

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 390

Revelation 17-18

August 27, 2021

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Episode Summary

Revelation 17-18 overlaps a good deal with elements in preceding chapters, most notably 13-16. In those earlier chapters readers were introduced to the Beast, the symbolic representation of anti-Eden chaos drawn from Daniel 7; Babylon as a metaphor for that system and cipher for the present enemy of John's day, the Roman Empire; and the judgment of the nations—unbelievers who have aligned themselves with the Beast and Babylon against the true God and his people. Chapters 17-18 continues these themes utilizing other imagery and language from the Old Testament. Collectively, chapters 13-18 lead to the confrontation at Armageddon (har-mageddon), the mount of Yahweh's council assembly, between the returning Christ, Yahweh incarnate and risen, and the Beast (Rev 19). In this episode we explore John's use of the Old Testament and specific themes related to Psalm 82 and the Day of the Lord judgment of the fallen gods of the Deuteronomy 32 worldview, the Babel rebellion, in setting up this climactic confrontation.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 390: Revelation 17-18. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you feeling?

MH: Well, this has been a pretty good day. I mean, the days aren't all equal. Some of that is because I can't eat... [inaudible]. You know, all that good stuff that we look forward to as we age. [laughs] So I have it thrust on me now before its time. But here we are.

TS: Yeah. Well, have you at least been able to rest and watch some baseball and all that good stuff?

MH: Yeah, yeah. I've been doing that. Sleeping a lot. So I think I'm caught up from the hospital experience.

TS: There you go.

MH: This is not a slight against anybody who actually works in a hospital, but I'm convinced Vlad the Impaler made the beds that they use in hospitals. It's his patent.

TS: [laughs] Yeah.

MH: Because they are just unbelievably uncomfortable. Just crazy. Where I was at had this... I actually made a video of it because I couldn't believe it. But you tilt the bed up and it forms a gulley at the hinge. Like, "Well, that can't be right." [laughs] So it's like, you throw three or four pillows in there, you sit on top of them, and you can just about get comfortable. Because I've had lower back problems since high school, so this is an issue for me. And then when you're settled, the bed moves. It moves, like, every four or five minutes, or whatever it is. And it's for people who are bedridden, for bed sores, and change positions and all this. But it's like, "What in the world?" It's like you *can't* get comfortable. So I asked the one nurse, "Can you just unplug this thing?" And she didn't know how. Well, I figured it out. And I didn't ask permission either.

TS: Yeah.

MH: I did. I dismantled the thing. You know? It's like, I've got to be able to at least get... I was getting maybe three hours of sleep a night, plus all the beeping and the tests. It's almost like they want you to *want* to leave. [laughs]

TS: Yeah.

MH: Like, "You had me at the first night. We don't need to continue. I *want to* leave." [laughs]

TS: Yeah. At least you're over that piece of it. And you're able to eat now. So that's good. Taste some things.

MH: Yeah, I have not had any kind of stomach problem as far as nausea or anything like that. I mean, it's still... I still get pain, like gas pain and stuff like that, when you're reintroducing food. But you know, that'll get figured out. We're working our way through the grocery list (pun intended) of stuff that I feel like eating. So it'll get there. I've managed to gain 12 pounds.

TS: That's awesome.

MH: And I don't really know how. Because right now I still don't have much of an appetite. I mean, I don't have the nausea problem. But I can eat normal things, but not in great amounts. And then sometimes it'll just rip me around. So it's still an experiment. But somehow or another, it's like, "How in the world did I gain 12 pounds?" A lot of it's the IV stuff. But it's still meaningful because I've got to put

the weight back on before chemo. So that's actually been kind of astonishing, to step on a scale, and, "How'd that happen?" But there it is.

TS: So what you're saying is you're not in the garage, pumping iron?

MH: No, we're not there yet.

TS: Alright. Well, good deal. Well, I can only imagine through all of this how much fun you've had preparing for Revelation 17 and 18.

MH: [laughs] Right. Yeah. Exactly.

TS: [laughs] Yeah, I mean, these two chapters are pretty big ones.

MH: Maybe I should hold the rest of Revelation until I'm on, like, medical marijuana. Because that would sort of fit. You know?

TS: Absolutely. [MH laughs] We'd get some good episodes on that. Yeah, that's great.

MH: [laughs] Yeah, my comments at that point would be just as meaningful as anybody else's.

TS: Eh, I don't know. That's a good experiment. We should try that. [MH laughs]

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MH: Yeah, I don't know. I don't know if we'll get there or not. [laughs] But there we are. You can tell I've been reading about all this stuff that people try when they get chemo. And so that has popped up in four or five articles I've read. So it's like, "Yeah, that'd be good for the rest of the book of Revelation. Why not?" You know? [laughs]

TS: There you go. There you go. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I've ready for it. This is two chapters that... There's lots of stuff going on in these two.

MH: Yeah. And you know, we're going to do 17 and 18 today. And there's a lot of overlap—a fair number of overlaps—between these chapters and stuff we've already hit. So we're not going to rehearse everything that we did before. We're not going to cover all that turf again. So I'm going to pick my spots. For instance, we've talked before about Babylon being a chaos symbol and a metaphor. That was chapter 14. It's going to pop up again here. We've talked about its relationship to Rome, and so we're not going to repeat that material.

In this episode, we're going to try to focus on the identity of Mystery Babylon and how it's rooted in Old Testament descriptions maybe of idolatry and specifically injustice to the nations. And again, if that sounds like Psalm 82, take note of that.

Because it is kind of surprising how much... Let's put it this way. When you're talking about Babylon and you're talking about a system... Because this is the book of Revelation. Okay? The city of Babylon itself is not a big deal anymore. There is no Babylonian Empire. So we get John talking about Rome—the big, bad empire of its day, the last empire of Daniel 2. Because that's when the kingdom of God comes into the picture during the Roman Empire. I mean, we're very clearly talking about Roman stuff throughout the book of Revelation. So John is going to use Old Testament Babylon as a way to talk about the great enemy that the Church is facing when he's writing the book of Revelation. Well, everybody sort of knows that. But do we realize what we're talking about when we talk about Babylon as a system? That's the Deuteronomy 32 rebellion. That's the Deuteronomy 32 worldview. And so it shouldn't surprise us that the judgments that are meted out (whether it's the trumpets or the bowls or whatever set of judgments we're talking about) are judgments on the nations. They're judgments on the people who have aligned themselves with the beast, i.e., with Babylon, with these other nations that are against not Israel (ethnic Israel in this case), but against the new Israel, i.e., the Church.

And again, I'm not a total replacement theologian kind of guy and my audience knows that. I refer to the Church as *a* new Israel, not *the* new Israel. I do think there's an eschatological destiny for *Israel*—geographic Israel. But you have to be thinking in these modes. It makes a lot of sense to read through the book of Revelation... We've got judgments against the nations and judgments against the people of those nations tied up with the Day of the Lord, which is when those things happen in the Old Testament. And ultimately, the gods of those nations—supernatural evil—are going to lose total control. They're going to be destroyed. So they're no longer going to govern the nations. Their authority has already been stripped away. People who have already read *Unseen Realm* or the *Demons* book already know this. People who listened to our Colossians series when we got to Colossians 3, you're going to know that Paul unites the idea of the resurrection with the nullification of the authority of the fallen sons of God of the Old Testament—the gods of the Old Testament, who are Paul's "principalities and powers" and so on and so forth. All these things intertwine.

And so when you're here in the book of Revelation and you see these judgments being played out (the Day of the Lord), another element of this that's being described *is* the final death of the gods. This is when the judgment of Psalm 82 comes to pass. And these chapters (17-18) are leading up to... We've both led up to and now we're dealing with the fall of Babylon (the fall of Babel, the whole system) and the death of its gods, that's really going to take place at Armageddon. Because what is Armageddon? It is not a battle at Megiddo. It is a battle for Zion. It's a battle for the seat of divine authority. It's the *Har-moed* (the mountain of assembly—the mount of assembly), which in the Old Testament, on the pagan side is going to be Baal's mountain and so on and so forth, but on the Israelite side (on Yahweh's side) this is Zion. This is Jerusalem. This is where the

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battle is. This is what it's about. This is all stage-setting for the ultimate conflict between the Deuteronomy 32 Babel system and Yahweh himself, for supremacy. That's what it is.

And so when we read through the book of Revelation, those people in this audience who understand what the Deuteronomy 32 worldview is, it ought to be jumping out at you in this talk about the nations and the beast and Babel/Babylon. Again, how could you miss it? It's just that we're not taught about eschatology in this way. We are taught *systems*. And those systems are typically applied to, "Well, what's going on in Russia? What's going on in some other country?" We isolate it geographically. Or maybe we literalize Babylon. And a literalized Babylon approach is better than a literalized Russia or China approach. I mean, because that makes no sense at all. But this is the way we're typically taught. Or we're taught to spiritualize everything, where there's really nothing going on boots-on-the-ground here. There's no heaven and earth symbiosis. This is just all ethereal. It's the Church against evil in a very abstract, ethereal sense. Because again, if you're the amillennialist or somebody like that, you're typically, in your tradition, not thinking about the reclaiming of the nations in real time, just like they were lost. You're not thinking in those modes. And so I'm hoping that as we've gone through 15 and 16 and now Revelation 17 and 18, these things will start to again recur in your mind and just jump out at you, because this is really what these chapters are about. They're stage-setting for the ultimate conflict over who is the Most High. Who is the Most High? Is it going to be the beast and that system? Or is it going to be the God of the Bible?

So I want to jump in here and just start pecking away at some of the things that we haven't addressed in too much detail to this point and sort of fill in the gaps. So let's just start in chapter 17 with the woman who is the prostitute (some translations will have "harlot"). So I'll just read a few verses here.

**One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters. ²With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."
³Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.**

Let me just stop there. "Full of blasphemous names." Well, "blasphemous names," these are spiritual competitors. Okay? They're the names of the gods and the other nations. And they're in the wilderness. This is the realm of the dead in the Old Testament. This is cosmic chaos. This is anti-Eden. All the things that you read about in *Unseen Realm* just sort of wind up somewhere in the last few

chapters of the book of Revelation. [laughs] They just do, because they're very cosmic in their orientation. But anyway...

...and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.

Again, we've seen that before.

⁴The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. ⁵And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." ⁶And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

You know, spiritual adultery, something real simple like that... I mean, we're not dealing with literal adultery, but adultery is an Old Testament metaphor for idolatry—for spiritual unfaithfulness, for worshiping other gods. Why does it make sense here? Why does it fit here? Because it's Babel! Okay? This is the Deuteronomy 32 worldview. Nothing could make more sense. This is the whole point. It's the gods of the world that are going to be arrayed and aligned against the God of Israel and his people. Okay? That's the "End of Days" scenario. It's the Day of the Lord. It's the final judgment of the gods. And it comes down to this one final conflict.

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Again, what I'm trying to communicate is that the language of the adultery stuff, the fornication stuff, the harlot... these are ways in the Old Testament that idolatry and loyalty to some other god, i.e., one of the gods appointed (allotted) to the nations back at the Deuteronomy 32 rebellion at the Tower of Babel... This is the way idolatry is described. So it should be no surprise. It should be just firing off the radar in your head. The biblical theological Deuteronomy 32 worldview radar should be just ringing in your head, that this is the setting for what we're reading—what's going on in these chapters. But again, we're just not taught about End Times this way. We're taught some system and then, "There you go. Be warm and filled. Pick your system, and away you go." And it's like it's not tied anywhere to an Old Testament worldview or a supernatural worldview context. And again, that's just a shame. How many times have you heard me say that on the podcast? But here we are again.

So back to the woman here and the description, "seated on many waters"—again, the theme of the immorality and so on and so forth. So it's important to... I'm just going to rabbit trail a little bit here. Because one of the things you read is that Babel, the beast, is actually a description of Jerusalem. Now I'm just going to say it. I think this is an unfortunate (I'm going to try to be a little kind here) anti-

Semitic trajectory and interpretation. We need to remember from the outset: there is a difference between an unfaithful wife and a prostitute. Okay? Those two are on the same page, but they are not the same thing—in most respects, not at all. There’s also a difference between the *seducer* and the one who gets seduced, okay? So just hole those thoughts. I’m going somewhere with this. But I want to rabbit trail a little bit on this notion that Babylon here is Israel or Jerusalem. I don’t think that’s the case at all.

So Keener writes in his *New International Version (NIV) Application Commentary* on Revelation, which I don’t think we’ve used to this point before, but I’ve been reading through it and there’s a lot of good stuff in here, as you’d expect with Keener. But anyway, he writes:

The Old Testament prophets often portrayed Israel as a woman, either God’s faithful bride when pure (e.g., Isa. 54:5–6; 62:5; Hos. 2:19–20) or an adulteress when unfaithful to him (e.g., Lev. 17:7; Isa. 1:21; Jer. 3:1; Ezek. 16:20) [MH: of course Ezekiel 16 is the big one]. Revelation contrasts two cities, Jerusalem and Babylon, as a bride and prostitute respectively (17:5; 21:2).

So out of the gate, this is not Jerusalem. Because the contrast between Babylon and Jerusalem has already been given in the book. We’re going to get this in Revelation 17:5 here, reading a few verses ahead, like we just did, and also Revelation 21:2, this is going to become clear.

In two Old Testament instances, the “prostitute” is not Israel, Judah, or Jerusalem, but an evil world empire [MH: so there’s Old Testament precedent for the harlot—the prostitute—image being used of a world pagan empire, and those two instances were]: Nineveh or Tyre [MH: Tyre is going to become a little more important as we proceed]. Nineveh will seduce the nations with her prostitution and witchcraft (Nah. 3:4; see comment on Rev. 18:23); Tyre will play the prostitute “with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth” (Isa. 23:17), yet her wealth will ultimately be laid up for the righteous (23:18).

Let me just stop there. It’s the theme of wealth that loops Tyre into this. If you go back to Ezekiel 28... Ezekiel 28, the seat of the gods, it’s the Divine Council. We’ve talked a lot about Divine Council in there, Eden stuff—Eden, the mountain of God, the garden of God there in Ezekiel 28. But the other thing that happens in Ezekiel 28 is you get the gemstones; you get terminology for economic wealth and prosperity and how this is used to bring other nations under the power—under the influence—of Tyre in that chapter. And so that idea of using wealth to entice other nations into relationships and ultimately into idolatrous relationships is going to be part of what’s happening here in the book of Revelation. It’s going to be part of the description to describe this massive world system. And ultimately, it’s going to emerge as the Babel world system, because Babylon is the last power standing that actually succeeds in destroying the people of God in

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the Old Testament. Tyre doesn't. Egypt didn't. It's going to be Babylon. Okay? And that ties back very obviously to the Deuteronomy 32 worldview. But again, I'm just throwing stuff out at the point. There are things that are going to pop up in this chapter that, they seem not related, but they actually are related. It's seduction. It's idolatry. It's spiritual unfaithfulness. And ultimately, it's the Deuteronomy 32 rebellion. So let's go back to Keener. Keener says:

Some scholars have proposed that Babylon here partly symbolizes Jerusalem. Others suggest it predicts a revived role for literal Babylon. But especially in view of its place on seven hills (17:9), most commentators recognize that Rome is in view, whether or not they believe the text also looks beyond Rome [MH: like further into the future]. As commentators often also recognize, Babylon the prostitute is a deliberate contrast with new Jerusalem as the bride [MH: okay, there's this contrastive element]. Others also contrasted Zion and Babylon, lamenting Babylon's prosperity but anticipating its judgment [MH: Second Temple writers do this] (2 Bar. 11:1-3; 4 Ezra 3:29, 31).

I mean, this is not new to either Keener or myself or New Testament scholars today. There are going to be Second Temple Jewish writers that see the deliberate contrast prophetically between Babylon and Jerusalem. Now that's the end of the Keener quote.

Now you could say, "Okay, you have the prostitute motif used of foreign empires." Okay, that's fair. Keener's given us two examples here. But someone could come back and say, "Well, Ezekiel 16 describes Israel as a whore." And that's true. Jeremiah 2:20 through chapter 4:30 does that. But you know, we need to think a little bit more about what's going on in these passages. On the Jeremiah description (Jeremiah 2-4) of Judah as a prostitute, Beale and McDonough note the following. They say:

[In that passage] Judah is a harlot (2:20) who has "a harlot's forehead" ([MH: Jeremiah] 3:3) and causes others to sin (2:33), on whose "skirts is found the lifeblood of the innocent" (2:34), whose "dress (is) in scarlet," who "decorates herself with ornaments of gold" (4:30), and whose lovers will despise her and try to kill her (4:30). Israel is called a harlot because although she is supposedly committed to Yahweh, she has spiritual intercourse with idols.

Again, it's idolatry. But there's a problem here. In Revelation, the point of reference is to a specific city. It's not to a country; it's not to a region. It's to a specific city that seduces others by means of idolatry and injustice. It's not to a country that was seduced by such things, like Israel. I mean, Israel is the one who gets seduced. By the way, that's Deuteronomy 32 as well. This is the first time where we read in the Torah of Israel actually getting seduced to worship other gods. That's Deuteronomy 32, I think right around verses 10, 11, 12. We actually get verse 17, of course, where Israel is blamed for worshipping gods (the

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shedim) and so on and so forth. So Israel is the one who gets caught up in this. They *get* seduced by the gods of the nations. The gods of the nations come after Yahweh's children to make them disloyal. And so Israel (Judah, whatever) *becomes* what Babylon already *is*. Okay? They get seduced by this. They're not the one that is going to go out and seduce other nations. You're not going to have any passage in the Old Testament where Israel or Jerusalem is going to go out and make the other nations idolaters. They're already idolaters. That doesn't make any sense. So I think we need to be thinking a little more about what is actually described in the book of Revelation, which is a city that has been the engine of chaos, not a victim, not one who's been seduced (like you could say Israel was). But this is the one that drives the bus. This is the one who's driving the idolatry bus. So the reason Israel receives harlot/prostitution imagery is because she has *become* idolatrous. She has been seduced. Not because she lures other nations into that condition. The prostitute of Revelation 17 is not a victim. The prostitute of Revelation 17 is the engine of chaos. And that just isn't Jerusalem. It makes no sense. So Beale and McDonough chime in. They say, despite some of these references to Judah or Ezekiel 16, they say:

However, "harlot" can also refer to other ungodly nations in the prophets, as in Isa. 23:15–18; Nah. 3:4–5.

They mention one Dead Sea Scroll text that applies the Nahum text to other apostates even within Israel. But again, the Old Testament precedent for this is other nations. They comment that:

The "harlot" metaphor has the essential idea of an illicit relationship, whether that be religious, economic, political, or a combination of these. In both Nah. 3:4–5 and especially Isa. 23:15–18 Nineveh and Tyre are called harlots because they cause ruin and uncleanness among the nations by economically dominating them and influencing them by their idolatry (see Glasson 1965: 95). Furthermore, the whore in Rev. 17 is called [MH: specifically, explicitly] "Babylon the Great," which refers to...

Babylon, okay? Not Jerusalem, but Babylon. And by extension it's going to be Rome because that's the enemy of the time.

Therefore, "Babylon" refers both to the pagan world and apostate Israel and to the apostate church that cooperates with it.

Anybody who cooperates with the Babel system is committing spiritual idolatry. But the great whore *herself* is Babylon. She is the one. She's the engine of chaos, the engine of anti-Eden, the one propelling the ruination of all nations, and especially targeting the people of Yahweh to turn against him as sort of the final end game of the Deuteronomy 32 rebellion.

Now there are other reasons that are more obvious why the prostitute wouldn't be Jerusalem as well. I'm just going to run through these real quickly. The other imagery describing her (the prostitute) clearly belongs to either Babylon from the Old Testament or Rome, by extension, in John's own time period. But not to Jerusalem. So here are a few examples:

1) Most obviously, the woman is identified as Babylon the great. Okay? That kind of takes the ambiguity out of it.

2) Babylon is said to be "drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." That's verse 6 in Revelation 17. Now earlier in the book, the martyrdom of the faithful is associated with the material in Daniel fulfilled through Antiochus IV (the little horn—the antichrist figure), who is a Gentile. While Jews did kill Christians (Acts 7 with Stephen, for example—this does happen in the book of Acts), there were no full-scale persecutions of Christians anywhere near the level of Roman persecution in New Testament times. There just weren't. Yeah, you can tell Saul to go to Damascus and take Christians captive. You know, what is he going to do? Bring a few dozen with him? Okay, we're talking massive-scale, concerted, empowered, funded persecution of believers by an empire. Okay? You don't get that with the Jewish communities. I mean, it's very localized and sporadic and sparse. I mean, you read about this stuff in the book of Acts, where somebody gets beaten or they get shunned from the synagogue. Okay, obviously that stuff happens. That is not the kind of scale of persecution that's being described in the book of Revelation for Babylon—for the great whore. It's nowhere close.

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3) Babylon is described as a city whose people dwell by many waters. Now Beale notes that this particular point of description about end-time Babylon and her judgment is taken from Jeremiah 51:13, which, if you do follow along in the Septuagint, it's actually Jeremiah 28:13 in the Septuagint. You say, "Well, how in the world can it be 30 chapters different?" In some of the major Prophets, the sequence of the Prophets and the chapters in those Prophets is dramatically different than you get in the traditional Masoretic Text. So that's why. If you read my book, *The Bible Code*, you would learn that in an appendix. Anyway, the description is taken from Jeremiah 51 in the Masoretic Text (Jeremiah 28 in the Septuagint), where Jeremiah predicts absolute judgment on historical Babylon:

...for his [God's] wrath is against Babylon, to destroy it utterly... against the inhabitants of Babylon dwelling on many waters.

So right there it is. That quote is actually the Septuagint, Jeremiah 28:11-13. Now Beale and McDonough note in this regard as well, this "many waters" description and some of the other descriptors here:

"the fact that the phrase "fallen, fallen is Babylon" of Isa. 21:9 appears in Revelation [MH: in the next chapter, Revelation] 18:2, as well in the preceding

text [MH: earlier in the book, Revelation] 14:8, which itself looks ahead to chaps. 17–18 [MH: where we are today].

You know, the fact that we're talking about Babylon itself, not Jerusalem or something like that...

Isaiah 21:1 uniquely combines the apparently disparate images of desert and sea...

I'm going to go back and read just a few things here. I'm going to read Revelation 17, a couple of the verses that we read already, just so that you follow Beale and McDonough's point here. So the chapter starts out:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, ² with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality,

So on and so forth. And then verse 3 says,

³ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast...

So you get the *waters*... How can the woman be on many waters and then also be into a wilderness where she's sitting? And Beale and McDonough say, "What's happening here is John is taking two items from the Old Testament (Isaiah 21:1, Isaiah 21:9) and combining them and using them both here. So let me just read Isaiah 21:1. Let me just look this up real quickly in the Septuagint, since that's basically what John is going to be doing here. So Isaiah 21:1:

¹ As a squall might pass through a desert, coming from a desert out of a land, fearsome ² is the vision and harsh; it was reported to me:

So on and so forth. He's going to go off against the Elamites and the Persians and so on and so forth. And you get down to verse 9, when the prophet is railing against these other nations. I'll go to verse 8:

The Lord said, "I stood through every day, and I stood over the camp the whole night." ⁹ And look, he himself is coming, a rider of a pair of horses! And [he answered and] said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon; and all its statues and its handiworks have been crushed into the earth."

So there you have in Isaiah 21:1 and 9—this “desert” idea—and then you have the “many waters” idea. And so, again, Beale and McDonough would say, “We know where both images are *found*, in the same chapter in the Old Testament about Babylon. And the fact that John uses them both here pretty much tells us really clearly that John’s talking about Babylon, not Jerusalem or some other place.” Okay? Isaiah 17:12-13. We might as well just throw that in here as well. Beale does not mention this, but I’m going to just loop it in here. So this is, again, one of the oracles against the nations. This is a general one: “Woe to the nations.” I’m going to just read you these two verses.

12 Woe to you, multitude of many nations! You will be troubled like a swelling sea, and the back of many nations will resound like water. 13 Many nations are like much water, as *when* much water rushes with force.

Okay? So there you go. You have the equation of “many nations” with “many waters.” And so when the prostitute in Revelation 17 is sitting upon “many waters,” and later on the chapter (both in chapters 17 and 18), the judgments are against many *nations*. Again, this is Babylon. This is the Deuteronomy 32 worldview. When you think “Babylon,” you should think of the fallen sons of God—the fallen gods of the nations of the Old Testament that emerged from the same rebellion at the Tower of Babel.

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And so this is why we would expect the great beast, the great prostitute, and all these images, sitting upon many waters and many nations... All these things go together, you know? It’s sort of like a recipe for chaos, if you think about it. The desert. Okay? Well, that’s anti-Eden. It’s completely 180° away from what Eden was. Because deserts are places where you die. They don’t have enough food, enough water. They’re terrible. You suffer there. Well, that’s anti-Eden. Okay? Many waters. We don’t live in the seas. We don’t live in the waters. You know? These are scary. They’re unpredictable. Humans can’t live there. It’s the force of death. It’s one of these great metaphors of the Old Testament. Yeah, it’s exactly what Eden wasn’t.

All these things, even though to our eye they look like, “What in the world is this guy trying to say? He’s talking about waters. He’s talking about deserts. He’s talking about prostitution. He’s talking about a beast that comes from the waters and it’s got all these heads and all these nations and crowns. And what in the world is...?” All of these things actually go together. Because they’re all ways to describe the Deuteronomy 32 worldview, where all the nations of the world are under dominion of other gods who hate Yahweh and his people. It’s actually very simple. What we’re reading here in these chapters in Revelation and elsewhere is, the pieces are disassembled and the pieces get talked about individually. But when you put all the pieces together, they make sense when they’re together because this is what they describe.

Now going on again with the list of why we don't have Jerusalem here:

4) Jerusalem doesn't have seven hills. Neither does Babylon. And that's fine, because Rome does. Rome is described that way in coinage and other primary sources of the period where John's living. Again, it's a way for John to draw attention to Rome while he's using Babylon language to unite the two. Again, they're anti-Eden, the forces of chaos.

5) The description of the beast in Revelation 17 upon which the prostitute rides derives from Daniel 7. Okay? If we look at Daniel 7, the fourth beast is the one whose description is prophesied there in Daniel 7 that bears a resemblance to Revelation 17. But think about Daniel. The fourth beast of Daniel 7 is the one who persecutes faithful Israelites and Jews. And that one is analogous to the fourth kingdom of Daniel 2. And it's in the time of the fourth kingdom in that series of four Gentile empires (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome). The fourth kingdom is very obviously Rome. It's not Jerusalem. The fourth kingdom isn't Jerusalem. The fourth kingdom gets destroyed by the kingdom made without hands—the kingdom of God. When do we see the kingdom of God re-inaugurated on earth? That would be during the time of Jesus, which of course is during the time of the Roman empire. Again, all these things fit, even though it gets confusing when you're looking at individual pieces. Another one:

6) Revelation 17:15. Let's go read that.

¹⁵ And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.

It can't be any clearer than this. Where do we get those? Deuteronomy 32, Babel, Tower of Babel incident. So in light of the explicit clarity there, it's very evident that Revelation 17 and what's going to follow in Revelation 18 should be understood in the context of the Babel rebellion—the Babel chaos failure at the heart of Deuteronomy 32. Another one:

7) Revelation 17:12 has roots in the Septuagint back into Daniel 4 and Daniel 7 that can only point to Babylon. So what does Revelation 17:12 say?

¹² And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour [MH: here's the phrase "for one hour"—hold onto that], together with the beast. ¹³ These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast.

So Beale and McDonough write in this regard:

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As Dan. 7:4–7 was the source of the seven heads, so Dan. 7:7–8, 20, 24 are the source of the “ten horns” [MH: all you’ve got to do is read through Daniel 7 and you’ll see that]. Daniel identifies the horns with kings, and Rev. 17:12 does the same in beginning to reveal further details about how that prophecy will be fulfilled: The kings’ future reign with the beast will last for a period referred to as “one hour.” The time period echoes that in Dan. 4:17a LXX, where it refers to the period during which God caused King Nebuchadnezzar to become like a beast [MH: the same language is used]. Here also God is sovereign even over the authority of ungodly kings who ally with the beast in order to prepare to oppose the Messiah (cf. 17:13–14). The phrase “one hour” is repeated in [MH: Revelation] chap. 18 with reference to the time in which “Babylon the Great” was judged by God (18:10, 17, 19), which is a combined allusion to the “one hour” from Dan. 4:17a LXX with “Babylon the Great” from Dan. 4:30 LXX.

So essentially what you have here is... Let me just throw one last one in here:

8) Revelation 17:18 excludes Jerusalem but fits Babylon and Rome very well. Let me just read that.

¹⁸ And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.

Okay, at no time did Jerusalem have dominion over the kings of the whole earth. You could say that about Babylon. You could say that about Rome, given the nations that were in the biblical worldview and the Mediterranean context and all that. Again, it’s very clear that the beast is Babylon. The woman... It’s all Babylon used as a cipher, or used as a symbolic pool by which to talk about Rome. This should all be just explicitly clear. There’s nothing that would loop Jerusalem into this description as the beast or as the great prostitute or anything like that.

So I’ve spent a lot of time on this because I want you to see that chapters 15, 16, 17, and 18 are setting up a final conflict between God and the Babel system. It’s not between God and Jerusalem. Okay? The final battle (Armageddon) is going to be fought at Zion—at Jerusalem—but that isn’t God’s enemy. God’s enemy here is the Deuteronomy 32 thing—the nations of the world and all that align themselves with the beast, who controls the nations of the world and has seduced the nations of the world into worshiping him.

So this is going to be... As we proceed into chapters 19 and especially 20, you’re probably already thinking, “Well, this whole scene—this whole set-up—sounds like what’s going to happen in chapter 20. How can it be happening here?” Because if you’re asking that question, you’ve been taught to read the book of Revelation in linear fashion. What we’re going to see when we get to Revelation 19 and 20 (especially 20, we may hit it in 19 but I’m still not sure how I want to do

those chapters)... But you're going to see that Revelation 20 is actually a condensed version of stuff we've seen before in the book. This goes back to, "Should we read Revelation as a linear chronology of events or do things in the book repeat themselves in cycles?" That's one of the interpretive problems or controversies in the book of Revelation. And I actually think the truth is, "Well, it does both." It just depends where you're at, rather than picking a system. Because again, the system will say, "Well, it only does this, and therefore we're amillennialists." Or, "No, it's a linear chronology. Therefore we're pre-trib, pre-mil, whatever." You know? Look... both of them happen. And I'm going to show you when we get to chapters 19 and 20 specifically how one passage in the Old Testament (it's going to be Ezekiel 38 and 39) gets repurposed in these chapters (17, 18, 19, 20) to show you that John is using that to describe a repetitive cycle of events.

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So there are going to be those who say, "Well, if you take it that way, then there is no millennium." Meredith Kline is one of those. And I quote him in *Unseen Realm*. He has a very famous... He's might be the only evangelical I've ever seen that understands *Har-moed* (*har-mageddon*) is not Megiddo, but it refers to Jerusalem. Outside evangelicalism, you have scholars that have known this for a long time. But again, evangelicals typically get married to a theological or eschatological system, and they never see this stuff. They're never going back into the Old Testament and looking at the precedents. Well, Kline does. But Kline actually uses it to argue for... I think he's a post-millennialist... Or no, I think he's an amillennialist. I think that that's how he uses it. I don't think his is at all necessary. That'll surprise the guy who reviewed my *Demons* book in *Masters Seminary Journal* who thinks I'm an amillennialist. But that's a subject for a different podcast. It's amusing how you can be so misread. But when people can't think outside the box (their own boxes), this is what you get.

So we're going to get into that. And I already know that some of you are thinking, "This just sounds like Revelation 20, where Satan is released, and the nations surround Jerusalem. That's after the Millennium, Mike. That isn't leading up to Armageddon." Well, actually it is. And actually it's describing the same thing. But again, that doesn't mean that we don't have these things actually occurring in real time. And that's what somebody like Kline, who wants to resist because he's committed to a certain End Times system that doesn't have a literal kingdom... Okay? I do. And we'll get to that at that point.

So I wanted to stress some of this, that there's a deep connection between chapters 15, 16, 17, and 18, with a battle—battle lines being formed. It's all stage-setting for Armageddon. And Armageddon is going to be about the nations aligned against God and his people at Jerusalem, just like Revelation 20 describes. Okay? And I just want people to know that you can see it, but then you're going to think that we're reading things out of order because of the way

you've been taught to approach the book of Revelation. So I just want to lay that out there. It's both for today and for a subsequent episode.

But for the rest of our time today, I don't want to park on all of that. I want us to think a little bit about, why is it this way? Like, what is this sort of leading up to? What's the takeaway point? And here's what I think it is. I think that when we read Revelation 17 and 18, and we get all this "Babylon" stuff (we get all the nations, many waters, the spiritual adultery, blah blah blah, the great whore, and all this stuff) that looks just weird, it looks abstract, it looks like none of these things have any relationship to each other at all. But they all do because they are ways of describing allegiance to other gods instead of Yahweh. They are ways of describing the Deuteronomy 32 rebellion—all this stuff. I want you to be thinking the rest of the time who Psalm 82 links the judgment of the gods over the nations with not only these themes, but also the whole theme of injustice—social and economic injustice. Just the chaos that the gods sow in the nations. Remember Psalm 82? What is God so angry at the gods for? He has allotted the gods to the other nations. He has abandoned the nations because he's judging them for the whole Tower of Babel episode. He's fragmented them through the languages. We all know the Tower of Babel story, okay? What we miss is the allotment of the gods to the nations and the nations to these other gods. If you've read *Unseen Realm*, this is old hat by now. Deuteronomy 4:19-20; Deuteronomy 17:1-3; Deuteronomy 20:23-26; you get this allotment language of the host of heaven. The host of heaven are called *elohim* in these passages. They are called gods, and these gods have been allotted to the nations. God has taken Israel (this is the language of Deuteronomy 4:19-20) to be his own, and he has abandoned—he has judged—the other ones. You get to Deuteronomy 32: "When the Most High divided up the nations, he divided them up according to the number of the sons of God. Israel is Yahweh's own portion." And again, it's a judgment.

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And so what happens next in the biblical story is that God says, "Okay, we're done now. You don't get to set up your own religious system, where you build a ziggurat, it's part of a temple complex, and then I come to you and say, 'What do you want?' Okay, we're not... You're doing exactly the opposite of what I told you to do. We repeated the Edenic mandate. You're supposed to disperse all over the earth and reclaim it for me. We're here to try to kickstart Eden again, folks. And you don't seem to get it. Fine. Let's see if you get this. I'm out of here. I am no longer having a relationship with you. I'm going to allot you to these lesser members of the heavenly host. And then next I'm going to go and I'm going to go call this dude, Abram (Abraham), and his wife. And I'm going to raise up through them a new Adam, a new humanity, a new people for me. Because that's why I started Eden. I wanted a human family. You don't seem willing, so 'so long!' Now we're going to start it again. We're going to do it again. And Abraham and Sarah are perfect, because she cannot have children. This is wonderful, because when I enable her to have a child, no one on the face of the earth is going to be able to

deny that the only reason this people exists (Israel) is because of a supernatural act on my behalf. I get the credit. I'm the creator. Nobody else is."

And so this is what God does. And when he does it, he makes Abram a promise in Genesis 12 (the chapter right after Babel), and says, "Now, look. I'm going to promise you all sorts of things. I'm going to give you a land. I'm going to multiply you. You're going to be like the stars." And we've had David Burnett on in the past, talking about the "star" language. It's not just quantity. It refers to a quality, that, "This is the people who are going to be with me in a new Eden." It's the language of glorification. It's not just quantity, but quality. "But you know what? Those nations that I just divorced, we're not forgetting them. Because one day, just like I told Eve that one day she's going to have a human child, there's going to be a human being that extends from her lineage who will be born, who will undo the effects of this disaster that happened in the Garden of Eden. So just like I told her that, I'm going to tell you something. One of *your* seed is going to be the key—going to be the conduit through which all of these other nations are going to be brought back into the family. I *will* have my people *from* them. Okay? I'm not going to abandon them permanently. They're on the shelf now. But I'm going to use *you* to bring them back—to bring the nations back."

And this is the Old Testament story. Now what happens is that the gods who were appointed over these other nations... And since God is still interested in them... I mean, if you're a member of some other nations in Old Testament times, there's no rule against you joining Israel, except for one. You must abandon other gods. You must turn your back on all other gods. You must confess that Yahweh is the God of all gods and that he has entered into a covenant relationship with these people known as Israel. And when I join them, I will worship no other. I will trust no other. I will presume that no other deity will rescue me from Sheol. I will presume that he is the God of all gods, and that only he is capable of rescuing me from death, ultimately. This is what you must believe. And there's no rule against anybody believing it. We know that there are pagans and Gentiles in the Old Testament who come over—they switch sides. There's no barrier to that, other than turning their backs on their gods.

So this is what's going on. Well, the gods of the nations, their strategy becomes, "Okay, well, we'll just seduce Yahweh's people into abandoning *him*. We're going to turn them into idolaters. And the people under our charge, we're going to enslave them. We're going to make them dependent on us. We're going to sow so much chaos in their lives, we're going to sow so much fear in their lives, that they're going to be so paralyzed with fear that they wouldn't *think* of leaving us, because we'll retaliate. We'll destroy them. It's a fear-based, power-based, abuse-based, chaos-based system. And if you read Psalm 82, this is what you get in verses 2-5. This is what they're doing, and this is why God is angry.

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So I want you to be thinking about all that as a background, because when you head into the rest of Revelation 17-18, there are a number of places where it describes the economic injustice. And what I mean by that is, ways that those who hold power enslave people—economically through what they can eat, through what they own or what they don't own... They create economic dependence on this. You know, you can go to Revelation 17:1-2:

Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with the kings of the earth they have committed sexual immorality...

Okay, so they hold the power brokers in their hands, okay? That was Revelation 17. Here's Revelation 18:2-3. Let's just go to verse 1:

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. ² And he called out with a mighty voice,

"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

She has become a dwelling place for demons,

a haunt for every unclean spirit,

a haunt for every unclean bird,

a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

³ For all nations have drunk

the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality,

and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her,

Then now all of a sudden, we throw in the merchants—the people who will use wealth to victimize and enslave others.

...and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living."

So there we add the economic element. You keep reading in chapter 18, you get to verse 5. We see it again:

**⁵ for [Babylon's] sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.**

**⁶ Pay her back as she herself has paid back others,
and repay her double for her deeds;**

mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.

⁷ As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,

**so give her a like measure of torment and mourning,
since in her heart she says,
‘I sit as a queen,
I am no widow,
and mourning I shall never see.’ [MH: She’s not going to see disaster.]
⁸ For this reason her plagues will come in a single day,
death and mourning and famine,
and she will be burned up with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.”**

You go down a little bit further, you get verses 10-17. Look at how Babylon is described:

**¹⁰ They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,
“Alas! Alas! You great city,
you mighty city, Babylon!
For in a single hour your judgment has come.”
¹¹ And the merchants of the earth [MH: there they are again] weep and mourn
for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, ¹² cargo of gold, silver, jewels,
pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood...**

I mean, there’s a long grocery list of spices. I mean, this is the economic center because Babylon was the dominant world empire.

Let me just be real simple. It’s like Thomas Jefferson said, “The more that the government gives you, the more it can take away.” When you are under its authority, when you are dependent on it, it will strangle you. You have now given it the power to crush you and to control you and manipulate you. This is what... We live in America, but we’re still fond of saying things like... And it’s true. When is the last time government surrendered power? It doesn’t. And this is why economic power and other kinds of manipulative power are used in the Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament and here in Revelation. Revelation picks up all these themes. I’m reading the book of Revelation—reading Revelation 18. So this is why these things are referenced. Because when a system of power owns you, you’re trapped. You’re going to suffer greatly to ever get out from under it. It will not allow it. It will not tolerate you excusing yourself from the arrangement. It owns you. And it’s an abuse of power. It’s an opportunity for chaos. It’s an opportunity to exploit and destroy.

And this is why the book of Revelation casts Babel in these economic terms. And that goes *right back* to Psalm 82. It goes right back there. This is the kind of abuse of people that God does not want. God is not in favor of coercive, abusive

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power exercised by people over other people. And he's not in favor of it. Because ultimately, when it is evil and coercive and abusive, ultimately the ones driving the bus aren't necessarily the human power brokers. Because behind the human power brokers, there's a more sinister intelligence that wants to destroy, that wants to enslave, that wants *you* to worship *them*. This is why the nations, both in Psalm 82 and Revelation, and lots of other passages... I mean, there are tons of passages like this in the Old Testament. This is why the nations are described this way, and why the gods of those nations get looped into it. It's all one huge chaotic evil system that is aligned against, ultimately, the people of God.

So let's go back to the "why" question. This is what I think it's really about. Because where is all this leading? Chapter 15, 16, 17, 18... Well, 19, we're going to get Armageddon. We're going to get the return of the Lord. We're going to get the Day of the Lord enacted. We're going to get all this evil—we're going to get the beast—dealt with. Now think of it this way. If this is really about God against the nations, if this is really about the Psalm 82 judgment of the gods, the death of the gods finally coming to pass, think about the purpose of that. *Think about the purpose of that.* Revelation 17 is an integral part of the Day of the Lord judgment of the gods and the reclaiming of the earth. Why? For the re-inheritance of the messiah. The earth is going to be *wiped clean* of chaos. The earth is being readied again to be sacred space for the true God and the King. That is ultimately what this is about. The earth must be made fit. It must be made fit for the re-occupation of the true King in a new Eden with this own family and his reconstituted council, going back to Eden. And that's us!

So again, we need to pay attention to the theological backdrop behind all of these sorts of descriptions. It's not about who has the best weaponry. It's not about who has the best army. You know, it's ultimately about the gods getting what they deserve, the beast getting what it deserves. It's about the annihilation of chaos. Chaos must be annihilated. It must be eliminated in totality. Because this time, when the Lord returns (chapter 19), he's going to be occupying a new Eden. And in this case, the new Eden is global—the whole world. Every nation. Every square inch of the place has to be readied and retooled—refit—to be sacred space. Because he is showing up. He is re-occupying.

So again, we need to think a little bit bigger picture about these things. I know they look strange, they look disparate, they look like they're not related. They're *all* related. They all fit together. If you can take the birds-eye view and look down and look where John is drawing all this stuff from, and the key here is Babylon. The key here is the Deuteronomy 32 worldview. Then the imagery makes sense and the end game makes sense. The ultimate conflict, as the players are taking sides, they make sense.

So we're going to end there. And the next time we're going to obviously get into chapter 19. We might get into 20; I don't know yet. But this is ultimately what it's

about. It's about re-occupation. It's about making the world a new Eden. It's about making it fit for sacred space because the King is about ready to show up. And then everything comes full circle. Psalm 82 judgment, the death of the gods, the whole thing is going to come full circle.

TS: Alright, Mike. Those were loaded chapters. I mean, I'm ready for him to come on down. Let's get it going. [laughter] Let's just get it going.

MH: Oh, I know. Absolutely. You know? Who... You know, well, I'm not going to go there. We all have these things that we want to see happen before the Lord returns. [laughs] But all those things are sort of off my list, you know? [laughter]

TS: Yeah, yeah. I wouldn't mind just throwing my list away and just having him come on down. Let's just get it going.

MH: Yep.

TS: Alright, Mike, well, good episode. We appreciate you taking time to fit us in. Because we know it takes its toll.

MH: Yeah, we're going to plug away. We're going to plug away.

TS: Alright, I like it. Sounds good, Mike. Alright, well, our prayers are still with you. We hope you have a good week. I appreciate everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.