

The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0

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“Ezekiel 6”

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With

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Ezekiel 6

Chapter 6 of the book of Ezekiel focuses on the primary reason for Judah's exile: idolatry. This episode discusses the vocabulary used by Ezekiel for idolatry and spiritual apostasy and its links back to passages like Leviticus 26, which connect occupation of the Promised Land to believing loyalty to Yahweh alone.

pdfs referenced:

[HIGH PLACES](#)

[IDOLS](#)

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 115, Ezekiel 6. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you doing?

MSH: Very good, how are you Trey?

TS: I'm doing pretty good. Staying busy. How was your trip last week?

MSH: It was good. We had probably pushing 50 people at the event, then we had a nice get together afterwards. It was in Potomac Falls Cascade Library there in Virginia, near DC. People seem to appreciate the content, appreciate coming out, good questions. It was a pretty good group.

TS: Good deal. I'm excited about continuing with Ezekiel so we might as well just get right to it.

MSH: I hope you and everybody else are into idolatry, at least hearing about it, because that's about all we're going to get. Ezekiel 6 is pretty much just about why Jerusalem was being punished for idolatry. So obviously it comes on the heels of Ezekiel 4-5 with that whole series of sign acts against the city of Jerusalem. In chapter 6, we basically get the reason why God is so upset. It's all about idolatry. Remember, chapters 1-24 are oracles of judgment against Judah and Jerusalem. This is, of course, following into the midst of that. This one really distills toward why is God so upset. We're going to find out in this chapter. It isn't going to pull any punches. So the main focus is going to be for the whole episode Israelite idolatry. And really it's the main focus of the cause of the exile, not just in Ezekiel, although especially Ezekiel, but in other prophets as well. I'm going to read the whole chapter. It's only 14 verses and then we're going to take a look at some vocabulary that really focuses on idolatry. We're going to talk about the state of the spiritual apostasy in Judah but it will be wider than that as well when we talk about Israel's idolatry, just a history of it anyway. So let's jump in here with chapter 6:1, and I'm reading from the ESV.

The word of the LORD came to me: ²“Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, ³ and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. ⁴ Your altars shall become desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain before your idols. ⁵ And I will lay the dead bodies of the people of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars. ⁶ Wherever you dwell, the cities shall be waste and the high places ruined, so that your altars will be waste and ruined, your idols broken and destroyed, your incense altars cut down, and your works wiped out. ⁷ And the slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I am the LORD.

⁸“Yet I will leave some of you alive. When you have among the nations some who escape the sword, and when you are scattered through the countries, ⁹ then those of you who escape will remember me among the nations where they are carried captive, how I have been broken over their whoring heart that has departed from me and over their eyes that go whoring after their idols. And they will be loathsome in their own sight for the evils that they have committed, for all their abominations. ¹⁰ And they shall know that I am the LORD. I have not said in vain that I would do this evil to them.”

¹¹ Thus says the Lord GOD: “Clap your hands and stamp your foot and say, Alas, because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, for they shall fall by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. ¹² He who is far off shall die of pestilence, and he who is near shall fall by the sword, and he who is left and is preserved shall die of famine. Thus I will spend my fury upon them. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD, when their slain lie among their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the mountaintops, under every green tree, and under every leafy oak, wherever they offered pleasing aroma to all their idols. ¹⁴ And I will stretch out my hand against them and make the land desolate and waste, in all their dwelling places, from the wilderness to Riblah. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

MSH: That’s the whole chapter. There are some things in here that I’m going to reserve comment for for later chapters. For instance, the sexual imagery of idolatry, I have been broken over their whoring heart, that kind of language. We’ll really hit that in force when we get to Ezekiel 16, which is extremely explicit. If we really translated it literally, what’s there you might be tempted to call it pornographic when we get there. But we’ll save that content for that chapter since that’s sort of a focus there. Obviously, you get references to the remnant idea. We’ll say a little bit about that. Sword, famine, and pestilence, we talked about this a little bit how there’s sort of an immediate destruction and the aftermath, people are still going to die. Ezekiel has already indicated that the devastation’s going to be thorough. We talked in chapters 4 and 5 about how the language is so thorough, could we really be sure that there’s going to be anybody left? Ezekiel took his hair and put it into three parts and then all of them were destroyed, yet he pulled a few out and kept them in his garment, that sort of thing. You get the same idea here where it says even those who escape, they’re going to die. It’s not going to be everybody totally.

It’s not a totality because he says in a few verses earlier that some will remain. So we want to talk a little bit about the remnant idea, develop that a little bit in this chapter. But you’re going to see that in certain chapters as well. Primarily, we’re going to spend our time today in this chapter on the whole issue of idolatry. Now, if you listened to the Leviticus series, there would be some content here in what I just read that would be familiar. A lot of the designations that we just read, the designations for idolatrous pagan cultic objects and places, that vocabulary is actually also found in Leviticus 26:14-33. And that was about if the nation apostatizes, what’s going to happen to them. There was a series of cursing language in Leviticus. And specifically in Leviticus 26, the notion of faithfulness to God, only having him as your God and being a people sanctified to him that was tied to the greatest commandment, that you would worship no other

god, this believing loyalty idea we talked about in Leviticus 26. And that in turn was tied to your presence in the land. We've talked before about how the Abrahamic covenant, the land elements, were not totally unconditional. In Leviticus 26, the curses in Deuteronomy 28-29, it's very obvious that being in the land had something to do with refusing to worship other gods. It's just point blank.

So the Abrahamic covenant does have conditional elements. They're very clear even going back into Genesis 12, 15, the original covenants. God told Abraham, Genesis 17, walk before me and be blameless. Genesis 22, the whole issue offering Isaac and God says now I'm going to honor my covenant with you because you have not withheld from me your only son. There are conditions on all the covenants. So anyone who tells you that the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, these fundamental covenants in biblical theology are unconditional, they're not. They're actually both unconditional and conditional. They all have conditions, every one of them. But there's also this unconditional idea. What I mean by that, to recap content we've gone through in Leviticus, God made these covenants with the full intention that no matter what happens, I am going to get my way. I am going to have a people raised up from Abraham and Sarah. I am going to bring them into the land. I'm going to have a family. There's divine intent that never goes away. As bad as it gets, God never gives up on his covenantal promises. But whether an Israelite, a descendent of Abraham and Sarah or anyone for that matter, gets to participate, gets the participatory benefit of the covenant, that had conditions all the way around.

So you actually have both working. A lot of people want to say that these covenants are totally unconditional because they want the land element to be still out there, and that's because they have a certain view of the end times and eschatology and the kingdom and the millennium and all that stuff. You don't need to be blind to the conditions of the Abrahamic covenant and the Davidic covenant to get those things. It's just that people try to argue their point or perspective from a certain way. It's really not faithful to the text certain things that are said. So we have a situation here where Israel, this whole chapter in Ezekiel 6, is kind of a concise statement of how the people of Judah, remember the people of Israel, the northern kingdom are already history at this point. We talked about the all Israel language and the family of Israel and the house of Israel language referring to descendants from Jacob, descendants from Israel the person at this point in Israel's history. So you have a concise statement here of how these people violated this principle, worship no other god before me, believing loyalty to Yahweh alone, and it led to their expulsion from the land. That's where they are. They're in exile. That's what the whole chapter's about.

Now, I want to focus on some of the specific terminology. I'm going to be reading from a number of sources here, some articles on vocabulary and idolatry in general. I'll give you a head's up to telegraph what those sources are. There a number of terms used in Ezekiel 6 that you will also find in Leviticus 26. I'll just give you the quick list here. *Bāmôt*, high places, Ezekiel 6:3, Leviticus 26:30; the singular is *bāmâ*, a high place, in most general terms, was not necessarily a cult center built on a mountain or elevated location, although a lot of them were. But the designation of high place also referred to sort of their style. There were these cult centers, these ritual places of ritual that had elevated stands and platforms with steps going up, that sort of thing. So the term also refers to that style of architecture, cultic installations that were in many cases dedicated to other deities or gods. So *bāmôt* is an important term, high places. We have *qat·ṭə·rîm* typically translated incense altars. We're going to be getting into that

terminology a little bit about what else it might mean. So these would be associated with the high places with these ritual locations.

Qat·ṭā·rîm, the incense altars are in verse 4, 6. You'll find those in Leviticus 26:30 as well. We got *ḡil·lū·lîm* usually translated idols, verses 4, 6,13 in Ezekiel 6, also Leviticus 26:30 right out of that passage, *ḡil·lū·lîm*, idols. We have *pā·ḡā·rîm*, which the ESV translates as corpses or dead bodies, verse 5 for instance, also Leviticus 26:30. We'll talk about what else that might mean. Those are the main terms I want to cover here. There is one or two others but I'm going to skip those for time and focus on the major issues, lemmas, terms, and talk about them. Let's go back to *bāmôt*, high places, and just talk about this series of objects and terms so we can begin to get a picture of what the state of spiritual apostasy was in Israel, and specifically in the context of Ezekiel, we're talking about Judah and Jerusalem. I'm reading a section from the Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical books, and I recommend the whole series by the way. I've contributed to a couple of them myself, some Divine Council articles and a few other things. But on the entry on idolatry, there's a discussion about *bāmôt* and it says this.

“High places,” or *bāmôt* (sg., *bāmâ*), were cultic installations found in a variety of locations in Israel and used by the population before and during the monarchy. Making sacrifices and burning incense were recurring activities held in or at *bāmôt*. *Bāmôt*, along with the tabernacle and the temple, were humanmade structures where worshipers encountered Yahweh. Thus *bāmâ* is a generic term related to places where sacrifices were offered.

Prior to the monarchy, *bāmôt* were considered legitimate worship spaces and received no condemnation, neither for their existence nor for their use. *bāmôt* met the religious needs of the fluid environment of the tribal confederacy along with the “temple” or “house” of Yahweh at *Shiloh, a semipermanent structure perhaps built around the ancient tabernacle (1 Sam 1:7, 24; 3:15; 1:9; 3:3).”

MSH: What the situation was, think about it. We have the conquest. They go into the land. If you've read the book of judges, you know it makes a point to say none of the tribes really did the job completely and in terms of yeah, they targeted the Anakim. Joshua says there's no more Anakim in the land. They fled to where the Philistines lived. We get that part but the other part of the conquest was the expulsion, not necessarily the killing, but the expulsion of peoples from the lands and avoiding their gods, avoiding intermarriage, avoiding living like they do, these sorts of situations. The book of Judges makes it very clear in the first couple chapters that the Israelites just didn't do that. They didn't do the job. And so in the midst of this failure, we go into the period of the judges with all these cycles of oppression. God doesn't help them to complete the task, and they get invaded by foreigners or overtaken by indigenous inhabitants. You go through these cycles of oppression and God raises up a judge and they get delivered and then a repeating of the whole thing again. If you've read the book of Judges, that's very familiar to you.

When they go into the land, they're in the land during the period of the judges but they don't have a central place of worship. It's everyone doing what is right in his own eyes, to quote

the book of Judges in several places. There's no temple. We find out when we emerge from the book of Judges, Samuel was the last of the judges that we have some sort of religious site at Shiloh as the quotation noted perhaps built around the ancient tabernacle because Eli the priest is there. The Ark of the Covenant's there. Are all of the furnishings of the tabernacle there? Well, the Old Testament isn't very or totally clear on that. We get later into the monarchy and there are parts of the tabernacle in some places and not in others. You don't have a centralized place of worship as God intended, to quote Deuteronomy, a specific place where God would set his name, put his name. If you've read Unseen Realm, you're familiar with the name theology. These are references to a central location where the tabernacle would essentially be transported and that's where it lives now and we'll build a temple and we install the Ark and all that kind of stuff. And that eventually happens under Solomon but you have a long period of time where you don't have a central site.

What you have instead is just what the quotation described. You have high places in different locations around the land, sort of like what you have with the patriarchs. Remember, the patriarchs would build altars where they had divine encounters and they would worship Yahweh there. There was no central location. You have sort of that kind of thing going on and what will the author here's trying to describe here is prior to the monarchy, you have the situation where you have a number of high places and Yahweh might be worshiped at one of those or some other god might be worshiped at another one. But you don't have a condemnation of the high places, in particular, in that situation because of frankly, just what it is. It is what it is. The people are not spiritually with it. They're under oppression. God raises up judges. Eventually, the prophets, God's going to use people like Samuel to get things turned around, get a monarchy installed. If you are thinking God was opposed to kingship all along, that is also not correct. There are rules in Deuteronomy about kings so there was an intention. Kingship wasn't necessarily bad. What's bad is the reasons they've asked for it, what their motives are, that sort of thing, the kind of person they target. We don't want to lapse here into a discussion of 1 Samuel here. But this is what was supposed to happen. Eventually we get David installed but he's not allowed to build the temple because he's a man of blood and we know the story. It falls to Solomon. His whole point is that prior to when we actually get a temple, the central place of worship, Yahweh is still worshiped by faithful Israelites in the land and they do it in a variety of places and those places are called high places, the places of ritual or where worshiped occurs or sacrifices were performed. They're a variety of these. So let's go back to the quote from the dictionary.

Even though a plurality of *bāmôt* existed, there is no hint in the narrative that the people were sacrificing indiscriminately.

During the monarchy, however, *bāmôt* were considered illegitimate worship spaces and received considerable condemnation for their existence and use. After the building of *Solomon's temple, their inadequacy should have been apparent. Yet people continued to sacrifice at and multiply *bāmôt* as if no temple existed. The text mentions four categories of *bāmôt*: (1) Yahweh's *bāmôt*; (2) foreign deity *bāmôt*; (3) "high places of the gates," *bāmôt hasšē 'ārîm*; (4) "houses of the high places," *bêt bāmôt*. All these construction projects received condemnation.

This situation resulted in a heightened expectation for the kings to remove *bāmôt*, particularly in the Judean kingdom.

Although *Hezekiah removed Yahweh's *bāmôt*,

MSH: That was legitimate for Hezekiah to do because now we have a temple. Once the temple is erected, the other *bāmôt*, even if Yahweh was worshipped there, don't make any sense. So after that, we have the temple. The prophets are running around telling the kings to tear them all down, get rid of them because now we have a temple.

Although *Hezekiah removed Yahweh's *bāmôt*, it was *Josiah who finally destroyed all foreign deity *bāmôt*, including those built by *Solomon, and Jeroboam's northern "houses of the high places," *bêt bāmôt*, with its associated personnel.

MSH: It's only under Josiah where the situation basically gets cleaned up. It's not going to stay that way. We know that if we've read the books of Kings, but Josiah is the one who does the most to correct the situation. This reference to Solomon's *bāmôt* I think deserves a little bit of a sidebar here. Examples of Solomon building high places in addition to or in opposition to the temple to Yahweh that he builds, Solomon actually builds *bāmôt* along with the temple and he builds them in Jerusalem in proximity to the temple. An example would be 1 Kings 11:7 says,

Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem.

MSH: 2 Kings 23:13 another example, a little bit repetitive but there's other details here.

¹³ And the king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, to the south of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

MSH: Solomon builds high places for rival deities. This whole situation, especially with Molech and Chemosh and I think in particular as 1 Kings 11:7 said that they're located East of Jerusalem. Here you have two of the worst foreign deities and their high places, *bāmôt*, were erected right in proximity to Jerusalem. So the little geographical sideline here we get in both of these verses, you have sort of a signal to Solomon, kind of accommodating divine competitors with Yahweh right there in Jerusalem. This is Solomon. So the apostasy that we think of as the apostasy of Israel, the apostasy, Solomon, of course, is reigning over all the tribes. It's not just the Northern Kingdom. It's not just after Solomon's time after the kingdom splits. Solomon is a significant part of the problem. Let's go back to the dictionary.

Before the building of *Solomon's temple, we do not know who the originators of these installations were. The texts simply mention the presence of *bāmôt* (e.g., 1 Sam 9:14, 19; 10:13; 1 Kings 3:4). The term is

associated with the introduction of *Saul to *Samuel (1 Sam 9:11–27) and Saul’s encounter with a band of prophets (1 Sam 10:5–8). 1 Kings 3:3–4 announces Solomon’s preference for the Gibeon *bāmâ*, and 1 Kings 3:2 notes that *bāmôt* were used by the general population. These passages presuppose the existence of *bāmôt* without stating their origin.

The narratives of the northern kingdom focus on structures that originated with *Jeroboam. Besides the sanctuaries at *Dan and *Bethel, Jeroboam constructed numerous “houses of the high places,” *bêt bāmôt* (1 Kings 12:25–33). The fact that Jeroboam built *bêt bāmôt* and not merely *bāmôt* distinguishes northern from southern *bāmôt*. As was the case under Rehoboam of Judah, the people followed in Jeroboam’s footsteps and built *bāmôt* for themselves (2 Kings 17:9). Thus, in contrast to the premonarchical period, the text clearly communicates that *bāmôt* originated with certain monarchs and people. And now two categories of *bāmôt* existed: foreign deity *bāmôt* and Yahweh’s *bāmôt*.

MSH: Once the temple is built, all of them should've just been superfluous and especially if foreign deities are being worshiped, they're abominable. Back to the source here.

Even with Solomon’s temple at center stage, sacrificing at Yahweh’s *bāmôt* continued (1 Kings 3:2; 2 Chron 33:15–17). In fact, each Judean king, starting with Asa through Jotham, was suspect because he did not remove or tear down the *bāmôt* (1 Kings 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kings 12:4; 14:4; 15:4, 35), and by association probably continued using them for sacrificial purposes. The text’s emphasis on the kings and their inability to remove *bāmôt* reflects the expectations articulated in 1 Kings 3:2: *bāmôt* should have been discarded, presumably because they were obsolete and replaced by the Jerusalem temple.

However, it was not until the arrival of Hezekiah that these hopes were met (2 Kings 18:4).

MSH: Now let’s transition here to another term, *qat·tə·rîm*, the incense altars. These would have been part of a *bāmôt* place, a high place, place of worship. So the high places are where sacrifices are going to be offered before the monarchy had a bunch of them. Yahweh was worshiped and other deities were worshiped. Even after we have the temple, most of the Kings just left them alone and people were using them even though there was a temple. That's what the prophets were angry about, both legitimate *bāmôt* that had been used for Yahweh, they should go by the wayside, they're obsolete, and there should be no *bāmôt* to foreign deities. In those complexes, you'd have incense altars that was part of the ritual worship. Remember our series in Leviticus. There was incense used as part of the various sacrificial rituals. So Ezekiel 6 mentions these as well. Now Block in his commentary on Ezekiel has this to say about the incense altars. He says,

“The word, *qat·tə·rîm* name is usually thought to derive from a verb, *chamam*, to be hot, and interpreted either as incense altars or some object associated with the sun cult represented by the deity Baal-*hamon*, a deity referred to in 9th Century Phoenician text in general and later worshiped as the patron deity of Carthage. However, both this etymology and this interpretation now seem doubtful. Evidence from Ugarit suggests that the word *chamam*, to be hot, and the name of the deity *hamon* derive from different roots. The confusion arises from the requirement in Hebrew that the letter *het* represented two distinct semantic letters.”

MSH: If you know Hebrew, you have two H's, *he* and *het*. *Het* is a little harder pronunciation. In other Semitic languages, what is *het* in Hebrew actually splits into two separate consonants. There are two hard H's so you have a total of three H's in other Semitic languages. What Block is saying is this association with *chamon* the deity is actually probably not correct because it would've been spelled with one of these other letters. So it's not the same term even though it sounds to our ear like it's the same. So he says here,

“Although the root *chaman*, to be hot, does occur in Ugaritic, the deity *chamon* is written with an H with a little curvy line under it, this other third H which opens the possibility of a link with another Semitic word or root, *chama*, to protect.”

MSH: So maybe it comes from this idea of this verb to protect. These don't have to be incense altars for this deity Baal-*hamon* is Block's point.

“This picture might denote that the *chamanim* denoted a sanctuary or some sort of chapel that was part of a *bāmôt* complex. This picture of *hamonon* or *hamonim* occurs with every occurrence of *hamon* in the Old Testament, and is particularly helpful in elucidating 2 Chronicles 34:4 which speaks of tearing down the altars of Baal and the *chamanim* that were high above them. It is difficult to visualize incense altars meeting that description. If the *chamanim* were understood as a cultic building, then the statement in 2 Chronicles 34:4 makes sense.”

MSH: *Hamonim* is probably some sort of reference not really to an incense altar, even though the ESV has it translated that way, and other English translations will. But it's probably some sort of little chapel that's part of a *bāmôt* complex, a high place of worship, some little chapel there. Another term, *gîl·lū·lîm* the idols, there's a number of terms for idols in the Hebrew Bible. This is not sort of the normal one that you'd read about in the Torah, for instance. You'd have something like *pasel*, which is a graven image. This is a totally different term and the etymology for it is actually controversial. It's not clear where this term comes from. Ezekiel uses this term a lot. It occurs 48 times in the Old Testament, 39 of those are in Ezekiel. It's a special word and Ezekiel uses it in particular in describing something, describing false worship of something. DDD, the Dictionary of Deities and Demons, has an entry on the *gîl·lū·lîm* and I want to give you a little excerpt on that. It says,

“Many scholars derived *gīl·lū·līm* from a hypothetical noun *galol*, which would mean stela, sort of an upright stone object, whose vocalization has been deliberately modified by the Israelite prophets to correspond to the vowel pattern of the word *siqqusim*, abominations.”

MSH: Now what that means is if you have three consonants galol, GLL, what this viewpoint is suggesting is that maybe this term comes from a word that has the consonants GLL and to make it an abhorrent term, the Hebrews and the scribes and even verbally would take the vowels of the word for abominations. They would insert those vowels between GLL and that's where you get *gīl·lū·līm*. It's kind of an artificial word but it would refer for some sort of object that people were to view as an abhorrence, as something detestable. That's the guess for where this comes from because there's no clear noun, lemma, root word *galul* anywhere in biblical Hebrew or other Semitic languages. The guess is the writers took this GLL term and stuck these vowels in to make it an object of abhorrence. Biblical writers do that with proper names like *Mephibosheth*. That's not the actual original name of that person in the Hebrew Bible of Israelite history. It's that the second part of the name was substituted with the name *bosheth*. *Bosheth* means ashamed or something like that, so *Ishbosheth*. There are instances where a person's name would have this this word appended to it to sort of mark them as something shameful. The speculation here is that maybe they're doing the same thing with this particular upright stone or cult object.

So going back to DDD here, you have an originally neutral term for stela, upright object, that becomes a dysphemism or a more pejorative term that signifies deities other than the Lord that are basically abominable, garbage, shameful. Second possibility is that some scholars would say that's possible and interesting. Maybe they were doing that but they also note, and this is going to be especially true, later rabbinic sources will make this argument, that you do have a GLL term in Hebrew that has nothing to do with an idol or object but it means poop or feces. Ezekiel 4:12 uses this term, Ezekiel 22:3. And so the other view is that maybe Ezekiel is taking a term for feces which would normally be pronounced *delalim* and takes that and alters it to *gilulim*, maybe taking the vowels from the word for abomination, the things that are detestable in Leviticus. So maybe he just basically does double duty. He takes this word which means something bad, something unclean, and stinky and then changes it with the vowels to make it refer to a cultic object that should be viewed as abhorrent and detestable. The short answer is nobody really knows.

Both of those options are kind of workable. A lot of people like the reference to feces there as the explanation because Ezekiel, to try to not be explicit or blunt here, we're going to see elsewhere that Ezekiel is very fond of graphic language. When it comes to Chapter 16, it's going to be very sexual in nature. We've already seen references to human dung that God said I'm going to make you cook over this. Ezekiel says that he's a priest and can't touch this unclean stuff. There are going to be other places where Ezekiel will use very earthy, very graphic language. And so scholars would say this would be like Ezekiel. This would be something he'd do. He'd take the word for feces and he'd put new vowels in it to make it refer to some sort of erectable object rather than just something you expel as a normal human being. He would do this because it's colorful, because it's graphic, because it's memorable. It would be something that would leave no doubt as to how Ezekiel feels about what he's talking about. Now, I'll add a little bit more to this.

Ezekiel uses *gilulim* as I mentioned a few minutes ago more than any other prophet. Other prophets use sort of normal words for idols and 39/48 times, Ezekiel opts for this term we're talking about, *gilulim*. He's also the only author that uses the verb defile in relation to *gilulim*, chapter 18, 20, 30 so on so forth. So this is in part also scholars figure that since he's specifically using verbiage that you'll find in Leviticus, again he's a priest, he specifically using verbiage that is associated with things that are defiling and many of those things in Leviticus that are defiling have to do with bodily fluids, functions, or other things that are determined to be unclean, that would make a person ritually unclean. But it becomes part of the argument that Ezekiel would probably be the guy who would do this, who would play with the language in this way. And so a lot of people sort of opt for this second possibility that what we're talking about is a play on words that denotes an object but because of what's done with it makes you think of that object as crap, to just put it that way as clean as I can put it here. And since Ezekiel's very fond of this kind of language, I think it's probably a good bet that that's what's going on but the truth is that nobody quite knows for sure where the term comes from. One more here, *pā·ḡā·rîm*, which the ESV has as corpses or dead bodies, also found in Leviticus 26:30. I might as well read that verse. I've brought up the verse a number of times. We're at the last of our vocabulary words here and they all show up in Leviticus 26:30, which says,

³⁰ And I will destroy your high places and cut down your incense altars and cast your dead bodies upon the dead bodies of your idols, and my soul will abhor you.

MSH: This is in response to, if you don't worship only me, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to drive you out of the land. This is going to be the result. So all that vocabulary finds its way here in Ezekiel. So back to *pā·ḡā·rîm*, there is a word in Hebrew which denotes human bodies or corpses, in many places. Not every reference as there's a homograph issue here. There's another *pā·ḡā·rîm* but typically the one you find in the Hebrew Bible is related to a dead body. The verb means to grow faint, to become weak sort of like metaphorically, you can see where that would be related to the act of dying, that sort of thing. The verb is going to be used in context where someone is dying or right at the time of death or something like that. The noun is very well known, very common. Some have suggested though that we have not *pā·ḡār* in the terms of the corpse but *pā·ḡār* in terms of a different word that occurs in other Semitic languages in certain texts where it's probably also an upright object, maybe a heap of stones or a stela as well. Without getting into the external textual data, there's one particular text that has the word SKN which everybody knows means stela or heap of stones in parallel to PGR. So some people think that makes more sense here because, let's go back to Leviticus 26:30. Here's what I just read to you. See if you detect sort of an odd phrase here.

³⁰ And I will destroy your high places and cut down your incense altars and cast your dead bodies upon the dead bodies of your idols, and my soul will abhor you.

MSH: That just sounds kind of odd, cast your dead bodies upon the dead bodies of your idols. What's weird about the verse is that *pā·ḡār* occurs twice in the verse. That's why ESV translates it I will cast your dead bodies upon the dead bodies of your idols. A lot of scholars say the second

of these shouldn't be dead bodies, it should be this other PGR word. If that's the case, here's how you would translate it.

³⁰ And I will destroy your high places and cut down your incense altars and cast your dead bodies at or upon the stela of your idols, and my soul will abhor you.

MSH: There's another place in Ezekiel 43 where this sort of makes sense. So it probably doesn't refer to corpses here. It probably refers to some cultic object, some sort of stones. If we take all four of these terms, you've got *bāmôt*, *chamanim*, which is probably a little chapel. *Bāmôt* is just the whole complex or ritual location, the altar as it were where sacrifices are offered and then there's a chapel associated with that. You've got the *ḡil·lū·lîm*, probably an object that gets its name to mark it as something detestable so that when people look at it and think about it, they're just grossed out by it. It becomes something abhorrent. And then this *pə·ḡā·rîm* referring to some sort of upright cult object. This is what Ezekiel's targeting in this whole chapter. God says I'm going to destroy all of these things because they're all present in my land and my people are worshiping other gods with these things and some of them are probably thinking they're worshiping him through these cultic objects in these high places. This is at the root of their apostasy, essentially not just cleaning house, not getting rid of all this stuff, Now, I want to talk a little bit more, even more generally, about idolatry. There's an interesting article that I can't unfortunately make it something accessible. I couldn't find it online. I had to get it through a database. Milgram has an article on the nature and extent of idolatry in 8th and 7th century BC Judah. This is the Monarchic period leading up into the point of exile here. And it just has some interesting stuff in it. I want to read you a few excerpts from it. He says here,

“Datable Biblical texts of the eighth century accuses Israel of idolatry 15 times. The literature of the following seven century does it 166 times. In the seventh century, the prophets repeatedly stated that idolatry pollutes its inheritance, temple and the land of just all the place the users pollute terminology a quantitative difference in the number of statements on idolatry between the eighth and seventh centuries is accentuated by the difference in the effects of idolatry as illustrated by the use of this term *tame*, to be unclean.”

MSH: All of that kind of language occurs in text that are datable to the seventh century. Think about it. Seventh century is the 600s BC, eighth century is the 700s BC. Most of the attention in the eighth century BC texts is to be the northern apostate kingdom. You get 15 times they complain about the idolatry and whatnot. It's exponentially more after the northern kingdom is gone. So why would that be. It's kind of obvious because now you're talking about Judah and you're talking about the place where Yahweh's own house is, the place of the Davidic dynasty and covenant, the temple. So the prophets basically just lose their minds that this kind of thing has now moved south into Judah and it's just exploding. So they just go kind of berserk with this whole situation and the texts reflect this dramatically more vociferous concern or objection in the seventh century because of the proximity to the presence of Yahweh in Jerusalem. So it just gets blown up in into a much bigger deal. So Milgram says,

“How can we account for this stupendous change? First, as mentioned above, we must take the book of Kings at its word: Jehu in North Israel and Jehoiada in Judah wiped out the Baal cult during the second half of the ninth century. In effect state-sponsored paganism ceased. It is absent throughout the eighth century. There was private fetishism but the eighth century prophets were virtually unconcerned. It was no threat to the worship of Yahweh in his sanctuary or to Israel's existence on its land. To be sure, Molek worship and necromancy are indeed indicated in the text but the general populace didn't view these acts as incompatible with their allegiance to Yahweh, a misconception that prophets try to correct.”

MSH: His point is that the big issue for the prophets and the thing he's arguing that really gets tied to the land is when you start using rival cult centers and building rival cult centers in Jerusalem, in proximity to Yahweh's presence in the temple, that was essentially the straw that broke the camel's back. That is the trigger point to God saying enough. The northern kingdom got what it deserved because of idolatry. The Davidic dynasty is still intact. It's a legitimate dynasty. This is where I live. This is my temple, sanctuary, sacred ground, and it doesn't matter. If you're going to invade my sacred space with this kind of stuff, you're all toast. I'm not going to spare the monarchy or priests. My hands are not tied here just because the temple's here, just because this is where my presence is. I'm going to drive you from the land. So that the prophetic criticism, the call against apostasy doesn't go away or doesn't get any softer because now we're talking about Jerusalem and David's line. God says who gives a rip? I don't care who we're talking about here.

In fact, this is exactly the sort of thing that I warned you back in Leviticus 26, back in the Torah that I would do if you violated this so don't think there's any security in the fact that we're still alive. We didn't get killed off with the 10 tribes of the north. They're the ones that split up the kingdom. They're the bad guys. We're here in Judah. We're loyal to David. We have Davidic kings down here, and we have the temple. We're not building other temples. The high places, yeah, we still use those. Solomon built a couple of those, and we didn't tear them down. But we still have the temple here and this is God's place. God's not going to touch this or destroy this because it's his temple. God says phewy. I don't care. I don't care about any of the things you think keep you safe with respect to relationship with me. What I care about is where is your loyalty. You're not going to dress yourself up with these other things, while on the other hand, you're doing exactly the same things I said would mean expulsion from the land. It isn't going to protect you.

So I think it's really an interesting perspective. Milgram goes on in the article. He does a lot of other interesting things. He talks about how with the prophets the big deal was state-sponsored paganism. In other words, you don't just build a high place or *bāmôt* next to the temple in Jerusalem or in Judah or in proximity to the holy city. You don't just do that. That takes royal approval, state sponsorship. Those things don't get built unless the people in charge who are the kings and even the priests, those things don't happen unless those people either approve them or don't try stop them. That's the real issue. You don't have any account in the Old Testament of prophets or priest or kings or anybody going house to house checking to see if they have asherah figures, little idols or anything like that. There's no indication that anybody called

for or tried to eradicate idolatry at a house to house level. What's typically the focus is this state sponsored paganism, because this is David's line, David, the man after God's own heart, the line that God promised was the only legitimate one allowed to sit on the throne. And the temple, the only place God said I will put my name there and dwell there. That is by far the greater focus of apostasy and idolatry. Frankly, if the priests aren't doing their job, people are going to do what they're going to do.

This makes me think of situations now. I'm not going to name any names or give too pointed an illustration here, but we all know Christians in churches do stuff that we hear or see and think good grief. If the Lord were here, he'd just have a canary. He would just go berserk and say this is nuts. This is not legitimate real worship. It's abominable and wrong and bad, whatever. We all know that, so that's kind of the lens through which I look at stuff like this. Yeah, and people don't have Bibles. They're all dependent upon the priests and if mom and dad heard anything from the priest they're supposed to transmit it to the kids. Nobody can just go look up, should we do this or not, this or that. Is it ok to use this cult center now even though we have a temple? It's a shorter trip and Yahweh was worshipped there by our ancestors. Is that okay? If you don't have prophets or priests or whoever, teaching the people, they're just going to go astray.

It's not that God is thrilled with that or approves it. He doesn't because that's part of the critique here. But he's far more concerned with is the institutional faith and Israelite religion, state sponsored paganism. Do with that what you want but I look at the church on an institutional level. We can all think of bizarre examples where ministries and churches have literally jumped the shark. They are apostate. Because they're big, public, and have lots of people under their charge or care, and multitudes are lead astray, what the situation was back in Judah, that is a much bigger problem and concern because it's institutionalized. While the other's not good, and we wish that were different and it needs to be different, what breaks the camel's back here, what prompts God to punish his people is the state sponsored garbage that went on in Judah. This is the picture that emerges as you read through Kings and Chronicles and some of these other neglected books. It's an interesting perspective that you have such emphasis in different centuries, places, situations, and contexts. I'll just give you one more paragraph.

“State sponsored cults were more of an issue as evidenced by references to the queen of heaven, the astral gods on rooftops. The royalty established cult places were the ones expatriated by Josiah. Thus, alongside of official state-sponsored idolatry, there sprouted a widespread individual or family centered cult, apostate forms of worship, which existed after the destruction of the official Baal cult in North Israel and Judah, and even after Josiah's reform, successfully annihilated royally sponsored cult places in Judah.”

MSH: When the kings put a stop to the state-sponsored paganism, God said good job. That's what we need to have happen. And then the prophets could sort of preach about worshipping Yahweh and you hoped that the word circulates. You hope that the priests are doing their job to sort of forestall or correct what's going on in individual homes but that isn't the stuff that's going to result in expulsion from the land. What's going to lead to the expulsion from land is the state-sponsored abominations. Milgram adds,

“The biblical evidence of idolatry has yielded thus far the following picture. The difference in state endorsed religion of Judah between the eighth and seventh centuries is largely summarized by the single word, rather by a single person, Manasseh. He reintroduced idolatry into Jerusalem and Judah, completely undoing his father Hezekiah's reform and Josiah's efforts. Even succeeding the previous status quo, he installed idols in the temple courtyards and in the sanctuary itself (2 Kings 21-23). Also alongside the official cult, there flourished an ongoing popular cult that continued unabated throughout the eighth and seventh centuries until Judah's destruction.”

MSH: What triggered the exile for Judah was the reintroduction of officially state sanctioned apostasy by Manasseh and this is why Manasseh becomes the focus point in a number of prophetic passages related to the exile. It got cleaned up by Hezekiah and Josiah but what Manasseh did, that was the trigger point. He goes on and talks about the archaeology. It's kind of an interesting observation. He says,

“Archaeological evidence for the popular cult exists and in perfusion. Among the artifacts, the most likely candidate is the figurine with respect to idolatry of eighth and seventh century Judah. The entire figurine collection reveals a consistent pattern. The figurines cluster in non-conformist worship contexts. They are virtually absent from establishment sanctuaries whereas a total of 862 figurines were found throughout the countryside of Judah as opposed to none of them in sort of established Yahwistic high places.”

MSH: So these figurines that you see pictures of in archaeology are typically found in homes and graves and private contexts or private home situations. They're cheap. They're everyday objects crudely fashioned. These asherah should not be confused with the cult stature of the biblical asherah, what you read about the prophets tearing down and all that stuff at the *bāmôt* because those asherah were sacred because they were typically made of expensive materials situated in a public temple and they represented the goddess in front of the whole population. So the whole point is that what's going on in people's houses isn't good but it's not what's going to be viewed as the reason we're being punished by Yahweh, the reason we're being expelled from the land. The reason that that happens is because we worshipped rival gods in Yahweh's own presence. We built these *bāmôt* or use these *bāmôt* right there in the vicinity of the temple. God is not going to put up with that. He's not going to share his worship with the official priesthood and house. He's not going to share that with anyone else. He's not going to share his sacred space with anyone else or anything else. That's the thing that triggers the exile and all that goes with it. In verses 8 to 10 as we wrap up here, I'll say something about the remnant thinking.

⁸“Yet I will leave some of you alive. When you have among the nations some who escape the sword, and when you are scattered through the countries, ⁹then those of you who escape will remember me among the

nations where they are carried captive, how I have been broken over their whoring heart that has departed from me and over their eyes that go whoring after their idols. And they will be loathsome in their own sight for the evils that they have committed, for all their abominations. ¹⁰ And they shall know that I am the LORD. I have not said in vain that I would do this evil to them.”

MSH: That’s verses 8-10, harkening back to Leviticus 26. Now, the basis for the covenant curses come from this older talk in the Torah that your presence in the land is linked to your fidelity to me as a nation and monarchy, kings, and priests. People are going to make mistakes. They are going to have aberrant worship but God is actually more tolerant of that sort of thing. He’s tolerant of error by ignorance, think back to Leviticus. He’s intolerant of institutionalized apostasy. I think that's important because just that little bit of tolerance is going to pave the way for saving a remnant. There’s going to be a remnant of just the people who survive and then there’s going to be a remnant of that. There’s going to be some that are saved. There’s going to be some that get to return back to Judah and rebuild the temple. We’re going to try it again. God’s not going to totally abandon the whole proposition even though he could have because there's so much aberrant worship going on out there.

But what the focus of the condemnation is is knowingly worshiping other gods, knowingly doing what is detestable, knowingly violating Leviticus 26 and this stuff that the curses of Deuteronomy outline. When you have your leadership and people generally who should know better, when they are doing these things, God is not going to put up with that. He’s going to be just a little more tolerant toward people who are just “sheep without a shepherd”. God could punish everybody because none of us are going to be perfect in our worship. None of them were perfect in their worship. They’re all going to do some violation but they literally are sheep without a shepherd. It’s the ones that bear the greater responsibility to the ones who “sin with a high hand”. What they're doing is intentional. It's flaunting their status and it’s taking the resources that should go to the proper worship of Yahweh and using them to erect and construct abominable things in Yahweh's own sacred territory, his own city. That is not to be tolerated. So do with that what you will.

I think there’s a lot of ways that we could apply this to our own institutional situation when it comes to what we think of as the church. That's the kind of thing that will destroy a country, not this or that boneheaded thing that somebody who's truly sincere and just kind of messes up or would doesn't know better. That’s the kind of thing God’s going to respond to and say we need to correct that, send somebody over there and hopefully they’ll be teachable. It is just the other side that draws his anger consistently when you just have no excuse. You just have no excuse to be doing this. Despite all that, God is plenty angry. There’s plenty of destruction in the exile. We all know how it turned and know the story. And God would have been completely right to just destroy everything and everyone but he doesn't. He doesn't do it, and we can see in the captives like the Ezekiel situation, he’s a priest. There will be members of the royal line who are kept alive. There will be part of the priesthood. There will be people from all stations of life who God spares to learn the lesson and return to him as Ezekiel says even in this chapter, some will survive. I will save some.

I will do that. But in terms of the book, the whole explanation or situation is going to get a lot worse before it gets any better. But it’s still a good lesson. God targeting those who should

have known better, those who sin with intentionality and despite even that, despite the degree to which things went bad, God still finds it within himself to just not call the whole thing off, not destroy everyone and everything, he would have been perfectly justified in doing so. So as we proceed through of the book of Ezekiel, you're going to get more of this. It's going to be really really awful stuff, graphic in some places, but the light's not entirely going to go out, and God will ensure the remnant survives and he doesn't abandon the plan. As I've said many times, there is no plan B. There's only plan A so as bad as this gets, it's never going to quite all be destroyed.

TS: Mike, real briefly, can you talk about the idolizing of celebrities and stars versus an actual figurine idol in idolatry?

MSH: I think because of our culture, on the one hand, you could look at that and say it's not really the same thing. It's an abstraction and it is. It's an abstraction, but if you think about what assigning believing loyalty to Yahweh meant, it's not just an intellectual decision. You're the God of gods, check the box. It's more than that. It's a trust in him for your livelihood, for your preservation as a family, as a nation, the whole thing. If you're thinking correctly about Yahweh in an Israelite context, it is more than just passing a quiz. Its life. You assign value and worth to Yahweh. Why, because what I have comes from him. Look at what he's done for me. Look at the covenants that he's made. He is our protector, provider and the person that we should be devoted to above all other.

We shouldn't be looking at anyone or anything in terms of value assessment, an affection or affinity for, just the whole concept. I think believing loyalty is a good one. We don't look at any other thing or person to fill these roles for us to make our life fulfilling, to meet our needs. I do think in our culture we do get distracted in these ways and I actually think more of a problem than particular celebrities or whatnot, because that can border on sort of absurd in many contexts. I think of things like government, job, things that really actually put food on the plate and give us the life that we have. Kim Kardashian doesn't give anybody the life they have. She just becomes an idol for some other absurd reason. But it is these things that we attribute our own success to certain things, certain acts of our own, certain circumstances that we think we create or we credit to ourselves instead of the Lord. The things we think will protect us and keep us secure instead of the Lord. To me, that is actually more of an application to idolatry than I love the Cowboys or the Eagles. I'm going to watch them on Sunday, stuff like that, even though that can become something that displaces something else that ought to be in front of it. I can't help putting myself in the context of an Israelite as to how are we supposed to look at God? How are we supposed to think about him? What are we supposed to understand that you owed to him? Why would you be grateful to him? For what are you dependent on? All these sorts of questions and then ask ourselves, are their things besides him that we kind of put in those slots, and to me that's a bigger issue.