

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 389

Revelation 15-16

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Episode Summary

Revelation 15 and 16 deal with the seven bowl judgments meted out against all those who follow the Beast. The passage contains several images drawn from the Old Testament that telegraph the victory of Jesus and the Father over the Beast and the chaos system of Babylon. This episode explores those systems and the connections between the bowls and other Old Testament chaos enemies. The effect of the judgments is to cleanse the earth of chaos, preparing it to once again be sacred space to be re-occupied by its rightful Lord, the returned Christ.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 389: Revelation 15-16. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Mike! Mike.

MH: Yes.

TS: How are you feeling, man? How are you feeling?

MH: Well, you know, I'm a little tired. For those who are just tuning in, this is the first episode we're recording after my cancer diagnosis, that we put out on social media. So yeah, as you listen, you'll probably hear that I'll sound a little more tired, because I am. The immediate issue is dehydration. So we're still dealing with that. But you know, there's no reason that we can't keep going on the podcast, especially, as much as I love the book of Revelation [laughter], let's not let something like cancer be a deterrent to me continuing in the book of Revelation. You know, wouldn't want that to happen.

TS: No, absolutely not. Well, I mean, you *sound* good. So that's good. And you know, I think...

MH: Well, you must have some sort of filter on the other end, you know. Because I can feel it. I don't feel normal as far as energy level. But hey. If you make me sound good, that's good. You know how to do that.

TS: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Well, words fall short on anything that I can say. But you know, thousands of people out there are commenting on social media, and you know you're loved. And we're so thankful for your service for the kingdom and all you've done and are still doing and are going to do. And I'm honored to be here with you doing it for the last seven years. And we're with you.

MH: I mean, I know that. I can obviously see that, and tell it. And there are people sending me... I'll get some text messages, but people are putting mostly responses on social media. I'll get an email now and then. But I had my original pastor, who we had on one of the years at SBL... He's cycling through Jacksonville for their anniversary, so I'm going to get to see him shortly, in a couple of weeks. And I told him... (His name's Dave Burggraaf. He used to pastor in Lebanon, where I grew up, but he's in Charlotte now.) I said, "By no means am I afraid to die." Because that's like Hebrews 2. That's your introduction to the council. I said, "But if I do, I'm going to feel terribly cheated." [laughs] You know? And I actually have these (conversations, I guess)—conversations with God. It's like, "This just doesn't make any sense at all. There's so much to do. I've got this whole list of things. I even have a spreadsheet. You know, here's my Excel spreadsheet of things I should be doing." So I just said to Dave, "I am just going to feel terribly cheated." You know. Because I don't know if it's a guy thing. I don't know if it's a Pennsylvania Dutch thing. But it's like, as good as I know the other will be, it's like, "I don't feel like I've done my job." And I just grew up in a household and an environment where that's just drilled into you. It's the whole work ethic thing. It's, "You're not done until you're actually done. Don't come home until you're done." It's just this sort of mentality. You know, if you're raised in it, you never lose it. So that's kind of the situation that I'm in. You know? It's like, I just can't imagine not being able to complete this or that task. So like I said, I would... It sounds really goofy, but I would feel terribly cheated. [laughs] That's just the way I'm looking at it.

TS: Well, we appreciate you continuing the podcast, even though we know you're tired. That means a lot to us. And again, words fall short. But we're there with you and Drenna and your family. And we appreciate them sparing you to spend time with us. So again...

5:00

MH: Oh, yeah. You know, and Drenna's doing a great job. So it's basically having... I mean, it's not like I'm bedridden or anything like that. I'm just sitting here at my desk. But you know, there's a lot of mechanics—a lot of logistics—to do with the intravenous stuff, and the constant phone calls, and going back and forth with doctors. I mean, she's doing all that. So she's essentially the... She's the boss. [laughs]

TS: Well, I'm glad she's doing that.

MH: That's what I need!

TS: Yeah. Tell her thank you for us, so you can spend time with us doing this. It's duly noted and appreciated. So be sure she knows that. And Drenna, if you're listening, thank you. [laughs]

MH: She'll probably give it a listen.

TS: Well, Mike, I'm going to switch gears to some happy news. Because on Sunday, I got to baptize both my kids. So Jax and Jenna are baptized now.

MH: Oh, wow.

TS: So that was a very proud father moment for me. So a little good news there.

MH: Yeah, that's cool.

TS: That's good stuff. Yeah, absolutely. And also, Abilene Wylie Little League made it to Williamsport, PA, for the World Series in Little League baseball, Mike.

MH: I thought you didn't care about baseball.

TS: Well, I, I, I, I, I do, [MH laughs] because these kids are my son's age. They've played baseball with him. So I like to take some credit that I taught them all they know in T-ball. Because I was a coach for a lot of them.

MH: Yeah, T-ball. "Run that way, not the other way." [laughter]

TS: Haha, Mike, I taught them important things, like when they're four and five, playing T-ball, like how not to eat the dirt. And, "Don't play with the dirt. Stand up." Things like that. So those are important things that you carry on [MH laughs] in Little League.

MH: "Gentlemen, this is a baseball." [laughter]

TS: "Look at the batter or you're going to get hit." They all would be bunched up at the pitcher mound, and it was like herding cats. Because they would just scatter, play in the dirt and stuff like that.

MH: Yeah, I remember doing that.

TS: But now, here they are, 12 years later, going to the World Series. It's awesome.

MH: Yeah, I remember doing that with Calvin. Every time the ball hits the bat, it's a home run. Because they just keep running. [TS laughs]

TS: Right. Nobody picks the ball up.

MH: [laughs] The kids keep throwing the ball somewhere. You know? Every hit's a home run.

TS: Yeah, absolutely. That's good stuff.

MH: Did you watch the "Field of Dreams" game?

TS: No, of course not, Mike. It's baseball. I'm not going to watch that. I saw it, though. I mean, don't get me wrong. I saw the highlights. How awesome was that?

MH: Yeah, that was cool. That's Ronn Johnson's favorite movie.

TS: Yeah, that's a *lot* of people's favorite movie. That movie's flawless. That's a great movie.

MH: Yeah. I watched a lot of it. I didn't see the end, unfortunately, though, live. I saw the walk-off on the replay. I just thought the Yankees were toast in the top of the 9th. But that was wrong. So I missed that part, but I saw most of it.

TS: No, no, I'm starting a hard knocks with Dallas Cowboys.

MH: Oh yeah.

TS: So my head's out, seeing how Jack is going to be this year. I'm watching.

MH: Yeah, well, we've got the Fantasy league coming up too.

TS: Yeah, I'm ready.

MH: So I will be there for that, unless I'm, like, unconscious or something. But I plan to be at the draft.

TS: Your draft won't be any different. So you're team's going down regardless. [laughter]

MH: Sure.

TS: Oh... Alright, Mike, well...

MH: [laughs] Now we've covered the sports gamut, it's like, "Oh, yeah, everything's normal here. They're talking about stuff we don't care about."

TS: Exactly. Just wanted to give a quick shoutout to the Abilene Wylie Little League team. So good luck, guys! We had some good news there, Mike. But alright, we've got two chapters to cover today in Revelation.

MH: Yep. Revelation 15 and 16. Because there's a lot of overlap here. And to some extent, there's been overlap with parts of both chapters in earlier chapters, so it's workable to take these two in tandem. And you know, they cover the seven bowl judgments just generally anyway. So let's just jump in here a little bit. I'm going to go to Revelation 15. I'm not going to read the whole chapter, but just enough to get us started here. Revelation 15 is pretty short. I'll read that and then talk a little bit about chapter 15 and then we'll jump into 16. So reading ESV, Revelation 15 says:

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

² And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. ³ And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

**“Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!**

**Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations!**

**⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?**

For you alone are holy.

**All nations will come
and worship you,**

for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

⁵ After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, ⁶ and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. ⁷ And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, ⁸ and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

10:00

MH: So that's Revelation 15. It's pretty short. And it opens with these seven angels, who are going to unleash seven plagues (the bowl judgments). And we see these seven angels later, of course, in chapter 16. (That's when we're going to get the actual bowl judgments spelled out.) We also get a reference to them in 17:1. Because the last bowl judgment is going to... All the bowl judgments, but especially the last, is going to set up the fall of Babylon. And so we again get a reference to these seven angels in chapter 17. Because chapters 17 and 18 really deal with the fall of Babylon.

So we have seven angels. We've seen this number of angels before. And like I said, we'll see it again. What I want to focus on, though, since we've covered a lot of the seven-angel territory, is the sea of glass. Let's just start there. This is actually an Old Testament allusion. Even though you would wonder, "Well, where have I seen a sea of glass before, other than maybe the book of Revelation?" Certain language, it lends itself to that. Beale and McDonough summarize it this way. They say:

The sight of what appeared to be "like a sea of glass like crystal" could include allusion to the reflection of the laver in Solomon's temple and the heavenly splendor of God's holy separateness (see Beale 1999a: 327–28, 789–92). But uppermost in mind is the heavenly analogue to the Red Sea in connection with the new exodus. This identification is confirmed beyond doubt by the following mention of the new "song of Moses," which is the latter-day counterpart of Moses' song recounted in Exod. 15... The exodus atmosphere is discernible through the prior mention of "plagues" (15:1), which clearly are modeled after the plagues of Egypt [MH: and we're going to see that in chapter 16], and by the subsequent mention of the "tabernacle of testimony" [cf. v. 5]. The first exodus, out of Egypt and out from under Pharaoh's tyrannical power, will be recapitulated by divine design in a final, end-time exodus of God's people out from under the tyrannical oppression and rule of the "beast" over the world.

So that's a paragraph of summary. I think it's a pretty good summary. Since it's going to be very clear that you have Exodus plague imagery with the bowls and you've got the song of Moses specifically mentioned, what we have here with this "sea" language is analogous to the deliverance at the Red Sea. So we have the deliverance at the Red Sea back in the Old Testament, where God's people are delivered from what at the time was the primary chaos agent of the Old Testament: ancient Egypt. Because ancient Egypt was holding God's people hostage in Egypt. Of course, Pharaoh eventually tries to exterminate them. All that served as an analogy when it comes to the beast. Now the new beast is bigger and wilder and badder, and all those things. But again, he sees an analogy to the beast. And specifically, he's going to analogize the beast not only to Egypt here, but we've already seen him do it, and we're going to see him do it. He's going to analogize it to Babylon. Babylon becomes, after Egypt, the primary chaos agent, the primary anti-Eden agent, the primary threat to the existence of

15:00

the people of God and the survival of the covenants and, really, the restoration of Eden. Babylon is the primary threat as the Old Testament comes to a close, which is why, as John's looking forward into what awaits the Church (the looming threat and darkness), he's going to portray that threat (and the beast and his power) with Babel and with Egypt. I mean, it makes sense. This is how you communicate the idea—not only the idea of who they are, but what God is going to do and who's actually going to win here.

Now there are other Old Testament allusions to the sea and the crystal language, the sea of glass, that kind of thing. Ezekiel 1:22 is probably the more obvious in terms of the specific language, where you have the firmament in Ezekiel 1:22, which is the crystal platform for God's throne. And that's important because we have to remember what the context for Revelation 15 is. This is still part of that Divine Council meeting that we were launched into in Revelation 4 and 5, where the judgments of God and the Lamb are going to be described and meted out. All of this is taking place in the Divine Council context. And so, of course we would get this image associated with the throne of God. Because in Ezekiel 1, we have the same image with God's throne—the wheels and the fire, and then you get the firmament, again with the cherubim and all this. And we've seen all of these elements from Ezekiel 1 elsewhere in the book of Revelation (Revelation 4 and 5 being most prominent). And we shouldn't be surprised to see it picked up again here sort of as a cue for readers to reorient ourselves back into the actual scene where this is taking place. So Beale observes that, but he also loops in Daniel 7 along with Ezekiel 1 and Exodus 15, in his comments about the sea of glass mentioned in Revelation 4:6. So if we go back and look at what he said there, he's going to describe the relationship of this scene and this language to the Divine Council decision of Daniel 7, specifically 7:10, and that involves the judgment of the fourth beast, whose body was given to be burnt with fire (that's Daniel 7:11). So Beale writes:

The “sea” is also associated with the idea of evil [MH: that's familiar to us]. Caird [MH: who was a well-known New Testament scholar] has argued that here it connotes cosmic evil, since it often has such a nuance in the OT and sometimes elsewhere in Revelation (see Rev. 13:1; 21:1; and especially 15:2, as well as “abyss” in 11:7). This speculation receives support from the modeling of these chapters on Daniel 7, since the sea as a picture of the beasts' origin is a significant feature in Daniel 7, and the scenes of Daniel 7 and Ezekiel 1 have integral literary links, the former usually seen as dependent on the latter. The portrayal of the Red Sea in the OT as the abode of the evil sea monster [MH: this is Leviathan imagery] confirms that this setting is also included in John's thought (cf. Isa. 51:9–11; Ps. 74:12–15; Ezek. 32:2) [MH: Psalm 74 is one that we've referenced here on the podcast a number of times, about Leviathan imagery that's tied to the crossing of the Red Sea]. In view of the Daniel and Exodus imagery, there is then a hint that John sees the chaotic powers of the sea as calmed by divine sovereignty. Rev. 5:5ff. reveals that Christ's overcoming through his death and resurrection is what

defeated the power of evil and so calmed Satan's watery, tumultuous abode [MH: the abyss]. [MH: Revelation] 4:6 gives a picture of the stilling of the hellish waters from the *heavenly perspective*, though the devil displays his wrath even more furiously on earth because he has been decisively defeated in heaven [MH: that's Revelation 12 he gives a side nod to] (see further on 5:6b; 12:12; 13:3)... When John later says that "there is no longer any sea" [MH: Revelation] (21:1), he means that all evil on the earth will be not only defeated but also eradicated when Christ's kingdom is established consummately on earth. In fact, the "sea of glass like crystal before the throne" in 4:6 may be an intentional contrast with "a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne" in [MH: Revelation] 22:1.

20:00

So what Beale is suggesting here is that the "sea" here might be both a metaphor or a symbol of satanic evil—the power of the beast—because he comes from the sea and all these other allusions here, but also it's still the throne of God, because God is the victor over chaos. So he's saying it's a symbol or an image that can do double-duty, both the thing that's the symbol of the threat (and the origin of the beast), but also, just like back in the Old Testament, the Red Sea was... When they're standing there at the Red Sea, they're thinking, "We're going to die." And the sea *is* a metaphor for chaos. But God subdues, divides, parts the waters. He is in control. He dominates chaos at the Exodus event. And so that would be what John is trying to convey here—that despite all the stuff that he said about the beast up to this point and the terribleness of what's going on on earth, it's the Lord that's going to dominate the beast. The Lord is going to win the day. So again, he's using this imagery to convey these thoughts.

So the point for Revelation 15 in these observations from Beale and others is that you have God's throne resting atop the sea of glass. Again, if it is tied to Ezekiel 1 (and it's pretty hard to see how it couldn't be), just like Ezekiel 1 was a declaration of God's sovereignty: "Yeah, we're sitting here in Babylon, but you get the cherubim with the four faces—the four cardinal points of the zodiac—and God is still king over time an history, the movement of time, the epochs of time." He knows where history is going. He's in control of it. All these things are brought to bear in Revelation 15 as we lead up to the final set of seven judgments (the bowl judgments) and the collapse—the defeat—of the beast and his empire.

So let's move to verses 5-8 in Revelation 15. We have just a few comments here. We have the attire of the angels (how they're dressed), which is obviously drawn from Levitical priestly garments. We can see that from Ezekiel 9:2-3; Ezekiel 9:11; Ezekiel 10:2; Daniel 10:5; Daniel 12:6-7. And you know, just to harken back to earlier episodes, there was this notion about how maybe the 144,000, because of the way they're dressed (Leviticallly) and also the comment that "they have not defiled themselves with women," maybe they are sort of a priestly class that symbolically represents the antithesis of the Watchers and the chaos they're

going to spawn on earth at their release from the abyss. So some of that could be in play here, too. So we don't want to forget that.

Moving on from the clothes... "Bowls" are also used in the Old Testament inside the sanctuary—inside the Tabernacle and the Temple. And Aune, in his Revelation commentary, has a few brief comments about this. He says:

"The word *phialē*, usually translated "bowl" (Louw-Nida, § 6.124), must be understood as a *cultic utensil* [MH: in other words, it's an object used in ritual service—priestly service] and should therefore be translated "bowl used in offerings" (BAGD, 858)...

And he references BDAG, the main lexicon for that idea. Because if translators chose to do that, it would preserve the ritual feel to it as opposed to just "bowl." Because we think of cereal bowls or something. You know? But it's a little more specific than that in context. And Aune says:

These libation bowls are mentioned twelve times in Revelation (5:8; 15:7; 16:1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17; 17:1; 21:9).

They're mentioned a lot. And again, a lot of the places, really up to Revelation 21:9 in the list that Aune gives of these twelve times, most of them are going to be in passages that have the heavenly tabernacle, i.e., the throne of God, i.e., the Divine Council throne room, in view. So again, the ritual angle is definitely worth pursuing and observing. So the bowls, then, are cast as ritual objects. What were they used for? Again, if you use the Old Testament analogy, the bowls there were probably used to carry out the ashes and fat of sacrifices from sacred space. And if that's the case, the symbolism would likely be that the earth is about to be purified by removing defilement. The earth is going to be sanctified. It's going to be made ready for reoccupation of the Messiah. Because what follows is the decimation of the beast.

The next image we run into is the sanctuary filling with smoke. This is going to bring us to the end of chapter 15. And that reinforces this Levitical ritual idea for these other vessels—these other instruments. Beale and McDonough note this:

25:00

God's presence in the temple is highlighted as it is "filled with the smoke of God's glory and from his power" (as in Exod. 40:34–35; 1 Kings 8:10–11; 2 Chron. 5:13; Isa. 6:1, 4 [MH: especially in the] LXX). The description may be a collective echo of similar OT descriptions of God's presence in the earthly temple, though the focus may be more on Ezek. 10:2–4, where an angelic being "clothed in linen" stands close to the four cherubim in the heavenly temple, and "the temple was filled with the cloud, and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD." The Ezek. 10 scene is an introduction to an announcement of judgment,

which brings it even closer to the function of the similar vision in Rev. 15 so that the former becomes analogous to the latter.

You've still got the judgment context. You've got the purification of not the heavenly Tabernacle/Temple here, but the earth—the idea being conveyed by the priestly garments, the bowls, ritual service. The earth is being prepared for the reoccupation of the messiah. In other words, it's being prepared to once again become sacred space. We're removing defilement, we're going to destroy the beast, and move on from there.

Now let's jump into Revelation 16 from this point. Here's where we actually get the seven bowls described. So if 15 is the set-up, 16 is where we get them described. And the first three bowls... I'm going to read Revelation 16:1-7 and we'll just jump in there. So the context for all this is the Divine Council meeting that began in Revelation 4 and 5. And the slain and risen Lamb of chapter 5 is the revealer and dispenser of the judgments, through the authority of the enthroned Father. So Revelation 16:1 says this:

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."

² So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

³ The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

⁴ The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵ And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say,

**"Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was,
for you brought these judgments.**

**⁶ For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink.**

It is what they deserve!"

⁷ And I heard the altar saying,

**"Yes, Lord God the Almighty,
true and just are your judgments!"**

Now that's Revelation 16:1-7, which gets us into the first three of these. As was the case back with the first trumpet judgment, the first bowl judgment targets the earth. So there's a parallel there. And those afflicted are those having the mark of the beast. Now the immediate Old Testament point of reference is the Egyptian plague of boils. (This is Exodus 9:9-11. There's an ironic reversal here. If you remember the plague back then, the Egyptians are the ones that get the plague of boils. Here we have those being afflicted are the ones that take the mark of the beast. And so the reversal here is, those who take the idolatrous mark of the beast are now marked with boils in God's judgment. So again, there's some irony here that I'm sure John doesn't want readers to miss. "You took the mark? Well, God's going to mark you." [laughs] "Here's the first mark. Remember these (the boils from the Egyptian plague judgment)?"

The second and third bowls take us back to the Nile, obviously. When I read that, I'm sure that's what is popping up in your head. It takes us back to the Nile turning to blood, the initial plague on Egypt (which was Exodus 7:14-25). And in his Revelation commentary, Beale has a good bit to say about this connection. I'm going to read you a good portion of it. It's all good stuff, how the context is going to inform what's going on here. So he says:

30:00

The second bowl's parallelism with the second trumpet [MH: we don't want to forget that again, Revelation 8:8-9] is striking. The trumpet struck the sea and "a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the living creatures in the sea died." Likewise, the second bowl strikes the sea and "there came about blood as of a dead person, and every living thing died, the things in the sea." Both texts are based on Exod. 7:17-21, where Moses turns the Nile into blood and the fish in it die (like Rev. 8:8-9 and 16:3, Philo, *Vit. Mos.1.100*, extends the effect of the plague in Exod. 7:17-21 to include the death of people) [MH: which is not a detail you're going to get back in Exodus necessarily, but he fills in the gap, and he therefore sounds a lot like Revelation here]. Therefore, the second trumpet and the second bowl have to do with the same kind of judgment. The primary difference is the trumpet's partial effect and the bowl's total effect... Just as the world kingdom of Babylon was the object of the second trumpet's woe, so likewise the kingdom of Babylon throughout the world together with that of the beast is the object of the second bowl's affliction (see on 8:8-9). Indeed, the bowls generally are linked to the judgment of Babylon, as implied from the connection of 14:8, 10 with 15:7 and 16:1. The seventh bowl makes the link with 14:8, 10 explicit, especially in 16:19: "Babylon the Great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of his fierce wrath"...

So the connection between this exodus imagery and Babylon is very explicit.

The "sea" as figurative for ungodly humanity is not inconsistent with the other uses of *thalassa* in the Apocalypse [MH: in the book of Revelation] (twenty-four

occurrences), [MH: and many of those references] are susceptible to such a symbolic interpretation [MH: Beale actually thinks all of them are except for Revelation 18:17, 19, 21]. Clearly the “many waters” of 17:1 are a picture of unbelievers throughout the earth [MH: which is echoed in] (17:15). Furthermore, Satan’s standing “on the sand of the sea” in 12:18 may refer to his sovereignty over the wicked nations, since in 20:8 ungodly nations are compared to “the sand of the sea.” The sea from which the beast of 13:1 emerges represents the mass of nations. This symbolic understanding of 16:3 is supported by the explicit figurative interpretation of the bloody “rivers and springs of waters” in v 4 as God’s judgment on the impious [MH: on unbelievers] (vv 5–6).

I’m going to just stop there. What Beale’s trying to argue here (and I think does a good job) is that this language about the waters, when it refers to the waters being poisoned and polluted with the blood and stuff like that, it’s a symbolic way of expressing that just like in the first bowl judgment where those who take the mark of the beast are the ones that are afflicted, well, the same people are afflicted here. It’s not just an affliction of the literal waters, but as Beale’s pointing out, some of this language (waters, sand of the sea, the sea itself) gets used elsewhere in the book for *people*, for the mass of nations opposed to God. Again, just think of the Deuteronomy 32 worldview here—the nations against Israel, the nations under dominion of hostile supernatural forces. Here we have the beast, we have Satan. So what Beale is saying is that we don’t want to over-literalize the language here. In fact, we want to look at how the language is used elsewhere in the book. And when you do that, it’s used of people, which would make sense because people are being judged in the first bowl judgment. Why would we expect them to not be judged in the second and third bowl judgments? The target is people. It’s not just dirt, water, grass. Okay? It’s people. It’s the people who take the mark are going to be suffering the affliction. Just think back to the exodus imagery and the connection is pretty obvious. So to pick up again, to reiterate the point, Beale says:

35:00

The understanding of “blood” in v 3 as representing the suffering of the ungodly is warranted by the immediate context (e.g., vv 2, 8–11) and by the use of “blood” (*haima*) elsewhere in Revelation to refer, without exception, to the suffering of the wicked or of Christ and the saints [MH: and he has a long grocery list of references to “blood” here that refer to the suffering of the wicked, which in context makes sense because they’re the ones that are the targets of the bowl judgments] (the former in 11:6; 14:20; 19:13; cf. 6:12; 8:7–8; the latter in 1:5; 5:9; 6:10; 12:11; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2).

So I think this specific citation... In Revelation 16:6, where we hit this section here... Let me just re-read it:

**“Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was,
for you brought these judgments.
⁶ For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink.
It is what they deserve!”**

That is a citation of a few verses in Psalm 79. Psalm 79:3... If you go up to the beginning of the psalm...

**O God, the nations have come into your inheritance;
they have defiled your holy temple;
they have laid Jerusalem in ruins.**

Obviously, this is a post-Nebuchadnezzar, post-Babylon psalm.

**² They have given the bodies of your servants
to the birds of the heavens for food,
the flesh of your faithful to the beasts of the earth.
³ They have poured out their blood like water
all around Jerusalem,
and there was no one to bury them.**

You keep going down to verse 10:

**¹⁰ Why should the nations say,
“Where is their God?”
Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants
be known among the nations before our eyes!**

Okay? So you have this “nation” talk in the psalm that John quotes in Revelation 16:6 about blood. Okay? So what Beale is arguing is that the symbolism here is once again designed to inform readers (who sort of have these cross-references in their heads) that the judgment here is about those who take the mark of the beast. They are going to, ironically, have the same thing happen to them that Babylon did to God’s people way back in the Old Testament in Psalm 79. So now it’s going to happen to them. Things are going to come full-circle. It is an intended reversal strategy that John has here, to help us (help the reader) see that what he’s describing is the defeat of the ultimate chaos agent (Babylon). This is the natural touchpoint in the Old Testament for what he’s saying here and what he wants to get across to his readers.

I would also want to throw in here... (Beale doesn't mention it; it just popped into my head.) Deuteronomy 32... Not verse 8, but the other Dead Sea Scroll text that affects Deuteronomy 32 is verse 43. And I'm going to read the ESV again because it follows (just like it does in verse 8) the Dead Sea Scrolls here. It says this:

**⁴³ “Rejoice with him, O heavens {MH: you could translate it “O heavenly ones”};
bow down to him, all gods...**

So it starts out where the ones who are going to be rejoicing and the members of heavenly host who are loyal to God. And they are commanded... The gods of the nations (this is Deuteronomy 32) are commanded to bow down to God and his council. Here's the rest of the verse:

**...for he avenges the blood of his children
and takes vengeance on his adversaries.
He repays those who hate him
and cleanses his people's land.”**

Okay, that verse (Deuteronomy 32:43)... I'm a little surprised that Beale doesn't mention it. That verse is a microcosm of what Beale has been saying in his commentary about this chapter—about these first three bowl judgments. It's the judgment of the nations. Those who are under dominion of the beast are the nations. They are all the people who are not the people of God. And this is the eschatological Day of the Lord—all of this judgment stuff. This is the Day of the Lord. All this stuff's going to be a precursor to the return of the messiah—to the return of Jesus. And this is the time when the gods are destroyed. So when we have all this talk about the nations being the target of these judgments, yes, it refers to people who have taken the mark. But even more significantly, it refers to the beast. You know, it's all leading up to chapters 17 and 18, where the beast himself is destroyed. And of course, that's going to lead to the destruction of Satan himself. All of this stuff (the whole system, both cosmic and earthly)—this is where it's going to come to an end. And Deuteronomy 32:43 really, I think, encapsulates that very nicely.

40:00

Revelation 16:8-16. That's the next three bowls, so numbers 4, 5, and 6. And really, let's just read that. And we may just read through the end of the chapter here. But we've got here:

⁸ The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. ⁹ They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the

name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

¹⁰The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish ¹¹and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

¹²The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. ¹³And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. ¹⁴For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. ¹⁵(“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”) ¹⁶And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

Or *Har-Mageddon* in Greek. So you have the next three bowl judgments. Bowl 4 begins in verse 8. And the command here, kind of like verse 17 later on... Let me just jump to verse 17. Because that's going to be basically the end of the chapter. So let's just go back there. So Revelation 16:17. This is where the seventh bowl starts up. This says,

¹⁷The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air...

So we have that phrase (“the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air”); we've got back in verse 8 the fourth angel pouring out his bowl on the sun. And this has drawn interest from commentators because it appears contradictory to Revelation 16:1, the verse that starts out this whole series of bowl judgments, which says, “Go and pour out on the *earth* the seven bowls of the wrath of God.” So how in the world can we be pouring out bowls on the sun and on the air? I mean, the bowls are supposed to be poured out on the earth. So commentators have noticed this. And Aune notes that in Revelation 16:8 and 17, that what the text (what John) is really informing us of, is that what is in view is the ancient conception of matter. So Aune writes this:

In 16:1, the bowl angels are commanded to pour out their libation bowls upon the *earth*. While this plague is not closely related to the others, it does result in the affliction of the four elements...

(When he says, “this plague,” he means the one beginning here in 16:8 with the sun.) It results in the affliction of one of the four elements. And this is going to go for 16:17. What were the four elements of the conception of matter in the Hellenistic world? That everything was composed of earth, water, fire, and air. So Aune is basically saying, “This is why we get the language we do. It all concerns the earthly existence of people as they know it and as they understand it and as they articulate it—that everything is made of earth, water, fire, and air. And so it doesn’t matter that you get this verbiage in verse 8 and verse 17 that doesn’t say “earth;” it says “sun,” which is the source of heat—source of fire—and air in verse 17. It doesn’t matter. Because it’s just ancient elemental thinking.” And I think he’s really on the right track here. It makes good sense.

45:00

So in other words, and taking Beale’s earlier comments about the symbolic nature of the language (just generally) to heart, what is described here in all the bowls (even these ones that have this odd wording) is a judgment of all the earth in its most basic elemental sense. And the goal is to express totality. All the elements of the earth are affected. And by extension, this is the ancient writer’s way of describing that *all*, not just some or most—*all* of the followers of the beast will be judged. Every one of them. No matter where they are on the earth. The picture is thus not one of literal and overly literal cosmic upheavals that have to be dodged by believers. Because let’s be honest, when you get into popular commentary reading of Revelation, these are the kind of passages where, “Oh, it must be a supernova. Oh, it must be some kind of plague or a virus or something like that.” Well, if the whole point of the bowls is the judgment of those who have taken the mark, if these judgments are literal, then they’re going to affect believers. Here’s the point. The believers are under the sun, too. It’s the same sun that shines on a believer as an unbeliever. Believers are under the sun, too. So if this is literal, they’d be included. Believers breathe air, too.

So if this was literal, if we’re supposed to read this literally as some kind of poisoning of the air, well, believers would be affected by that too. Unless they’ve got gills or something. You know? Everybody’s wearing a space helmet. You know? The literal interpretations here that are very common in popular commentaries, and on the internet (conspiratorial kind of thinking), they just don’t work here. Because if you’re going to keep the bowls in context about being directed toward all of the people who have taken the mark of the beast, these can’t be literal judgments of the literal sun and air because believers are under the same sun and they breathe the same air. So this is part of why Beale and other commentators (Aune) say that the language here is meant to express elemental totality with the goal being to communicate the idea that *every* person who’s taken the mark of the beast, no matter where they are, is going to be judged. God isn’t going to miss any of them. None of them are getting away. So it’s trying to express totality, but over a very specific target audience, if you will. And that is those who have taken the mark.

Another irony we get here is that those who have taken the name of the beast curse the name of the God who is now judging them. That's a nice touch. It brings... The whole thing about the mark of the beast is really about bearing the name, that we talked about earlier when we talked about 666. So again, some of these ideas are just getting picked up and they become threads through the whole description.

The fifth bowl... We get some questions there. What is the throne of the beast? In Revelation 16:10, we read here:

¹⁰ The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness.

So obviously throne and kingdom are used in parallel there.

People gnawed their tongues in anguish ¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

So what do we make of this? The throne of the beast is not likely a specific place. Nothing in the other judgments suggests this. Because we're dealing with totality. More likely (and this is Beale's thought):

The throne represents the beast's sovereignty over his [MH: entire] realm. Therefore, the bowl affects the beast's ability to rule.

Anywhere and everywhere, to paraphrase Beale there. The judgment, of course, itself reminds us of the plague of darkness back in Egypt. That was #9 in the exodus plagues (Exodus 10:21-29). And it also reminds us of the fourth trumpet plague back in Revelation 8:12, where the sun, moon, and stars were partially obliterated. Now as Aune notes, this "a typical apocalyptic event." And he cites a bunch of Old Testament passages: Isaiah 13:10; Joel 2:10; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Habakkuk 3:11; a bunch of Second Temple literature. This is very typical of Day of the Lord/apocalyptic description. And he also adds that "Darkness is a symbol of judgment" in other places. He points out 1 Samuel 2:9; Amos 5:20, which is one of those passages that has "the day of Yahweh will be darkness and not light." Joel 2:2 is another; and Zephaniah 1:15. So it's Day of the Lord imagery from the Old Testament drawn into what we're reading here with the fifth bowl. And Aune also notes that:

It is not immediately evident why the plague of darkness should inflict pain on people who are part of the kingdom of the beast.

Okay, well, that's nice. He notes the problem, but he doesn't offer any solution. Beale takes this as metaphorical, so I'm going to read you what he has here. He relates it to the Egyptians. He says:

50:00

"[This pain] [MH: why would darkness cause pain?] is metaphorical for all ordained events designed to remind the ungodly that their persecution and idolatry are vain, and it indicates their separation from God [MH: because God is the source of light in biblical thought]. As with the Egyptians, this darkness induces anguish, figuratively expressed by the phrase "they gnawed their tongues because of the pain." God causes all who follow the beast to have times of anguish and horror when they realize that they are in spiritual darkness, that they are separated from God and that eternal darkness awaits them... The temporal judgment here is a precursor of the final judgment, when unbelievers will be "cast into the outer darkness," where "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

That's the end of the Beale quote. And isn't that interesting? There we have New Testament passages that associate darkness with pain. And it's really referring in the Gospels to the place of eternal separation from God. And so that's what Beale is playing off here to explain the language of this bowl. And I think it's reasonable.

Revelation 16:17-21 is the sixth bowl. And this takes us to the end of the chapter, the seventh bowl. Let me just go back here. Because we ended with the Armageddon verse.

¹⁷ The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" ¹⁸ And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. ¹⁹ The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. ²⁰ And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. ²¹ And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

So there's a lot here that dovetails into the preceding bowls and then adds a specific element of its own (the hail). And I bring that up because there are some commentators who sort of want to merge these things. But we'll get to that in a moment as we wrap up here. So I would say, just in regard to the sixth and seventh bowls, just like the other ones, they're clear references back to Babylon. We have the River Euphrates mentioned (like how clear is that reference to

Babylon?). And the “kings of the east.” Who are the “kings of the east” to somebody living in John’s day? I’ve got news for you, it’s not China. The “kings of the east...” Think, “Where is Israel? Where is Canaan? What’s east? Look east.” It’s Babylon. It’s the Tigris and the Euphrates. It’s Babylon. It’s the Medes and the Persians, the Babylonians. This would be obvious to anyone living at the time, acquainted with their geography. And frankly, the rest of these judgments—the first layer of seven, the second layer of seven... Here we’re in the third layer of seven. And it’s all pointing to Babylon as the chief metaphor for the ultimate chaos agent. In this case, in John’s writing, the beast and his whole system... So the sixth bowl makes this abundantly clear. You’ve got this language referring back to Babylon very clearly. In some respects, it is like the last judgment due to its overlap with the seventh bowl, because the seventh bowl could be read as a climactic summary. Some commentators do. However, the seventh bowl does have a distinctive element of hail, which again takes us back to the exodus plagues on Egypt. So I’m content to have them be discrete six and seventh bowls in judgments. But you’ll see this sort of merging in other commentators.

The sixth bowl further represents a striking parallel to the sixth trumpet. So we have a symmetry there. Both feature “the great river Euphrates” as the sixth element in the respective sequence (that’s Revelation 9:14 compared to 16:12). In Revelation 16:19 Babylon is specifically noted as the point of orientation.

“Kings of the east”... Look at what’s happening here. These kings of the east are the ones who are going to meet at the place which is in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. You know? For the whole Har-Mageddon thing, you need to go back and look at *Unseen Realm*, chapter 41. This is not Megiddo. This is Jerusalem. This is Mount Zion. This is where the final apocalyptic battle is going to take place. Har-Mageddon is not a reference to Megiddo for a number of reasons. Again, just go back and read the material in the book, *Unseen Realm*, chapter 41. It’s a reference to the *Har-Moad*, which is the place of the Divine Council. So the forces of evil—the forces of Babylon, the primary chaos agent—and all his forces, the hordes that are associated with the east, which is Babylon... Okay? All of the nations. They are going to march on Jerusalem, which is God’s domain, the place of his council. It’s God’s cosmic mountain dwelling place (Jerusalem and Zion). And that is where we are going to find out and see how this all plays out. It’s the final confrontation for all the marbles. And it takes place at (and really over)... And it’s really about who will be Most High. Who will sit on the throne of Zion? Who will occupy the throne of the cosmic mountain? Is Babylon going to overwhelm Jerusalem and Zion again? Or (and we know how the story ends) is everything going to be reversed from the way it was the first time? And of course, the answer is the latter.

Think of it this way. After the Babel rebellion back in Genesis 11 and that judgment of the nations (assigning them to lesser members of the heavenly host, out of which emerges the Deuteronomy 32 worldview with the supernatural

55:00

princes over geographical nations, and the principalities and the powers and all this stuff)... After that is launched (that awful situation of the third rebellion in the primeval history of Genesis 1-11), after that occurs in the flow of biblical history, Egypt emerged as the nation that was the central enemy. They are the face of chaos in the ensuing biblical story. Because we have Abraham called. We've got Isaac born. We've got Jacob/Israel. Israel winds up down in Egypt and they're almost exterminated. So Egypt emerges as the primary face of chaos. But it doesn't stay with them. Obviously, Babylon emerges again as rightfully [inaudible] that way, of the situation that was begun on its own doorstep, as it were. Egypt gets displaced by Babylon in that role. And Babylon's status as the emblem of anti-Eden transcends that of Egypt, because it's Babylon. And Babylon succeeded where Egypt did not. Babylon conquered Jerusalem. Destroyed it. Destroyed the Temple. Sent the people of God into exile. But God used them. God was still behind this. It was a judgment for Israel's own idolatry. We understand that. But Babylon succeeds where Egypt did not, with the destruction of the nation of Israel and Zion via the exile. And all of this imagery—all of this back history connected specifically to Babylon—is strewn throughout all of these judgments. They're not about Russia. They're not about Asia or China. Okay? You have to think more transcendently. You have to think about just chaos in general. The forces of cosmic evil and humans that are aligned with cosmic evil in general, that is who the End Time enemy is—the whole system. It's not tied to one geographical entity that *we're* familiar with. We don't want to use a single geographical entity (or even a couple) as filters through which to interpret Revelation when none of that would've been in John's head. And he's trying to communicate the totality of the problem. And the best way you do that is Babylon, because of the Deuteronomy 32 worldview and the history of what happened to Zion before.

So it's quite misguided to try to pin the beast's tail on some nation that we don't like today. I'm not saying we should like them, okay? But that misses the point. It's so much *bigger* than that. It's everything. It's the whole system. It's the whole world—everything aligned against Christ and his people. So all of this sets the stage for the ultimate reversal (Revelation 17 and 18), the fall of Babylon, and that's what we'll get into as we keep going.

TS: Alright, Mike. It's interesting. Because we've actually stood at Megiddo with you, talking about this exact thing, and how it's not the location. But physically, visually...

MH: Well, where is the mountain? [laughter]

TS: Yeah, visually, standing there and seeing how it's kind of more of a valley, it's just amazing.

MH: Yep. Where is the mountain? [laughs] Where'd it go?

TS: Absolutely.

MH: Who moved it?

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TS: Yeah. God did I guess. [MH laughs] But alright, looking forward to the next two chapters. We're getting close to wrapping up Revelation. And so we're getting to the conclusion. And I'm looking forward to the next couple of episodes (chapters 17 and 18). And also, Mike, I wanted to mention, just to make sure to clarify, that we have canceled our conference. So I just wanted to throw that out there for listeners. And I want to ask our listeners for continual prayers for you, Mike, and your family. And we appreciate, again, all that you do. And with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.