

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 354

Revelation 1:4-6

December 12, 2020

Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Episode Summary

This episode continues our series on John's use of the Old Testament in the book of Revelation. We resume with material in Rev 1:4 not covered in the previous episode and move the discussion into verses 5-6. What is the relationship of the seven churches to the seven spirits before God's throne? How do they relate to the seven lampstands and stars in verses 12-16? What passages from the Old Testament is John alluding to and why?

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 354: Revelation 1:4-6. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you doing?

MH: Pretty good. Can't complain. We're well into the holiday season now (post-Thanksgiving). And I just want to say that on Thanksgiving Day, it was 83 degrees, sunny, and humid. We didn't quite know what to do with ourselves. [laughs] Nobody complained, I can say that! Nobody complained. Nobody said, "Oh, I miss the rain! I miss the gray!" Yeah, nobody said that.

TS: Do you know what the temperature was back in Washington state?

MH: I didn't look. But we had a visitor from Washington. And she just commented once or twice about it being gray and rainy, so we figured it was about the same as usual, about 50-60 degrees, probably in the 50s, and just rainy. You know, that's what it is. That's what it is in the Northwest. So we didn't lament where we were at all.

TS: Well, Christmas is right around the corner. So you're probably looking at roughly the same type of weather for Christmas.

MH: Yeah, it could be. I expect it to be sunny and maybe in the 60s or something like that. But the 83 was a little bit warm (we were told) for November. But sunshine, I'm expecting that. So it'll be good.

TS: Yeah, but it's the humidity that's the killer. The humidity. Phew! That'll get ya.

MH: Yep, we've had a couple days that were what I would describe as perfect weather. 60s, no humidity, and just sunny. It's like, "Man, this is awesome." [laughs] I could get used to this.

TS: Have you seen those bugs that I warned you about yet? Those big...

MH: Not yet.

TS: I don't know when they come out. Maybe springtime.

MH: Maybe the lizards take care of them. I don't know. We had a lizard get loose in the house.

TS: What about snakes? You've got a lot of pythons loose around that area, don't you?

MH: Nah. We haven't seen a single... Nothing like that. And there's water on the... They have these walking trails. There's lots of water there. We haven't seen any of that. But plenty of lizards and that sort of thing. But we like them. They're kind of fun right now.

TS: I hear ya.

MH: I don't know, maybe if there were two or three times as many we wouldn't like them, but they're kind of welcome right now.

TS: Well, Revelation, Mike. We're still in chapter 1 here.

MH: Yeah. It's too bad we're not on chapter 12, because we could have transitioned real nicely into the dragon.

TS: Yeah, I was going to say the snakes. I almost said something, but I was, like, "Ah, we're too early for that." Well, we'll have to remember that.

MH: Yeah, yeah. Well, we find ourselves still in Revelation 1, as Trey just said. And we're still in verse 4 (at least we will be a little bit). We covered a lot in verse 4 last time, specifically the phrase "who is and who was and who is to come." There are some things still in verse 4 that I want to say something about and then move into verses 5 and 6. So that's where we're going to camp out today, really: Revelation 1:4-6. And I'm just going to read verse 4 to get us started here. It says that:

⁴ John [MH: is writing] to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,

So to launch here, we want to talk about the seven churches and the seven spirits. It's transparently obvious John is writing to seven churches. And then he mentions... He throws in this line about "the seven spirits who are before his throne" (God's throne). So if you just looked at *this* verse, it doesn't connect these spirits, even though they're both seven (seven churches and seven spirits). So you sort of intuitively connect them (mentally, anyway). The verse doesn't actually do that.

So it raises the question, "Well, who are the seven spirits before the throne of God?" Later in the chapter we're going to get a little more information. That's where connections are made, and we're going to get there because we're not going to stay in verses 4-6. We're going to have to jump out a little bit into verses 12-16 to help us understand what's in 4-6 specifically. But we'll get to that in a moment.

5:00

If you keep reading into the book of Revelation, you run into some things that contribute to what we did just read in verse 4—this whole thing about the seven churches and the seven spirits. So if you keep reading, when you hit verse 12, you're going to run into another seven—seven golden lampstands (Revelation 1:12). So as we'll see, these are actually better understood as menorah *branches*. Like if you can think of a menorah lamp in your head, these would be the branches actually. So these are actually seven menorah branches, not seven separate lampposts (to use a modern description). And in verse 16, we run into seven again. This time it's seven stars in the right hand of the glorified son of man. So we've got these sevens.

Now in verse 16, the seven stars are identified as angels of the seven churches. So the seven stars are actually seven angels, and they *are* connected here. In verse 16 it starts, but when you get to verse 20, it's even more specific. So really from verse 12, verse 16, and verse 20, you put all those together and go back and read verse 4 and this is where you start to get the connections. So we've got seven stars identified as *angels* of the seven churches (verses 16 and 20). The seven lampstands are identified as the seven *churches* (also in verse 20). And if you keep reading, again, in Revelation 3:1, "he who has the seven stars in his hand" (that's the glorified son of man from Revelation 1:16) is also said to have the seven *spirits* (that's language from Revelation 1:4). And that implies that the seven spirits of 1:4 are in fact these stars who are angels of the seven churches. So all these things are connected. And there's actually a good deal to support John making these connections, using these images together collectively and intertwining them. There's actually a good deal of precedent for that in Second Temple Jewish literature. I'll just give you one example from Beale's commentary here. He writes:

A similar phenomenon [MH: all these elements] is traceable in 1 En. 90:20–25, where “seven white ones” [MH: who are in that passage identified as angels] and [MH: are also mentioned with] seventy “stars”...

...Also identified with angels. So 1 Enoch 90 does this. And it’s based on the context of things that the writer of 1 Enoch found in the book of Daniel (imagery in Daniel 7:10, in Daniel 9:2, 24, and in Daniel 12—this star language, this celestial language). Also in 1 Enoch 21:3, Beale says, there are seven stars that are equivalent to seven angels. He writes:

This evidence suggests that these stars [MH: here in Revelation] are heavenly angelic beings (see 1 En. 86:1–3 and 88:1, where stars also symbolize angels).

So again, there’s precedent for this. And just by way of a quick summary, in verse 4 we’ve got seven churches that are in Asia. We have seven spirits who are before God’s throne. And then if we keep reading, verses 12, 16, and 20, these seven stars are identified as angels. The seven lampstands are the seven churches. And the stars are also the seven spirits, so they’re also angels. I mean... And John is drawing this (as Beale noted of 1 Enoch) from a number of passages. I mean, John knows all this stuff in Daniel. He knows about the star language in Daniel and elsewhere, where you have angels identified as stars. But now he’s looping in lampstands and all this other stuff. So it’s already feeling a bit convoluted. [laughs] You know, like, “Can’t John just cite an Old Testament verse, like, close to its entirety and just talk about it and move on?” And the answer is, “No! No, he just doesn’t do that.” And we talked about this in the introduction. I’m going to keep bringing this up, at least for the first few episodes in this series, that this is not what John does. John has thoughts running through his head (or putting him in the context of the vision, he *sees things*). And his mind is so filled with lots of the Old Testament that he just starts picking things off the shelf to describe for his reader what it is that he’s seeing and also what it means, telegraphing what the imagery is pointing to. And it is not as easy as a verse-by-verse citation. He just throws it all into the blender.

10:00

So to this point, we’ve got seven spirits (who are stars, who are angels) identified with seven churches (also called lampstands). We also have... Let’s not forget Jesus [laughs] in all this. Jesus, the glorified son of man, is “in their midst.” And that is the wording of Revelation 1:13.

Now again, the “son of man” language is easy to see. We’re going to hit it now and we’re going to hit it in the next episode as well. And you should all know (at least most of the listeners in this audience are going to know) it comes from Daniel 7 where the son of man gets the deity epithet, “the one who rides on the clouds” and “comes with the clouds.” And Daniel 7, as well, features the Ancient of Days (hair and clothing white as snow, pure wool, with a throne of fire).

Now I'm going to go back just before we get a little too far into this. I'm going to read you, just so it's in your head... I mean, a lot of it already is. And I know that because we're familiar with our audience here. But I'm going to read (in case we have new listeners who aren't as tuned in to Daniel 7 as most of you are) Revelation 1:12-16. So we got verse 4 (the seven spirits and the seven churches). And then we hit verse 12:

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands [MH: so there's that], ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

You already know that that isn't from Daniel 7, and again, we'll get to all these details either in this or the subsequent episode.

14 The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire,

That's verse 14. And you know that, "Well, in Daniel 7, that's the language about the Ancient of Days, not the son of man." You're correct. "Why is John mixing the two?" Again, just hold on.

15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.

If you're thinking, "Well, that sounds a little bit like Ezekiel chapter 1 and chapter 43," well, yeah, it does. Again, John is throwing it all into the blender.

16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

And then when you get down into verse 20:

20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

So this is what's in the hopper. And it's going to take more than just one episode to get through this. You can already see that John is not merely alluding to passages like Daniel 7. He's including material from other passages—"throwing into the blender" is my metaphor. And he's applying the language in ways that the original passage didn't. If you go back to Daniel 7 you have the Ancient of

Days (well that's God), you have the son of man who comes with or on the clouds. Again, most of this audience is going to know that's a deity epithet. So the son of man is also deity. They're also going to know that this cloud-riding motif thing gets applied to Yahweh, the God of Israel, four times in the Old Testament. This is the fifth occurrence. And this time it's not applied to Yahweh, it's applied to the son of man instead. But John takes the language about the Ancient of Days (at least part of his description) and applies it to the son of man, which Daniel 7 doesn't do. I mean, this is what we're dealing with. This is what we're dealing with. John throws lots of stuff into the blender, and what comes out doesn't necessarily conform to the way you found it or how you found it in the source texts.

Now conceptually, theologically, John (in this case especially) A) is allowed to do that because the theology is consistent, and B) John feels very free to exalt Jesus to the level of Yahweh of Israel. So that's also why you get some of this mixing. I mean, John's Gospel does this all the time. This is what it's known for: high Christology. So this is John's method (if you can call it a method). "I like this passage, this passage, this passage. This has something to do with what's going on in my head or in front of my eyes. And we're going to throw it all into the blender and watch what comes out." Again, it's not just easy citations.

15:00

Now on the surface, if you're reading in Revelation 1 and you see all these sevens, and then you run into the exalted son of man, who is Jesus (even though he's described with the Ancient of Days), "Well that makes sense because Jesus is God anyway." Okay? All this is set-up. All of this is context for what follows in chapters 2 and 3. That's where you get the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor. So we know its context. It's all leading somewhere, and initially where it leads are these letters. And honestly, you can hear that much in church because it's so obvious. But there's so much more that's going on here. It's hard really to know what to take first and you'll soon discern why. Because John doesn't cite things just neatly and in order. He's not tracking on a passage in order. Just throw out the word "orderly" when you're thinking of John's method here—what he does in the book of Revelation with the Old Testament. What John does is messy. And what's happening here in Revelation 1 is sort of a classic illustration of how John alludes not only to (in this case) Zechariah 4. We're going to go there in a moment. But that passage, when he lands there and he pulls something out of that passage, that passage alludes to other passages (Zechariah 1, Zechariah 3). It's just this "follow the bouncing ball" kind of thing. And also Daniel 7.

So John is just throwing all this together. John ultimately draws upon three or four Old Testament passages instead of simply citing an Old Testament reference and then leaving it at that. He just doesn't do that. He alludes to material in several passages and combines what he uses, and then he more or less leaves it to the reader to figure out why he's doing it.

Now for the sake of this episode I'm going to leave the son of man material specifically for the next episode (or a future episode). So we're not going to spend much time in Daniel 7 in this episode at all. Instead, we're going to be spending a lot of time in the Zechariah passages. So as a way to get there, let's start with the seven spirits and the seven stars and the seven lampstands and the seven churches. So despite what seems like a simple symmetry... The angels are the spirits and the churches are the lampstands. Seems simple enough. Despite the symmetry of that and the fact that John is writing to seven historical churches (these are churches that actually existed), many scholars (and it might be fair to say "most") would consider these letters *not* to have been written *merely* (that's an important word) to those seven historical churches, but *all* churches—all bodies of believers, everywhere, for all time. And that second thought (this universalizing of the language here) doesn't seem to make too much sense. It doesn't seem logical, since we know that these churches existed, and there's all this seven symmetry. "It must be obvious John is isolating what he's saying to *these* seven." Well, not really. Because there are other things that he's doing that make it a little more apparent that he's casting a wider net. And the thinking in that regard that scholars have (that what we really have is a wider net being cast here)... They're led to think that because of where John goes in the Old Testament.

So we just looked at Revelation 1:12-16, where you get the lampstand imagery. And that takes us to verse 20. We just did that. Ultimately, though, this is going to take us back into the Old Testament and specifically Zechariah 4. So if we ask of what we've read to this point, "Hey, what's up with these seven lampstands that I run into in verse 12? I got the Spirit and the spirits and the churches and the stars and the angels. What's up with the lampstands?" So if we start there... And again, I'm just being a bit arbitrary. I'm looking for entry points here because it is messy. If we ask that question first, they are, it turns out, an allusion to Zechariah 4:1,2. And so I'm going to read Zechariah 4 (those first two verses) here, to get us into it. We read in Zechariah 4:1,2 (this is Zechariah writing or speaking):

And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep. ² And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it.

20:00

I'm going to stop there, because that's where the lampstand imagery comes from. If I kept reading, though... Well, let's just loop this in. Again, it's messy. So we're just sort of playing it by ear a little bit here. If you keep going to verse 10, it says that the angel... And boy, do we need to talk about that. And lot of that we're going to save for next episode as well, like, "Is this a special angel? Which

angel is this?" That's a whole different question. So the angel is trying to explain this to Zechariah. And he says:

¹⁰ For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

"These seven [MH: so he's referring back to the branches of the menorah here] are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth."

That's kind of cryptic. Thanks for that. [laughs] You know? What are we supposed to do with that? [laughs] So we've got a lampstand with seven branches. This is where John gets this language, back in Revelation. And those seven menorah lamps are "the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth." Okay.

Now we have to think about this description a little bit. "Eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth." Now typically scholars have understood this, and I think it's coherent for a number of reasons, but... We're just looking for an entry point here. Typically, they've understood these branches in light of this metaphor ("the eyes of the LORD") as representing God's omniscience and knowledge. And it makes sense because the metaphor is one where you have light... It's a lamp. These are branches of a lamp. So light penetrates or removes darkness so that what is hidden is revealed. I mean, it makes sense. So if these are the eyes of the Lord, it refers to the fact that God sees beyond the darkness. It doesn't obscure his vision. It doesn't hinder his knowledge of everything that's going on.

More to the point for us, though, is the "whole earth" language. "These are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth." So if this language that John is using in Zechariah 4 really expands to the whole earth, that's why interpreters of Revelation presume that the seven spirits, stars, lampstands, and angels are also to be universalized. That is, what's going on in Revelation 1-3 should not be restricted to those seven churches, but churches in general. This message is for every church everywhere. The language is representative of believers in churches everywhere. This is why scholars go this direction.

Now we're not done talking about the lampstands or the branches here. They go throughout the whole earth... John has these branches, though, as the churches whose angels or spirits are in view. Another reason why this identification sort of makes sense... I'm trying to make sense of John's logic here and really, Zechariah's logic as well. It's obvious that human beings can't see what's going on in the whole outer world, but spiritual beings can. So the eyes are more properly the spirits who are associated with the churches, okay? Did you follow that logic? Because in Revelation 1, the seven spirits who are before the throne of God are linked to the churches. You say, "Well, how can that be

universalized? Because churches are made up of people and people can't see things everywhere? And if they're God's agents, they're still people, and they can't see things everywhere." Aha, you're correct. But that's why we have the spirits connected with the churches. Because spiritual beings *can* see beyond human sight. And since these are the eyes of the LORD that go throughout the whole earth, we should not be reading Revelation 1-3 restrictively. Yes, individual churches are the localized manifestations of not only the people of God, but also God's *presence*. Let's not forget the churches also have something to do with God's *presence*. So it would make sense for God's *presence* to also be accompanied by spirits, i.e. angels.

25:00

Okay, if you're starting to think, "Well this is kind of sounding Divine Council-ish here," you're correct. You're correct. In New Testament theology, churches and believers are God's *temple*, God's *house*, where God *lives*. And where God *lives*, so does his spiritual entourage reside. If you're thinking already that... Like, wow, out of this language and John's use of Zechariah 4, we've got sort of a Divine Council family (where that spiritual council family is blended with humans), we've got that sort of imagery going on here. We've got actually Divine Council-ish imagery going on here. And guess what? If you loop the son of man into it, isn't that logical, too? Because Daniel 7 is a Divine Council meeting. "The court sat and the books were opened," Daniel 7. If you're thinking and suspecting all of that, you're on the right track. You're on the right track.

In other words, the pieces disassembled look kind of crazy. They look like they don't belong together. But when you start to think of them theologically, the pieces actually paint or come together as a coherent picture. Isn't that marvelous? You know... [laughs] it's like John knows what he's doing. It's like he knows how to build a mosaic that telegraphs the idea of God's presence in his house with his spiritual family and his spiritual agents being united to—married to, associated with—his human agents. And humans are his sacred space. It's where he dwells now. It's like John knows all this stuff and he's putting it together and he's going to do something with it. Again, if you're suspecting that, you're correct. You are onto something.

Now I want to spend a little bit more time on "eyes of the LORD" (eyes of Yahweh) just to show that this isn't Mike sucking this out of the passage because Mike wrote *Unseen Realm*. As I have said on hundreds of occasions, nothing in *Unseen Realm* is unique to Mike. [laughs] Okay? I am a sifter and a dot-connector. That's what I do. And I don't have to make up the dots. The dots are there in the text. And I look to other scholars to help me see dots so I can make connections, and other scholars make connections, too. So let's camp a little bit on Zechariah 4:1-2 and verse 10 as well—this whole "eyes of the LORD" thing. So I'm going to read it again. Because Zechariah's not a passage anybody has memorized.

And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep. ² And he said to me, “What do you see?” I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it.

It's a menorah. And then you go down to verse 10, where the angel informs Zechariah:

“These seven [MH: branches here, these lamps] are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth.”

Now Eric and Carol Meyers wrote a two-volume commentary in the Anchor Bible Series on Zechariah 1:1-8. It also includes Haggai. But in their first volume, when they are commenting on this passage, they write this:

eyes of Yahweh. This expression is analogous to the “seven eyes [of God]” as reflected in 3:9...

Zechariah 3:9. Let's just go there quickly.

⁹ For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua ...

Joshua the high priest, and that is a Divine Council scene. Again, we're not going to drift over into that one yet.

⁹ For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.

So we've got a stone with seven eyes. These seven eyes are eyes that God puts there. Okay? So the Meyerses (Eric and Carol Meyers) say:

This expression [MH: “eyes of the LORD”] is analogous to the “seven eyes [of God]” [MH: because he's the one who puts them there] as reflected in 3:9, where it is a metaphoric expression in an oracular context for God's omniscience and omnipresence.

Now that's interesting, but we like more detail here. So I have an article called "The Eyes of the Lord," which is obviously an appropriate topic. It was written in 1968 by A. Leo Oppenheim in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. It's volume 88. He spends seven or eight pages on this (the eyes of the Lord). Now I

want you to listen to what he writes here because this is basically a study of the phrase in its ancient Near Eastern context. He writes:

30:00

We know of these "eyes of the Lord" from a passage in 2 Chron. 16:9 which is quite explicit about their working and their purpose: "for the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him." The "eyes" have, as the seer Hanani points out here to Asa, king of Judah, discovered the king's wrongdoing and now God is to punish him on the basis of the information the "eyes" have relayed to him...

Let me just stop there. You can already see, obviously, that "eyes of the Lord" is a metaphor for God knowing things, God's omniscience. Oppenheim continues:

But the prophet's imagination [MH: here in Zechariah] seems to have been sparked by several heterogeneous concepts and images... He uses the following words [MH: he's going to quote Zechariah 1 here]: "I saw by night and behold a man riding on a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled and white" (Zech 1:8). The mysterious rider explains... "These are they who Lord has sent to walk to and fro through the earth" (1:10) [MH: it sounds like Zechariah 4:10, but it's actually a different verse]. The next verse tells us quite explicitly what these mysterious night-riding spies of the Lord are supposed to report: "We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest" (1:11). In another vision, Zechariah sees these men not on horseback but on chariots and he elaborates on their activities and appearances in a clearly mythological vein. Four such chariots are coming out "between the two mountains of brass" in which we have to see the entrance to heaven, the same cosmic locality characterized by two mountains between which, in Mesopotamian and related cosmologic representations, the Sun god comes forth and enters heaven every day [MH: so he cites a Mesopotamian parallel idea, then he quotes Zechariah 6:5]. "These are the four spirits of the heavens, which should go forth from standing before the Lord" (6:5). Order is given them: "Get hence, walk to and fro through the earth" (6:7). This they do on their chariots drawn by horses of different colors, each toward one point of the compass. It seems that these riders and charioteers start their rounds at night and are to roam the earth until morning when they report on what they have seen, standing again before the Lord. We have tried to trace the recurring allusions to the restlessness of these ever observant demonic [MH: basically he's using it as a spiritual *daimonic* here] or celestial beings, the "eyes" of the Lord [MH: *daimon*, spiritual being]. This search is bound to bring to one's mind the familiar passages from the Prologue to the Book of Job. When the "sons of God" come before the Lord, and when [MH: *satan*] Satan is asked "Whence comest thou?" he answers: "from going to and fro

in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (Job 1:7 and 2:2). This [MH: particular *satan*] Satan does in the service of the Lord and for the explicit purpose of watching over people—in fact, he is supposed to know them by name...

I'm going to just end the quote there. So you've heard me, both in *Unseen Realm* and various things on the podcast, talk about *satan*, that's he's basically doing his job. And God asks him, "Where have you been?" "Well, I've been going to and fro throughout..." He's one of these guys. He's a spiritual being assigned to go see who's obeying God or not, what's going on. So I'm going to try to simplify here. Oppenheim does a nice job of giving us the context of a phrase like "the eyes of the Lord" with supernatural beings who are watching people. This is an expression of God's omniscience. But the extension of that omniscience seems to be that the eyes of the Lord are God's heavenly agents who watch and keep watch (they do both)... They watch and keep watch over people. The eyes are the spirits of God's presence. They report right back to God. It's no wonder that John associates with the menorah *light* branches... (Light gets rid of darkness. It enables sight, for us.) It's no wonder that John associates with the menorah light branches this idea, which John in turn associates with the angels, or the spirits, and the churches.

35:00

So the members of the heavenly host are God's eyes. Now you might be thinking, this is kind of like our expression, like when we appoint... Maybe we have a business and we appoint somebody to be a supervisor. And the boss would say to the guy that's appointed to be the shift leader, "You're my eyes and ears." That's our expression. And that's the idea. Interestingly enough, ancient Near Eastern material does include the ears. It has this kind of thing for spies. Oppenheim points this out in his article. It's a really interesting article. But it includes the ears, too—eyes and ears of the gods. The Old Testament, though, only uses the eyes part. It doesn't use the ears. Again, that's just a bit of a sidebar I thought... You're probably thinking you've heard expressions like this, even in our own language. And we have. We talk like this. And it's the same in Scripture. It's just a way of expressing that the one whom you are an extension of, this is how that person's going to know. This is the gaining of knowledge. And in this case, God knows, God sees, because he has these agents with him who are watching and recording. This gets you into the whole heavenly books motif, which we spent a whole episode on. We're not going to rabbit-trail back into that. But again, this is what you're dealing with in this passage.

Now as I said just a few minutes ago, the metaphor of the eyes of the Lord being connected to God's knowledge works because light penetrates or removes darkness so that what is hidden is revealed. And the menorah branches—the lights, the eyes of the Lord—go through the whole earth. But John has these light branches (which ESV translates as lampstands, which isn't great, but we'll go with it)... John has the light branches as churches whose angels or spirits are in view. And again, since human beings can't see what's going on in the whole

world, but spiritual beings can, this reflects this universalized language. This is another reason why it *has* to be universalized. Because this language is true of every church, of every group of believers because God's presence is with every believing church and every individual believer. Believers are God's temple. We are God's house—all these temple/house metaphors that are in the New Testament for believers as sacred space. And we are accompanied by (dare I say) the cloud of witnesses. Or Hebrews chapter 1—the angels who are sent to assist us. Now we've got the eyes of the Lord with us as churches, as believers, as groups of believers. This is New Testament theology. It's just that John is expressing it in a very metaphorical, symbolic way. But he's drawing these metaphors and these symbols from (you guessed it) the Old Testament. And it really takes us down this road of believers being the reconstituted Council already, but not yet. You know, we have a role to play now. There's sort of the passive side of this. We're being watched. We're being assisted. This whole light metaphor—that God is sending out his eye, the eyes of the Lord, his lights, his menorah branches... God is sending them out so that he can see what's going on. And we have sort of a passive expectation there, that God sees what's going on with our lives, especially as believers. These agents are here to help us and assist. All of that's correct. There's actually an active side of it, though. Because again, these are council members in the spiritual world, and they're doing active things. They're *being light* to the world, aren't they? They are, by their presence, exposing darkness. The New Testament talks about believers this way, too. [laughs] We have a role to play now as lights to the world. We are present to and fro throughout the whole earth, are we not? The Church is sprinkled—has penetrated—everywhere on the planet. We are, just as these spiritual beings are, also his agents to go and minister to and watch others. And again, in a positive sense. "You are the light of the world." I mean, Jesus uses this language. This should not be unfamiliar.

Now Brian Tabb is an author who has really a nice book. This is part of the New Studies in Biblical Theology series, which is really a good series. It's put out by IVP Academic. And his volume is *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*. I really like the title. *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*. And he writes this of this lampstand passage. Just listen to this:

40:00

The Apocalypse's use [MH: Apocalypse is the book of Revelation] of 'lampstands' as a major symbol for the churches is significant for several reasons. First, this symbol highlights the basic contrast between the church and the world, between light and darkness... Second, the lampstand imagery signals that God's people must bear the light of God's presence and truth in the world through faithful living and speaking in the Spirit's power (11:3; 12:11). In Matthew 5:16 Jesus calls believers 'the light of the world' and summons them to let their 'light shine before others'. As lampstands, God's people do not produce light intrinsically themselves but hold up the illuminating, life-giving presence of God as they speak 'the word of God' and 'the testimony of Jesus' [MH: both of those phrases are

right out of the book of Revelation] (1:2, 9; 20:4; cf. 12:11)... Christian readers of the Apocalypse should embrace their identity as lampstands and live accordingly, eschewing worldly compromise and cowardice and anticipating the future day when the light of God's glorious presence will eradicate all the darkness.

We are the reconstituted council already, but not yet. Let's ask another question. So we asked, "What's up with the lampstands?" That's the answer. [laughs] Another question is, "What do the eyes of the Lord see in Zechariah, and does John do anything with that?" Let's go back to Zechariah 3:6-9. We've already alluded to one of the verses here. But here's Zechariah 3:6-9. Now we have the Angel of the Lord in the passage in Zechariah 3. But we're going to start in verse 6. We're not going to get distracted with the *satan* vision in the first part of Zechariah 3. In verse 6 we'll start:

⁶ And the angel of the LORD solemnly assured Joshua,

This is Joshua the high priest. And this is set in the exilic or post-exilic period, coming out of exile. At least for Judah and Benjamin. At least for a few people. [laughs]

⁶ And the angel of the LORD solemnly assured Joshua, ⁷ "Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. ⁸ Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch. ⁹ For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. ¹⁰ In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree."

I looped in verse 10. Now isn't it interesting that this reversal is associated with the Branch? It's not associated with the return of a few thousand Jews from Babylon from two tribes. It's associated with the messiah. You all know... We've done plenty of material on the exile and how people... Israel's still in exile when Jesus shows up, because all the promises about returning from exile concern all the tribes and the messiah. We're not going to rehearse all that again. But here you have it again, in Zechariah 3. It's associated with Jesus. But this is what he sees. He sees this stone. "A single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription." Let's go back to the Meyers' commentary (Eric and Carol Meyers). They write of Zechariah 3:9. This stone associated with the eyes here.

45:00

9. *this stone*. The attempt to identify this stone and understand its meaning in this verse has elicited an enormous scholarly discussion, which is summarized extensively by [MH: and then they cite a writer] Petitjean in the context of his analysis of verses 8–10 (1969:161–206). The problems in dealing with the stone are related to the difficulties surrounding the placement of verses 8–10 and the complexities of its connection with verses 6b–10a of chapter 4 [MH: we were just in chapter 4]... Zerubbabel is mentioned explicitly with respect to temple restoration and in the process “stone” appears twice. Furthermore, the stone of 3:9 is said to have “seven eyes”, a phrase very similar to the one describing the seven eyes of Yahweh that appear in the Interpreting Angel’s explication, immediately following the Zerubbabel insertion of 4:6b–10a, of the seven lamps of the menorah...

To those for whom the present attachment of this oracle to the preceding Joshua vision is of paramount importance, the “stone” set before Joshua is a reference to a component of the high priest’s garb.

So Let me just stop there. So some scholars think that “stone” refers to one of the gems on the high priest’s garb. And then they go into a little bit of an explanation about, hey, if you go back to Exodus 28, we have ornamental stones that are engraved. They have little inscriptions on them with the words “holy to the LORD” on the turban and all this stuff. But then they go on and say this:

The single inscribed stone here contrasts with the sets of inscribed stones in the high priest’s ephod shoulder pieces (two stones, each of which signifies by means of an engraved inscription six tribes) or on his breastplate (twelve stones, each engraved with a name of a tribe). At the same time, it may refer to the dedicatory stelae or stones introduced to some temple precincts and inscribed with the names of the dynasty responsible for the sacred edifice [MH: who built it]... In either case, the singularity of the stone set before Joshua is being emphasized [MH: in other words, it’s one stone], maybe to symbolize the unity of the community of which Joshua is the high priest. Since, however, this stone can likewise be related to the building stone in the Zerubbabel passage of chapter 4, the focus on *one* stone would be analogous to the role of a single fragment of the ruined preexilic temple which would have been ceremonially brought forward and laid into the renewed structure (see NOTE to “first stone”), symbolically conveying the continuity between the two.

Let me just stop there. What they’re saying is that, “Look, this is one stone. It’s not a bunch. We’re not told what’s inscribed on it.” And basically, they’re saying, “We don’t think it has anything to do with the high priest and the turban and the ephod and all this stuff.” They think that the stone here with the seven eyes associated with it and this inscription has to do with the practice—the expectation—of using a stone of the destroyed temple in the foundation of the

new one. Because the vision and this language is given to Joshua the high priest. He is now the leader of the community. There is no king. Yeah, you've got Zerubbabel. He's a governor and all that kind of stuff. And by the way, soon Zerubbabel is going to disappear from the picture. But historically, both in the books... You don't have a Davidic descendant leading the people. You've got Ezra and Nehemiah in the post-exilic age. The line of David essentially just goes into the background. It fades into oblivion, almost. You're going to get it, obviously. There's still a messianic expectation. You're going to get it with Jesus. But in the biblical story, the leader of the community is the high priest. And that high priesthood is going to get passed on. So what they're saying is, "We think that this is really about a new temple being raised up." So if you go back to... Elsewhere the Meyerses have some other things to say about this language. They would say, "Look, the seven pairs of eyes... We need to deal with that. Perhaps the usage of the eyes in Zechariah 3:9 has been affected by the chapter 4 language. They're definitely connected," is what they're saying. Chapter 4 the eyes, chapter 3 here, the whole Zerubbabel thing with Joshua the high priest. They really think it's about the return of the people to the land and a new temple. They write:

The notion of God's eyes, seven of them, reflecting his full or complete divine vision, is a metaphoric expression for God's omniscience as well as his omnipresence. A stone either with seven facets or with a design of seven eyes or pairs of eyes [MH: it's grammatically dual] would signify God's involvement with and approval of the construction of his earthly dwelling. A temple-building typology includes the notion that divine favor and assent must be associated with such an enterprise...

Several other biblical passages likewise attest to the metaphoric usage of God's eyes to indicate divine presence, specifically in the temple: Ps 11:4; 5:6–8 (RSV 5:5–7). Of course there are many additional instances, notably in Psalms, in which the presence of Yahweh everywhere is represented by his "eyes" (e.g., 34:16 [RSV 34:15]; 66:7). One passage outside the psalter is particularly interesting in relation to this verse; in Deut 11:12 God's eyes are said to be upon the land and so assuring its fertility, a situation akin to that of the restoration of peacefulness and fruitfulness that accompanies, in temple-building typologies, the building or restoration of a divine dwelling...

50:00

I mean, they're all over this. They think that all this language is about the new temple. And God's saying, "I am with you. My presence is going to be with you. I approve of the building of the new temple." All this kind of stuff. So let's ask the obvious here. Let's just assume for the sake of the discussion that the Meyerses are right here. They're tracking on Zechariah 3 and 4 with the stone language and "the eyes of the LORD" language and the "presence of the LORD" imagery that that's about. And the context of Zechariah 3 and 4, that the nation is going to

be cleansed. Joshua the high priest's garments are cleaned up. The nation is forgiven. Zerubbabel is going to lead them back. And Joshua the high priest (their leader) is coming back. And God is restoring the people, at least to the land, to whatever limited degree this means. Let's just say that the Meyerses are tracking this correctly and that John is in agreement here, that John would read Zechariah 3 and 4 and think of the same thing—this a beginning of the return from exile and having something to do with the building of the temple.

So let's ask kind of the obvious question. What does this have to do in relation to seven spirits and stars that are associated with seven churches? But really the whole Church, because the eyes of the LORD go throughout the *whole* earth. What does this have to do with each other and to John? It's as if John is thinking that the churches and the divine presence and maybe even the presence of God himself... Because the Angel of the Lord is a possibility here, as we'll learn in the next episode. In Revelation, it's the son of man, the embodied Yahweh, from Daniel 7. And in Zechariah 4, going back to Zechariah 3, going back to Zechariah 1, there is one particular angel there that might be the embodied Yahweh, the Angel of the Lord. So it's as if John is thinking of all this stuff together: churches, divine presence, Jesus, the embodied Yahweh, God embodied as a man, the son of man language. It's like John's thinking that all of that has something to do with temple and God's presence—in whose presence the Divine Council (the seven spirits before God's throne—seven angels) serve. Why, if John's thinking that, that would mean identifying the church with or as the temple and then marrying all that stuff to the Church and believers.

If you're thinking, "Well, this sounds suspiciously like New Testament temple talk," you'd be correct. [laughs] And guess where that starts in the New Testament? John. John chapter 2. "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." That's where New Testament temple talk starts: John. And of course, it sounds like Paul—his idea that believers and the local churches and the corporate Church are the temple of God. Because silly Paul, it's the body of Christ, isn't it? It's as though John's thinking that God is building his temple anew in the form of the Church (which already exists, of course, when John is writing), because it *is* the body of Christ already, but not yet! And you know what? When John winds up his book, there won't be a temple in the new Eden, either. Instead, you have the entire New Jerusalem (which also had to be rebuilt, by the way). You have the New Jerusalem. That is the place where God's presence is found, in Revelation 21. I might as well read it. Revelation 21:22:

²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

You know, again, this is John. You have the Gospel of John. You have Revelation. All of these... This is New Testament theology. What John's doing

55:00

here is, when you essentially take all the pieces and you put them in a pile, or you try to sort out the pieces of the puzzle and you start seeing how they might be connected, something forms out of that. Something forms. And what forms is this notion of believers as the reconstituted Council. Because we're the eyes of the Lord, too. And this "eyes of the Lord" language—the seven spirits and stars and angels, connected with the churches... And the churches are really us. This is... We serve in the presence of God *now*. And we are commissioned to do some of these same things. And the presence of God is here and with us, keeping us together, but also commissioning us. There's just a lot of this "already, but not yet"—this family and partner, the reconstituted Council idea. All of this is smashed together in these metaphors. Angels. Spirits. Lampstands (or these menorah lights). The eyes of the Lord. And now the stone. The temple. I mean, Peter uses this language too. The builders have rejected the one particular stone—the cornerstone—and all this. It's as though John is doing New Testament theology in a very metaphorical, symbolic way. And basically I think, yeah, that's exactly what he's doing. That's what's going on here. He's telegraphing these ideas by pulling this symbolic, metaphorical language from three or four different places. And I'll grant, he makes some assumptions when he does it. He assumes his readers are going to be able to pick up on this because he assumes that his readers are going to have this kind of knowledge of the Old Testament. They're going to know where these things come from. They're going to see that he's transferring their meaning to Christians, to the Church, to Jesus, which of course isn't happening in the original Old Testament passages. But his application of these things are theologically consistent. The New Testament theology he's building is consistent with the Old Testament theology from which he draws the data (the metaphors and the symbols).

Honestly, if you don't look at it this way, John's a crazy man. [laughs] Okay? You know, I mean, look at what he's writing here. "Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, from the seven spirits who are before his throne. And from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth." We'll get to that in a bit, when we cover verse 5 in some other episode. But I mean... "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom." I mean, he actually tells you in verses 5 and 6... Verses 5 and 6 are really proof of the angle that I'm building here, that it's really about the Church and believers and being the reconstituted Council. I'll just stop and go back. Listen to verse 5 and 6. We've got all this spirit and lampstand and church and stone and temple talk. And I'm trying to say, "Look, John is just doing New Testament theology, where we're the body of Christ. We are the reconstituted council. "Already, but not yet." All this stuff. And John just gives it to you in verse 5 and 6.

⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

He's the king.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

So amid all that spirits and angels and lampstands and churches talk, and the stone, John refers to believers as a kingdom and priests. That ought to sound real familiar. It's Exodus 19. It's Exodus 19. Let me just read the verse to you. Exodus 19:6. God through Moses, speaking to the Israelites:

⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

Kingdom of priests. When you look at it, it should be clear as to what he's doing. He takes all these pieces and throws them into the blender. But this is what he's angling for. So amid all of that, we get this talk—Church, kingdom, priests, all this stuff. Now there's a nice summary of this. I'm going to go back to Tabb's book, the book *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*. He writes this:

The opening doxology in Revelation 1:5–6 extols Jesus Christ, 'who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father'. The combination of kingdom (*basileian*) and priests (*hierais*) likely alludes to Exodus 19:6, where Yahweh calls Israel 'a kingdom of priests' (MT, *mamleket kōhănîm*) or 'priestly kingdom' (LXX, *basileion hierateuma*). Further, the reference to Christ's love and redemptive work conceptually parallel Exodus 19:4–5 [MH: the preceding two verses], where Yahweh reminds Israel that he has rescued them from Egypt and brought them to himself as his 'treasured possession among all peoples'. All the earth belongs to Yahweh as the supreme Creator, but he insists that he has chosen and delivered Israel and entrusts them with his covenant. The expression 'kingdom of priests' aptly summarizes Israel's God-given vocation as priestly mediators of Yahweh's presence, blessing and revelation to all peoples.

1:00:00

So yeah, John is throwing a lot in the blender, because all these ideas intertwine. He's certainly not separating the temple from the Church or Israel from the Church. If he was, he just made a huge mess of things. And again, I'm not a Replacement guy. The Church is a new Israel. It's not *the* new Israel. And it's an important distinction. But John is definitely looking at one as the rightful outcome of the other. So I realize this is messy.

I'm going to stop here, because we want to go back into the son of man imagery and all that stuff. That's for the next episode. But I'm hoping this episode gives you an idea of what's in store. Because John is literally like the kid in the candy shop. "I want some of that Old Testament passage, and that one, and that one!"

And now let's eat them all in one sitting!" He can't simply bring himself to cite *one* verse and then talk about it. He can't bring up *one* aspect of Jesus, or his kingdom, or his Body the Church, heaven returning to earth, the Divine Council stuff. He can't just do that. He can't just leave it go at one thing. "Let's talk about one thing at a time." He ain't doing that. He can't bring up just one aspect and settle it there. And eventually it's going to turn to final judgment and vindication and all this sort of stuff. Everything's going to get looped in here. But this is just what he does. He wants to talk about it all. And no one aspect of all this operates in isolation from the other aspects. And John doesn't care if it gets messy. So this is what it's going to be like in this series. It's going to be sort of an Old Testament smorgasbord, because that is how John operates.

TS: That's probably the perfect way to describe you as well, Mike. A smorgasbord of Old Testament. [laughter] You and John would probably get along.

MH: Yeah. You see what he's doing? It's like... I'll confess. I want a little more order [laughs] than that.

TS: Yeah.

MH: But if you're doing the dot-connecting thing, you sort of can't help it. And that's kind of what he's doing.

TS: Yeah, lots to digest there. Alright, Mike, we'll leave people with that to think about. And excited about next week, especially when we get into the weirder passages, to see what you have to say about that. But it's good. I like where we're going. Alright, Mike. Good stuff.

MH: It'll be sufficiently weird. [laughter]

TS: Perfect. That's the way we like it.

MH: I can't get any weirder than he is, but it'll get sufficiently weird.

TS: That's the way we like it. Alright, perfect. With that, Mike, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.