</sup> But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. <sup>13</sup> And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.**

**<sup>14</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." <sup>15</sup> And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner, <sup>16</sup> saying, "A hand upon the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."**

Now what you typically hear with this is that here you have a rogue people. There's nothing typically unusual about them. They essentially molest Israel on their way to Sinai. Basically, Israel is practically at Sinai, so they're preventing Israel from getting to the mountain of God. And that's so offensive that from here on out, God is angry at the Amalekites. And that's not untrue, but there's just more lurking in the story than you would suspect.

So in the last episode, like I said, we asked, "Who were the Amalekites?" And I'll confess, this episode is going to feel like a long rabbit trail before we return back to the passage and make a few observations. But I think it's worth it, because this is the kind of thing we do on the Naked Bible that nobody else does—get into some of the weeds here. And there are some really interesting things. So despite the fact that it's going to feel like a long rabbit trail, I want to establish that I'm not making up the association of Amalek to terms or people names or labels that are clearly associated with giant clans. I'm not making it up. You can find these connections in scholarship. You find all the data points and then you connect the dots. It's not rocket science in that respect. But you're never going to see these things unless you go looking.

So basically, if all you want to know is whether it's reasonable to think that this conflict with Amalek was possibly (at least in part) a conflict with a giant clan population, the answer is yes. But explaining why or how that worked in the mind of the biblical writer (I'll be honest here) would be a book-length task. So what I'm going to try to do here is summarize a few things in what will feel like a rabbit trail, and then take it back to Exodus 17:8-16 and read that episode supernaturally (or as some would prefer to call it, mythic history—events on the ground that are happening that have a strong supernaturalistic/divine/quasi-divine feel to it). So that's what we're going to do in this episode.

So we first encounter Amalek (as I mentioned in Part 1) in Genesis 36:12. That's where we get the name. And I'll just read Genesis 36:11-12.

**<sup>11</sup> The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. <sup>12</sup> (Timna was a concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son; she bore Amalek to Eliphaz.) These are the sons of Adah, Esau's wife.**

So we learn from that little bit that Timnah is a concubine of Eliphaz (who was Esau's son) whose own mother was Adah. If we go back to Genesis 36:2, we find that Adah was the daughter of Elon the Hittite. According to Genesis 36:20-22 (a few verses later), Timnah was a Horite, one of the native population of Edom. Now the Horites are going to be our focus today. They were a people group who lived in the hill country of Seir. And Genesis 32:3 tells us that Seir was part of Edom. And according to Deuteronomy 2:10-12 and 20-23, we learn that the Horites were defeated and displaced by the Edomites. And they are listed in

those passages in Deuteronomy with other people groups that are incontestably giant clans.

So this raises the question of “Who are these Horites exactly?” And answering that question requires investigating the contexts in which the Horites are mentioned, doing a little digging into the other people groups with whom they are listed. So this is the direction we’re going to go—that we have an association with what is going to emerge as a giant clan population (the Horites). Esau’s line has a child by one of these women, and that child is Amalek. And Amalek is the forerunner of the Amalekites.

So there’s this line of descent (pardon the pun) that we could look at and say, “Well, isn’t it odd that these are the people that surface when the Israelites are trying to get to Yahweh’s domain? And isn’t it interesting that Yahweh’s domain is smack-dab in the middle of this?” Because when we have this complex of geographical place names (Seir, Edom, Paran, Teman, Kadesh, Massah, Meribah, Rephidim)—this concatenation of places—we learn from Deuteronomy 2 that earlier than the days of Moses and Joshua, they were just infested with these giant clans. And the descendants of Esau got rid of most of them. You actually have references to other people (the Philistines). When they come into the area, they get rid of them. One of the populations as well. You have the Genesis 14 incident where some of this happens. But it’s as though (I’m going to telegraph where we’re going here) God has planted himself in the middle of the chaos tribes (the chaos vestiges of Genesis 6) because we know that these people groups (from Deuteronomy 2, both of those passages) are the people who are Rephaim, and the Rephaim are Anakim, and the Anakim (by virtue of Numbers 13:32-33) were descended from the Nephilim. It’s as though God just sort of camps right in the middle of this to make a statement, and then waits there until his own choice of timing to bring his people Israel (the people that he created supernaturally after the Babel incident) to this place. And in the centuries prior to that, he is using other lines of Abraham (and even other peoples from other nations) to eliminate these giant clans, to clean house before “company” gets there (i.e., before the Israelites get there).

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So this is the big picture view of what’s going on here in terms of a supernatural outlook of what’s going on in these stories. So Deuteronomy 2:10-12, 20-23 (let’s go back there) establish the Horites lived in Seir, which is a subregion of Seir. Rephidim is, of course, associated with Massah and Meribah, which in other passages (and we mentioned this last time) are explicitly associated with Kadesh. And Kadesh was, of course, the place that Israel failed. Later on (after Sinai)... After they get to Sinai, they get the law, and then it’s time to go on to the Promised Land. They’re going to come back to Kadesh and they’re going to fail. They’re going to send in the 12 spies. Ten of them are going to come back and say, “Forget it. We’ve looked in there at the land and we know who’s there. We know the Anakim are there. It’s worse than we thought.” Now if they’re encountering some of these people at the incident at Rephidim, they should have

known that God was capable of delivering them. But they fail at basically the same location regionally here at Kadesh. And that's what initiates the 40 years of wandering.

So we come full circle in a short amount of time (13 months later), because they're going to be at Sinai for 13 months. So a little over a year later, they circle back around. They're going to go up through this area—the March from the South themes that we get in the Hebrew Bible about where Israel comes from to enter the land, or where Yahweh comes from. And here we go. We encounter basically the same situation, probably magnified (more of them) and they just quit. The spies say, “Forget it. We can't do it.” And then we get 40 years of wandering.

So when it comes to the Horites specifically (where we want to camp here), we have limited passages. We have Genesis 36 (which we looked at), we have Deuteronomy 2:10-12, Deuteronomy 2:20-23, and Genesis 14:5-7. So Deuteronomy 2 is where we'll start here. That should be pretty familiar. I'm going to read the passages in total just so they're fresh in the minds of the listeners, and then I'm going to make a few observations. So Deuteronomy 2:10 says this:

**<sup>10</sup> (The Emim formerly lived there, a people great and many, and tall as the Anakim. <sup>11</sup> Like the Anakim they are also counted as Rephaim, but the Moabites call them Emim. <sup>12</sup> The Horites also lived in Seir formerly, but the people of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them and settled in their place, as Israel did to the land of their possession, which the LORD gave to them.)**

We skip down a little bit to verse 20:

**<sup>20</sup> (It is also counted as a land of Rephaim. Rephaim formerly lived there—but the Ammonites call them Zamzummim— <sup>21</sup> a people great and many, and tall as the Anakim; but the LORD destroyed them before the Ammonites, and they dispossessed them and settled in their place, <sup>22</sup> as he did for the people of Esau, who live in Seir, when he destroyed the Horites before them and they dispossessed them and settled in their place even to this day. <sup>23</sup> As for the Avvim, who lived in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorim, who came from Caphtor, destroyed them and settled in their place.)**

There are some interesting things there. You can already see how what's said about the Emim is almost word-for-word what's said about the Zamzummim and referencing them as Rephaim and “tall like the Anakim.” And then some of that language is applied to the Horites. You just read through the passages and you



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notice that. So a couple of observations. Here's what's sort of obvious. The Horites are mentioned in connection with both the Emim (giant clan of Moab) and the Rephaim/Zamzummim (giants of Ammon). The Horites are right smack-dab in the middle of that. Secondly, Deuteronomy 2 tells us that the people of Esau destroyed these giant clans and also destroyed the Horites. Why include the Horites in this description unless there was a reason to do so? Third, along with the Emim, Zamzummim, Rephaim, and the Horites, the Avvim are mentioned as also being destroyed by people who came in. Interestingly in this case, it's the Caphtorim (the people from Caphtor). Now the Avvim were said to have lived in villages as far as Gaza (which is on the coast). That's going to become Philistine territory. So we have another people group of interest here. And they live in what would be traditional Philistine area, by the time the Philistines get some attention in the Bible. They are part of this complex. They also show up in Joshua 13:3-4. I'll read that.

**<sup>3</sup>(from the Shihor, which is east of Egypt, northward to the boundary of Ekron, it is counted as Canaanite; there are five rulers of the Philistines, those of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron), and those of the Avvim, <sup>4</sup>in the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians, to Aphek, to the boundary of the Amorites...**

Now you get a bunch of people groups in there. We're going to talk about who some of these groups are and their history. And more importantly, two things: how these people would have been perceived by their contemporaries (by ancient people), and then later on when we get the Israelites in the picture, how the biblical writers, especially, would have been using these people group terms of the population of Canaan. Those are two related but somewhat distinct issues.

Now there's a book I'd recommend to people who are really into this. I recommend this book because it's not easy to find a lot of information about some of these groups, because they're basically mentioned once or twice. Avvim... You get into the lists of people who are targeted: The Gergashites, the Jebusites, the Perizzites, the Kerethites, all that stuff. There aren't that many good sources, but one of them is by Baruch Margolith. It's called *The Sea Peoples in the Bible*. The Sea Peoples (for those who aren't familiar with the term) were people from the Aegean who come from that area, cross the relevant portions of the Mediterranean, and they settle in Canaan eventually. You get them in Canaan and Syria. They try to attack Egypt. This is where we know the Sea Peoples from—basically Egyptian texts. Because the Egyptians had to essentially defeat them and thwart their infiltration. But we don't have an empire in Canaan, so that was just easy pickings for the Sea Peoples to get in there. And they had to decide either to live there or move on and invade somebody else. So one of the Sea Peoples are the Peleshet, which in biblical language are

the Philistines. But some of these other terms that you get with these people groups are derivative from terms (names) for the Sea Peoples.

So this is a good resource (*The Sea Peoples in the Bible* by Margolith). And according to that book, the Avvim basically get defeated... The Avvim are a people there before the Sea Peoples ever get there. They are defeated by the Philistines. And his take on Joshua 13 is that essentially the survivors (the ones that aren't killed) get absorbed into the population of the Philistines.

Now what's also going to happen by the time you get to the days of the conquest is that you're going to have the sons of Anak (the Anakim, those that escape Joshua)... They're going to go as well to these places, to the Philistine cities. We know that from Joshua 12, for instance. So you've got vestiges of the giant clans that these places are going to become known for. Having said that, it seems (if you do a lengthy study of the Philistines), since the Philistines are the Sea Peoples and they come from the Aegean, you also have giant traditions (giant warrior traditions—this sub-population)... You have some of that in ancient Greek (speaking broadly) material. And some of that gets wrapped up with the Sea Peoples. So it's quite possible that you have some of this kind of thing going on with these people that are unusually tall and they're perceived as divine offspring, especially by the biblical writers. They are agents of chaos because of their history.

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Now the Aegean... We have to remember this, that there are two parts to the Aegean. There's the Greek part, and then on the East, you have Anatolia, which is where you're going to get some of these other people groups. You're going to get the Mitanni. You're going to get the Hurrians. And a lot of scholars (I think there's good evidence for this and we're going to go through some of it today)... I think that the Horites were the Hurrians. You have people coming from the Caucasus (from what is now Turkey) down into the land. And their history is directly traceable back to Babylon.

So the ancient person is going to know (and the ancient writer, somebody who's literate) the bloodlines (the genealogies, the history) of these peoples. And all that the biblical writers are going to need to know is that, "Look, we have here vestiges of certain places in Mesopotamia, specifically Babylon (that's the big one), who are going to be perceived as generational offspring, agents of chaos. They're going to emerge from (in Babylon's case) the Apkallu incident in the Ur epic. This is how these people groups are going to be perceived. Some of them are going to come across the Mediterranean. They're going to settle in Canaan, even before we have the descendants of Esau. Even before we have Moses and Joshua. And the descendants of Esau are going to wipe some of them out. Abraham (that whole incident in Genesis 14)... They're going to be involved in that. And then of course here with Moses and Joshua.



So there's a history here of certain people groups getting into Canaan that God is going to providentially deal with. And they have a long Mesopotamian history that goes way back to Babylon. That's what I want to try to flesh out and explain in the time we have left for this episode.

So the Avvim (in a nutshell) are pre-Philistine sea people. When I say pre-Philistine, I'm talking about the Philistines we know from the Bible that have settled in these cities. The Avvim are going to have lived there before. They're going to come from the same areas as the Philistines are ultimately going to come from, but they're going to be conquered by the Philistines and they're going to be eliminated and absorbed. So they're pre-Philistine sea people. And Boling, in his *Anchor Yale Bible Commentary* when he's commenting on Joshua 3, puts it this way:

"they were settled in the neighborhood of Gaza, only to be at last attacked and displaced by people from Caphtor (Crete), that is, Philistines."

He adds, interestingly enough, that the Septuagint, where we have Avvim in these two passages (the Joshua passage and then the one here in Deuteronomy) translates that as *heuaiō*, which the Septuagint translator also uses to render "Hivites," and the Hivites are one of these people groups in the conquest that we know almost nothing about. So there's a chance that they could have been the same, or at least perceived as the same. That's from Boling's commentary in the *Anchor Bible* series.

So what we glean from all of this is that it would be odd to have the Horites thrown into this mix where, by the time Joshua gets written, these places are going to be characterized (known for) giant clans. So it would be odd to have the Horites (and frankly the Avvim) thrown into that mix if they weren't also. Because they're described as being targeted in some cases by the same descendants from Abraham and the line of Esau or others. Why would you throw them in there? Why would you even mention them if they weren't part of the same problem—if they weren't part of the same targeted group that the biblical writers want us to realize that God was basically getting rid of these vestiges of the days of primeval chaos (if you're a Mesopotamian, the Apkallu or the descendants of the Nephilim). God was already at work getting rid of those individuals. They were the biggest threat, even before Israel got there. So why, if you're trying to make that point, would you throw the Horites in? It stands to reason that we've got something going on here with the Horites. Now the Horites themselves, we know from the Bible that they preceded the Edomites in Seir. We know their lineage. Tigay writes:

It is uncertain whether they are connected with the Hurrians, a non-Semitic people spread throughout the Near East in the third and second millennia b.c.e.

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And he's right. It's not certain, but a good case can be made for that. So I'm going to follow that trajectory. A possible link to the Hurrians is better addressed in conjunction with Genesis 14. And I'm not going to go too far into Genesis 14 here because a lot of this material I'm going to do a presentation on at a conference in Lubbock (very shortly now, in the middle of August), and this is going to be my topic. So I don't want to tip too much of my hand there. I want people to come to that. It's Jed Burton's conference. But I'm going to read this and say a few things about it. If we read Genesis 14:5-7, here's what we get. This is that confederation of kings in Abraham's day. It says this:

**<sup>5</sup>In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, <sup>6</sup>and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the border of the wilderness. <sup>7</sup>Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh) and defeated all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who were dwelling in Hazazon-tamar.**

"Amalekites" there is something of an anachronism. You have to realize that Genesis 14 is written *after* the time of Esau. It's going to be one of his sons whose concubine is actually the mother of Amalek. So "Amalekites" there is a bit of an anachronism. We've encountered this kind of thing before in Exodus. You get it lots of places in the Old Testament because of the time of when something is written. But look at the names here. It's very obvious what you have going on here. You have the Rephaim mentioned, the Zuzim, the Emim, the Amorites (which is the name used in the book of Amos for the giant clans generally—Amos 2:9-10), the Amalekites (who descended from the Horites), and you have the Horites thrown in here. Why would you put the Horites in here when everything else...? Why would you put the Horites in there and then their descendant Amalek in this list unless you have the same kind of problem? There's just no reason to do it. Everything else in the list is very explicitly associated with the giant clan stuff. So this is what we're dealing with here now. Let's go to Mesopotamian sources. We don't want to lose sight that the Amalekites are derivative of the Horites. The Horites are likely (Tigay says it's uncertain, but you could make a good case for this) to be associated with a people called the Hurrians. And the Hurrians have some relationship (association) with the Amorites, at least in Mesopotamian sources.

So what I want to do here is talk about other sources—Mesopotamian stuff. They know these people, and these people have a history. And what I'm going to point out here is that the names of individual people groups here are going to be used by biblical writers intentionally to take the mind of the reader back to the chaos of Babylon. What we get in the Bible is Horites (and Hittites is another one of these)... Even the Philistines in some of the Genesis passages... Some of these names don't refer ethnically to people. They sort of become swear words or bad

words—bad labels that you would stick on people that you were afraid of or that you just don't like—bad guys. And that is the way the biblical writers will use terms like Amorite, even Canaanite, Horite, Amalekite. But especially the Amorites and the Horites here because they have a long history. If the Horites are the Hurrians, there's a history here in Mesopotamian sources that give you some of the background as to why these names would be associated with Babylon itself.

So to summarize what the primary sources of Mesopotamia show, here's a bullet point list:

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- Before the time of the biblical patriarchs, in northwest Syria or Lebanon (that's the area geographically just north of Canaan) and in northwest Mesopotamia... Think of the Tigris and the Euphrates, those rivers extend almost into Syria. That's just above Canaan. Before the time of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) in these areas (northwest Syria, Lebanon, northwest Mesopotamia) those places were occupied by a people known in Mesopotamian sources as Amorites.
- Now these Amorites migrated east into Mesopotamia at some point before the third dynasty of Ur, which is still before the time of Abraham. They were therefore called by the Mesopotamian population Amurru (that's where Amorite comes from). And that means "Westerner" (people that come from the West). The Sumerian equivalent is mar.tu. (Amurru equals mar.tu. It's just different languages.)
- These Amorites eventually take control of Mesopotamia. They literally run through Mesopotamian city-states there, including Babylon. What we don't realize is that Hammurabi (the great Hammurabi) was an Amorite. His dynasty was an Amorite dynasty. The Amorites took over Babylon.
- So what the biblical writers thought of as Babylonian, then, was historically Amorite. That's an important point to keep in the back of your mind. When the biblical writers are talking about the Babylonians, yeah, it's people that live in Babylon. Okay, we get that. But the people who are in control in certain periods of time are actually these Amorites. So Amorite and Babylonian (in some contexts) are almost synonymous. Hammurabi would be the best example. His dynasty was an Amorite dynasty. And the Amorites ruled most of the city states in Mesopotamia.
- Now when you get to around 1500 BC (which might be right around the early date of the exodus), there was another migration that occurred from the North. Another group (the Mitanni, which was a federation of Hurrian states) sweep down from Anatolia. So from part of the region that would have been associated with sea people, they sweep down from Anatolia

through Syria. Some of them settle in Canaan. That was pretty minimal. They are going to do the same thing the Amorites did. They go through Mesopotamia. They get all the way to Babylon. They actually conquer Babylon. But then for some reason, they turn around. And they go home. So they don't stay there. But what's left is a combination of still native Babylonians (Amorites) and now you've got some Hurrians (or Horites) in the same area. We're going to focus on Babylon. It's more than Babylon, but Babylon's the big deal here.

So here we have all three of these terms (Horite, Amorite, Babylonian). You could even throw Hittite in here, because from Anatolia (that's where the Hittite empire was) you get a Hittite presence. These names (I think you can already see where this is going) are names that show up in the conquest accounts biblically, not only for people who need to be defeated, but several of them are associated with the giant clans. And that shouldn't be a surprise, because the context for Genesis 6:1-5 is the Apkallu story from Mesopotamia (which is focused on Marduk—the one who punishes the Apkallu), which is Babylon. You have this matrix of ideas associated with individuals—the descendants of the Apkallu, which were half divine and half human, and they were giants (Gilgamesh, all this stuff).

You're basically throwing all of this into the hopper along with these place names. And for an Israelite (for a biblical writer) these are the worst of times and the worst of people. What happens here with the Apkallu... To a Mesopotamian, they're heroes, because they restore civilization after the flood. And Babylon is so wonderful. And we owe this to the Apkallu (the divine overlords, the people who helped the kings and gave them wisdom). But if you're a biblical writer, especially if you're writing Genesis 1-11 (either editing it heavily or composing it) during the exile in Babylon, these are the worst of people and the worst of times. This is chaos central. This is anti-Eden. The conditions that emerge from the flood incident with the sons of God (the Apkallu in the Mesopotamian story) is the worst of the worst. They are the very manifestation of the anti-Eden world.

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So this is how a biblical writer is going to think about that. And when they're thinking about Babylon as anti-Eden, if they know the history of the place, they're also going to lump in the Hurrians, the Horites, the Amorites, and all these other terms. And so when they write about the conquest, they're going to be using these terms to label people that just generally oppose Yahweh and oppose the re-implantation of Eden (in other words, the kingdom of God—Yahweh's people and his land and his temple). They're going to be standing in the way. And if they happen to be unusually tall, they're the worst of the worst. They're the biggest threat. They are the personifications of anti-Eden. This is how this set of circumstances is parsed in the mind of the biblical writer. So when we encounter these terms in the Old Testament, we shouldn't be surprised if we know a little history.

Where else do we learn about Eden in the Old Testament? Isaiah 14. Ezekiel 28. You go back and read that stuff. Ask yourself the question, “Are there Babylonian elements in those episodes too? In those diatribes against the king?” Good grief! Isaiah says, “King of Babylon.” He’s the one that it’s directed at! Using the story of divine rebellion... I hope listeners have read *Unseen Realm*, because I can’t rehearse the content of *Unseen Realm* in every episode, or even any episode. But this diatribe against the king of Babylon is using the story of a supernatural rebellion in the heavens, in the council, to comment on or go after the hubris of the king of Babylon. But it’s Babylon again! It’s this rebellion motif, which if you’re familiar with the Genesis 6 story, you get that. You go back to what happens in Eden—the rebellion of one particular divine being, a member of Yahweh’s council, to eliminate the humans that he doesn’t want... There you are again.

There are Babylonish elements to all of the stories of Genesis 1-11. That is not an accident. You are supposed to be thinking “anti-Eden” in all these stories. And not only anti-Eden in terms of people (what people do to screw up) but supernatural agents who are in rebellion against the true God, and who not only are adversarial in their relationship to him, but they are adversarial in their relationship to his human family. This is what all this stuff is about, on a cosmic-geographical level. Ezekiel 28... cherubim... You get the Mesopotamian/Babylonish elements there. And Ezekiel is writing from where? Babylon! [laughs] All these things are factors in the way writers are writing things and the way their readers are deciphering what’s being written.

So when you come across Babylonish stuff and some of these other people group names (and even the place names), you should be thinking... The thing that should pop in your head from this point forward (hopefully) is anti-Eden. That is an agent against Eden. He’s a representative of anti-Eden—chaos. Because that’s what an Israelite is going to be thinking. That’s how they’re going to be parsing these things. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 aren’t lessons on heavenly zoology. I run into people all the time, “Explain the anatomy of the cherubim.” If you’re going down those rabbit trails, you’re missing the point. These are metaphors. They are descriptions, images, iconographic descriptions of agents that the biblical person would’ve immediately associated with Babylon and anti-Eden. That is how you’re supposed to be thinking about these passages, not getting a heavenly zoology lesson. And it’s the same thing for some of the terminology here associated with people groups. It’s not a geography lesson. These terms are being used to produce certain ideas (thought patterns) in the reader’s head. And the main thought pattern is chaos/anti-Eden/enemy of Eden. And specifically, some of those enemies that come from the Nephilim (the Apkallu on the Mesopotamian side)—the worst of the worst. This is how the writers are trying to get their readers to think.

A few notes on the term “Amorite”... this is from *Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

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The term *amurru* first occurs in Old Akkadian sources as the general designation of “the West,” referring to the W wind, and to the geographical area lying to the (N) W of Mesopotamia. The most frequent usage of the term refers to the population of that W region as an ethnic designation [MH: in those days]. Its semantic equivalent, Sumerian *mar.tu* was used already in the mid-3d millennium b.c. even at Ebla in an ethnic or cultural sense, designating the population of the “West” that was recognized to be foreign...

These are foreigners. To the Mesopotamians, the Amorites were foreigners that are going to invade their own lands. It's going to be bad, but they're going to become the “Babylonians” that the biblical writers know. Amorite can't be established as a Semitic language. It's something different. Akkadian is Semitic. It's east Semitic. Sumerian of course is something different. Amorite is different than that. It's not related to Hebrew or Ugaritic, not part of the northwest Semitic group. They're their own people. They're foreigners. And recent studies of Amorite have established this. For those of you who are interested in this sort of thing, *Journal of Semitic Studies* actually just came out with an article (Alexander Andraon and Juan-Pablo Vita, “Amorite: A Northwest Semitic Language?”). And they basically conclude that we really can't say that it's Semitic. It has features of Semitic, but there's lots of stuff that's just totally different.

So I mention this, not for some language lesson, but... These are outsiders. They're foreigners. Now what we know of them, though... Amorite to date has produced no texts. There are no Amorite texts (like literary texts, or even economic texts). What we do have are in the neighborhood of 6,000 or so personal names that are Amorite. You're familiar with biblical names—how you can take them apart and they say something. Biblical names have a grammar. *Dan-i-el*: “God is my judge.” It's actually a verbless clause. Amorite is the same way, and names in other languages, too. And we have about 6,000 of these. And they come from all parts of Mesopotamia.

So it's demonstrable that the Amorites (both by the evidence of personal names and what the Mesopotamians actually say later on) took over the whole area. This is an invasion. It was viewed negatively by the people of the time. But they become what the biblical writers know as Babylon. You get the same thing (as I mentioned before) with the Mitanni—the Hurrians. Mitanni is an empire name, but it's actually a confederation of Hurrian city states from north Mesopotamia. They do the same thing, just like I described a few minutes ago.

So this is what you have happen. You have all of these people sweeping down, invading what would become biblical Babylon. And the names of these people become part of a metaphorical vocabulary to take the mind of the biblical reader back to this place—specifically to Babylon. That's ground zero for the anti-Eden. And when you do that and you're talking about giants, you as a literate Israelite are going to think, “Oh, yeah. I know why Genesis 6:1-4 is there.” The



Mesopotamians thought that this was great after the flood, that the sons of God (divine beings, Apkallu) came and had children that were hybrids and all this stuff. And they thought that was great. It saved their civilization. But we know that this led to disaster, depravity, idolatry, people forsaking the true God and worshipping these other beings as gods. This is where the writer wants to take the mind of the reader. Because an Israelite... Let's face it... This is what we do here at Naked Bible. I've made the comment a number of times. You run across these weird passages, weird people groups, weird names. The Israelite who's living in the first millennium BC or even the early second millennium BC is going to know what to do with this stuff. They're going to know. They're going to know what it means. They're going to know where to plug it in in their worldview and their theology. They're just going to know because it's part of their world. We don't know any of it. So we have to go back and try to recover it. So to us, it's difficult. It's work. But that's what we try to do here.

I want to read one other selection here. Go back to *Anchor Bible Dictionary* about Amorite as a political designation. ABD says:

It was noted above that in native Amorite society there were already kings and other titles that designated political functions or offices.

When the Amorites come in there and they take over, they set up their own governmental political systems. Again, Hammurabi's dynasty was Amorite. And they're going to use certain terms to describe themselves as rulers, their apparatus, their bureaucracy. It's normal stuff. So ABD continues:

Following the diaspora of Amorites in the 20th to 19th centuries [BC], there was evidently a multitude of political titles that made use of the term Amurru or the Sumerian mar.tu. The term "father of the land of Amurru" was used at Larsa by an Elamite king, and subsequently by other kings including Hammurapi. The title became "king of the Amorites" by Hammurapi's 35th year and was a standard appellative of kings from then on, obviously devoid of any ethnic connotations.

Now that's an important paragraph. What it means is, after the Amorites invade and they take over and they set up office, the title "King of the Amorites" is going to be used across the board in Mesopotamia and in the years following by anyone who's a king, whether they're ethnically an Amorite or not, because they want to hitch their wagon to the conquerors. It just becomes a title: King of the Amorites. Now that becomes an issue when we get into biblical stuff. Back to ABD:

The next and last occurrence of the royal title "king of the Amorites" occurs in the biblical references to Sihon, who associated with Heshbon in Transjordan, and who was defeated in the earliest recorded battle of the newly established Israelite federation (Numbers 21). There can be little doubt of the historicity of the event,

even though the present narratives are of course garbled by the overlay of later tradition and interpretations. His royal title must have derived from, and represented a continuation of, the political traditions of the old N Syrian principality of Amurru [MH: the Amorites]. Together with a number of other puzzling traditions (notably the Balaam narratives), this title strongly indicates a considerable influx of population into Transjordan [MH: the other side of the Jordan] and Palestine at the time when destructions in N Syria were leaving much of that region virtually depopulated. At the same time (i.e., the transition from LB [Late Bronze] to Early Iron Ages) the population of Transjordan saw a very sharp rise in density, and the only reasonable source for this rapid growth was the region to the N. Even the name Sihon (as well as Og of Bashan, who is also identified as an “Amorite” king) has no reasonable Semitic etymology. As was true also in Mesopotamia, the term “Amorite” no longer had any ethnic or linguistic significance and had simply become part of the traditional titulary of kings with N Syrian cultural connections.

By the way, that’s the “foe from the North” thing working its way through again. If you’ve read *Unseen Realm*, you know what that is.

The conclusion is inescapable that Sihon and others were the remnants of N political entities [where the Amorites that invaded Babylon long before had come from] attempting to reestablish their old political regimes in another region [the Transjordan].

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So what that means is, the Amorites go into Babylon. They take over. They’re so ubiquitous in terms of their leadership that the title “King of the Amorites” becomes something everybody uses everywhere. When they have trouble—when they get run out of town by the Mitanni (Hurrians)—they eventually are going to go down into the Transjordan, where we find them biblically circa 1500 BC. Sihon and certainly Og are Rephaim. These are clearly associated with giant clan stuff. They’re going to come down into the Transjordan and they’re going to call themselves Amorite kings. Doesn’t mean they’re Amorite ethnically descended, like if you gave them a DNA test. No. It means that they are trying to link their authority with the old Amorites, with Babylon. It’s Babylon *again*. This is why in *Unseen Realm* I made a few comments on this specifically about the way Og and his bed are described. You remember this if you read the book. The sacred marriage bed of Marduk aligns to the cubit precisely with the dimensions that are given for Og’s bed in Deuteronomy 3. I’m going to read a little excerpt from *Unseen Realm*:

The most immediate link back to the Babylonian polemic is Og’s bed (Hebrew: *‘eres*). Its dimensions (9 × 4 cubits) are precisely those of the cultic bed in the ziggurat called Etemenanki—which is the ziggurat most archaeologists identify as the Tower of Babel referred to in the Bible. Ziggurats functioned as temples and

divine abodes. The unusually large bed at Etemenanki was housed in “the house of the bed” (*bit erši*). [MH: Ersi and the Hebrew ‘eres (Og’s bed) are cognate equivalents.] It was the place where the god Marduk and his divine wife, Zarpanitu, met annually for ritual lovemaking, the purpose of which was divine blessing upon the land.

Then in a footnote I add this:

Consequently, in addition to the giantism element, a link between Og and Marduk via the matching bed dimensions may also have telegraphed the idea that Og was the inheritor and perpetuator of the Babylonian knowledge and cosmic order from before the flood.

And that’s what Og wants you to think. That’s why Og is calling himself an Amorite king. “I’m from Babylon. I inherited this civilization... I’m a product of the wonderful apkallu salvation that resulted in the greatness of Babylon.” That’s what Og wants you to think. The biblical writers are clued into this. This is what the dimensions of Og’s bed are about. Not telling us how tall Og was, precisely, but to link Og back to anti-Eden. And that’s what the term “Amorite” is supposed to do. That’s what the term “Horite” is supposed to do in these conquest narratives. ABD continues:

That Sihon and Og were not the only illustrations of such a process is indicated by the fact that the Amorites are also included in all of the various “Tables of Nations” scattered through the Pentateuch and Joshua. These lists designate political regimes and not merely “ethnic” groups. This is evident both from the fact that they are labeled *gōyîm* (which is probably best defined as “a politically organized military gang”) [MH: just a group of people, maybe mercenaries, something like that, a military force, a state force] and from the fact that some of them, such as the Jebusites of Jerusalem [MH: there’s another name that we get associated with the conquest], can definitely be identified with specific city-states. It has been established that the regime of Jerusalem already in the Amarna period [MH: Just call it 1300 BC. This is long before David. David has to take Jerusalem from the Jebusites.] derived from N Syria [MH: that’s where the Amorites are from] (Moran 1975). Its Amorite derivation is indicated not only by its name, *Yebus* (which is Amorite *Yabusum*), but also by the bitter condemnation of the prophet Ezekiel (16:2–3), who accurately described its [Jerusalem’s] origin as a hybrid of Amorite and “Hittite” (i.e., N Syrian) forebears.

Remember what the verses said? Ezekiel 16:2-3:

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**<sup>2</sup>“Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, <sup>3</sup>and say, Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite.**

Both those terms (Amorite and Hittite) are from the Amorite and the Mitannian invasions that will create what the biblical writers know as Babylon. These things are not accident. And isn't that cool that when David (the prototype of the Messiah) chooses a capital, it's Jebus—the Amorite capital. It's like he's invading the new Babylon and taking it for Yahweh. The conceptual imagery here, if you know the backloaded story and why these place names and people group terms are used, is all about the supernatural rebellions of Genesis 1-11. It's *all* about that—the anti-Eden. All of it! And what we do typically is we think that the context for understanding this stuff is just a map or pieces of pottery or historical records of this or that. All of that's important. It is, but what you get typically with biblical scholars today is that they never even think about or introduce to you the cosmic religious angle of all of this stuff. That's what's missing. That's why the Old Testament can be pretty dry and toasty.

This is a conflict between two kingdoms. I've used that phrase of Jesus' announcement about the kingdom of God. What is spiritual warfare? Spiritual warfare is actually the conflict between two kingdoms. And it's easy to see that when Jesus shows up and he starts saying things like, “The kingdom of God is among you,” and he starts casting out demons. “Spiritual warfare, we finally get some of that.” Look, you've been having that for a long time. You just don't recognize it because we don't know the terminology. We don't have the worldview in our heads. What Jesus is doing with Satan, casting out the demonic presence in various places... And he hits both Jewish and Gentile territory. When he's doing this, he's doing what the Israelites were doing to the giant clans. It's the same thing. It's the conflict of two kingdoms. It's the effort to reinstall Eden and defeat the anti-Eden. It's order against chaos. It's Yahweh against the gods. It's Yahweh's children against their children. This is how it's perceived. But most of the time, Old Testament scholars (even in the evangelical tradition) don't want to go there. “It's just too weird.” Okay, call it weird. It's weird. That's a nice word. But it's what's in the head of a biblical writer. Do you want to understand what they're writing or not? Here we go again. It's the same thing. I'll quote you a little bit from *Peoples of the Old Testament World*. This is a good book. I recommend it. I think it's a normal paperback now.

Numbers 13:29 states: “The Amalekites live in the land of the Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan” (nrsv). While the Amorites are here listed among the peoples of the land, the Bible provides scant evidence about them...

Yeah, specifically ethnically.

The word *Amorite* has ancient origins, deriving from Akkadian *Amurru*, the equivalent of the earlier Sumerian *Martu*. In both languages the word could designate a region, people, or direction (westerner)...

It goes on to talk about the Amorites. But it says here:

But the discernment of specific ethnic groups from archeological evidence is next to impossible. Excavations from Hazor in the north to Lachish in the south clearly indicate that throughout the region during the period of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages the material culture was uniform. In the absence of inscriptional material it is impossible to determine the relationship of particular material remains to a specific group. Nevertheless, Kathleen Kenyon begins with the biblical statement that “the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan” (Num. 13:29 nrsv).

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The rest of it is where these people live. “The Amorites are the hill-dwellers. The Canaanites are the plains-dwellers.” So on and so forth. I’m going to be as gentle as possible here. *It doesn’t matter*, because “Amorite” transcends ethnicity. The term transcends ethnicity. And that’s what you get with Horites (Hurrians). The Horites might also be the Hivites. You’re dealing with the use of a term to label a people (an enemy) who themselves... Like Sihon and Og. They *wanted* to be thought of as Amorites. They *want* you to think that they’re the vestiges of what happened long ago in Babylon. It’s supposed to make you think of that. It provides a cosmic-theological rationale for what’s happening on the ground in terms of the conquest in this area.

And Yahweh has decided to settle early. Before they even get to the land, Yahweh is here in this region. This is where his mountain is. And he’s going to clean house. He doesn’t want any agents of chaos—any of these descendants from the days of the flood, the violation of the flood... He doesn’t want them in his house, in his home, in his backyard, in his front yard. He doesn’t want them. So he’s going to remove them in preparation for the company that he *does* want. That would be his people whom he has taken out of Egypt. And then when they’re there, he’s going to give them the law and then he’s going to travel with them to Canaan.

And we’re going to have to repeat the process where we go. We’re going to go to the Transjordan and finish the job there, because we still have some of these Amorite dudes left. The Rephaim are still up there in Bashan, so we’re going to take care of business there. The descendants of Esau have already taken care of business in Ammon and Moab. We’re going to take care of business in Bashan and then we’re going to cross into the land. And these are the targets—those individuals that are perceived as being descended from the episode of the flood. This is where you get the whole failure in Numbers 13. Like I talk about in *Unseen Realm*, it’s not a coincidence that where the verbs of killing (the *karem*

terminology) and other verbs are used... If you go to the places where they're used, they all happen to be places where the Anakim were spotted. It's not a coincidence. It's a cosmic-theological rationale for what is going on and what God wants done.

There are other verbs of conquest used (I point this out in *Unseen Realm*) that talk about "dispossessed," "drive out," "expel." It's not just verbs of killing. The verbs of killing show up when you have armed conflict in places where the vestiges of the giant clans are. You just do. I'm not saying that other people aren't killed. These particular individuals are scattered throughout the land. There are pockets of them. They live in different places among the other peoples of the land. But they're the ones that get targeted. And God has been targeting them for centuries before Israel ever shows up. And this is the overarching rationale for what's going on here.

Let's take this back to spend a few minutes here in Exodus. And I told you it was going to be a long rabbit trail to set this up. So Exodus 17:8-16 is the battle with the Amalekites. Again, we know where this place is. It's part of this regional complex where Yahweh is and Sinai and the mountain, and all of this stuff. So we know the context for what's going on. And let's just read a couple of... There are a few things here that are kind of curious, when we actually get into it.

**<sup>8</sup>Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. <sup>9</sup>So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand."**

And that's an important phrase. He's going to stand on the hill with the staff of God in his hand.

**<sup>10</sup>So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.<sup>11</sup> Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed.**

And then in verses 12 and following, they give him a place to sit. They hold up his hands on either side. And when the hands are up, Israel prevails. When they're down, Amalek prevails. So what's going on here? Well, in episode 280, the one on Elim's 12 springs and 70 palm trees (the end of Exodus 15)... we talked a little bit about this. The rod is conceptually connected to the tree metaphor of divine presence. Where did he get the rod? The burning bush. God specifically empowers Moses through the rod. "Take the rod that's in your hand. Put it down." All these things that Moses is going to now use the rod to work for signs. It represents the power of God and the presence of God because of where it came from and because God is with Moses. It also goes back even further, as we talked in episode 280. Again, you've got to think like an ancient person.

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Where do rods come from? They come from trees. They're made of wood. Why are trees important? Because they mark places of divine encounter. This is all over the Old Testament, especially the Torah. They mark places of divine encounter. The big one, of course, is Eden. It sets a different tone, because here we have Moses with the rod of God in his hand, which serves as a cosmic metaphor for the presence and power of God. And where was the presence and power of God first known on earth? Well, that would be Eden—the *garden*. Gardens have trees.

All these things are interrelated—the matrix of ideas here. So you have cosmic geography. It's holy war in that sense. God is going to deal with Amalek (who is descended from the Horites) in this place, with the tree, with the rod. Conceptually, the elements just come together. And it just gives you a little bit of a different flavoring for what's going on in the confrontation. In the battle, you have the rod of God. You get to verse 11, the part about holding up the hands. Commentators will say, "The meaning of the holding up the hands is unclear. Maybe it's like laying on of hands." No! He has the rod in his hands! That's what the earlier verse said. He's not going to stand up there with empty hands and raise his hands. "No, I'm going to stand at the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." That's what the hands are. The motion is about raising the rod. And that language, interestingly enough... If we actually look up the lemma used here for "held up," that same verb (for holding up the rod and his hands) also occurs in Exodus 7:20:

**Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood.**

It shows up in Exodus 14:16:

**Lift up your staff. Stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground.**

To me, it's very clear what's going on here. He is wielding the rod of God. Moses is empowered by the rod, the staff. And why is it important that it be held up? So that the people can see who is delivering them, who is giving them victory. You hold it up at the top of the hill. If you're not holding it up, they don't know that it's there. They don't know that Yahweh is fighting on their behalf. The victory is linked to the rod. It's not Moses. It's not Joshua's generalship. It's the rod of God—the staff. And it's seen when you hold it up high. That's the whole point of the description of the story. Now verses 15-16 (to wrap up) are kind of enigmatic.

**<sup>15</sup> And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner, <sup>16</sup> saying, “A hand upon the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”**

Now that's the ESV. Sarna says:

Although the passage purports to be an explanation of the altar's name, the relationship between the two [MH: between the altar and the saying] is difficult to discern.

Currid, in his commentary, writes this, and I think this is a... You'll see what I think here in a minute. Currid writes:

The Hebrew term often translated 'banner' is really a 'standard' or signal-pole. [MH: The Hebrew word is *nes*.] In antiquity, a standard was a rallying-point. Often it bore an emblem, symbol, or banner on its top. A standard was normally raised on a hill or other high place to be seen by all (see Num. 21:4–9). It was an object of focus and hope for the people.

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Moses' appearance on top of the hill with the rod of God in his hand acted much like a standard. The rod on the hill served as a symbol of Yahweh's power. Yahweh was thus seen to be the standard beneath which Israel rallied.

Now we know that the word banner is *nes*. So let me go back to the two verses again. It sounds kind of odd.

**<sup>15</sup> And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner, [MH: The Lord is my *nes*—*nesi*, actually, in Hebrew.]<sup>16</sup> saying, “A hand upon the throne of the LORD! [MH: Moses is interpreting the name of the altar.] The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”**

What's that? What throne? What are we talking about here? A lot of commentators have pointed out that the word throne here is *kes* or *kaph* instead of *nun*. The consonants between *nes* and *kes* are the same, except the first one. So some have thought, “Maybe this is a script error.” It's true that old Hebrew (paleo Hebrew) letters *k* and *n* are very similar. So when the Hebrew Bible was moved or transcribed either from old Hebrew or when the script being used was transitioning from the old Hebrew script to the block script that we're familiar with today, they could have confused the *k* and the *n*. So maybe we're supposed to read “banner” in both of these verses. “The Lord is My Banner, saying ‘A hand upon the banner of the Lord.’” That would make sense in view of Moses holding up the rod and stuff like that. So most commentators are going to say, “Look, this is a text-critical problem. It should read “A hand upon the banner of the Lord,” not

“A hand upon the throne of the Lord,” which really doesn’t make any sense. And the point would be (if we make that textual change)... The point of calling the altar “The Lord is My Banner”... It would be “Yahweh is My Power.” Yahweh fights for me. Then the following verse changing throne to banner would be to explain *how* the Lord fought. Well, he wielded his rod against his enemies. The altar would mark the ground as under Yahweh’s dominion. So it kind of works. It kind of fits. And to me, that’s a good explanation.

However, the Masoretic Text as it stands could mean “kept.” You don’t have to make the change. You can still get the same basic point. Instead of “a hand upon the throne of Yahweh,” you could translate the verse “a hand *against* the throne of Yahweh.” Now what would the point there be, if we just go with the word throne? “A hand against.” Well, the reading as it stands would explain not *how* the Lord fought. It doesn’t have the word banner in it anymore. It has the word throne. It would instead explain *why* the Lord fought. The Amalekites had encroached on his domain—his sovereignty. They’re there at Rephidim, which is in the region of all these other places associated with the presence of God and Sinai. So the Amalekites are trespassers. And they’re also threatening God’s people.

So if we say that Moses builds the altar and calls the name of it The Lord is My Banner, saying “There was a hand against the throne of Yahweh,” then the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation because of that. Anti-Eden is encroaching upon Eden. That would be the point. So whichever one you prefer, I think you could make a good, interesting, cosmic-theological statement out of it.

So that’s the latter half of Exodus 17. I told you up front, it’s going to sound like a long rabbit trail. But I think it’s useful to do this from time to time, because there’s just a lot going on under the surface if you think like an Israelite—a literate Israelite who knows this set of ideas, who knows a little bit of the history of the other people. The scribes are literate people writing the Hebrew Bible for their own audience, and they’re assuming certain points of knowledge about peoples and about terms and about places in their own lives, in their own histories, whether they be oral histories or some other parts of the Bible that happened to be written before this, that we just lack. We just lack exposure to that sort of thing. So I think it’s useful to go on rabbit trails like this occasionally, because they become helpful for fleshing out things that are going on in a particular passage.

**TS:** Alright, Mike. I enjoy rabbit trails. They are fun. [MH laughs] What do we have for...

1:20:00

**MH:** For Exodus 18, since we dealt with Exodus 18 in actually a couple of earlier episodes... And I’m going to reference those when we get there so people can go listen to them. So since we did that, I’m going to spend Exodus 18 talking

about the institution of elders in Israel. Who were they? There's actually different groups of elders (the same term is used). But who were these guys? What did they do? What was their role? So basically, an episode on Israelite eldership.

**TS:** Alright. Looking forward to that. Well, we'll get everybody up with that. I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.