

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 361

Revelation 2:8-29

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### Episode Summary

Revelation 2:8-29 contain the letters to the churches of Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira. A number of content items in these verses draws on items discussed in episode 360 (Rev 2:1-7). In this episode, we rehearse some of that older content, comment briefly on the “synagogue of Satan” phrase, but ultimately focus on new connections to the Old Testament: the believer’s reception of “hidden manna,” a “white stone,” and a “new name.”

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 361: Revelation 2:8-29. I’m the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he’s the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! What’s going on?

**MH:** Well, I’m sitting in my office that is again torn apart. So I have to move my office again. This is the third time since I’ve been here. Hopefully the last. And no, I don’t like moving my office. So I’m not just doing this for giggles.

**TS:** Well, this is why I recommended you have a *home* library and not have to lug your books around.

**MH:** Yeah. [laughs] Who should I kick out? [TS laughs] Who’s the low-hanging fruit here? [laughs] Oh, boy. Yeah. Well, someday we’ll get there.

**TS:** Yeah. I hear ya. Well, Mike, I guess, since we didn’t talk too much Fantasy throughout the year, we can talk about your Packers.

**MH:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, as of this recording, we are headed into the NFL Championship weekend. So by the time people hear this, there will already have been an outcome. So I don’t know. Would I tweet something about a Packers win or loss or not? I don’t know. Maybe I should just keep people in suspense. Or better, just keep my thoughts to myself.

**TS:** Hmm. Yeah.

**MH:** But my Packers are in. So I am desperately hoping to see the Packers in the Super Bowl.

**TS:** Against hopefully my fellow Red Raider, Patrick Mahomes.

**MH:** Oh, yeah, Mahomes, yeah. Texas Tech. Yep. Well, I have another reason, too. I desperately *don't* want to see Tom Brady in another Superbowl. I'm just so tired of hearing about him. You know? For those of you who are football fans out there, just stop.

**TS:** All three of them.

**MH:** [laughs] Yeah, all three of them. You know, it's like, if you put Brady back on the Patriots, he'd look a lot like Cam Newton. Of course he looks good, because he has all this talent around him. But I'm just so tired of hearing about how he's 43 and doing this or that. Well, yeah, George Blanda did it, too. If you've ever seen a picture of George Blanda, you know there's a difference there. But still. I'm just tired of it. Go Pack. [laughs]

**TS:** Mike I forgot to mention this. Our last Q&A, when I asked you about the UFOs and we talked Fantasy, somebody commented on Facebook [laughs] and said...

**MH:** Somebody from the Pentagon commented?

**TS:** No. [laughs] That would've been funny. They probably would've done that privately. However, somebody commented, "Ugh. I tuned in for my first episode and they're talking sports and aliens. Gag," or, "Ugh," or something. You know? [laughter] and I was, like, "What a perfect episode to tune in for your first time." And you're getting sports and...

**MH:** I actually think I told you that.

**TS:** Yeah. We earned the right.

**MH:** Right. Well, it's like... Didn't I say something like, "Yeah, somebody's going to tune in for the first time and hear this"?

**TS:** Yeah. You were correct.

**MH:** So there you go. I'm a prophet now! [laughs]

**TS:** Yeah! And I'm not apologizing for it either.

**MH:** Yeah, okay.

**TS:** It is what it is.

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**MH:** Take heart, you single listener out there who posted that comment (if you've tuned back in). That doesn't happen every week. [laughs]

**TS:** No, not at all. Unless we're winning in Fantasy. Then...

**MH:** [laughs] Right!

**TS:** We'll talk about it every chance we get.

**MH:** It could be worse, you know? It could be political talk or something like that.

**TS:** Nobody wants to hear that.

*Ancient Aliens*

**MH:** I guess worse would be reviews of every episode. That would be worse. There are a lot of things that would be worse.

**TS:** Yeah, I'd get behind that. That'd be fun.

**MH:** [laughs] Oh, yeah.

**TS:** Alright, Mike. Well, we're wrapping up Revelation 2 today, aren't we?

**MH:** Yeah, we are. We're going to get all the way through. Because again, this isn't verse by verse or anything like that. We just go through the chapter and if it has some link back into the Old Testament (John referencing something in the Old Testament, doing something with an Old Testament passage), that's our focus. We are not going through Revelation to talk about Blackhawk helicopters and microchips and nanotechnology and all that kind of stuff. If you want that, you can read my novels. Because we *like* to do stuff like that in there. But for this podcast, it's biblical theology. We look at the text.

5:00

And so Revelation repurposes the Old Testament *a lot*. And if you've been following the series up to this point, you know that it gets messy, too, because John just sort of assumes that you have a solid grasp of the Old Testament and you're going to know where he's getting stuff. And then you'll be able to ask the question, "Why are you doing that, John?" And if you have a real good grasp of your Old Testament, you'll sort of be able to figure that out. So that's what we're doing as we're tracking through Revelation. Last time, we took the first seven verses (the letter to the Ephesian church). And in this case, we're going to pick up a few more churches in verses 8-29, which goes to the end of the chapter.

But we're going to have to do a little review from the last episode. Because in this chapter we hit (for instance) the Nicolaitans, which we need to say something about in this episode. But we already commented on it in the last episode. We actually ended last time with a reference to the Nicolaitans. Again, that was verse

6 at the time. But we're going to run into the Nicolaitans again in Revelation 2:14-15. I'm not going to spend too much time on this. But if you recall, last time I quoted from Aune's commentary on Revelation, his *Word Biblical Commentary*. And he wrote:

The Nicolaitans are mentioned explicitly only in 2:6 (in the proclamation to Ephesus) and 2:15 (in the proclamation to Pergamon). In 2:6, it is simply said that the Ephesian Christians hate the works (i.e., the behavior) of the Nicolaitans. In 2:14–15, the “teaching of Balaam” is apparently identical with the “teaching of the Nicolaitans” and consists of eating meat previously sacrificed to pagan deities and the practice of fornication.

Aune goes on in his commentary to wonder if Revelation 2:20-21, with its reference to “that woman Jezebel” might be linked to the Nicolaitans because both are described in relation to eating meat sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality. And the answer to that is going to be “yeah,” because what this is really angling for is these aberrant practices. There's a reason why John is referencing two prominent examples of idolatry and immorality that he wants to warn the church about. There's a reason he picks two prominent examples of just that (Balaam, Jezebel) because he wants to create this very negative association. And you know, the sin of Balaam is clear enough (we noted this last time). Israel was led to worship idols and commit sexual immorality as a result of his influence and counsel. That's Numbers 22-25 (those three chapters). And this is one of two necessary points—these connections to Balaam specifically, and then Jezebel is looped in. You have to sort of understand what the referents are to understand the consensus of scholars about the Nicolaitans, that they weren't actually a literal sect. Rather the term is pejorative. “Nicolaitan” is a pejorative term designed by etymology (you may recall this from last time) to link idolatry and immorality in general with Balaam of the Old Testament.

You say, “Well, how does that work?” Well, both terms... If you divide up Nicolaitan you get νικᾷ λαόν (*nika laōn*), which means “he or it overcomes the people.” And in rabbinic literature, the rabbis took the name Balaam, and you could divide that into syllables too, doing etymology: *bil'ām*, or *bela' 'am* or *balah 'am*. Those derivatives mean essentially the same thing, “he or it who consumes the people.” You could also go *ba'al 'am*, “he lords over people,” or “he or it rules over the people.” So there are certain etymologies that sound suspiciously like νικᾷ λαόν (*nika laōn*), “he or it overcomes the people.” And so therefore, these terms, when they're broken down into constituent parts, mean essentially the same thing. And it's for that reason (and, we should add, the specific absence of a historical sect that corresponds to John's era)... It's for those two reasons that scholars think the term Nicolaitans is just a functional pejorative. So we covered that last time. We're not going to stop at verses 14-15 here to go over it again.

So if you're listening here for the first time (and you didn't listen to the previous episode), you'll wonder, "Well, why are you skipping the Balaam stuff?" Well, it's because we've already covered it and now we've reviewed it.

So on to the rest of chapter 2. And there isn't a whole lot of specific ("specific" is the operative word) use of the Old Testament here. There are some rabbit trails, though, that we need to take. And there'll be some stopping points—some signposts along the way through the rest of chapter 2.

10:00

Let's go to verse 9, where there's a reference to the "synagogue of Satan." Let me just read the reference to get a little context here for you all. So Revelation 2:9:

**<sup>9</sup> "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.**

So there's this reference to this thing. John continues in verse 10:

**<sup>10</sup> Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. <sup>11</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.'**

So that's essentially the guts of the letter to the church at Smyrna. That's Revelation 2:8-11. And we get this reference to the synagogue of Satan in verse 9. We're going to see the same or similar reference later in 3:9. So the question is, "What is that?" Now some say just because have the word "synagogue" here (*synagōgē*), that has led some to say that the phrase "synagogue of Satan" is *inherently* (that's a key word—inherently) anti-Semitic. And that, I'm here to say, is nonsense. Okay? Yes, John is angry at a very specific Jewish opposition, which leads to followers of Jesus being persecuted. Well, duh. Like, who wouldn't be angry, you know? If you... Let's say you were a bunch of Italians or Germans or Swedes or whatever and they're betraying essentially your countrymen, of course you're going to be angry. You just shouldn't do that. But a Jew... And please recall, John *is* a Jew. Okay? [laughs] The writer is a Jew. But a Jew being angry at a fellow Jew for persecuting fellow Jews for embracing Jesus as messiah isn't anti-Semitism—this whole-cloth kind of thing. So I would say, if you think that, you need to check your definition of anti-Semitism. Because anti-Semitism is focused on ethnicity—that class of person. "You're a Jew; therefore, I hate you because you're a Jew." Again, the writer is a Jew. I mean, saying that John is anti-Semitic is like being angry at a criminal who has harmed you and

then being accused of being anti-human. “Well, criminals are humans! So you don’t like that criminal, so you must be anti-human!” It’s just ridiculous.

My point is that people can be angry at people for wicked things they do and not have that mean they are angry at *all* people in that particular villain’s subculture. So John thinks they’re liars and false Jews because Jews (at least according to the Torah)... Remember the Torah? Okay? According to the Torah, Jews were supposed to treat their brethren (their fellow Jews) with justice. Anyone who thinks clearly ought to see that out of the gate. If you know the Torah, this is Torah. This is the law. This is how you treat your fellow countrymen. And obviously these Jews in this context were not doing that.

Now you could say, “Well, okay, these Christian Jews, they’re violating the Torah. They’re holding beliefs that aren’t correct about the messiah.” Well, sure, but why don’t you just expunge them from synagogues and, “You’re not welcome here anymore.” Why do you have to turn them over to the Romans for execution or torture or whatever? Okay? It’s violating the Torah. These are not principles of justice. It’s not just designed to protect the community, it’s designed to punish and kill. Okay? So [the fact] that they are violating the Torah and persecuting brethren means that these offenders are aligned with evil. And of course, John would add that they are aligned with evil because they also reject the messiah. I mean, John obviously believes Jesus is the messiah, so we have a problem there.

But again, this is a doctrinal disagreement. And we’re not dealing with a theocracy here, because the Jews aren’t in charge of anything. What they’re doing is they’re turning their fellow brethren that they have this theological disagreement with over to persecution and death. And yeah, that’s something to be angry at, if you’re John, but that doesn’t mean you think *all* Jews are like this. You don’t put these offenders... You don’t let the offenders color the whole category, because he is one of them. Okay? And their mission is to win them over to believing in Jesus as the messiah. They can’t just turn their back and go away because that would be disobeying their messiah. This is part of why Jesus came.

15:00

So, you know, this is an overblown (but very easy to make) accusation when it comes to the “synagogue of Satan” language. It has a context. The context is very specific. It’s very understandable. So let’s just sort of have a grasp on the obvious here when we look at this phrase.

Now you also have “throne of Satan” that’s going to show up. And we need to understand “synagogue of Satan” (“they’re of the synagogue of Satan with the throne of Satan”). And the throne of Satan is not Jewish. It’s not a synagogue. It is a place specifically in Pergamon (or Pergamum—you see it pronounced and spelled either way) in verse 13. So we’re going to find out that the clearest referent to that is the pagan authority. So that alone should tell you that we are

not dealing with anti-Semitism. We are dealing with a subset of the Jewish community in league with pagan ruling authorities to persecute and kill their own brethren. That's the context. So let's check our anti-Semitism definition and have it make more sense. And if you look at the context, it's very evident that this is what John is angling for. I'll read verse 10 again. John tells the members of the church at Smyrna who are being persecuted by the "synagogue of Satan":

**<sup>10</sup> Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

You know, later in chapter 3, when we get the "synagogue of Satan" reference again... And we're going to loop "throne of Satan" in here in a moment. We read this in chapter 3. This is verses 9-11:

**<sup>9</sup> Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup> Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> I am coming soon.**

In other words, what does John suggest should be the response of those persecuted toward their Jewish brethren? Does he say, "Get revenge; retaliate"? No. He says, "Deal with the suffering. Do not fear that you are about to suffer." To use an Old Testament phrase, John opts for, "Vengeance belongs to God. Let God handle it." He does not recommend retaliation. Vengeance is the Lord's; that's not for you to decide. So again, John's the writer here. It would be kind of weird (if he was really anti-Semitic) for him to recommend a suffering response. So like I said, let's check our definitions here so that they make sense before we start blathering on about it.

Continuing, Satan's throne comes up in 2:13. Let me just read that verse. This is to the church at Pergamum.

**<sup>13</sup> "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.**

So there we have a very obvious reference to persecution again. But we have this "Satan's throne." Now there's no specific Old Testament touchpoint for this. Indirectly, though, in Revelation, Satan is connected to the dragon. There's the dragon figure in several passages. Revelation 12 is one of those, but there's at

least one other. And the dragon, of course, is a clear chaos image. Now this imagery prompts Aune to write this. This is again from his commentary:

The fact that *θρόνος* (*thronos*) [MH: throne] is articular [MH: has the definite article] suggests that the author is alluding to a specific throne (either literally or figuratively), which he expects the readers to recognize. The throne of Satan (i.e., of the Dragon) is mentioned again in [Revelation] 13:2, where the Dragon (previously identified by such aliases as the Devil and Satan in 12:9) gives it to the Beast from the Sea, which clearly suggests the association of the throne with the imperial cult. The throne of the Beast is again mentioned in 16:10, when the fifth bowl angel plunges his kingdom in darkness by pouring out the bowl of plagues on his throne. In neither 13:2 nor 16:10, however, is this throne localized, while in 2:13 it is placed in Pergamon.

20:00

So basically, to decipher all that, Aune is arguing that this “throne of Satan” or “throne of the dragon” is connected with the beast of the sea—again, a very obvious chaos imagery here. He’s going to say, “Look, this is going to be associated with a kingdom—an authority, a power—that represents chaos.” And what’s the term that John is going to use in Revelation for this kingdom? *Babylon*. Okay? And who’s the power of the day? Well, it’s Rome. It’s very obvious. So you’re dealing with a reference (this “throne of Satan,” in this case at Pergamon, and then others it’s not as specific). You’re dealing with imperial authority. And here we go again. You have certain Jews that are turning their comrades—their brethren that they have this theological disagreement with... They’re turning them over to the secular authorities for torture and death. This is the problem.

So what about the throne of Satan, though? I’ll throw this in even though there’s no clear Old Testament referent other than chaos imagery, which goes back to Babylon, which again is a term that John’s going to use in the book. Put those data points together. Connect those dots. It should be sort of obvious that this is an imperial power that is opposed to the kingdom of God. But Aune lists several options for interpreting the throne in the history of scholarship. And I thought I’d throw this in because some of you out there might find this interesting. As to where... Is there a place in Pergamon that we would associate with this? Like if we could go back in time and we were in Pergamon and we walked up to somebody on the street and say, “Hey, you know, where’s the throne of the dragon?” Or probably better, because that sounds pejorative to a pagan living in Pergamon, “Hey, where’s the seat of authority? Where would I go where all the power is held? What spot in the city would that be?” So that’s what Aune is trying to get at here. You could use certain phrases and if you were talking to a citizen, they’d, “Oh, it’s this place” or “that place.” There are certain candidates as to how this question could be answered. And here’s his list. I’m not going to go through all his notes here. But this comes from his commentary.

1. *The temple of Augustus*, perhaps originally built at the foot of the acropolis of Pergamon by permission of Augustus in 29 B.C.

So this is going to be around when John is writing. This specific site, though, for us (for moderns) has never been located. It no longer exists. And Aune comments:

This view coheres well with the view expressed in the *Testament of Job* (again, this is a Second Temple Jewish text)... *Testament of Job 3:5 and 4:4*, where a pagan temple is called ὁ τόπος τοῦ Σατανᾶ (the place of Satan).

So that's a candidate. Temple of Augustus, place of Satan according to the *Testament of Job*. Okay, let's put that on the list. That might be it.

2. *The Great Altar of Zeus Sotēr*. [MH: That's "Zeus the savior."] This elaborate column structure was constructed during the reign of Eumenes II (197-59 B.C.) to commemorate a Pergamene victory of the Gauls in 190 B.C. It was decorated with elaborate bas-reliefs depicting the Gigantomachy (that is, the battle between the Olympian gods and the giants). And, like the temple of Augustus and Roma, was located on the acropolis. Reportedly, this acropolis could be seen from all sides at a great distance. Further, the equation of the altar = throne is an ancient one.

Now I've actually put a link here on the episode page so that you can go look at a reconstruction of the Great Altar of Zeus *Sotēr* with the Gigantomachy (the battle between the Olympian gods and the giants), the sculptures of how it would have looked. Because there are pieces of this that remain. And there are actually several projects. When I was in, oh, let's see... When I was in Vienna for an International Society of Biblical Literature meeting (boy, this was years ago), they had part of this on loan, I think, from the museum at Berlin, which is where you could go see it. And it's pretty spectacular, the recreation. But it's obviously associated with the war between the gods and the giants. And so this becomes a candidate for "Satan's throne." Again, nobody's sure. But it's kind of an interesting possibility.

3. *The judge's bench or tribunal* where the proconsul sat to judge could be referred to here as the throne of Satan. The Roman proconsul...

Again, it's imperial authority. This is where the imperial figure who's going to decide cases, where he sits.

25:00

The Roman proconsul resided at Pergamon and it was to Pergamon that Christians in the surrounding area were brought after being denounced by informers, even at a later date.

4. *The temple of Asklepios*. Asklepios was linked in special ways with the symbol of the serpent, which Christians associated with Satan (Rev 12:9, 14, 15; 20:2; 2 Cor 11:3).

5. Pergamon as a center of persecution.

In other words, really, the city itself. “The throne of Satan,” “the dominion of Satan” just is Pergamon generally, which caused the oppression of Christians. So there’s a possibility there. And Aune cites verse 13 here about Antipas being slain, a martyr, so on and so forth “where Satan dwells.” So maybe it’s just a reference to the city or the town. It’s certainly not a Jewish group. It’s the locus of authority.

6. Pergamon as a major center of the imperial cult.

Maybe, again, it’s the city for that reason.

7. Pergamon as an important center for Greco-Roman religion generally – city full of idols.

Then lastly:

8. The shape of hill on which the city was built.

Perhaps it had some sort of serpentine feature.

I mean, honestly, who knows? There are some good candidates there. I kind of favor the Great Altar of Zeus. But again, I’m not basing that on anything other than just the nature of the altar and the fact that Zeus claimed to be the Most High. We’ve talked about this, I think, in the first or second episode of this series— how Zeus was referred to as *Υψιστος* *hypsistos* (the Most High) and that’s the episode we talked about the Name. If that’s the case, it could’ve been associated by Christians with the desire for another deity to be called Most High, which would take their minds back to Isaiah 14, so on and so forth—rebellion in the council. And again, I like the Great Altar of Zeus because it’s about rebellion in the council and these wars. Who knows? The honest answer is, “Who knows?” But I kind of prefer that one just because it has more than just one connection to it.

Now all of that is backdrop and incidental or indirect references. Let’s get to some specific Old Testament references. If we keep going in chapter 2 (and we’re still in the letter to Pergamon), we get verse 17:

<sup>17</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'

Now there are three metaphors, essentially, here for eternal life in Revelation 2:17, and they all have Old Testament antecedents. So let's just break verse 17 down. The first one, the "hidden manna." Of course, manna was the food of angels. There's a reference to that effect in Psalm 78:25 (in the Septuagint it's 77:25). Why is it called the food of angels? Well, because it's food from heaven, and heaven is where the angels are. Food that they eat... This must be what the angels eat because the food is dropping from heaven. You know, it's Exodus 16, the story of the manna. You can also find references to manna because it's food from heaven—that this is the food that will be served at the ultimate meal with God—the marriage supper of the Lamb, which is the event (the gathering) toward which all the previous biblical meals with God move (or are related to). There are lots of meals with God in the Old Testament. Genesis 18 is sort of an obvious one. But you've got Exodus 24: Moses, Nadab, Abihu, and Aaron go up and sit with the elders, they see the God of Israel, and they have a meal. There are a number of these kinds of events that foreshadow the ultimate meal with the Lord, which is the marriage supper of the Lamb, the Day of the Lord meal when everything is consummated and, as I've mentioned before, where Leviathan is served for dinner. Leviathan is consumed. Chaos is consumed. It is no more. So there's a lot of imagery here. John 6:31-35. Let's just read that because I think there's a tie-in here with manna, obviously. This is the "bread of life" passage.

30:00

<sup>31</sup> **Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'** <sup>32</sup> **Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.** <sup>33</sup> **For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven [MH: "that would be me," Jesus might have said to himself] and gives life to the world."** <sup>34</sup> **They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."** <sup>35</sup> **Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.**

So the "bread of life" passage, food from heaven, this whole idea, is of course associated with Jesus. And that association in turn makes us think of the marriage supper of the Lamb. All these ideas are related. They're all connected. And so this reference to "hidden manna":

<sup>17</sup> **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers [MH: the one who overcomes] I will give some of the hidden manna...**

In other words, you're going to be at the table. You're going to be at the table.

Now Beale writes this of this passage in his massive New International Greek Text Commentary on Revelation:

**The promise of “hidden manna” is a metaphorical portrayal of end-time fellowship and identification with Christ, which will be consummated at the marriage supper of the Lamb and which those refusing to participate in pagan feasts [MH: remember the idolatry problem?] will be rewarded with [MH: that fellowship—with that supper]... Manna was also a portrayal of eschatological expectation in Jewish writings [MH: and then he cites a bunch of rabbinic texts] (so *b. Hagigah* 12b; *2 Bar.* 29:8; *Sib. Or.* 7.149; *Midr. Rab. Eccl.* 1.9; cf. *Exod.* 16:32ff. with *2 Macc.* 2:4–7), a promise was sometimes addressed to those not worshiping idols...**

“Refuse what’s going on with idolatry and you’ll get hidden manna.” This was a familiar thought in the Second Temple period. “We’re not going to eat food served to idols. We’re not going to participate in these rituals, because we want to have a seat at the table of the Lord, the messiah, at the last day.”

Some have proposed that the hiddenness is linked to the Jewish tradition that Jeremiah hid the manna in the ark before the temple was destroyed and that it would be revealed again when the Messiah came (cf. *Exod.* 16:32ff. with *2 Macc.* 2:4–7).

We’ve done an episode a long time ago, it seems now, on what happened to the Ark of the Covenant. We get into some of these Jeremiah legends and whatnot. But I did an episode on this on FringePop, too. But again, Beale comments that there were some that thought, “Well, Jeremiah hid it. It’s going to come out when the messiah returns.” So on and so forth. Beale adds another thought:

This [MH: whole set of ideas] is not incompatible with the understanding of the hiddenness described above [MH: so maybe the ark, the presence of God, these ideas sort of go together]. The manna given to Israel in the wilderness was also said to have been “hidden in the high heavens... from the beginning” of creation (*Targ. Ps.-J. Exod.* 16:4, 15)

You ask, “Well, where is that?” That’s actually the Targum, one of the... Targum is an Aramaic translation, so an Aramaic translation of the Old Testament, specifically Exodus 16:4-15. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan actually says this about the manna:

The manna given to Israel in the wilderness was also said to have been “hidden in the high heavens... from the beginning” of creation... and was ultimately to prosper Israel “at the end of days” (*Targ. Neof.* [MH: or Exodus] 8:16).

Now again, these are late texts. I thought I’d throw that in there because they’re kind of interesting. It tells you that there are certain ideas in the Jewish community about manna. But these texts are much later than John’s era. But nevertheless, they’re interesting.

Next part of the verse, 2:17b, what is up with the “white stone”? Let me just read the verse again.

**17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’**

Like, what’s up with the white stone? The Greek here is *psēphos leukēn*. And Aune writes this:

*Psēphos* means “pebble,” “stone,” and so “gem” (Philostratus *Vita Apoll.* 3.27; Artemidorus *Oneir.* 2.5: “the stone in a ring we call a ψῆφος”); it can even be used in the more specific sense of “magical gem” or “magical amulet” (*PGM* XII.209, 280; cf. IV.937, 1048, 1057). Most frequently, however, since ψῆφοι were used for voting [MH: casting votes], ψῆφος came to mean “vote.” The adjective λευκοί, “white,” is used of *favorable* votes (*SEG* 26:1817.80; see Horsley, *New Docs* 1:39; Horsley, *New Does* 4:209).

Beale has some of these same thoughts, but he adds a little bit of information here. He says:

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There may be no single background for the “white stone.” It could be intentionally allusive and suggest diverse but compatible historical associations. The presence of multiple backgrounds is a phenomenon we have already encountered and will meet again throughout the book...

That’s an understatement. I mean, John draws stuff from everywhere.

A white stone was commonly associated with a vote of acquittal [MH: and he cites] (cf. 4 Macc. 15:26; Acts 26:10 [MH: for casting the votes]) or a favorable vote. Conversely, a black stone indicated guilt...

Let me just stop here. So if you had a council or community or Sanhedrin or whatever there casting votes, you'd get white or black stones. White stones, you're not guilty, you're acquitted; black stone, you're guilty. So this is a culture thing.

The "white stone" also enforces the idea of the "manna" as a heavenly reward, since the OT describes the heavenly manna as resembling [MH: get this] white bdellium stones (cf. Exod. 16:31 and Num. 11:7). The LXX of Num. 11:7 compares it to "the appearance of *rock crystal*."... The association of white with righteousness in direct connection with admission to a banquet is expressed in 19:8–9, where the "fine linen, bright and clean" [MH: this is Revelation 19, these are the people invited to the marriage supper] represents "the righteous acts of the saints," which is directly followed by the reference to being "*invited* to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (always elsewhere in the book "white" is metaphorical for righteousness [so 13 times]). Whiteness probably also connotes the victory won by the person who conquers through persevering faith and righteousness (cf. 6:2; 19:14).

So "to the one who overcomes, I will give him the hidden manna and a white stone." Again, it's a vote of approval. "You belong here. You're clean. You're righteous." Why? "Because of your believing loyalty to the messiah, to Jesus." So again, it has this Old Testament precedent and this wider Second Temple Jewish precedent of voting and acquittal and these sorts of things like this. So this is what... John is drawing from this. But for me personally, it is really interesting, the Exodus 16:31, Numbers 11:7 references about comparing manna to the appearance of rock crystal or white bdellium stones I think is really interesting here.

Last component. So you get a white stone "with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it." So here's the basic question, this third element. Does the wording that John has here point to a divine name (in other words, the name of God or Jesus) being written on the stone, or does it refer to the name of the conquering Christian to whom the stone is given? Which is it? Now scholars have speculated that the idea might be drawn from a couple of Old Testament passages. One is Isaiah 62:2, where God is speaking of Zion. And we read this:

**<sup>2</sup>The nations shall see your righteousness,  
and all the kings your glory,  
and you shall be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the LORD will give.**

So there's this new name for Zion. It doesn't really answer the question, though. (Is it God's name or is the Christian's name?) Another possible source is Isaiah

65:15, and again, God is speaking about the enemies of his people, and we read this:

**15 You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse,  
and the Lord God will put you to death,  
but his servants he will call by another name,**

It still doesn't really answer the question. But in this one, there's this hint of identification, this hint of "you belong to me," that sort of thing, in that Isaiah 65 reference. Now Aune picks up on this and he looks at one of the Targums for Isaiah 65:15, this last part about being called by another name. And he writes this:

In Tg. Isa. 65:15b this notion of a "different name" is connected with another concept found in Revelation, the second death...

Let me go back to the passage here in Revelation 2:17.

**17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'**

40:00 And back up just a few verses, verse 11:

**11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.'**

The second death, of course, is the final judgment—your eternal separation from God. So Aune says... It interests Aune that you've got this "being put to death" in Isaiah 65:15, the enemies of God are going to be put away, ostensibly forever, "but his servants will be called by another name." So Aune looks at this and he says, "You know, in the Targum of Isaiah 65:15, both of these ideas are connected, and we find them both in Revelation, one in verse 11 and one in 17." He says, "That's kind of interesting. We have both of these." And then he quotes Isaiah 65:15b again. He quotes Revelation 2:11, which we just did. He says:

There is an[other] obvious parallel with Rev 3:12, where the exalted Christ says that the name of God, the name of the city of God, and "my own new name" will be written on the conquering Christian...

So let's just go to that verse (Revelation 3:12). And this is something we'd run into in the next episode, but we'll hit it here.

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**12 The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'**

So Aune's saying, "You know, we probably ought to be thinking about this in Revelation 2:17 with what is said in Revelation 3:12. It might answer the question." He also references Revelation 19:12...

... (see 19:12, where the exalted Christ appears under the imagery of a conquering warrior who "has a name inscribed which no one knows but he himself").

Now Aune relates all of this... He goes through all this. And he goes back to the stone idea and how white stones were used of magical amulets that bore the names and epithets of deities, and how divine names were used in healings and exorcisms in the early church. And so he lands... If you asked him, "Which is it? Is it the name of God or Jesus or the name of the Christian on the stone?" he lands on the name being the name of God or Jesus, for all these reasons. I would say it probably is just simpler just to go to Revelation 3:12. And this is what Beale does. Beale writes this of the language:

The "new name written" on the stone confirms further the idea of an end-time supper in which intimate fellowship occurs. 3:12 reveals that the name in 2:17 is a pregnant reference to "the name of my God, the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and my [MH: that is Christ's] new name," which is written on the believer.

So Beale says point blank, Revelation 3:12 is the answer to the question of Revelation 2:17c (the third part). Now again, that's a fairly clean path, just to appeal to Revelation 3:12. It makes sense. So the answer to the question would be, "It's not the Christian's name that's written on the white stone; it's the name of God. It's the name of the New Jerusalem. It's the name of Jesus. This is what's written on the stone. Because it's like your ticket in." [laughs] Okay? It's your pass. It's the thing that grants you admittance. These are symbolic references here, too. If you are identified with God and the New Jerusalem (and of course Jesus), you're in. It goes with the End Times supper. This is your admission ticket to the meal, to the hidden manna, all this stuff. So to me, I think that makes the best sense, rather than the name of the Christian. And here's another reason why I like it. What do we really have here? We have Name theology. We're going to see its reverse, by the way, later on when we get to the beast. How do we know those who are aligned with the beast? His name, his number, is upon them—this idea of the name indicating ownership. It's Name theology—all the

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way back to the Old Testament. And we've had Carmen Imes on the show, *Bearing the Name*, her book, her popular version of her dissertation, which was also published as a scholarly work. But bearing the name. Bearing the name. This is what it is. Revelation 2:17 is about bearing the Lord's name. And that indicates that you're in the family. You are his. So to me, there's a very strong attachment to Old Testament thinking here. And to illustrate it, I'm going to... Aaron's blessing (Numbers 6:22-27). And Carmen references this in her book, obviously. But it reads as follows:

- <sup>22</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>23</sup> "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,**
- <sup>24</sup> The LORD bless you and keep you;**
- <sup>25</sup> the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;**
- <sup>26</sup> the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.**
- <sup>27</sup> "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."**

So this was a priestly gesture to identify the people as the people of God, with the Lord. They are *his*. Called out among all the nations. They're the subset, the elect. All these ideas intertwine. And to me what we have here in Revelation 2:17 and Revelation 3:12 is a New Testament application of the same idea. And again, we're going to get its reverse later on—to not have the name of Jesus on you, but the name of the beast. It couldn't be any clearer. Again, these are symbolic, metaphorical ideas. It's not like when you die and you get to heaven, somebody (an angel) walks up to you with a stamp. "Kachunk. There's the four consonants on your forehead." You know? That isn't the idea. The idea is ownership. The Lord knows those who are his, who are aligned with him. They bear his name. They represent him. They are his imagers. And it's the same thing on the other side. To refuse, to reject the gospel (according to the book of Revelation) is to align yourself—to be an imager—of the beast (the dragon, Satan, all this stuff that goes with the other side). So it goes back to the priestly blessing. It goes back to the name. Think of *Unseen Realm* here. I spent three chapters here talking about the Name theology. The Name is another way to refer to God himself. The Name of the Lord appears visually in certain contexts. It's God embodied in human form. All these ideas wind up funneling into Jesus, and here we get them applied to believers.

Now again, if you keeping going in chapter 2... To be honest with you, I cover all of this stuff in *Unseen Realm*. But if we continue on in Revelation 2, here's what we read. Verse 18-29 is the letter to the church at Thyatira. So it starts off in verse 18:

- <sup>18</sup> "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.**

That harkens back to chapter 1. Description of the Son of Man, the Ancient of Days, merged into one.

**<sup>19</sup> “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. <sup>20</sup> But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel...**

So just as the church of Ephesus was *resisting* the idolatry and the immorality, here at Thyatira, they're giving in. He says, "I have this against you. You tolerate that woman Jezebel"—using her as a symbol of pagan religion that involves sexual immorality (that's verse 20) and eating foods sacrificed to idols (verse 20). Why? Because, like Paul discussed in 1 Corinthians 10 (we talked about this last week), this was to have fellowship... To sit at whose table? The table of demons. The table of the fallen gods. You're on the other side when you do this.

**<sup>21</sup> I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.**

Again, the pagans have been warned here. So on and so forth. There's a reference here to just general people who follow other gods. And so there's a judgment laid out. "I'm going to strike her children dead. The churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart." So the church is sort of getting caught up in this judgment—in this punishment.

**<sup>24</sup> But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. <sup>25</sup> Only hold fast what you have until I come.**

"So some of you people in Thyatira are holding the line. And I know it and I see it. Just keep up with that."

**<sup>26</sup> The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, <sup>27</sup> and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. <sup>28</sup> And I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'**

And that's how chapter 2 closes. Now both of those things... Verse 26, "I will give him (the one who overcomes) authority over the nations," quoting a messianic psalm about believers, messianic psalm aimed at Jesus, the authority over the nations. But it's actually quoted here of believers. And then the morning star—sharing the morning star, the messiah. Again, morning star is a symbol of messianic rulership. But that gets shared with believers (those who overcome). I've discussed both of those at length in *Unseen Realm* so I'm not going to repeat

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that content here. Most of you have read *Unseen Realm*. If you have not, well, you need to read *Unseen Realm* to follow a lot of what we're doing here. But again, I'm not going to just rehearse that content.

But what you have here is you have, at the end of days, those who overcome—those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb, those who are in, those who are united to Christ. Their believing loyalty has held firm. Those are the people who will inherit the rule of the nations. Well, who rules the nations now? Deuteronomy 32 worldview. It's the fallen gods who Paul calls demons in 1 Corinthians 10. He says, "Don't have fellowship with them by participating in feasts (and of course immorality) with those guys." Okay, you've got to pick sides. You've got to pick sides. You do not want to be in fellowship with the other side because ultimately, they will be displaced and replaced. And who are they replaced by? Human believers who inherit the rule of the nations. And the nations are brought back into the family of God.

Again, this is the Deuteronomy 32 worldview on the New Testament side. For those who have read *Unseen Realm* or followed this podcast or my content, this is biblical theology 101. And that's a good thing. That's a good thing. Because these are the kinds of things that tie both testaments together. So if this is new to you, read *Unseen Realm* to get up to speed. But these are important metaphors that show how the Deuteronomy 32 worldview works out.

I might as well throw in 1 Corinthians 6:3. If this is new to you, I challenge you. Read 1 Corinthians 6:3:

**<sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we are to judge angels?**

Or "rule over angels" (however you want to translate that). The commentators have no idea what to do with that. This audience knows *exactly* what to do with that. It goes into this motif of the gods who were put over the nations in judgment at Babel. Deuteronomy 32:8, reading that with the Septuagint and with the Dead Sea Scrolls.

**When the Most High divided up the nations, he divided them up according to the sons of God, but Israel is Yahweh's portion; Jacob is his allotted inheritance.**

That Deuteronomy 32:8-9. You know exactly what to do with that. The nations were judged at Babel, put under other gods (the *elohim*, members of the heavenly host). They were placeholders. But they become corrupt according to Psalm 82. They rule the nations terribly. They sow chaos among the nations. God sentences them in Psalm 82 at a meeting of him and his council that, "You're going to die like men. *You're going to die like men*. I'm going to do away

with you.” And other passages, like Isaiah 34. Isaiah 27 talks about the judgment of the heavenly host. This is what it is. This is what it is.

So this is why when Paul goes to these nations, he knows exactly what he’s dealing with. All the nations other than Israel are under dominion of hostile powers of darkness. They’re not mere demons. Demons are low level on the pecking order. These guys are geo-political entities. This is where Daniel gets his theology—Daniel 10, prince of Persia, prince of Greece. “Oh, that’s cool. Supernatural beings over nations.” Have you ever asked where Daniel gets his theology? He gets it from Deuteronomy 32:8-9. And the outcome of all that at the eschaton is that all of those dudes are judged, done away with, destroyed finally. At the end of Psalm 82, the psalmist gets what he asks for. “O God, rise up and take back the nations.” That’s accomplished in final form. It’s accomplished in “already, but not yet” form in the epistles. (We spent a lot of time on this stuff.) But it’s accomplished in final form. “And you, as a believer,” to those members of the churches John was writing to, “to those of you who overcome, who don’t fall into unbelief, who don’t go over to the other side, who remain steadfast in your believing loyalty to the gospel, you’re going to inherit those nations. It’s going to be *you*, not them. It’s going to be *you*.”

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So this is how Revelation 2 wraps up. And so for next time, we are going to wander into Revelation 3. We actually did a little of that today. But again, we can’t help it, because some of these themes repeat. But my goal is to get substantially into Revelation 3. We might be able to get through the whole thing, because there is some repetition. But this is what we’re trying to do. When John is writing this stuff, what are the antecedents in the Old Testament? What is he doing theologically? How is he tying data points together to teach believers something or to warn them. And also to remind them, “This world is not your home. This is what awaits you. Remain faithful. Because if you don’t, you’re going to be destroyed with them—with the other side. It’s for all the marbles. This is why you remain steadfast. You remain loyal to the gospel. You don’t switch your belief system—your belief commitment—to anything else, especially idolatry (worship of other gods). It is the foundational, fundamental thing that you don’t do.” Okay? [laughs] You couldn’t get any more clear in the Old Testament. Idolatry is the thing that separates you from God. And resistance to it (your loyalty to the true God) is the thing that makes you part of his family. Point blank, it’s fundamental. It’s obvious when you think about it. And this is where John is going. He wants them to come out of the right side.

**TS:** Alright, Mike. If anything, I’m learning how to pronounce some of these words, like Thyatira (thie uh teer’ uh). [MH laughs] Or is it thie uh tie ruh? Which one is it?

**MH:** I prefer thie uh teer’ uh. I mean, you’ll hear it pronounced both ways. But it’s not like it matters a whole lot.

**TS:** Still, I’d rather hear a professional pronounce it than me spit-balling it.

**MH:** [laughs] We should go out and hire a professional. [laughter]

**TS:** And also, it's time to read *Unseen Realm* again, Mike. I think everybody needs to start the year every year and just re-read it, to get your bearings.

**MH:** Yeah, well, this is why on the front page of the podcast, we have, "Are you new? Start here." Right up at the top. You get those couple of videos. And that gives it to you in a nutshell. So that's good. But you're right; it's not a substitute for the book. But it at least gets your feet wet.

**TS:** Well, with that, we'll be looking forward to chapter 3 next week. And I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.