

# **The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0**

**Number 113**

**“Ezekiel 2-3”**

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**With**

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## **Ezekiel 2-3**

The second and third chapters of Ezekiel continue the episode of his call as a prophet. This episode of the podcast focuses on some interpretive issues in the chapters as well as some divine council elements that get less attention than chapter 1.

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 113, Ezekiel 2-3. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. How are you doing Mike?

**MSH:** Busy as usual Trey. Nothing new, no surprise there.

**TS:** I hear you. So we're going to tackle two chapters this episode?

**MSH:** Yeah, I'll finish up Ezekiel's call. People might remember from last time that the call of the prophet actually extends from first verse all the way into chapter 3 so that's the goal, to wrap the call and really go through the whole entirety of chapter 3 so two chapters. People I hope recall that chapter 1 ended with the explanation or the unveiling of what in the world was Ezekiel looking at in terms of the cloud occupant, and it ended like this.

Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

**MSH:** This is Ezekiel encountering God. We talked last time about how this phrase, the glory of the Lord, if you go over to chapter 10, which is mostly the same vision encounter, you'll see that the glory of the Lord was actually cast in the form of a man. I mean it is here in chapter 1 as well. But you get to chapter 10 and the glory of the Lord is sort of swapped out for a phrase like the God of Israel being over the expanse that's over the cherubim. So it's very clear that we have a theophany. We have an appearance of God as a man in this cloud with all the radiance and that gets called the glory of the Lord. So we need to sort of stow that away a little bit because of some things that we'll see coming up as we go into chapter 2. The first five verses are pretty normal even though there are some things I want to comment on that will help us really through the rest of book. And for those who didn't listen to the series on Acts or the series on Leviticus, the format here's going to be the same. I am not going to go through verse by verse the entirety of the book of the Ezekiel.

Frankly, anybody can do that. What I'm looking for are things that are of interpretive interest to me, interpretive interest I hope to people, things that intersect with the Divine Council worldview, the supernatural world especially. If that sounds unfamiliar to you, go to the naked Bible podcast.com and watch the introductory videos up near the top where it says start here to get familiar with that, or if you've read Unseen Realm, you should already be familiar with a lot of the supernatural worldview of the biblical writers in its own context. So when things like that pop up we'll address those, and also sort of problematic issues. We'll hit some of those as we go through chapters 2 and 3 here today. So let's just start with chapter 2:1. It's pretty normal because here we have the unveiling of the glory, the appearance of the God of Israel as a man, this is radiant divine man. And we get him speaking to the prophet. He's going to call him to ministry so he says in the first verse in chapter 2,

And he said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you."<sup>2</sup> And as he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.<sup>3</sup> And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this

very day. <sup>4</sup> The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' <sup>5</sup> And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them.

**MSH:** We'll stop there. That's the first five verses. A couple of things here. Son of man is something that you see frequently in Ezekiel. In Hebrew, it's *ben adam*, and Ezekiel is referred to by this phrase more than any other prophet, over 80 times actually throughout the book. The title basically just means human one. It kind of speaks to a person's mortal nature, the fact that you aren't divine. You are human, the human one. The title in this immediate context would distinguish Ezekiel from the rest of the divine beings that are in the scene, God, the cherubim, and all that. So the titles are appropriate here but it's going to be repeated a lot so it's a constant reminder of Ezekiel's status as a mere mortal. It's kind of interesting, we see this title used in the Gospels of Jesus, Son of Man, human one, mortal one, that sort of thing. Jesus uses it as a self-referent a lot and we're not going to drift off into the controversy over the Son of Man term in scholarship. Most of the time it doesn't refer to anything sort of special or supernatural. Jesus was a man. Orthodox Christianity affirms that. Jesus refers to himself as a man. A lot of people would say when he uses the phrase, he's making it clear he's a prophet or prophetic figure because here's Ezekiel and others they get called this.

It's certainly true but I kind of think there's a little bit of novelty that here you have the incarnate God referring to himself as a mortal one, a human one. It is sort of reinforces the paradox of the incarnation. I actually think that perhaps Jesus got a little kick out of it, too. I'm the mortal one, the human one. The idea that I could become man then I did this and he knows and all that's entailed in that. But sometimes I think when Jesus is on trial before Caiaphas when he quotes Daniel 7, then it has a bit more of an impact because of the Son of Man figure in Daniel 7, which a lot of the New Testament scholars that bicker about the Son of Man being nothing special, they never seem to trace it back to its, not only Daniel 7 roots, but Daniel 7 as a context, that's actually Mesopotamian. It actually ties in with a lot of some of the other stuff in Genesis in terms of the Mesopotamian flavor of it, why the title would be important. But it's actually kind of a subject for a whole episode on its own so I don't want to drift into too much here. But we see it here and we're going to see a lot.

He also says, it's interesting where God says to Ezekiel, 'they and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day.' I think this is interesting because if you remember the episode on chapter 1, Ezekiel comes in the second wave of captivity, so in the 590s we'll just say for lack of precision here, BC. So the second installment of the captivity and despite the fact that the Babylonians have showed up twice now and taken people captive and installed puppet governors, the people back in the homeland, back in Jerusalem, are still sinning. They're still rebellious against God. God says, to this very day, they're still doing it, which kind of gives you a glimpse into the hardness of the hearts of the people. So I think this is kind of an interesting editorial comment. But what I want to focus on here is sort of a bigger picture that here you have, now think about what we just talked about our last time. Here you have Ezekiel, a guy, happens to be a priest. He's going to be called into this prophetic office by divine encounter. He's meeting with God in the form of a man. Now, if you've read Unseen Realm, this is going to be familiar. I spent a whole chapter in the book, chapter 27, which the title of that is 'Standing in the Council'.

This notion where a human being has to have a divine encounter with God, with the Divine Council, in some cases more explicitly, is a pattern. This is patterning throughout both Testaments. We like to say the proof of the prophet is that he's never wrong. Well, yeah except where the prophecy is conditional and it can be wrong or because conditions were attached to it that aren't met. The real test of a prophet is exactly what Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 23:16-22, have you stored in the council of the Lord? In other words, have you had a direct encounter with the God of Israel, Yahweh of Israel typically in the form of a man to give you the words you're going to say, to commission you? Has that happened to you? That is really the test of propheticity. And we see it happen here with Ezekiel and this is a very familiar pattern. It goes all the way back really to the Garden of Eden with Adam and it never really discontinues all the way up through the New Testament. If you want all the details for that, you could read Unseen Realm chapter 27. I'm going to quote a few excerpts here just to illustrate the point. We'll go all the way back to Eden. I wrote in the book in this chapter 27,

“Eden was the dwelling place of Yahweh, the place from which he ruled with his council. Humanity was created to be part of God's family and his ruling council. That's not difficult to discern when approaching Genesis in its original ancient context, but seeing Adam as a prophetic figure requires moving outside Genesis. In Job 15:7-8 (ESV), Eliphaz, one of Job's friends, asks Job some intriguing questions: “Are you the first man who was born? Or were you brought forth before the hills? Have you listened in the council of God? And do you limit wisdom to yourself?”

**MSH:** It's this idea that Adam, the first man back in the Eden, listened in the Council of God. He obviously had direct encounter with God. He was given the task to do, a job to do. He's not like a spokesperson because it's just Adam and Eve. The presumption is that Adam is going to be the head or leader and he is going to be the conduit through which God's information comes. That is the way it works even with Eve. God tells Adam, gives Adam information and we assume that Adam transmitted it to Eve, so on so forth. So the pattern begins right here. I also wrote,

Think back to Genesis 3:8, a passage I've alluded to before, in which Yahweh approaches humans as a man. When Adam and Eve violated God's command, they suddenly heard “the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” This “walking” terminology suggests that God appeared to them in human form (spirits don't “walk”).

The description of Yahweh “walking” is also used of God's active presence *inside Israel's tabernacle*, creating another link between Eden, the cosmic mountain, and the tabernacle sanctuary.

**MSH:** I addressed a lot of this in the book but in Leviticus 26:12 for instance, when God through Moses is telling them about the way things are going to be. We're going to build the tabernacle and this is how it's going to be. He says,

<sup>12</sup> And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.

**MSH:** Deuteronomy 23:14, in Hebrew it's 23:15, we have here where it says,

<sup>14</sup> Because the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and to give up your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy, so that he may not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you.

**MSH:** We tend to think of the presence of God in the camp and the tabernacle as nothing more than a cloud or smoke or some ethereal nothingness. But yet, you actually have anthropomorphic language used just like you do in Eden. In these situations, even in the temple, you go to 2 Samuel 7:6-7,

<sup>6</sup> I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. <sup>7</sup> In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"

**MSH:** So we have this reference to, for lack of a better term, mobility in this passage but the terminology is kind of interesting where he has this, I've been moving about. It's actually in Hebrew the same Hebrew lemma *halak* for walking as in these earlier passages. I've been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. Now that could grammatically refer to the fact that we've had a mobile situation but because it's used in these earlier passages like in Leviticus and Deuteronomy to describe sort of a general condition within the tabernacle, God is walking about or walking in the presence of his people or in the camp, it actually opens the door to something more anthropomorphic because of the continuity of thought going back to Genesis 3. We often don't think of God's presence in Israel that way.

We tend to think of it as something always invisible. And it may have been more than that because we also have the angel who's leading the camp from Exodus 23, so on so forth. There's more to it. The broader point here is that there's more to this language than you might suspect. It's very consistent with this notion of divine encounter. You move out of the garden. You have Enoch. Enoch is taken to be with God. Enoch is called in the New Testament Jude 14 and 15, the seventh from Adam who prophesied saying, he's God's mouth piece. He obviously had a divine encounter. He was taken to be with the Lord. And he walked with God according to Genesis Noah also walked with God. God spoke directly to Noah as he'd done to Adam before him and many prophets after him. And 2 Peter 2:5, Noah is described as God's mouthpiece. Noah is the one who preached. He was a herald of righteousness to his generation. You get the patriarchs, lots of divine encounters there, Moses, Joshua, divine encounters all over the place there, from the burning bush to the captain of the Lord's host, that sort of thing. Exodus 33:9-11 is a little less obvious. I use this in the book.

<sup>9</sup> When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. <sup>10</sup> And when all

the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. <sup>11</sup> Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

**MSH:** So Joshua gets accustomed to the divine presence. There are passages, we don't need to go to them here, when Moses goes inside the cloud. It is just a theme or pattern that you see with the office of who speaks for God and that's what a prophet is. A prophet is simply a spokesperson for God. It doesn't have to be someone who tells the future. That is an incorrect view of prophecy, even though prophets will get information that relates to the future and will be told to say this, that, and the other things going to happen. Thus says lord, they do predict the future but that is not mainly what prophet does. A prophet tells the people whatever God wants them to hear.

It doesn't have to be just predictive and in fact, if you actually read through the classical prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and even the Minor Prophets, you are going to find out that most of what they say is really more like preaching than it is predicting the future. They are just mouthpieces. Isaiah 6, divine throne room, Jeremiah 1, a lot of people heard me comment on this because it's a tactile experience. The word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah and calls him to be a prophet. The word of the Lord is called Yahweh in the passage. Then Jeremiah says he reached out his hand and touched me, touched my mouth. Jeremiah 23 is the litmus test passage. I'll just read it to you in case it's unfamiliar. Jeremiah 23:16, we read God's own words about false prophets.\

<sup>16</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. <sup>17</sup> They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No disaster shall come upon you.'"

<sup>18</sup> For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened?

<sup>21</sup> "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied.

<sup>22</sup> But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds.

**MSH:** That's the end of verse 22. So this is the classic litmus test for who's a prophet and we see it happen to Ezekiel in the first five verses there and chapter 1 preceding. Let's jump into verse 6 in Ezekiel 2.

<sup>6</sup> And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions.

**MSH:** The word though there is the word key in Hebrew. It could be translated for or because briars and thorns are with you and you said on scorpions. ESV will have a note here, scorpion plants, a type of prickly plant. That's probably better here. So don't be afraid of them, don't be afraid of their words because, I'm going to translate it a little more causatively here for a reason.

Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house.

**MSH:** Of course, it doesn't mean don't be afraid of them if they're ugly. It means don't be afraid of them for the way they look at you, which would obviously not be friendly. Verse 7,

<sup>7</sup> And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house.

<sup>8</sup> "But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you."

**MSH:** This is preparatory to God giving Ezekiel a scroll he's going to have him eat. Now, just to pause here, if you compare this narrative here, if you compare this to other prophetic call narratives, this statement about because/though briars and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpion plants, that phrase, if you put all the call narrative side by side, that statement appears in the slot as it were where typically you'd get promises of divine presence, some sort of reassurance, I'll be with you and so on so forth. But we don't have that here. Consequently, a lot of scholars, and I think this makes sense, consequently, they would say that this statement, especially if we translate it causatively, Son of Man don't be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words because briars and thorns are with you and, by implication, because you sit on scorpion plants, or you could actually translate that sit near scorpion plants.

A lot of people take this phrase because it occupies this slot for some promise of divine presence or protection. They would say that the statement here, even though it sounds like Ezekiel's uncomfortable, it actually means that the thorns and the thistles are sort of like a protection to Ezekiel. God's going to surround him with a wall of protection that his foes, metaphorically, are not going to be able to penetrate nor would they even want to try because of the nature of it. So I think it's an interesting observation. It's easy to not think about that but it just sounds kind of odd. If we were in a class and I said we were in literary analysis class. I want you to go and look at all the other five or six call narratives and put all the elements side-by-side, and tell me what you see. This would be sort of an outlier and that's why scholars say it kind of is but maybe it isn't. Maybe this is God's way of promising protection to Ezekiel. I think it makes sense. Verse 9,



<sup>9</sup> And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. <sup>10</sup> And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

And he said to me, "Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel."

**MSH:** You've got a human form again. This is very easy to read over but it is very consistent divine call narratives with God coming to the prophet as a man, in the form of a man, often in the Divine Council throne room. We have the divine throne in Ezekiel 1 so it is in the Divine Council throne room. You just have the cherubim throne there. We don't get specific mention of other divine beings present like we do in Isaiah but even Isaiah is kind of the same thing because there you have seraphim, which is just a different word for throne guardians. But you get the idea. This is taking place. The divine throne room essentially in this case comes to Ezekiel as opposed to him being transported into it, either through a vision or something more physical. It's the same. God is man in the Old Testament. If you're an alert reader, you're going to pick out that idea in a lot of places and that should inform you that when you get to New Testament times when you have Jesus there and all this talk about God is man, yes the incarnation is different. Yes it's sort of up the ante. It's more dramatic because now you have God born of a woman. But the idea that God could be mediated in the form of a man, in a human body, is not new. That is not a Christian invention. So what does Ezekiel do? Going back to chapter 3, he does what you'd expect. He obeys.

Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." <sup>2</sup> So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat. <sup>3</sup> And he said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it." Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.

**MSH:** Now, you can ask is this a vision? Is he physically present here? You could read Chapter 1. Certainly to have Ezekiel physically present by the river and the throne of God who comes to him and so on so forth, is he in the divine presence? Is that a different sort of time and space? Is that the same time? We don't really know. And frankly, the biblical writers don't care to parse physics information for us. So on one level, there's a bit of ambiguity here, but on the other level, you could read it pretty literalistic where God in the form of a man hands Ezekiel this scroll and says eat the scroll. Now, it's probably in Ezekiel's day, a scroll like this, let's just talk literally here for the moment. A scroll like this is typically papyrus so it's not like leather, vellum later, which would be next to impossible to eat. But you actually could eat papyrus scroll. It's edible. It's probably not something you'd be able to keep down. A lot of scholars think this is the point of the language here. He says eat this scroll but then he follows it by saying

feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it."

**MSH:** In other words, don't just take a bite. I want you to eat it all and then keep it down. The whole image of it and the whole reason for either the visionary act or the supernatural act where God is giving him this and he eat it and it tastes like honey, it's wonderful. And he does keep it down. He doesn't puke the thing up. Whether it's literal, quasi-literal, visionary, isn't really the point. The point is that by virtue of the act and the whole scene, Ezekiel knows and the readers are going to know that God is depositing his words inside Ezekiel. Whatever's going to come out of Ezekiel's mouth is going to be the genuine word of God, the word of the Lord. Now, it sounds odd to us, even though we can see in the mouth and out of the mouth, we get the point of that.

But if you really think about it, it still sounds a little odd to our ear because he's receiving the words of the Lord but what's the connection between eating and speaking other than both of them require a mouth? You can't overly literalize things like this either. We're not being given a scientific statement here. There is no connection between eating and speaking so there has to be some element of metaphor. For the biblical writers, most listeners probably know this well, that the stomach or the insides of a person were considered the locus of thought and emotions and intellect and whatnot. There's no Hebrew word for brain so there is a bit more of a connection for the ancient person than there would be for us even though we can see, because of the mouth, we can see that the conceptual point of all of it. Just for example to illustrate this connection between the stomach and the locus of thoughts, emotions, intellect, that sort of thing, if you go to Job 15:2 for instance, we read,

<sup>2</sup>“Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge,  
and fill his belly with the east wind?”

**MSH:** There's the connection between thoughts and the belly. Proverbs 18:20 would be another one.

<sup>20</sup>From the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach is satisfied;  
he is satisfied by the yield of his lips.

**MSH:** Now, I have a quotation here from Michael Fox's commentary on Proverbs. This would be volume 2. His Anchor Bible commentary volume 2, which is Proverbs 10-31. Fox was my advisor in Wisconsin and his expertise is wisdom literature. These are excellent Proverbs commentaries, by the way. But he says here on Proverbs 18:20,

“When one speaks wise, honest, and friendly things, he is rewarded in unspecified ways. Alternatively, one who speaks well will enjoy the satisfaction inherent in eloquent and wise speech (see Proverbs 15:23). Conversely, one who speaks folly and evil will drink the poison he himself spews forth. The imagery is something of a surprise. Not only do others enjoy the nourishment of a wise man's words (see Proverbs 10:11; 10:21), but he himself does as well.”

**MSH:** Fox points us to the very next verse, Proverbs 18:20. Let's go back to the ESV here so we can be consistent. Proverbs 18:20 says,

<sup>20</sup> From the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach is satisfied;  
he is satisfied by the yield of his lips.

<sup>21</sup> Death and life are in the power of the tongue,  
and those who love it will eat its fruits.

**MSH:** So both of the verses connect the contents of the stomach, what's down there, and speech and thoughts even. So there is this connection the ancient mind. We can't over literalize it. We get the point of the conceptual metaphor. Fox adds to verse 21, he says,

“Speech has the power to give and preserve life and well-being and to bring death and destruction, both to the speaker and to others.”

**MSH:** So this imagery here used in Ezekiel is not going to be misunderstood or over literalized. Nobody's doing science or critiquing it on that basis. You've heard me probably too many times say that the critics of the Bible often sound silly when they critique the Bible for not being what it was never intended to be. We have to sort of police ourselves here, too. We understand this is a metaphor, whether it's something Ezekiel actually experienced through the presence of God in some way. We get that but we don't want to go too far in that direction and miss the whole point. So let's go back to chapter 3. We're in verse 4. Ezekiel's just gotten the scroll. He eats the scroll, tastes great. Verse 4 says,

<sup>4</sup> And he said to me, “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them. <sup>5</sup> For you are not sent to a people of foreign speech and a hard language, but to the house of Israel— <sup>6</sup> not to many peoples of foreign speech and a hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to such, they would listen to you.

**MSH:** That's verse 6. It's kind of funny. God's basically saying if I sent you to a place where you didn't speak the language, you'd probably get better results, a little bit of sarcasm there. But God's saying I'm not sending you to people who can't understand you. I'm sending you to the house of Israel. Verse 7,

<sup>7</sup> But the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me: because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. <sup>8</sup> Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces, and your forehead as hard as their foreheads. <sup>9</sup> Like emery harder than flint have I made your forehead. Fear them not, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house.” <sup>10</sup> Moreover, he said to me, “Son of man, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears. <sup>11</sup> And go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ whether they hear or refuse to hear.”

**MSH:** There are a couple of things in here, and this is of interest because of earlier episodes of the podcast where we talked about Israel and Judah terminology, specifically in those cases, as a

related eschatology. What is a Jew and Israelite, all these discussions we had in it earlier episodes. Here we have in verse 4, God says,

“Son of man, go to the house of Israel

<sup>11</sup> And go to the exiles,

**MSH:** Wait a minute, exiles? Israel, the northern kingdom, has been history, literally, for 120 or so years so what does he mean? Well, house of Israel, exiles, we’re not talking about the northern kingdom here. Now the terminology can be a little confusing because of the historical disconnect. Why this terminology if Ezekiel is dealing with the people from the southern kingdom, Judah? It’s been 120 years after the northern kingdom bit the dust and scattered to the wind. Well, this phrase, house of Israel, in particular, is used in conjunction with house of Judah, then you can be pretty sure that we’re talking just about the northern kingdom. For instance, in Jeremiah 31:31 we read,

<sup>31</sup> “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,

**MSH:** If you come up to a situation like that, it's pretty clear that both entities are being talked about. It takes the ambiguity away. When house of Israel is used by itself, it can refer to all Israelites or all the people of God. In other words, anyone who can claim common ancestry from Jacob whose name was changed to Israel. It doesn't have to refer to the northern kingdom. And in the context of Ezekiel, it can't because of who he is actually being sent to. He's being sent to the people of Judah who've been taken exile in a second wave because it's been 120 years since the northern kingdom existed. They're gone. So you can actually have this phrase just be used generically to refer to any descendent from Jacob. Now John Cook was a classmate of mine at Wisconsin. He writes in the Dictionary of the Old Testament, the volume on the prophets, he says,

“Ezekiel’s favorite designation for his audience is house of Israel, which occurs 83 times in the book, accounting for over half (57%) of all its occurrences in the Bible.”

**MSH:** So you’re going to see this phrase a lot. But we need to realize that the writer’s not being inconsistent or the writer’s not making an error here. This phrase can be used to speak of Judah. It sounds odd house of Israel refers to Judah in the days when you had the two kingdoms but we have to remember one actually don't have to kingdom now. One of them is gone. We have this other one now and the terminology just means they are descended from Jacob. It's no more complicated than that. Now I have another quotation here from the Dictionary the Old Testament, the historical books. And this is by a scholar who I don't know whose last name is DUGUID. I don't know how to pronounce it but he says in his entry on Israel, on page 392, he writes this.

“Because both North and South were part of the single kingdom of Israel, the unique nation that belonged to the Lord, the southern kingdom of Judah could also be referred to as Israel. Isaiah's message was directed to Judah at a time when the northern Kingdom of Israel was a hostile political power (Isaiah 7:1). Yet the Lord addressed those Judeans, whose capital city had been left isolated by judgment, as “my people Israel” (Isaiah 1:3, 5:3). Writing after the fall of the northern kingdom, Jeremiah spoke of the Lord's plan in the future to bring a nation from afar against the “house of Israel”. It has to refer to Judah. It can only in context mean Judah.”

**MSH:** Now if you look at Jeremiah 5:15,

<sup>15</sup> Behold, I am bringing against you  
a nation from afar, O house of Israel,  
declares the LORD.

**MSH:** This was from the book of Jeremiah. The Northern Kingdom doesn't exist anymore so he's clearly talking to the southern kingdom but he calls them house of Israel. It just has to mean Judah.

“Likewise, Ezekiel's prophecies speak of the “Israel” when it is clear that the southern kingdom is in view (Ez 2:3). He said to me, Son of Man, I send you to the people of Israel two nations of rebels who are rebelled against me.”

**MSH:** They're still alive. They're in rebellion but the other ones aren't alive. The northern kingdom are not around. They don't exist as an entity anymore so he has to be referring to Judah. Same thing later in Ezekiel 8:12, and even when you associate what was being said with the temple,

<sup>12</sup> Then he said to me, “Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of pictures? For they say, ‘The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.’”

**MSH:** And he goes on to talk about desecration of the temple. That's in the south. That's in Judah, in Jerusalem. I don't want to belabor the point but I already know there's going to be people who are going to try to confuse the issue and try to make a certain passage work prophetically for one entity or whatever. What they're doing is they're not understanding the wideness of the particular term. I wanted to bring it up because you got to be careful with what you do with the terminology. You have to let it find the way the Scripture defines it. In other words, look at all the ways Scripture can use a particular term and then try to look at the context and figure out which one of those things is in view here. My words, let's make a comment on this. Let's go back here.

<sup>4</sup> And he said to me, “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them.

**MSH:** We talked about the scroll that he eats but there's an emphasis here, and I think eating the scroll is part of this. There are scholars who have noted that frequently in Ezekiel God points out that Ezekiel's speaking his words. He tells Ezekiel these are my words. That's not really any different than other prophets and it's not, but here's what Block says about this phrase in this verse that I think is kind of interesting. This is Block's commentary on Ezekiel the first volume. He writes,

“Unlike his contemporary Jeremiah, Ezekiel is not free to exploit any rhetorical means available to move the people to repentance unless those strategies are here in the received oracle. This deliberately chosen form of expression, my words, prepares the way for the prophet's confinement and dumbness. Ezekiel's own voice must be silenced.”

**MSH:** And that's what happened in Ezekiel. In chapters 4 and 5, we're going to read about how Ezekiel is going to be struck dumb. He's going to be tied up and confined. And when he's enabled to speak. People are going to know that the guy couldn't talk, and when his tongue is loose again, it's a sign act that what I'm saying now isn't coming from me. I'm only talking to you because God is enabling me to speak. These are God's words very specifically and very directly. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able even to talk. So there seems to be more of an emphasis on this in Ezekiel, this idea that unlike other prophets who speak the word of the Lord but they're not struck dumb.

They're not made object lessons to convince the people that whenever this guy can actually utter a sound, it's from God. God is letting him talk now and giving him the words to say. That's a lot different with Ezekiel than it is with others and that's the Block means here. The other prophets have a commission and they know what they're supposed to say, teach, and know what the problem is. They were called just like Ezekiel but none of them are so tightly controlled and tightly bound. The purpose is to provide an object lesson to the people. None of them have that happen to them like it does with Ezekiel. So it's kind of interesting you get this reiteration of my words. These are my words, eat the scroll, that kind of thing. All of it is designed to get the single point across that when you're allowed to talk, people are going to know that it's me unleashing your tongue and giving you the words to say. Let's go back to chapter 3:12,

<sup>12</sup> Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great earthquake:

**MSH:** I quibble here, the voice. I heard the voice of a great earthquake. Well, I know why it's translated voice here even though the same Hebrew word *qowl* is going to be translated sound three other times in the next two or three verses. It could be I heard the sound of a great earthquake. The reason that the translator uses voice here is because we have a sentence, blessed be the glory of the Lord from its place. Now, earthquakes don't speak. The point here, think of the context, this is still part of the divine encounter. It's still part of Ezekiel meeting with the enthroned deity, God in human form, the cherubim throne. It's still part of the picture and since he's in the throne room of God we know from other passages that God has a heavenly host

with him. So most likely, this is the presence of the heavenly host in conjunction with the sound of the wings and the wheels and all that stuff uttering this statement, blessed be the glory of the Lord from its place. So we get an implicit reference to other divine beings in the throne room with God to praise God in this instance, in conjunction with this tremendous sound like an earthquake. So I wanted to point that out. This is why it's translated voice, because something's actually said. Since something is said, we get an implicit reference to Divine Council, the presence of some other beings there.

<sup>12</sup>Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great earthquake: "Blessed be the glory of the LORD from its place!" <sup>13</sup>It was the sound of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, and the sound of a great earthquake. <sup>14</sup>The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the LORD being strong upon me. <sup>15</sup>And I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who were dwelling by the Chebar canal, and I sat where they were dwelling. And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days.

**MSH:** Believe it or not, there are a few issues here. One is sort of kind of information. The other one we have to say a little about in terms of consistency. Hand of the Lord, this isn't the first time this phrase has occurred. It actually occurred back in chapter 1:3. We didn't really comment on it there but this phrase the hand of the Lord was upon me, the hand of the Lord came upon me, the hand of the lord was strong upon me, those kinds of things, most scholars, and I see no reason to disagree with this, would say that the point of the language is that the presence of God has some sort of palpable effect, like you can feel it. Is this a possession? It's probably too strong of a term. Maybe a compulsion, there's this palpable feeling of a compulsion. I hate use words like energy because they sound so new age and they're misconstrued. Basically, when the presence of God was there and God wants Ezekiel to do something, he can feel it and there's something to that. There's something experiential that goes beyond just hearing when the Spirit of God is doing something with him. Greenberg in his Anchor Yale Commentary on Ezekiel has this to say and I think there's some helpful things here. He says,

"The prophet describes the urgency, pressure, and compulsion by which he is stunned and overwhelmed. God's hand is a manifestation of his power elsewhere in the Old Testament."

**MSH:** So some of his cross-references for this, Exodus 9:3, Deuteronomy 2:15, 1 Samuel 5:9. I don't want to go through the whole list but God's hand is, in Old Testament thinking and theology, a manifestation of his power. Let's go back to the quote.

"When it lights upon a prophet, he may be charged with an uncanny strength (1 Kings 18:46) or with that supreme tension outwardly manifest as a trance brought on by consciousness of being addressed by God. Ezekiel uses the phrase in the latter sense, but in connection with some

sensory or physical effect other than mere audition, here the vision of chapter 1 and the extraordinary sensory experience of chapters 2 and 3 are the point.

The hand controls his movement (Ezekiel 3:22). It also detaches him from his surroundings and transports him in spirit to faraway places (Ezekiel 8:1, 37 Ezekiel 37:1, Ezekiel 40:1) or it rivets his attention to a psychophysical change that is supposed to occur in him (Ezekiel 33:22)

<sup>22</sup> Now the hand of the LORD had been upon me the evening before the fugitive came; and he had opened my mouth by the time the man came to me in the morning, so my mouth was opened, and I was no longer mute.

**MSH:** So Ezekiel would have this sensory experience where he knew something was going to happen, something involving the presence and power of God in and through him. Its language that lets us know that it is more than just hearing. It's more than just an auditory experience. So in chapter 3:16, where we're almost actually done with the chapter, the call actually ends with verse 15. So when we get here to verse 16, we start to get into the ministry content, what Ezekiel's actually going to be saying or doing. Let's just jump in and read that.

<sup>16</sup> And at the end of seven days, the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>17</sup> "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. <sup>18</sup> If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. <sup>19</sup> But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. <sup>20</sup> Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand. <sup>21</sup> But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul."

**MSH:** I think it's really important to note that, that's the end of verse 21, we're not talking here about eternal life, salvation, that kind of thing. Soul here, *nephesh*, is the very normal Old Testament word used for life, the fact that you're alive. You're a living animate being. God is not telling Ezekiel if you warn this guy and he turns and I don't destroy him, he's going to go to heaven. We're not talking about salvation in an eternal life sense. We're talking about whether the person is going to physically live or die. We're talking about temporal life here, not everlasting life, and I think that's really important. Verse 20, I also need to point out as well in conjunction with this, that Ezekiel is not being taught or the text is not teaching that Yahweh is the cause of sin.



if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die.

**MSH:** God isn't the cause of the sin and he's not setting traps for people so that they'll go to hell. This refers to temporal life situation, whether God is going to judge the person now or not, whether the person will be judged for their sin or not, whether that judgment is forestalled giving the person the opportunity to repent. If you look at verse 20, who gets blamed for the sin? The person who commits it. He's already sinned. He's already turned from righteousness and committed injustice. The idea of laying a stumbling block before him so that he dies is that God decides, okay, you've turn from your righteousness. You're in sin now and I'm going to set up a circumstance to judge you, to judge you for your sin. Look at the context of this. What's the circumstance of judgment for sin? It's called Babylon, the Babylonians. They're in the second wave of exile and God knows that it's not done yet. Jerusalem is going to be destroyed because Nebuchadnezzar's going to go back and he's going to finish the job.

And God is telling them, look Ezekiel, you need to tell the people what's going on, what's going to happen. When you get into chapters 4-5, we're going to get a series of sign acts where Ezekiel is going to do some strange things to reenact or visualize the destruction of Jerusalem and how the people who are stuck back in Jerusalem, most of them are going to die. He's going to cut his hair off and divide it into thirds and do stuff with it. But God tells him of the thirds, you pull a few hairs out here and by implication, those are people who are going to survive the invasion. But even some of them die. There's a very small remnant that's left and so the people he's preaching to or that he is actually living with in Babylon, they're part of this remnant.

But the whole point is here's what's happening or going to happen in Jerusalem. It's going to be destroyed. It's not over yet. You're here, you've survived but don't think that you're sort of off the hook here. You need to turn from your unrighteousness. You need to be loyal to, going back to, I hate to keep referencing Unseen Realm about the whole discussion about Old Testament salvation there, believing loyalty to the God of Israel. You worship no other. You depend on that status, his covenant with you and your loyalty to that covenant, your belief that he is the God of gods and he has entered into a covenant relationship with you, you worship no other in the faith that when you die, after you die, God will take you out of Sheol and you will be with him forever.

It's a very simple but very profound way to think about Old Testament salvation that ties into the Divine Council worldview that we spend a lot of time talking about here. This is essentially Ezekiel's message. You need to exercise believing loyalty, faith, that you will not go and worship other gods because that's why all this is happening anyway. You've got to turn from that and align yourself in faith with the God of Israel. If you don't, you can still be judged right here for your wickedness, for your idolatry. Don't think because you escaped these awful things that are going to happen in Jerusalem that you're in the clear. You're not. It's a very stark message. We don't want to miscontextualize what God as telling Ezekiel and what Ezekiel is saying. Let's go back to verse 22,

<sup>22</sup> And the hand of the LORD was upon me there. And he said to me, "Arise, go out into the valley, and there I will speak with you." <sup>23</sup> So I arose and went out into the valley, and behold, the glory of the LORD stood

there, like the glory that I had seen by the Chebar canal, and I fell on my face.

**MSH:** It's the same glory connecting it back to chapter 1. And look at the language, the glory of the Lord stood there. Spirits don't stand. Nebulous luminescence doesn't stand. Invisible spirits don't stand. It's the language of divine embodiment, divine encounter. Your senses need to be alerted to this sort of thing.

<sup>24</sup> But the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and he spoke with me and said to me, "Go, shut yourself within your house. <sup>25</sup> And you, O son of man, behold, cords will be placed upon you, and you shall be bound with them, so that you cannot go out among the people. <sup>26</sup> And I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and unable to reprove them, for they are a rebellious house. <sup>27</sup> But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' He who will hear, let him hear; and he who will refuse to hear, let him refuse, for they are a rebellious house.

**MSH:** That's the end of chapter 3. Now, he's told to go shut himself in and God says I don't want to freak you out unnecessarily, even though it's going to freak you out. After you're shut in there, cords will be placed upon you. Now, this is odd language because the next verse God says I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth. Who's putting the cords on him? The Hebrew form here is qal perfect third common plural. It could just as well be translated, they will put chords upon you and you shall be bound with them so that you cannot go out among the people. A lot of scholars will say it's probably people that tie him up and don't want him to come out because they don't want to hear what we says. They're hostile to him, so on so forth. Well, there's a bit of a problem with that, even though I would concede that's possible. There is a problem and Block notes it on page 155. He says,

"Even though verse 25 attributes the binding of the prophet to the people, the book offers no evidence of hostile actions against Ezekiel by the public. On the contrary, they see him out. And in less serious moments, they treat him as a curiosity and entertainer. Indeed, public apathy toward his message seems a bit more of a serious problem than malevolence towards his person."

**MSH:** He's right, that's true. So there's a question of how do we understand this. They will put cords upon you. ESV has chosen to translate it as a passive to sort of say in effect we don't really know exactly what's going on here. Is there an external action that's going to do this? Should we understand it metaphorically? Was Ezekiel actually tied up or is this another way of expressing metaphorically what had just been expressed in the previous verse, go shut yourself in your house? In other words, it is a metaphor for house arrest. I don't know. Nobody can really be completely sure but there's an issue here of whether the public is involved, and maybe they were even told to. Maybe they could refer to other supernatural forces. I don't think there's any clear evidence for that here.

I think it's a bit reading into the passage to say that. For my money, I think we might be better off to go with a metaphorical expression along with the previous verse. He's essentially under house arrest and then God will loose his tongue when he deems it adequate or when he deems it appropriate, that sort of thing. There is a bit of ambiguity here that isn't quite resolvable in terms of precision but just so that you're aware of it. This is the first sign act. In our next episode, we're going to get nine more. Chapters 4 and 5 have nine more sign acts that are specifically aimed at both the people there and mostly against Jerusalem because he's going to start doing things and behaving in a certain way. Now that his call narrative's over, he's under house arrest. So when he speaks or when he leaves, the house the people are going to know somethings up. They're going to know that God wants to get our attention. Ezekiel's loose. He got out today. He's not just locked up in there. He's not just struck dumb. When he can speak and when he appears among the people, they know at this stage of the book it's not good news. It's going to mean something that they probably don't want to hear but God wants them to hear. That's what we're going to get in the next two times. This one sets the stage for most of what Ezekiel is going to say in the rest of the book but certainly in the immediately ensuing chapters.