

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 367

Revelation 4, Part 2

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Episode Summary

This episode continues our discussion of Revelation 4, a heavenly council/courtroom scene structured after the divine council scene of Daniel 7 (Part 1). But Daniel 7 is far from the only passage used by John. In this episode we'll discover how John repurposes imagery of the cherubim of Ezekiel 1, the encounter with God at Sinai in Exodus 19, the seraphim of Isaiah 6, and the rainbow of Genesis 9. The vision of the cherubim chariot-throne (Merkabah) of Ezekiel 1 is especially noteworthy, and takes our study into the subject of astral prophecy.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 367: Revelation 4, Part 2. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you?

MH: Pretty good. It's warm here. We have weather this weekend (now and forecast) for the 80s. So it might be time to have the pugs take a dip in the pool. Supervised, of course.

TS: Sure, sure. Have *you* taken a dip yet in the pool?

MH: No, but I would take them in. I would do that. I would do that, just for the experience.

TS: Well, be sure you take pictures and post it so we all can...

MH: Yeah, "the Pug Pool Party Experience." [laughs]

TS: We're all wanting to see what that looks like. So please...

MH: Yeah, hopefully it doesn't involve resuscitation or anything. [laughter]

TS: Yeah. What's the hottest it gets there in Jacksonville? Do you know? And it's kind of humid there, too.

MH: Yeah, it's *real* humid. You know, it got into the mid-90s with high humidity. You'll get higher temperatures in the Southwest or something. But you don't have the humidity there. Yeah, that what makes it hard, just the... It's so sticky. You know, you go out and you walk around the house and it looks like you took a shower. And you probably need to take a shower. But it's what it is.

TS: I lived in Savannah, GA, for a year, and at 100% humidity, I'd walk out and boom, I'd just be wet. It was miserable.

MH: Mm hmm. Yep.

TS: Yeah. But my hair looked good. [laughter]

MH: Your hair looked good. Well...

TS: Yeah, all that humidity did wonders for my hair.

MH: Did it curl up?

TS: I have no idea, Mike. I can't remember. It was a long time ago.

MH: So that was not high school. Like, you weren't doing football practice in that.

TS: Oh, no, no.

MH: Because I remember doing that in high school.

TS: I did it in Texas, where it was 120° doing football practice.

MH: Yeah.

TS: I mean, that was worse.

MH: Ridiculous. Yeah, that's ridiculous.

TS: Yeah, I'm getting flashbacks. We need to move on. [MH laughs] Because I'm starting to have physical tremors here. But hey, we're doing Part 2. And we're going to have three parts of Revelation 4. We've got lots to talk about here.

MH: Yeah. Hopefully it won't be four parts. We'll try to get it all in next time in Part 3. But yeah, here we are. There's just so much going on related to the Old Testament in these chapters. So I don't want to just arbitrarily skip something just for the sake of not doing a separate part. So here we are. But we might as well just jump in here.

We should probably say something about Part 1. If somebody's just jumping in here, you probably need to go listen to Part 1 before you hit this one. Although maybe I can summarize things. Last time we closed with some material from Alan Bandy. Basically, the focus of Part 1 was how Revelation 4-5 repurposes something called the covenant lawsuit genre of the Old Testament, which is a fancy way of saying you have these scenes in the Old Testament that are courtroom scenes. And you have certain courtroom scenes that just involve people. That's actually the minority, though. Usually it's God sort of in a courtroom setting or with courtroom language. And there's a technical term for this: the *rib* (pronounced "reev"). That's a Hebrew term for "lawsuit" or "quarrel" or "contention" or "debate" or something like that. You'd have God bringing a *rib* (a lawsuit) against his people for violating the covenant. So there are a bunch of these where God is the judge and the jury and the prosecutor—either all those parts or the majority of them. And in some of those, that courtroom is set with the Divine Council. It's a heavenly courtroom. You have witnesses there—members of the heavenly host—that are part of the proceedings. So this is the backdrop to Revelation 4-5. You know, Bandy... I'll just take a little slice of what we closed with with him. He says:

The letters to the seven churches constitute lawsuit speeches whereby Jesus conducts a forensic examination of his covenant people.

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So even in the first three chapters, you have this sort of lawsuit or courtroom kind of challenge, where there is an indictment being issued. And do the people that are being spoken to do well? Are they vindicated? Or do they have something to change or to fix here? Bandy says:

The form of the letters generally distinguishes them as prophetic oracles similar to the OT prophets [MH: so again these letters themselves pattern themselves after things that you'll find in the prophets]... [T]he Book of Revelation follows the pattern of the OT prophetic lawsuit that begins with the people of God. The judgments and promises announced for the churches in the seven letters remain contingent upon what they do in response to these oracles.

So he describes this a little bit. But he makes the point (toward the end of this quotation that we ended Part 1 with) that in the first three chapters you have this dialogue between Jesus (the one telling John to write—the exalted Ancient of Days/Son of Man figure)... And it sounds like that's the only thing happening in the dialogue. But later Bandy points out that the proceedings here and the content of some of these things is going to be transferred over or carried over into an indictment of the nations. Not God's people per se, but their enemies as well. And so that's where Revelation is going to be heading. So Bandy says, "Look, this covenant lawsuit thing begins with the letters to the churches, and it's

going to be found throughout the book. But Revelation 4-5 is really sort of the big one.

I mentioned at the end of the last episode Beale and Carson. It was actually Beale and (I think) McDonough, the ones who actually wrote the part of that Old Testament in the New Testament commentary that's edited by Beale and Carson. They look at Daniel 7, which is a very famous and indisputable Divine Council (divine courtroom) scene, and there are 14 points—14 features—of Daniel 7 that occur in Revelation 4 and 5 in the same order. So it's very clear that John is tracking on Daniel 7. And I'm going to use that as a segue because... I didn't quote this in the first episode, but one of the other sources that I introduced to the audience in the introductory episode to this series, which is "The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation" by Steve (I always wonder if I pronounce his name correctly) Moyise. His book is *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*. It's an edited volume. He actually references Daniel 7, too. And he has a chart in his book (actually a series of charts) where he'll map parts of Daniel 7 over to Revelation 4.

So I'm just going to give a few examples here in the first 10 verses of Revelation 4. What parts of Daniel 7 show up? Well, in Revelation 4:2a (the first part of the verse), that references throne(s) in heaven, which is Daniel 7:9a. Revelation 4:2b references God on the throne. That's 7:9b. Then Revelation 4:3a (the first part of 4:3) you have an appearance of the deity—appearance of God. That's also Daniel 7:9c (the third part of that verse). Revelation 4:5, you have fire before the throne. And again, that's in Daniel 7:9-10. You have throne attendants (again, here you get the heavenly host language) in Revelation 4:4b and then 6-10. Again, that's Daniel 7:10b (the second part of that verse). So you could track all the way through Revelation 4 and 5 and find these elements from Daniel 7. It's very easy.

Now for what we're going to do in this part, we need to add some things because we're going to go in a few different directions here. But again, tied back into these scenes (the Divine Council courtroom scenes) to these items in Daniel 7 could be added (when you get into Revelation 4) Ezekiel 1 cherubim imagery and Isaiah 6 seraphim imagery. You get fire again. Which you could go to Isaiah 6 and see that. You could go to Ezekiel 1 and see that. What will become evident is that John is effectively casting the throne room scene in Revelation 4-5 with elements from Daniel 7 *and* Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6—three Divine Council scenes. And each one of those scenes reinforces the idea of God's sovereign rule and

his oversight. He is ultimately judge of all things. And that's going to be a theme that'll emerge in Revelation 4 pretty quickly.

10:00 But I'm going to read (for the sake of our episode here) a few verses from Revelation 4 so that you can mentally go back and catch some of these images in these three major passages (Daniel 7, Ezekiel 1, Isaiah 6). There are going to be others, but those are the three main ones. And they're all Divine Council scenes. So I'll just start in verse 1 here. And we'll read maybe through verse 10. Some of these things we've talked about a little bit before. You're going to hear references to white garments and crowns. We had those in earlier chapters of Revelation and earlier episodes. But a lot of new stuff here. So John writes:

After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." ² At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. ³ And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. ⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. ⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, ⁶ and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. ⁸ And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

**"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!"**

⁹ And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four

elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

**¹¹ “Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.”**

So that’s actually the entirety of chapter 4. We won’t go into chapter 5. But you can see right away how parts of Ezekiel 1, parts of Isaiah 6... Of course we’ve already tracked with the Daniel 7 thing in the last episode a little bit here. You have an amalgamation of very obvious and noteworthy divine throne room (Divine Council) scenes—God with his attendants and so on and so forth. Whereas Daniel 7 is really capturing a courtroom imagery because it uses... It has references to multiple thrones being there, “the court *sat* and the books were opened” (Daniel 7). So the context for this is pretty clear. And these all are going to provide some input into how we parse some of the elements here in chapter 4.

So let’s just start in verse 1 and we’ll work our way through as to what’s going on here. It’s not only these three passages; there are going to be some others here, but these are the three primary ones. Now as we do this, just think about... And for people in this audience who are familiar with *Unseen Realm* (my book), a lot of this you’ve already probably mentally looped in. Because heavenly courtroom—heavenly throne room—well, those aren’t really separable from where God lives, his house, these sorts of images. Because they all tended to overlap in Old Testament thought. And if you can sort of remember that point, then you can ask yourself, “Well, where else does God live in the Old Testament?” Well, he lives on mountains and gardens. And cosmic mountain is a big theme in *Unseen Realm*. We’re going to draw on all of that here.

So Revelation 4:1:

...the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet...

Let me just stop right there. I’m going to take a little bit of a rabbit trail and I’m going to do a little bit of End Times systems here, just a spasm—just a note. The verse does not say that a trumpet sounded. It’s not what it says. A voice. He hears a voice speaking to him, and the voice sounds like a trumpet. It’s not a trumpet, it’s a voice. So we must be talking about something like volume here,

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something really loud. That's the point. And this has an Old Testament precedent, which we'll get to in a moment. The text clearly has John hearing a voice that came to him *like* a trumpet. It has some point of similarity to a trumpet. It's not a trumpet, just some point of similarity. So the verse actually provides no connection to presumed rapture passages (I mean, other passages in the New Testament that people are either going to interpret as a rapture or second coming or something else). It doesn't really have a specific connection when it's just a trumpet, because this is a voice.

Now another sidebar. Those who hold to a pre-trib rapture add this thought to Revelation 4:1. They say, "Well, this must be the rapture," because on one hand they're thinking trumpet, but they're going to add this, "this must be the rapture because the Church," they argue, "is absent from the rest of the book." In other words, what they mean by that is that the word translated "Church" (*ekklesia*) does not appear in the rest of the book of Revelation. That's actually a little bit of careless thinking. While yeah, *ekklesia* does not occur the rest of the way, guess what does occur? The term "holy ones" (*hagios*). That gets translated "saints" in the New Testament. That occurs 13 times. And that is a frequent designation of the Church elsewhere in the New Testament, like Paul's letters. So it's really a misguided thought to say, "Well, after Revelation 4:1 with this trumpet, the Church is gone, so this must indicate the rapture, and the Church is taken off the earth." Well, no. The fact that *ekklesia* doesn't occur doesn't mean anything because "holy ones" (*haggios*—saints) occurs 13 times. So that's not a good argument for that. I mean, if you're going to adopt a pre-trib rapture position, you need to rely on something else other than this, because that's really a terrible argument. It's something explicitly contradicted by the text later on. Lastly, I would say this is the same voice/trumpet language we find in Revelation 1:10. Let's go back to Revelation 1:10. Again, just a suggestion here.

¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet...

It's the same language like we just read in Revelation 4.

¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 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.

And then you get the Ancient of Days image. I mean, this is the deity Christ figure. That's whose voice this is. So if you go to 1:10 when you're in 4:1 and think about there, "What's the possible relationship here?"... Back in 1:10 you have the same thing. We don't have a rapture there. So why would we have a rapture in 4:1? And of course, the argument is going to be circular here. "Well, we don't have a rapture in 1:10 because the churches are being addressed. There's still the Church on earth." And again, the assumption being the Church is off the earth after chapter 4:1, which is not true, because "holy ones" appears 13 times later on. So again, I wanted to get that spasm out, because you do have an Old Testament image here. But it has no relationship... I mean, the point of the image does nothing to prop up a specific point of a specific system of End Times thinking. Again, that's not the direction it goes. So before getting into where it does come from the Old Testament, I think we needed to say something there.

So let's get away from the eschatological systems and go to the text. I think that's a good idea. It's what we try to do here. So Aune, in his Revelation commentary, writes of the trumpet metaphor (and he's going to loop in some things here and you'll see what we're angling for):

A number of different metaphors are used in Revelation to capture the loudness of the voices heard by John. The sound of these voices is compared to the blast of a trumpet (as here; cf. *Apoc. Sedr.* 11:19; Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:612:11:13), to the sound of thunder, and to the sound of roaring water. The sound of a trumpet or *shofar* was part of the Sinai theophany according to Exod 19:16; 20:18.

What's happening in Exodus 19 and 20? It's the encounter with God on Mount Sinai after the Exodus when they're going to receive the law. And, of course, enter into the covenant with God. So back to Aune, he says:

... The motif of the sound of the trumpet continued to be used in theophanic contexts...

Theophanies. You'd often get this language when there's a theophany in view or in the context. And he gives some examples:

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(Isa 18:3; Joel 2:1; Zech 9:14; Ps 47:5); it was also used in the Israelite cult (2 Sam 6:15; Isa 27:13; Joel 2:15; Ps 81:3). The use of the *shofar* in cultic settings could therefore be considered an imitation of the voice of Yahweh.

I think that's an interesting point. Let me just stop there for a moment. Why would they use trumpets at certain rituals associated with the temple or the gathering of the people? Because that was designed to make people think of the voice of God at Sinai that sounded like a trumpet in terms of its volume. That was the way they imitated it or mimicked it. To call to their minds a recollection of, "Hey, we're Israel! And hey, God entered into covenant with us. And hey, there's this thing (the law) that we should be following." Again, it was all designed to take the people back, to set the scene or remind them of the original context for this stuff, which was God making them anew and entering into this covenant at Sinai. So again, I thought that was kind of interesting. He adds a point here. He says:

The voice of Athena [MH: in Greco-Roman religious texts] is compared to a trumpet in the introductory theophanic scene in Sophocles [MH: his writings] *Ajax* 17... Thunder is called the trumpet (σάλπιγξ) of Zeus [MH: in another text].

So you probably most definitely have a harkening back to Sinai with this trumpet. In other words, the point is not that the voice in Revelation 4 is calling people back into the old covenant. This is Jesus. This is the risen Son of Man who is portrayed also as the Ancient of Days in Revelation 1. This is the risen Christ—the Lord, the one on the throne. And he's not saying, "Oh, all that new covenant stuff that I accomplished on the cross and through my resurrection and ascension, let's forget about all that and go back to the law." That's not the point. The point is that *God is speaking*. That's why the trumpet imagery is used. And if you're Greco-Roman and you're thinking of Athena and Zeus, it's like, "No. That isn't the voice here to pay attention to. It's the God of Israel. It's the risen Christ, who *is* God in the flesh, who was and is and is to come. This is the voice of Christ the Lord, who is God, who is identified with God." That's what the trumpet imagery serves to do, to put people on alert as to whose voice this actually is. This is Jesus speaking as God and with the authority of God. He is God's Word. Okay? So just as God's word to Moses at Sinai was precipitated by the sound of a trumpet, from the glory cloud... That's Exodus 19:13, 19:16, 19:19, Exodus 20:18. I mean, it happens several times there. You get this trumpet sound from the glory cloud. And again, it's precipitating the dialogue that God has with Moses. Just as it announces that, this is supposed to take our minds back. And since in 1:10 it's the resurrected Christ, who is alive forevermore, who has the keys to Death and Hades (all this stuff we've covered before), he is the one who is going to judge the living and the dead (all this), listen up. [laughs] Okay? This is the Word of God. That's the whole point. It's not terribly complicated. And you miss *all* of that if you see the word "trumpet" and you think, "Oh, it's the rapture." No, it actually isn't. And if you're going to take that position in terms of End Times stuff, you really need to go somewhere else. This is not a good support for it. Let's move on to verses 2 and 3. John writes:

² At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. ³ And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper [Greek: *iaspis*] and carnelian [*sardion*], and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald [*smaragdinus*].

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Again, the throne and its occupant are pretty obvious, as is their correlation with Daniel 7, Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, 1 Kings 22 (we could throw that in there—it's a famous Divine Council scene). All this stuff we talked about in Part 1. I want to spend a little time, though, on the gemstones. That's new information. The first two are also found in descriptions of New Jerusalem, which is the dwelling place of God and his council (and believers in the end—the end of the story), which would make sense because we have a throne in heaven. Where would we expect the throne to be? God's house. Right? No surprise there. They're also used in the Septuagint (these first two terms) for the Tabernacle. It creates a link back into other sacred spaces—other houses of God, that sort of thing. The first one of the three is also used in the description of Eden, when Eden gets its geography in Genesis 2:12. So again, you have these connections back to other cosmic abodes of God. Now Aune has some comment here about the gemstones. I'm just going to read what he has in his commentary again.

Throne scenes in Jewish apocalyptic literature do not usually use precious stones as metaphors for describing the throne of God (L. L. Thompson, *Revelation*, 86). However, the throne vision in Ezek 1 mentions several precious stones and metals...

Ezekiel 1, there we go again. So some of this vocabulary you'll find in Ezekiel 1.

In some angelic epiphanies, precious stones can be used in the description (e.g., Dan 10:5–6, where gold, beryl, and burnished bronze are used to describe the girdle, body, and legs of the angel). To a certain extent John uses the precious stones drawn from the description of the heavenly Jerusalem in describing God and his throne. Three precious stones are used in the throne scene and in the description of the New Jerusalem: jasper (4:3; 21:11, 18, 19), carnelian (4:3; 21:10), and crystal (4:6; 22:1; cf. Ezek 1:22). Sapphire, mentioned in the description of the throne in Ezek 1:26, occurs in Revelation only in 21:19.

So again, he makes the point that we just sort of summarized before we got into his little section, that this gemstone imagery is often going to be describing the place where God lives. And if you've read *Unseen Realm* and you've read the *Demons* book, I use this very obvious fact to point out that we should not be looking at the stones in Ezekiel 28 as the stuff on the high priest's breastplate. The list does not match, but the list *does* match the divine abode language specifically where God lives, specifically in the book of Revelation. So in Ezekiel 28, the language there is not about the high priest; it's about the dwelling place of

God, which of course in Ezekiel 28 would make sense because the context is Eden, the garden-mountain of God. Okay? So let's segue out of that. We don't want to spend any more time on Ezekiel 28. We've done that a lot on the podcast.

Let's talk about the "rainbow." That also has Old Testament precedent. Aune comments briefly that,

The rainbow is based on an allusion to the throne vision in Ezekiel 1:27–28.

So let's read Ezekiel 1:27, because that's probably *not* the place that you would think about when you hear "rainbow." It says here:

27 And upward from what had the appearance of his waist [MH: the divine man on the throne in Ezekiel 1, the wheels vision] I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him.

So this idea of brightness around the one seated on the throne... "Think of an arc," Aune says, "there's possibly an allusion." This kind of language might be a reference back (again, like all this other stuff is with the gemstones) to Ezekiel 1:27-28. Now for sure, John has God enthroned as a man (that vision in Ezekiel 1) in view. Because we get this other vocabulary from Ezekiel 1 in Revelation 4. So what Aune is saying is, "That's legit. But there's a little more to it." The Septuagint word for "rainbow" in Ezekiel 1:28 (which is *tokson*) is not the word in Revelation, but the reiteration of the cherubim throne vision in Ezekiel 10 does use this word. So the connection back to Ezekiel vision is legit. That's certainly arguably part of what John is doing here. We do get the terminology in the weird throne wheels chariot vision in chapter 10. We do get the word that John uses in Revelation 4 here in the Septuagint of Ezekiel 10. We don't get it in Ezekiel 1, but we do get it in 10. But again, the description in Ezekiel 1 about this being surrounded by brightness. Okay, if you interpret that as there's a brightness encircling the one seated on the throne, well, yeah, okay, that can be rainbow imagery.

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So Ezekiel 1 is in play here. But you're probably thinking of the "bow" (the "rainbow" as it's taken) in Genesis 9:13 (after the Flood). This is a famously difficult passage. There's some oddities in it. I think that's also on the table. And again, this isn't unique to me. This could also be a referent point for John, but in a different way. Maybe not so much textually as a teaching point. So Beale, in his New International Greek Text Commentary on the book of Revelation suggests that:

In general, in view of the judgments introduced by [Revelation] 4–5 [MH: there is lots of judgment going on, and later in the book, too, obviously], the rainbow shows that it is important from the beginning that God bear witness that, even as judge, he will be gracious to his true people.

Just as the rainbow was the sign of the promise that “I’m not going to destroy all the life on the earth again,” so Beale is saying, “Well, this bow idea here (this rainbow idea) might signal to the readers of Revelation, ‘It’s going to be really bad. But God isn’t going to destroy everyone. The righteous will be saved,’ and so on and so forth.” It takes their minds back to the Flood in Genesis and gives them some hope as well. I think this point is expressed a little better, though, by Gallusz in his study of the throne motif in Revelation. I think I referenced this source in the last episode. Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*. He writes this:

In Ezek. 1:28 the divine splendour is likened to the mere appearance of a rainbow [MH: so he’s looping that in], while in Rev. 4:3 John sees a rainbow encircling the throne, which is compared to an emerald in appearance. As Bauckham concludes [MH: so he’s going to quote Bauckham here], the rainbow imagery ‘moves from simile to reality’. Though in John’s throne vision it primarily evokes the idea of God’s glory, at the same time it introduces the theme of covenant that is developed later in the book.

Now just think about that—the rainbow as a theme or sign of the covenant. That’s essentially what Beale was talking about in referencing back to Genesis 9. Because God makes a covenant with Noah, okay? So you have this same sort of thematic overlap. This is Revelation 4, if we think in these terms, in a divine council courtroom scene that parallels Daniel 7 in over a dozen ways. In Daniel 7, it is God and his council that decrees and executes the fate of empires opposed to his people. In Revelation, God is going to judge empires as well. And John’s going to use the Daniel 7 beast imagery in several passages for God’s enemy. Yet the people of God are also going to be under severe persecution as things move toward a climactic end.

Again, here’s where your End Times systems... I won’t say “get in the way,” but they also have a way of coping with this. The pre-trib rapture, “Oh, those are Christians saved during the tribulation.” Fine. If you don’t have a rapture, it’s just believers that are still left suffering in the pathway of God’s judgment here. So either way, this is an element. The people of God are under severe persecution as things move toward a climactic end. The heavens and earth themselves will melt away. It’s an apocalypse. And people get hurt. [laughs] Okay? They get harmed and killed.

But the sign of the rainbow is a reminder that God will *not* destroy all flesh. There *will* be a surviving remnant. He has made a covenant to that effect and will not

forget it. The council will judge rightly in the end. God's enemies will be destroyed forever (ultimately, when we get to the end of the book of Revelation, either into everlasting torment or annihilation—we've talked about those two options in Q&As—either one is forever). God's enemies will be destroyed forever, but his children will not. They will become citizens and rulers at the end of days in God's house, in the new Eden. So the rainbow imagery has some theological importance. And it would offer to readers, "Go back and remember God said he would never... It's not going to be a total annihilation. It's going to be bad, but it's not going to be total... The Lord will remember his people. Even those who die... As we find out later in the book of Revelation, even those who wind up dead are going to be raised to life. And they will not... Their death here is not the end of them. They will be raised to life, and they will live forever *with* the Lord in his house. So God's going to remember his promises. He's going to remember the covenant. Now let's read verses 4-8 again.

⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. ⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, ⁶ and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.

So we'll just pick up with that language that we had read earlier and then, of course, get the "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty" right out of Isaiah 6. The contexts here are familiar. Most of these items, though, are not only going to be familiar, but a good number of them we've already seen and already discussed in earlier episodes because they appear or were relevant back in earlier discussions. So for instance, the white garments and the crowns. We discussed those earlier in relation to Revelation 2:17 and Revelation 3:4-5 and Revelation 3:18. So we're not going to add anything to those. Lightning and thunder take us back to the Sinai theophany, which we just commented on in relation to the trumpet sound. So again, that's repetition in that sense. We also get, though, storm and earthquake elements. And they're found not only here in Revelation 4:5, but found in other passages in Revelation (basically four passages in total). So in Revelation 4:5 we get "from the throne came lightning and rumbling and thunder." In Revelation 8:5, there's a reference to "thunder and rumbling and lightning and an earthquake." Revelation 11:19, "there was lightning and rumbling and thunder and an earthquake and great hail" (with the

hail added). And Revelation 16:18-21, “Then there were lightning and rumbling and thunder and there was a great earthquake ... and great hail.” Now Aune has a comment on these lists (the four passages). He says there are several things we can observe about these lists:

... storm phenomena clearly forms the core of all four lists... The two lists in 11:19 and 16:18–21 are virtually identical... The theophanic use of storm phenomena...

Storm phenomena are often associated with a theophany (an appearance of God in the Old Testament). So these storm phenomena...

... such as lightning, rumblings, and thunder, grew out of the narrative of the Sinai theophany in Exod 19:16–18, where five phenomena are mentioned, thunder, lightning, a thick cloud, a loud trumpet blast, and an earthquake.

So again, it’s pretty clear where this is going back to and where it’s deriving from. In Revelation 4:5, the seven spirits of fire are identified with “torches” of fire. You get the fire imagery at Sinai as well. Again, the dwelling place of God. To be broader about it, fire is sort of a stock element of the divine presence. Now, I mentioned this is passing in *Unseen Realm*. I can’t remember what chapter. But you will often see fire associated with an appearance of God. I mean, the most obvious one is the burning bush. That’s pretty easy. But it’s actually a stock element. Aune writes here (this is an interesting quote):

Since the view is frequently found in early Judaism that angels are made of fire, it is possible that seven angelic beings are referred to here (as the allegorical interpretation in v 5c [MH: the last part of verse 5] makes clear) [MH: and this is all part of the seven spirits before the throne of God and the eyes of the Lord stuff that we’ve talked about before], or that the seven blazing torches represent the menorah.

But again, that would take us back to Zechariah 4 anyway. And you get into the seven spirits and the eyes of the Lord turn out to be supernatural beings. So again, this connection of the fire image with (he’s using the word “angels” because that’s sort of the throwaway word here) supernatural beings around the throne. The seraphim—throne guardians. There’s something really to be said for that in this language. It’s not just isolated to this. He quotes a couple of passages from some pseudepigrapha texts (some Second Temple material) that...

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... mentions countless beings constituted of flame and fire who stand around the throne of God [MH: that’s 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 21:6], and 4 *Ezra* 8:21–22 speaks of the hosts of angels who stand before God’s throne and at his command are changed to wind and fire...

And so on and so forth. Now again, this is a way that supernatural beings (particularly those who guard the throne) are described in the Bible. And again, this imagery is drawn from different places. Sometimes the context is Babylonian. Sometimes the context is Egyptian. Again, if you've read *Unseen Realm*, this is going to be familiar territory to you. If you've read the *Angels* book, it's going to be familiar. As I noted in *Unseen Realm*, the seraphim in Isaiah 6 could also likely be serpentine in appearance (from the noun *saraph*). It just depends, what does *saraph* come from? Is it the noun? That would be a serpent. Is it the verb ("to burn")? Then it would be "a fiery one." Well, you could have them both if you're talking about spitting cobras, and I bring this up in *The Unseen Realm*. And I draw on an article by Provencal; his study of *saraph* is the most extensive one. I quote that in *The Unseen Realm* about this point. And it's language drawn from Egyptian religion, where spitting cobras that had this fiery venom would guard the throne of the deity. And again, you get the *saraph* idea (seraphim idea), throne guardians protecting the sacred space of the deity from defilement, and all this sort of stuff. Again, both of these things can be true. It's probably best to see the imagery here as a both/and, not an either/or. But you actually don't need Isaiah 6 for the notion that supernatural beings can manifest as fire, or be described in those terms, or that fire is a stock element of God's presence. You get those ideas in passages like Exodus 3 (the burning bush), the pillar of fire (in the Exodus wanderings), Deuteronomy 33:2 (even though there is a textual issue there), we get this either a fiery law or the fire associated with a multitude of the heavenly host at Sinai giving the law. I discussed that in *Unseen Realm* as well. You have the fact that God sends fire from heaven (Sodom and Gomorrah). Psalm 104:4 says, "he makes his messengers winds, his ministers a flaming fire." There's a lot of Old Testament imagery that uses fire, and that's not to the exclusion of serpentine imagery. In my view, it's a both/and. It's not an either/or.

But this is where this thinking comes from. And look at what we have. We've got all these elements here in Revelation 4, and they can all be found with God's presence at Sinai. And you say, "Well, not the serpentine thing." Well, okay. That's true. But you still get myriads of angels there. Just go back to *Unseen Realm* and read the section about, where does this idea that the law was dispensed by angels come from? That's where we discussed it in the book. So you actually do have all the elements here. Maybe not in every facet or from every angle. But this is very clear association with Sinai, because Sinai is where God lives. That doesn't mean though that it's *not* associated with Ezekiel 1. Because Ezekiel 1 has all this imagery too, and *more* that you get looped into Revelation 4.

Again, I'm going to stop here and remind you, this is what John does. He doesn't just go to one passage. "I'm going to write about this, and I want you to go look at this Old Testament passage because I'm going to take some things from that Old Testament passage and teach you something." No, what John does is, "I want to say something here," or, "This is what I saw and I'm going to relate what I saw," and he winds up drawing the information from four or five passages. And you're

just supposed to know how to parse all that out. He combines things. He amalgamates things. This is why it's messy. It's not just a clean citation of one thing. He puts them all in a blender and that's what you get. And that's what he's doing here.

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So when we do all this talk about Sinai and God's appearance there, it doesn't mean we're not talking about Ezekiel 1, Isaiah 6. We're talking about all of it, okay? If you look at the creatures that surround the throne in Revelation 4:6-8 on the surface, they're the cherubim from Ezekiel 1. But the fact that their wings are numbered at six is a detail not found in Ezekiel 1. There the cherubim have four wings. The six count comes from Isaiah 6 and its seraphim. So again, we have this blending of sources. John is combining the descriptions. There is also an interesting modification. It's a combination, but I'm going to use the word modification because of the way John puts the two together. In Ezekiel 1 and Ezekiel 10 the cherubim are not said to have eyes or be full of eyes. The eyes and the things full of eyes are the "wheels". The wheels have the eyes. The wheels are full of eyes, not the cherubim. (And just a sidebar here, Ezekiel 10:12 is not inconsistent with that. It just depends how that verse is translated in English versions. So I'm not going to rabbit trail on that.) But in Revelation 4, the term is "living creatures." He doesn't actually call them cherubim. John could have done that. But it's interesting he calls them "living creatures." He doesn't call them cherubim or seraphim. And it's the living creatures who are "full of eyes." The point is not that they have eyes, but that they are filled with eyes—they are full of eyes. So why does John blend these things and then sort of mix the data points from those things in the way he describes the throne scene in Revelation 4-5? I think what he's doing here is actually conceptually consistent with Ezekiel 1. This is where... You don't so much see this in Isaiah 6, but Isaiah 6 has some elements. God does have throne guardians. They're just described differently because we have an Egyptian context there.

But let's just track on Ezekiel 1 because that's where the eyes imagery comes from. So I think for sure, John has something to communicate here in the context of Revelation 4-5, in the context of an apocalypse, that God's enemies are going to get judged. The nations are going to get judged. All the wicked are going to get judged. God is sovereign. That is a conceptual point that is conveyed in Ezekiel 1 using astrological or astronomical imagery from Babylonian religion. Those of you who have followed my content for a while, I have a blog post on this on my website about how we have things in Ezekiel 1 that very clearly point to the Babylonian zodiac and astral imagery that are used to make a very specific point about who controls time and history. It is not Marduk of Babylon. It is the God of Israel. And even though in Ezekiel 1 the Jews are sitting there, they're captives, they're in a foreign land, they've been thrown out because of their apostasy, God (*their* God) is the one still on the throne. That's the whole point of Ezekiel 1. And it's communicated through this astral imagery. I'm going to try to summarize it here. John wants to communicate the same thing. All hell is going to break loose on earth. It's going to be terrible. The righteous will suffer. Yes, there will be a

remnant. Remember what the Flood was like. God did save a remnant. He promised he would not annihilate everyone. There will always be a remnant. And even if the righteous die, they will be resurrected and be with the Lord at the end. We find that out at the end of the book of Revelation, when all of this comes full circle. So he's reminding them of that. But he's also reminding them of what the teaching point of Ezekiel 1 is. The God of Israel is the one in control of the cycles of time and history. Nobody else is.

So here in Revelation 4-5, the context is a Divine Council meeting. The council meets to begin unleashing God's judgment on the earth. The wicked will be punished, the righteous will be vindicated, and martyrs will be avenged. Supernatural powers will be destroyed, the nations will ultimately be healed, but in the course of doing all that, it's going to be really bad. And finally, Eden will return to earth. It is the Day of the Lord time. And just as Ezekiel's imagery conveys cosmic sovereignty, so does John's. That's the conceptual overlap. John is consistent here. He's just throwing lots of things into the blender.

Now I think for new listeners, I probably ought to rabbit-trail a little bit as to explain why I take this tack that I do on Ezekiel 1. And so I'm going to quote from some stuff I've been working on in terms of writing—this book that I've been working on for years, and maybe will never have an end. The book is about the use and abuse of astronomy and sacred calendar in end-times thinking. And here's what I write about Ezekiel 1 and Rev 4. I have a little section on this:

It is well known that Ezekiel's vision included "wheels within wheels" whose "rims" were "tall and awesome" and "full of eyes" (Ezek 1:17-18).

That's important about the observation with the rims, that they eyes are within the heavenly throne creatures in Revelation 4. It's interesting. It's important. And of course, the eyes on the rims that are full of eyes in Ezekiel 1... What are these things? What are these things? Just to draw a little bit more from this thing I've been writing—working on—I write this:

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Old Testament scholar Daniel Block notes that the word translated "eyes" (*'ayin*) in Ezek 1:17-18 "had been used earlier for 'sparkle, gleam' [MH: in the same chapter of Ezekiel, in Ezekiel 1:4 and Ezekiel 1:16]...

So the same word is used for "eyes" and for "sparkling and gleaming."
... and this may point the way to its interpretation here. "Sparkling" and "gleaming" are of course familiar descriptions for stars throughout ancient literature. Block elsewhere makes the important observation that the four faces of the cherubim in Ezekiel's vision correspond to the four signs for the cardinal direction points.

We could get into a little footnote here, where, what about the difference between the four faces between Ezekiel 1 and 10? Block has a nice explanation for that. Basically, it depends on which way the things are oriented. I'm not going to rabbit-trail there. But the two visions are actually consistent here. There's not a contradiction. So we have here Block making the point that, "Hey, if you look at the faces of the cherubim in Ezekiel's vision, lo and behold, they correspond to the four cardinal points of the zodiac in Babylon." They just do.

These compass points, in turn, had correspondences to...

...what the Babylonians were thinking, what they thought in what they were trying to communicate by having a zodiac. Now just to go on a little bit more:

These points are noteworthy. They were not overlooked by the apostle John in the New Testament. The heavenly throne scene in Revelation 4-5 borrows this terminology (and other elements of Ezekiel 1) [MH: we've seen a bunch of those today] to describe heavenly creatures [MH: this time] "full of eyes in front and behind" (Rev 4:6).

And here I quote another scholar, Pilch, in a Revelation commentary.

As Pilch notes, this is one of the ways that the ancients described stars—specifically, *constellations*:

Animals, creatures, "full of eyes." And again, the terminology for eyes also being used for "gleaming and sparkling" in the same chapter of Ezekiel 1. You say, "Well, in Ezekiel 1, they're in the rims." Right. Rims are what? Things that go in circles. Wheels go in circles. And the zodiac goes in a circle. Okay?

The ancients called stars "eyes," and thought them to be living entities. Constellated stars, called "full of eyes," were perceived as animate beings like persons or animals. Since Ezekiel sees all four constellations moving at once, his vantage point was high above the entire cosmos (vv. 4–11).

Ezekiel is describing the heavenly throne chariot of Yahweh.

It's a stock description of God's throne chariot. The divine throne in biblical days was just what Ezekiel described, supported by cherubim, these winged creatures. It had wheels. All the elements are there. You could go out on the web and find my blog post on this. You'll probably find a few pictures as well. This is just the way you describe the throne of a king or the throne of a deity. This is the throne in Ezekiel 1 of Yahweh.

The Hebrew term often translated "chariot(s)" is *merkabah* (plural: *merkabot*; [MH: and you'll find it in] cf. Joel 2:5; Zech 6:1). Like typical ancient throne

chariots known from sculpture and other art, Yahweh's *merkabah* is surrounded and supported by cherubim. Since Yahweh's *merkabah* is in the heavens, these cherubim are quite naturally part of the visual sky. Consequently, Ezekiel's comments about the stars being in both the wheels...

And factoring in the cherubim images, it's consistent. It's consistent. He is seeing the constellations move...

... through the heavens in their regular cyclic path (a "wheel") [MH: wheels are circular].

The "wheels within wheels" is a way of symbolically describing the stars (constellations) in their courses. Stars and constellations [MH: do what? they] mark time. The messaging of Ezekiel 1 has a very specific aim. Ezekiel's vision proclaims to the captives from Judah exiled in Babylon that the heavenly king who controls the cycles of time and history is not Marduk, the chief deity of Babylon at the time, but Yahweh of Israel...

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That John uses the cherubim imagery and describes living creatures filled with eyes [MH: is significant]. In his context and that of the eyes of Ezekiel [MH: earlier], it seems pretty clear he's describing constellations in the heavens – which of course is where God lives and is enthroned. The messaging would be the same – God is in control of time and history. He and his council are about to make that quite clear as they render judgment [MH: throughout the rest of the book of Revelation].

So this is why John does what he does. He's trying to communicate the same message. God is on the throne. It's going to be the Lamb—the Lamb's going to be part of this. We have the risen Christ described as the Ancient of Days, who in Daniel 7 is on the throne. All of these things just sort of converge and merge together (voice like a trumpet, the fire, the jewels, the white clothes). I mean, all of this stuff is drawn from Divine Council imagery. It's drawn from the place where God lives. It's drawn from the throne of God, which is in the heavens. And if we look up at the heavens, we see creatures that move in circles—cycles of time. Who's in control of time and history? Well, this is part of the illustration—the complex, the understanding of the throne of God. And who sits on thrones but kings? Okay? So who is the king of time and the passage of time and history? And how does history play out? It plays out with nations, geopolitical entities, and people. Who is in control of all that? God. Christ. The Lamb. The Son of Man. The Ancient of Days. The answer is yes. This is why John is doing what he's doing. He's trying to communicate the same theological messaging.

Now you ask, logically, “Well, what’s up with the 24 elders?” [laughs] And that, at least, is a good place to stop for this episode. We’re going to have a Part 3, necessary for time. But the 24 elders are a part of this. And the question is, “How? What interpretive trajectory might we follow here?” There are going to be several possibilities here. Is this another astral image? Does the number 24 have some astral significance? That’s one question. Or is the number related to the tribes or Israel? And the apostles (12 and 12)? It would seem the latter, but the apostles aren’t dead and glorified yet. At the very least, John is still alive, even with a late date for Revelation. If this is written in the earlier date, you’re probably going to get more apostles alive. So why do we see them... Does that get in the way of seeing them as the second 12 unit up here at the throne? Does that bother that approach? You know, does seeing 24 as including glorified apostles (some of whom aren’t dead yet), is that awkward? Maybe? It seems a little bit awkward. Does it matter? Does the number 24 have some other meaning that would align with the more general “cloud of witnesses” (human believers as part of the council) idea? We talked about that in the book of Hebrews. Again, we’ll go through the options next time. That’s what we’re going to do in Part 3. And hopefully in Part 3, we’ll do that and then loop some of the stuff that might be new as we go into and through chapter 5. Just trying to get through Revelation 4-5. But there’s just a lot of stuff here. It’s cluttered. It’s dense. This is what John does. So we’re in another one of these passages where he’s just letting it fly, and you’re supposed to know where the pieces come from and what he’s doing when he puts them together.

TS: Alright, Mike. I’m glad you brought it up. Because you do owe us an astral prophecy book. So when can we expect that? [MH laughs] What’s going on?

MH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. [laughs] I know. [laughs]

TS: I’m serious, though! What’s the holdup?

MH: I know. There’s just too many other things I’m working on. So...

TS: Yeah. But it seems like you’re kind of far down the road on this book.

MH: It’s both an excuse and a reality, you know? I’m always in that sort of situation.

TS: Yeah. Well, I’m going to stay on you. Because I personally think that book would be a good book. And you read some of it. That’s the first time we’ve heard *any* of it, right?

MH: I don’t know. It might be.

TS: I think it is! I like what I’m hearing. And I need that book, Mike, please. Just between me and you. [MH laughs] I need that book, please. But alright, that’s

good stuff. I love it. Alright, looking forward to Part 3. And with that, it want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.