

The Bible in Context Ep 22: The Divine Council and Babel

Transcription provided by AI Transcriptions by Riverside. This transcript is auto-generated and may deviate slightly from the audio.

00:00

Welcome back to the Bible in Context. And last time we talked about the Tower of Babel and how it is in the Ancient Near East and would have been understood as a ziggurat and the cultural significance of that and what it meant for the inhabitants of Babylon trying to establish a name for themselves and bring a deity down to them and how this was the foundations of the nation of Babylon.

00:30

We have a lot more to talk about and we also want to talk about what's going on behind the scenes in this story So to start that off, let's talk about the dispersion over the face of the earth and the confusing of languages Here so we're gonna go to Deuteronomy 32 and talk a little bit about the divine council worldview that's really been or that phrase has been coined by I think Michael Heiser primarily right and again a good resource for this is his book unseen realm or the popular version supernatural or

00:59

just go look up any of the content he's put out. He talks about it a lot and it's really good stuff. But I just want to give you all a taste of it and an understanding of how, again, the biblically-minded reader would understand the Babel event. So, yeah, what's the context of Deuteronomy 32? What's going on in this passage? It's a song, right? Yeah, yeah. So this is a song that – is it all Israel or Moses singing? Song of Moses, yeah. And this is as Moses is wrapping up the entire recounting of the events of the Torah and

01:29

given to Israel. And so he basically says, Hey, I'm going to give you this song and it's going to bear witness against you in future generations because Israel, you're all going to screw up here. And so this song is just going to remind you that you should have been faithful to Yahweh all this time. It sounds like a prophetic warning. Yeah, it's pretty much that's what it is. But there's this interesting couple of lines in there around

01:50

Deuteronomy 32, 8. Do you wanna read those couple of verses? Yeah, and I'm actually gonna back up to verse seven and read that one too. So remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations, ask your fathers and he will show you, your elders and they will tell you. So he's about to tell you something that is historically a big deal and everybody knows about it.

02:11

You can ask your grandparents about it and they'll tell you the story. And so this is the story, verse 8, when the most high gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he

fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob, his allotted heritage. So what's going on here? So yeah, we've got what seems very evident that he's talking about the Tower of Babel

02:41

was divided, where God divided mankind and he fixed the borders of the peoples or of the nations according to the number of the sons of God. Now your translation may not say the sons of God. The ESV does and some other ones do, the more modern ones do. And it seems like the one, the translations that came after we found the Dead Sea Scrolls tend to be the ones that are going to say sons of God.

03:11

where we have evidence that the earliest manuscripts were sons of God instead of what a lot of your translations may say is sons of Israel. Yeah, so the word in Hebrew for sons of God here is sons of El. Now Israel is

03:30

Yisra'el and so I think the ones who compiled the Hebrew text that we have from a thousand years ago At least that's when it was sort of completed. They may have either just had a different Reading there or over time those letters were lost or they thought that maybe they were wrong

03:47

that sons of El was wrong, sons of God was wrong, and it's the sons of Israel, so they inserted those couple little letters in there to make it sons of Israel. But the Septuagint, which is a much older Greek translation of the Old Testament, since 200, 300 years before the time of Jesus, it reads, he divided the nations according to the number of the angels, which the Septuagint often, whenever the sons of God show up, whenever spiritual beings show up, they just use the word angel because they understand angels to be kind of a spiritual being.

04:17

statement. That's really where we get our idea of angels today. Well, at least in part, it's definitely been an influence. So for a long time we didn't know, okay, well there's this Greek translation that says, you know, angelic beings, and then there's this later Hebrew script that says sons of Israel. Maybe the Hebrew is correct, and we'll go with that in a lot of our translations. Well, then we find the Dead Sea Scrolls, which Hebrew texts in there are, some are older than the

04:44

Septuagint, some are a little later, but either way it's a very old Hebrew manuscript and it says sons of God so that

04:50

that angelic beings from the Septuagint is correct. It doesn't mean to say sons of God. That was a little bit of a tangent, but I just wanted to explain why the translations differ and why sons of God is not us just picking our favorite words. Yeah, and that's significant because we've already had a discussion on this, but the sons of God is Hebrew slang for spiritual beings. And so it seems like what's happening here is when God divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples and so he put them in a...

05:19

location according to the number of the spiritual beings in his divine counsel.

05:27

And so he set his divine council to be over, to have some kind of authority over the nations as he dispersed them. And so we have other places where this seems evident when you get to Daniel, there's the Prince of Persia. All his principalities and powers, the rules of the air. Yeah. All those words that point to spiritual beings that are territorial authorities. Right. Even when we get to the Exodus and Egypt,

05:57

the gods of Egypt and you can go on and on throughout the Bible and you see these spiritual beings that have some kind of authority over, that were granted authority it seems like by Yahweh, but it also seems like that they were a rebellious group too. Yeah, I mean we had the question at church a few weeks ago of like, well are these guys rebels at this point or are they on God's

06:27

essentially or have they been let loose? And I think if we go read Psalm 82.

06:34

That answers the question for us. So I'm not going to read all of Psalm 82. You can go read it on your own time, but I just want to point out that if you go read through this, you'll see where God takes a judgment seat amongst the divine counsel, amidst the sons of God. And he basically says, look, you guys should have been helping the needy. You should have been administering justice in the nation. That was your job in all the nations of the earth. But instead, you fell. Basically they didn't do their jobs. They didn't administer justice.

07:04

Presumably just from looking at history they sought their own own authority their own power their own glory And so God says what you are sons of God, but you're gonna die like men

07:14

So they're going to be judged as well. They become rebels after they're given their jobs of shepherding the nations. Yeah. And at the very end of the Psalm, I think it's interesting too, where arise, oh God, so arise, oh Yahweh, judge the earth for you shall inherit all the nations. And so we see in Deuteronomy 32, he basically casts exiles all the nations. But then he, what's

the next thing he does? He calls Abram to be a blessing to all the nations so that one day through

07:44

Messiah, he would be able to inherit all the nations once again. Yeah. And I just want to point out too, like if you go just read Galatians, just read it through, you'll see a lot of this idea of the Torah, the law, and the law itself being this shepherding instrument for Israel that was supposed to lead Israel towards righteousness, but instead it just became an instrument that was twisted in their hands and allowed them to lean on their own righteousness and their Torah observance for their right standing with Yahweh, which was wrong to begin with.

08:14

Paul compares the Torah to the gods of the nations, to the divine council, to those rebel deities. But yeah, the deities were supposed to be a guardian for the nations, but instead they were twisted and they didn't do that, and so they will be judged in the end. I remember you talking about it. There's another passage I believe is, is it in Deuteronomy 4? Oh yeah, okay. 4 and 19-ish? And beware lest you raise your eyes to the heavens, and when you see the sun and the

08:44

of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples or nations under the whole heaven.

08:55

Yeah, and these heavenly bodies, they were, again, thought about in the ancient world as spiritual beings, as deities up there walking around on the big dome. And so he's saying, like, look, the spiritual beings, the sons of God, I have given them to the nations to lead them. That's theirs. But you are Yahweh's inheritance. You worship Him and you are His. And this isn't to say that, yes, the nations had a right to look to their respective deity

09:25

worthy of all worship. The whole plan here, and we'll talk about this a little more, but the whole plan was to reclaim the nations. The other quote-unquote gods, the little G gods, they were just kind of a placeholder. That's a lot we've talked about. It might be a new concept for some of you, some of you maybe not, but let's back up for just a minute. I think we need to start back over at the garden and explain the story so far so this makes a little more sense, because why did God do this? What's the point? And why in the world

09:55

become objects of idolatry to enter into his service over the nations to begin with. So we start out at the garden where humanity, they fall, they're exiled out, but he kind of redeems them. He gives them new priestly garments and he promises them a redeemer. And they go out, things get worse, and then you have the flood that cleanses all the earth. Well, after the flood, he has a new elect one, Noah and his family. He makes a covenant with them. He wants to continue his partnership and redemption of humanity.

10:25

things get worse, they go to Babel, and now there's no flood this time. Instead what he does is look, I promised to not flood the earth again. Instead what I'm going to do is, you know, if you guys want to try to bring down other deities, here you go. He essentially divorces humanity until he can redeem them. Yeah, so these deities, they're...

10:45

They're just placeholders for the time being. They're not the actual most high God of these other nations. Yahweh is most high and they're all in the employment of protecting these nations, at least they should have been, until Jesus came, essentially. So do you think that maybe at the Tower of Babel what's going on is the people trying to make a name for themselves, trying to manipulate a blessing out of Yahweh.

11:15

you want to treat me, if that's the relationship you want to have with me, I'll hand you over to my divine counsel and they can have authority over you. And you won't get my blessing, but you can try to get a blessing out of them. Good luck. Well, yeah, I mean, that's really exactly what happens with Saul, where you, you know, Yahweh is your king. No, we want a king like the nations, who's going to basically be an intermediary between Yahweh and the people,

11:45

the ideal would be for the king, but that's not what he does. He's like, okay, you want a king like the nations? Fine, here you go. Here's a king like the nations. He's going to be really terrible to you guys. Well this is the exact same thing. We want a God like the nations. Someone to step in between us and Yahweh. Okay, here you go. Here's that person. Things are not going to go well in this scenario, but if that's what you want.

12:08

So this is not the first time that this happens in the biblical story. I think it's worth bringing up that this is not like an innocent kid that sees a little green pebble sitting next to a little box of rat poison and thinks it's a skittle and is like, I want that. Humanity is not that child in this scenario, an innocent, ignorant child who wants something that's foolish. This is rebels who should know Yahweh, should have a relationship with Yahweh, and are actively saying we don't want that.

12:34

So do you think that Paul in Romans 1 has these kind of things in his head as he's writing for all the, this is Romans 1 starting in verse 21, for although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened, claiming to be wise. They became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. And so therefore,

13:04

God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity. Yeah. Well, yeah, absolutely. I mean, that's the pattern you see is you don't see a pattern of God makes man and then hardens their hearts and just sends them out into the world. It's God makes man, they fall. And sometimes after they have decided to leave Yahweh, he says, fine. And he just solidifies them in that state. You go for it. Yeah. He uses, yeah, hardening or darkening or.

13:32

like it says in Romans, to give them up to what they want.

13:36

as a judgment for the direction that they're already going. So again, this wasn't just like God just took a group of humans and said, hey, I'm going to make you guys horrible and send you out. It was, I made you for something better. You're being horrible. If that's what you guys really want, then here you go. A really good resource on this whole idea, there's actually two books I would say that are really good. So this first one, it's a little longer. It's by G.K. Beale. It's *We Become What We Worship, A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*.

14:06

in the biblical text whenever Israel commits idolatry, they're often, or the nations, they're described later by the prophets in the same terms that they use to describe the idol itself. And the idol and the worshipper suffer the same fate. And so he talks about the idea of whenever the nations want to be idolatified, they

14:26

that idol or whatever it is, they are given up to it and become like it. Another good book that picks up this idea is *The Word of God Has Not Failed* by Aaron Sherwood. It's actually a little book on Romans 9 and the meaning of hardening and election in that text. Really good book. But he just goes through picking up off of the ideas in Beal's book and there's an extended discussion of how hardening is used as a judgment throughout Scripture.

14:56

Yeah, so we set out to talk about the Tower of Babel and we have taken, I feel like a very long way around talking about the Sons of God. I know we talked about that topic before but it was worth bringing up again here and going a little more in depth as to how the Tower of Babel episode plays into the Sons of God worldview and idea. Yeah, yeah. I think this was the right place to bring in Deuteronomy 32 and...

15:22

that idea and that concept. I know this is definitely not something that we typically hear on a Sunday morning or in Sunday school, but it helps, as I've studied this more and more, it has really helped me better understand the Old Testament and the New Testament and get inside their worldview a little bit more on what they're thinking and what they're really doing and recognizing that over the years, I've always thought that the small G gods

15:52

make believe. And the more I read in Scripture, Scripture doesn't really lend itself to that possibility. No, yeah, the prophets, I mean, in the New Testament too, I mean, they assume that the gods are real. That's why Paul says if you partake in the feast of another god, you're partaking with demons, which I think as Americans we often have ideas of there's two kinds of spiritual beings. There's angels and demons, the good guys and the bad guys. It's not really how it works.

16:19

But he's just using the word demon there as a generic, one of the sons of God that's a bad guy. Right. And so it's whenever you partake with an idol, you're partaking with one of the sons of God. Yeah. One of the rebel ones. Well, just...

16:34

gives us the origin of where these ideas came from and it's better explained to them, I think. Well, I like how Michael Heiser has talked about how a Jewish reader would see three different fall narratives that put the world into the shape that it's in today where the first fall is it's human's fault. They don't listen to God. They don't trust God's wisdom. The next time you have rebel sons of God that come down and escalate our own violence and

17:04

catastrophic. And then you have the Babel narrative where God essentially divorces the nations until he can redeem them and he hands them over to these sons of God that the nations were asking for.

17:15

and knowing all along that these guys, they might rebel. That's what the nations wanted. So, he hands them over and now there are rebel spiritual beings that have been given charge of this world until Christ came and dethroned them and now they're dethroned but they're still active and working in the world until he comes and defeats them finally. Good deal. So, we've just about made it through Genesis chapter 11. We've got a little bit more with the genealogy of Shem after the Tower of Babel. Is there anything else with the Tower of Babel we need to talk about?

17:45

No, I don't think so. We kind of covered Shem's genealogy a bit towards the beginning. There's not a whole lot more to cover in the genealogy. We could spend time going through and looking at all the names, which I haven't honestly done all that research. And that's, again, something where I can read Hebrew, but I don't trust my Hebrew enough to go through and venture meanings of names because that can get you into trouble pretty quick when you start making up stuff. So again, if you want a good resource for that, check out Typical Names by Moshe

18:15

Another good one is Metathesis in the Hebrew Bible by Isaac Kalimi. Those are good resources just to dive into some of the word plays going on behind some of the names. Not all of them, but some of the names, especially in Genesis, but throughout the whole Hebrew Bible.

18:32

But I think one thing that we should notice is just that the structure gets picked back up. We saw this certain, he lived so long and then fathered this person and then lived this much longer. You see that structure or that same phrasing in this genealogy. We saw that previously in Seth's genealogy. Yeah, yeah. There's a lot of similarities between Shem's genealogy and Seth's genealogy. There's a few things that Shem's doesn't have that the other one has, but I think we're

19:02

to see the similarities. Essentially the genealogy of the bad guys, of Kane and of Ham, they're just kind of thrown in there. It's just, hey, this person thought of this person, this person, this person, this person. Whereas...

19:13

the chosen line has this structure to it. And so when we see the genealogy with this kind of structure, we should know that we're being cued up to see a good guy come onto the scene. Well, and I think it's significant. Both Shem's line and Seth's line have this phrase in here, and they had other sons and daughters. And that's over and over and over just to, I think, help us see that this is the line that's being blessed with multiplication. Fulfill and multiply. Yeah, being fruitful and multiply.

19:41

Yeah, so we get to the end of chapter 11 here. This is where we'll stop this time, is where we meet Abram and Sarai, who is barren. She has no child. So we will quickly learn that Abram is the new elect one, but he has a barren wife. So how is he supposed to be fruitful and multiply and produce the elect seed with a wife that can't have any kids? Dun, dun, dun.

20:06

Sounds like a good spot to leave off, a little cliffhanger there. Yep. We'll come back and talk about Abram. Sounds good.