

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

**Episode 117**

**Ezekiel 8-9**

**September 10, 2016**

**Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)**

**Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)**

### **Episode Summary**

Ezekiel 8 and 9 falls in the section of Ezekiel that concerns two themes: the punishment of Jerusalem and the departure of the glory of God. In Chapter 8 we're introduced to some specific points of Israelite idolatry – worship of Asherah and worshipping the creator as though he were part of creation. Ezekiel 9 hearkens back to our earlier episode about God keeping a record of the faithful. The judgment vision also takes us back to similar events like the death angel at Passover.

### **Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 117—Ezekiel chapters 8 and 9. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how're you doing this week?

**MH:** Very good, very good Trey, how are you?

**TS:** I'm doing pretty good! Things are normal... things are normal. And we're moving right along through Ezekiel. You know it's funny that I'm starting to see the name "Ezekiel" everywhere... on football, on TV...

**MH:** Speaking of football, how did you do on the first week?

**TS:** Yeah, I don't think I had anybody on the first night, so it remains to be seen on Sunday.

**MH:** I can't remember... did you draft Ezekiel Elliot?

**TS:** Of course I did!

**MH:** That's right... I called you a "Homer" during the draft... that's right.

**TS:** That's right... and you're a Homer as well for taking the Packers!

**MH:** Yeah, well... we want to win. Yeah, I took Eddie Lacy.

**TS:** So we're both Homers here, but I'm an Ezekiel Homer... so this podcast gives me the win, I guess. (laughing) We don't play each other until, like... a long time... like week 8 or something.

**MH:** I didn't look ahead. I wonder where we'll be 8 weeks from now.

**TS:** We've got a long way to go before we start trash talking.

**MH:** Yeah, okay, well... when we get to that point, I'm sure you'll be desperate for a win. (laughing) It's just too bad!

**TS:** We shall see.

**MH:** Yep! All right... well, let's jump in here to Ezekiel 8. Again, just to sort of get a little bit of context for this: We're doing 8 and 9 today, and these chapters fall into a pretty significant section of the book. Chapters 8 through 11 really concern two themes, and that is, these are visions of punishment for the people of Jerusalem, but the section also deals with the circumstances that lead to the departure from the temple of the glory of God. That's a big thing in Ezekiel: the loss of the glory, which of course would naturally coincide with the destruction of the temple. But the second one people have sort of heard about, it's kind of famous: the Ichabod passage—the glory has departed. We're not there yet, but this is the section in which that's going to happen, chapters 8 through 11.

Now, listeners will recall that Ezekiel 4 and 5 had been sign acts, you know, Ezekiel doing—for lack of a better term—dramatizations, visualizations of this impending punishment of Judah and the city of Jerusalem, and of course, the temple. So now we're getting into, not sign acts describing this, but visions that Ezekiel has. So the object, the target, the theme is the same, but this is kind of a different experience for Ezekiel and a different delivery of the same kind of message.

Now in chapter 8 we're going to be getting into some of the specifics about the idolatries that are being punished, so particularly it's going to add details to what we've covered in Ezekiel 6. Remember the big theme in Ezekiel 6 is "why is God doing all this stuff to us?" and the answer is "because you're idolaters."

Specifically, what was in the crosshairs there was state-sponsored idolatry in chapter 6. So now we're going to get some more specifics about what all that concerned and then in chapter 9 we're going to get this vision of divine executioners sent by God. It's sort of a vision/allegory of what is going to happen at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar in this impending invasion and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

So let's just begin. We'll read in Ezekiel 8. We'll just start there. I don't know that we'll read every verse of both passages, but we'll read a lot of them, so let's just go to Ezekiel 8:1. It says:

**In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month...**

We'll just pause there. That would be—if you're keeping track of the chronology and the dates—that would be roughly 14 months after the initial vision of chapter 1. So...

5:00

**In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month... the hand of the Lord God fell upon me there.**

As I sat, you know, in my house, the hand of the Lord fell upon me there. He's with, in verse 1, the elders of Judah. This is going to be a different group than the elders that I'll mention later, but back to the text here.

**<sup>2</sup>Then I looked, and behold, a form that had the appearance of a man. Below what appeared to be his waist was fire, and above his waist was something like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming metal.**

Now that should sound familiar. Let's just pause there. That's language drawn from Ezekiel chapter 1, except in this case we're not going to get the wheels and the throne, and the fire—the fiery throne—all that stuff. We get:

**...a form that had the appearance of a man. Below what appeared to be his waist was fire, and above his waist was something like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming metal.**

Again, this very radiant thing. Verse 3:

**<sup>3</sup>He put out the form of a hand and took me by a lock of my head, and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north, where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy. <sup>4</sup>And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the valley.**

Now let's just stop there. If you've heard a lecture of mine on the Two Powers in Heaven, this is a passage that I will often reference in regard to how "two powers language" is used in a passage where the Spirit becomes one of the figures in that passage. So the Spirit gets drawn into, or described through the use of "two powers language." And you say, "I'm not following, Mike." Well, here's what I mean. Look at the terminology. Verse 2:

**<sup>2</sup>Then I looked, and behold, a form that had the appearance of a man.**

Okay, so Ezekiel's sitting there. He's in his hut, his house, with these elders and he sees the appearance of a man, and that below the waist was like fire and above the waist was something like the appearance of brightness—language drawn from Ezekiel 1. So he's seeing the figure he saw in Ezekiel 1, which we know from Ezekiel 1 was referred to as both "the glory of God" and in chapter 10 (which we haven't gotten there yet, but we've already mentioned in it conjunction with chapter 1), that figure was also called "the God of Israel." So, as we talked in chapter 1, we have this anthropomorphized language about the God of Israel. Okay, fine, we've been there before, we've seen that. But then in verse 3, "he," apparently this *man*, the form of a man—the anthropomorphized God of Israel—put out the form of a hand and took me by a lock of my head. More anthropomorphic language. But then it says this:

**...the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem. (verse 3)**

10:00 Now here's where we get the *ruach* entering into this. So the question is: well, who lifted him up? Was it the anthropomorphized man or was it the Spirit? And the waters get muddied even more because he's taken to a place and he says, "the glory of the God of Israel was there," in the place that he was taken to. You say, "Wait a minute... I thought you were already looking at it. I thought this anthropomorphized man who was called 'the Glory' in chapter 1 is the one picking you up! How can the one picking you up be the one you see in the place where you're transported?" So the language here is not only two figures, apparently, but since we have the *ruach*, the Spirit, mentioned, this becomes Old Testament fodder for a three-person Godhead. Now *ruach*, of course, can mean "wind," so you could say, "the *wind* lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in visions of God to Israel." But since this isn't a literal journey—this is a visionary experience—and because of some of the other things that are said about the Spirit in the book of Ezekiel, most scholars very readily recognize that this is the Divine Spirit—either *a* divine spirit or *the* Divine Spirit (the Spirit of God, whatever)—and not just wind.

So you've got what looks like *two* figures, but the two are sort of confused as one, and then you have this introduction of a third. So who's lifting him up? How can he see the God Israel in the place to which he's taken when the description used of the God of Israel for the one picking him up matches chapter 1? Who's the God of Israel in the picture? Is it the one picking up or the one he sees when he gets there? We grant that this is a vision, and visions aren't supposed to be precise... they're not supposed to observe the laws of physics and all this stuff. They're like dreams or whatever. But the issue is the language of the text. It's not that we can't sort of map this out in real space-time kind of thing. That isn't our problem... it isn't really the issue.

The issue the way this language is used of two or three beings—and not only used, but they’re blurred. The distinctions between them get blurred in places in this passage and in other passages, too. So I just want to alert people to the fact that here’s a passage that becomes fodder for, not only the Two Powers in Heaven discussion that occurred in the Jewish context (in ancient Judaism—at least prior to the second century A.D.), but it also becomes fodder for perhaps the Spirit of God is a member, is *like*, these other two, is to be identified with these other two. Again, this is just a glimpse of Old Testament stuff from which the doctrine of a Trinity will develop.

Now, for those of you who have read *Unseen Realm*, you know there’s a lot more to this. The human Yahweh—the Yahweh as a man in the Old Testament—becomes the focal point because of the incarnation of Jesus and what New Testament writers say about Jesus. I made the comment before that just as Jesus *is but isn’t* God, the Spirit *is but isn’t* Jesus to the New Testament writers. I deal a lot with that in *Unseen Realm*. There are several places where the Spirit of the Lord is swapped out for the Spirit of Jesus—two places where Paul says the Lord Jesus *is* the Spirit, you know that kind of thing. What the New Testament writers are doing is kind of like what happens here in Ezekiel 8—they’re using terminology that you could easily associate with two separate beings—one or the other—and then injecting the Spirit into the conversation.

In effect, this is where your Trinitarian thinking comes from. It’s not an invention, it’s a repurposing and a reuse of Old Testament language. Now you have Jesus in the conversation for the New Testament writer. Again, the Trinity is not a new, innovative contrivance—it’s a repurposing of stuff in the Old Testament. Let’s just move beyond that because that’s pretty well-worn territory for at least the Naked Bible Podcast crowd.

We see mentioned here in verse 3 the “image of jealousy.” It’s also going to be mentioned in verse 5. So I read through verse 4, which said:

**<sup>4</sup>And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the valley.**

In verses 5 and 6, we read this:

**<sup>5</sup>Then he said to me, “Son of man, lift up your eyes now toward the north.” So I lifted up my eyes toward the north, and behold, north of the altar gate, in the entrance, was this image of jealousy. <sup>6</sup>And he said to me, “Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary? But you will see still greater abominations.”**

That’s verses 5 and 6. Now let’s talk about the image of jealousy a little bit. It’s kind of a natural point of curiosity. What is this thing? I think there’s a clue in verse 3. In verse 3, Ezekiel is brought to the inner court that faces north, and then in verse 5, of course, we read:

**So I lifted up my eyes toward the north, and behold, north of the altar gate, in the entrance, was this image of jealousy.**

Now Block in his commentary has a little note here. He notes:

15:00

The Solomonic temple had two courts inside the inner and outer walls, respectively (2 Kings 21:5 and 23:12). The gate of the inner court denotes the gateway through the inner wall, by which access is gained to the courtyard surrounding the temple building itself. In verse 5, the gate in question is identified as the Altar Gate, presumably because the great altar of sacrifice was visible through this gate from the outer court.

If you are either familiar with or are remembering a diagram of Solomon’s temple you can kind of orient yourself, but the key observation that we’ll come back to here is that this image, whatever it was, is basically right at the altar—right at the entryway where the altar is, it’s positioned somewhere in proximity to the altar. Now the terminology itself for “image of jealousy” is a little bit different here than

your typical terminology for idols. We have the word “image,” at least the ESV translates image as *tsemel*, which refers to something sculpted. This term only occurs in two other places in the Hebrew Bible: Deuteronomy 4:16 is one of them, where we have the *pesel akem tmunat kal tsamel*, roughly translated “the sculpted form of every *tsemel*,” whatever that is. In that verse it refers to any image of a deity that would be the object of Israelite devotion, but shouldn’t be. So anything that would stand in the place of Yahweh that was a carved image or a graven image or some sort of manufactured image, that’s what Deuteronomy 4:16 was talking about, so it’s kind of a generic reference.

We get a little more specific, though, in the second occurrence of this: 2 Chronicles 33:7,15—so this is the other chapter. There are two chapters where this occurs. And this is in reference to Manasseh’s abominable image, Manasseh’s—the thing that he created and installed there in the temple precinct, which 2 Kings 21:7 refers to as *pesel*, but then it’s followed by *ha aserah*. You could translate that as “an idol; a graven image; a graven form of Asherah.” Again, something engraved or carved is a better word for it. A carved form of Asherah. Now, Asherah is probably familiar to some people in the audience. Asherah was a goddess in Canaanite religion. Asherah was the—we might use the word wife—but the consort, the sexual partner—but some would say wife—of El. In Canaanite religion El was the highest deity. He’s not really the one who runs the show, that’s Baal—Baal turns out to be sort of the co-regent or the vizier if you want to use that term. But El was sort of this father god figure and Asherah becomes the mother goddess in Canaanite religion, because together El and Asherah give birth to seventy lesser gods. One of them is Baal, although in other texts Baal appears to be something of an outlier. Baal is called the “son of Dagon,” so there’s this big scholarly discussion: is El Dagon, is Dagon El, are they two different things, what’s Dagon mean? I’m not going to bother rabbit-trailing there. But we’ve got here seventy lesser gods produced, procreated by El and Asherah. Baal is called the son of Asherah and he’s also called the son of Dagon, and that sort of thing, so without rabbit-trailing into that issue, we can see what Asherah is—she’s a goddess, a female consort of El. If you’re an Israelite, El is both a generic term for deity and El is a term that biblical writers are going to use of Yahweh of Israel. There are verses that say Yahweh is El or Yahweh is *ha el—the El... the real El, the true El, that sort of thing.*

20:00

So you have a terminological issue going on here; you have an identification issue going on here. In terms of orthodox Israelite thinking, Yahweh is the El, he is the true El, which means the other El (or the other Els) are imposters. But it would be very easy for an Israelite, especially if they were encouraged by a priest, to say, “Oh, well Yahweh is just El—this El in Canaanite religion, so some of the stuff that the Canaanites do is okay. And one of the things that the Canaanites believe is that El has a wife, and that’s Asherah. So it’s okay if we bring Asherah into the temple, El would be okay with that. Yahweh is El, so Yahweh’s okay with having a goddess here.” You can see the easy path this took, and this is one of the things that the prophets are constantly harping on—



distinguishing Yahweh from other Els, other *elohim*, other Els. This is part of the problem. This is why they have to do it so often and with such force and with such frequency.

So let's go back to Asherah and ask the obvious question: Well, was Manasseh's image, therefore, an image of this goddess, Asherah? Now the image of Asherah could be, again, a sculpted goddess figure. There are things called *asherim* in sanctuaries or high places that were not images of the goddess herself but are poles—the Asherah pole. Some English translations will have that for *asherim*. It's not definite, but it's likely, that it's probably a phallic symbol, because Asherah has to do with fertility and that sort of thing. So Manasseh's image could be either an image of the goddess herself—something that looks sort of humanoid, feminine—or more likely, probably, an Asherah pole. So is this what Ezekiel is talking about?

Now, Block and others (he's not alone here) says that well, probably not because Josiah according to 2 Kings 23:6 Josiah had destroyed Manasseh's Asherah pole or Asherah figure from the temple. A part of Josiah's reformation is to get rid of this thing. Well that, of course, is true, but there's actually other evidence that this image was indeed an image of Asherah—whatever that was (is it a pole, it is something that looks more identifiable as a goddess—that part we can't really know). But there's other image that does take this phrasing and link it to Asherah, so if that's the case, if that evidence is sound (we're going to talk a little bit about it in a moment), what this probably means for the sake of the book of Ezekiel, is that sometime after Josiah tore this thing down somebody put another one in there. They created another Asherah *tsemel*, another Asherah image, and they installed it near the altar. So that could be what we're looking at.

Now what's the other evidence that here in Ezekiel we might be looking at another Asherah figure? Well, there are really four lines of evidence, and some of this is going to be familiar. Some it's going to require the Hebrew alphabet, so for those who have a knowledge of the Hebrew alphabet, you'll get more out of this than those who don't, but I'm going to go through it real quickly anyway. There are four elements to this argument.

One is the Septuagint. The Septuagint in this place in Ezekiel 8 doesn't read, "the image of jealousy," it reads, "the image of the buyer," which sounds really odd (*semel qn* or *qnh*, the feminine form, would likely have been the Hebrew that produced the Septuagint translation "the image of the buyer"). Now in the Masoretic text, "image of jealousy" is *tsemel ha qnh*. You notice how they sound very similar. Septuagint Guy, whoever the translator was, the text he was using—it looks like it read *tsemel qn'* or *tsemel qnh*. It's *qnh*—that's the lemma for buying and acquiring. Whereas the Masoretic text "image of jealousy" would be *q* (*qoph*), *n* (*nun*), *aleph*, possibly followed by a *he* to vocalize it. So very, very similar spellings, but they are completely different words. Now here's the point: you have a text... I should say this to make things more complicated: The *qn-*

25:00

*aleph* thing, you could have the *aleph* drop out and just use the *he* on the ending for vocalization. That can happen, too. It happens in Hebrew morphology and Hebrew manuscripts. So you could have two scribes either looking at slightly different words or the same set of consonants and drawing different conclusions about how to translate it. But the Septuagint has “image of the buyer,” so that’s the first part of the evidence—the consonants. What consonants are there, and depending on what consonants you think might be there, which lemma—which Hebrew word—is that? Is it a word that means “jealousy” or is it a word that means “to acquire” or “buy?”

Second (to muddy the waters a little bit more): *qnh*, the verb that ends with the *h*, with the *he*, “to acquire or buy,” can also mean “create.” This is a well-known biblical lemma (biblical Hebrew word). It’s controversial because this is the lemma that’s used in Proverbs 8, specifically Proverbs 8:22. The ESV translates, “the Lord possessed me,” “the Lord *qnh*-ed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.” This is, of course, the chapter on Lady Wisdom. If you go up to [thedivinecouncil.com](http://thedivinecouncil.com), there’s a brief essay by me there about the relationship of Jesus to wisdom. It’s important because Proverbs 8:22 portrays wisdom as a co-creator, someone who was there when God fashioned the world. In Proverbs 8:22 right around to verse 30 or so, wisdom is cast as sort of the agent of creation—someone who’s there helping or participating in creation. Well, wisdom has some real interesting things said about it in Second Temple Jewish literature. Wisdom is part of the divine council, wisdom is seated at the right hand of God, all this sort of thing. Now Jews of the day, many of them thought that wisdom was sort of a code word for “Torah.” There are Jews that actually believed and taught in the Second Temple period that the Torah was like a deity—the Torah was divine. The Torah was personified by this language. Of course, what others did was know that wisdom wasn’t the Torah, wisdom was a second divine figure—part of the Two Powers in Heaven thinking. And in the New Testament, wisdom gets applied to Jesus. Of course, the New Testament says that Jesus was the co-creator so that would make sense, but what the problem is is that when you go back to Proverbs 8:22, you have this verb *qnh*. And if you translate it “create,” well then you have the co-creator being a created being—and of course, the New Testament denies this about Jesus, so we have a big theological discussion. Now you can read the thing on [thedivinecouncil.com](http://thedivinecouncil.com), “Jesus and Wisdom.” Ultimately, *qnh* can be translated other things besides “acquire” or “buy.” It could be translated as “possess,” it could be translated as “create,” it could be translated as “bring forth” because in Proverbs 8:22 it’s used in parallel with other lemmas that mean “to bring forth” (which, of course, doesn’t require a beginning point, it just requires the introduction of something or the unveiling of something—something made apparent that before was not apparent). This was a huge part of the early Christological discussion, as you can imagine, in the early Church. You’ll find out if you read the article on [thedivinecouncil.com](http://thedivinecouncil.com) that “create” is not a very good translation in terms of the attributes of God because if wisdom is an attribute of God (even though you want to argue it’s personified), you can’t have God creating wisdom as a co-creator

because, well, didn't God have wisdom before that? How could you have the God of the Bible lacking wisdom? It doesn't make any sense. By definition, you wouldn't have the God of the Bible if he lacked wisdom. And how would he be smart enough to create it because he knew he would need it... he wouldn't know that because he wasn't wise! So "create" is really a problematic translation, which is why many people prefer something else. ESV has "possessed" here, for instance. Again, this was a focal point of early Christological discussion, but *qnh* does not require "create" as a translation. Even if you wipe Jesus and the binitarian thing off the table, you're left with the problem of how God can lack wisdom, and that's a significant Jewish Old Testament theological problem. But let's take this back to Ezekiel. Let's say that the text read that the image, the *tsemel qnh* (*qoph, nun, he*), and let's say that *qnh* can mean create. Now we have the image of the creator, if it's masculine. But if it's feminine—masculine would be *qn'*, again with Hebrew pointing, you'd have a masculine participle. The feminine would be *qnh*. If it was feminine, you'd have the image of the *creatress*, and that is a clear reference to Asherah, because that's what she was. She was the creatress. So "image of jealousy" might not really be a good way to read it. You might have to go with the Septuagint here and then translate it as "the image of the creator" or "the image of the creatress." Either way you have idolatry. If it's masculine, you'd have Israelites making a graven image of the God of Israel, which they're specifically commanded not to do. But since this language is used of Manasseh's Asherah image, a lot of scholars are going to say, "Look, the feminine would make sense here, the image of the creatress," and so what you're dealing with here in Ezekiel 8 is another image of Asherah—whether it's her as a feminine form or a phallic symbol like the Asherah pole, we don't know. But I think that's probably what we're looking at here. We have an Asherah image. And Block states, even though he doesn't want to go with the Asherah thing because of what happened under Josiah, he says this—and I think it's a really good observation, he says

30:00

The position of this *tsemel* [this image right at the altar] is overtly idolatrous and poses a direct challenge to Yahweh.

Because it's at the atoning altar! I mean, what does that say about their theology? It doesn't say anything good! (laughs) It says lots of bad things. The people would have known what this was, and would have been horrified—if you're an orthodox Israelite anyway—you're horrified with this. And then Ezekiel says, "But you're going to see still greater abominations." You have to be thinking, "Oh boy, what?" Well, let's jump back into verse 7 here. I'll read verses 7 to 11 of Ezekiel 8:

**<sup>7</sup> And he brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, there was a hole in the wall. <sup>8</sup> Then he said to me,**

**“Son of man, dig in the wall.” So I dug in the wall, and behold, there was an entrance.<sup>9</sup> And he said to me, “Go in, and see the vile abominations that they are committing here.”<sup>10</sup> So I went in and saw. And there, engraved on the wall all around, was every form of creeping things and loathsome beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel.<sup>11</sup> And before them stood seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel (MH: and the Hebrew there is *min*—the elders from the house of Israel), with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them. Each had his censer in his hand, and the smoke of the cloud of incense went up. Ezekiel 8:7-11**

Now, because these elders are not limited to seventy but they come *from* the seventy, scholars presume that this *isn't* a reference to the Sanhedrin (the early form of the Sanhedrin), but more probably a group representing lay—that is, non-priestly—leaders in Jerusalem. Political figures. So here we go again: *state-sponsored idolatry*. State-sponsored, again, by the people who should know better. They're burning incense in the dark. It's described as this room of pictures. Each one is there in this room of pictures. Now the pictures, these images, are going to correspond to the list of animals in verse 10:

**<sup>10</sup>So I went in and saw. And there, engraved on the wall all around, was every form of creeping things and loathsome beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel.**

So there are engravings of unclean things on the walls and they're burning incense there. Now Taylor has a short commentary, this is part of the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary series, that comments on this. I think it's worth a quick read. Taylor writes this about this section:

Engraved upon the walls (*portrayed*, 10, EVV, is inadequate for a word meaning 'incised' or 'carved in relief') [MH: Basically that means they were reliefs, is what he's saying] were *all kinds of creeping things, loathsome beasts, and idols*. *Creeping things* (Heb. *remeš*) are specifically mentioned as part of God's good creation (Gen. 1:24); they are not by definition all unclean [MH: Just because it creeps doesn't mean it's unclean], as the AV of Leviticus 11:41 would suggest, for the word translated 'creeping things' in that context is the Hebrew *šereṣ*. They do,

35:00

however, include many reptiles and small verminous creatures that scurry and slither over the ground, from snakes to scorpions, and these certainly were unclean. The serpent-deities known from Egyptian, Canaanite and Babylonian religions give grounds for supposing that this incident reflects the widespread influence of foreign cults on Israelite worship, cultivated no doubt from political, more than purely religious, motives.

Basically, that's an allusion to alliances—political alliances. Again, allowing this sort of influence as some sort of positive, political, good-will gesture within the context of Israel. So I read the quote just to make the point that the language suggests, like Taylor says, the widespread influence of other Ancient Near Eastern cults. This is why there'd be certain specific unclean creeping things engraved in relief on the walls. So, apart from the idolatry, you have also the issue of alliances with these pagan states that themselves—you know, God was supposed to be their king, so that's a violation—but then one of the reason that you don't do that is not only that you want to show that you trust God but also because you're going to be infected by what they believe. And sure enough, that's what you get here.

Now as far as the role of incense (I only bring this up, and I'd have to look for it... it popped into my head here), I had a friend in graduate school in an Israelite religion seminar one time who did a paper on the role of incense in worship. It's really hard to find material on that. If I could find it (it might be in his dissertation, and that probably means I can't post it). If I find just his paper-paper then I could, but I'll give it a look because I could post that. But anyway, the bottom line here is that you used incense not only, as many commentators say, "They used it in the tabernacle so that you couldn't smell the animal stink." Well, okay, that probably has *something* to do with it, but think of it this way: when you entered into sacred space, this is where you used incense. So you weren't depending on the incense cloud to filter outside the tabernacle where they were killing the animals and burning them, and the animal poop and all this stuff. That's a residual effect, but that isn't why you did it. You used incense in sacred space for a very simple reason: it marked *that* space different than other space. In other words, you couldn't just walk around the Israelite camp or the city of Jerusalem and smell incense. When you smelled incense it was a clue to your senses—it should have been a clue to your brain—that okay, this was divine territory, this is divine turf, because this is burned on holy ground, sacred ground. It distinguished the place from other places. That's a really important part of the logic of why you would use incense—to distinguish the sacred from the profane, from the normal. We spent a lot of time on this in Ezekiel [sic., Leviticus], talking about how these distinctions were made. Incense is part of that. So if you take that back to Ezekiel, what do you have? You have Israelites burning incense to these unclean figures carved on the walls, and the connotation was, "These are our gods." *They* are sacred. We are marking out space for *them*, as though the space they occupy is holy and sanctified and sacred. Of course, for Ezekiel this is just abominable. If you're the

reader and you're an orthodox Israelite, you're thinking, "This is horrible!" So what does Ezekiel say in verse 13, right after he's done describing that, he says:

**<sup>13</sup> He said also to me, "You will see still greater abominations that they commit."**

So now if you're the reader you're thinking, "What else could they possibly be doing?" Well, they could be doing a lot of things, and you're going to get it here again with more specifics in the chapter. Verse 14:

**<sup>14</sup> Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the LORD, and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz.**

40:00

Weeping for Tammuz. Now Hebrew here, when it actually refers to Tammuz, the Hebrew text here has a (sorry for the grammar spasm again) has a definite article prefixed Tammuz: *ha tammuz*. And if you remember my talk about *satan* in Job 1, you do not prefix a definite article to a proper personal name. You just don't do that. So this isn't actually a reference to the deity Tammuz himself, but it's certainly something connected with Tammuz. Or it refers to (this is probably the best way to look at it) the ritual act—the religious act—of weeping for Tammuz, which was well-known throughout the ancient world. People wrote songs for this, they used descriptions from Mesopotamian and Sumerian stuff, and it worked its way into the Greek culture and the Syro-Palestinian culture. There were odes to Tammuz, weeping for Tammuz, to commemorate Tammuz. If you don't know anything about Tammuz, I'll just give you a short reference. So the fact that they put a definite article on it refers to some specific ritual or some specific song, or maybe some specific literary piece or genre—not technically to the deity himself because of the definite article. But either way it's directed at the deity, so that's kind of like a distinction without a difference, or six of one and half dozen of another. But I just thought I'd point it out.

This is from DDD, I believe... no this is from Harper's Bible Dictionary, the article written by Richard Clifford, who's an author I particularly like. I don't always agree with him, but he always says something useful

Tammuz is the Hebrew form of Dumuzi, which is a Sumerian term for "proper son." Tammuz was a god widely honored from the third millennium, B.C., in Mesopotamia, onward. The vast and complex Mesopotamian literature about this god shows three essential aspects of him: as lover and consort of Inana [MH: a goddess], as one held in the underworld and mourned because of his absence [MH: in other words, in Mesopotamian stuff, Tammuz dies and rises from the dead again; that's why the people are mourning—because of his absence], and as the embodiment of spring vegetation, and then of vegetation in general.

So Tammuz was a fertility deity and fertility didn't just mean weird, aberrant sexual rituals. It meant fecundity for the land—for cattle, for crops, that sort of thing. And that's important because you eat that stuff. That's what keeps you alive. Clifford continues:

Many laments are preserved that bewail “the far one” who has disappeared. Detained in the underworld, the laments reflect the aspect of Tammuz as god of vegetation. His disappearance is connected to the drying up of the steppe in summer. His cult may have been brought to Israel by the Assyrians in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, B.C. Aspects of Tammuz became synthesized with west Semitic gods of similar characteristics. Baal Hadu, for example, went down to the underworld, died, rose, and was mourned during his absence. [MH: That's a specific reference to Baal, as the Canaanites knew him.] Some of Dumuzi's traits also appear in Adonis, a god first attested in Greece in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Ezekiel's vision of four sins being committed in Jerusalem at the temple [MH: That's the chapter we're in, chapter 8], the third of which is a group of women weeping for Tammuz in the North Gate, refers to this. The women in Ezekiel are mourning this dying and rising god. [MH: Now catch this—this is the point that I like that Clifford observes.] The action is an abomination to Ezekiel, who believes that God does not die, and therefore cannot be mourned.

Again, God is eternal. This isn't some sort of denial, even on Clifford's part of the incarnation and what-not. Clifford is actually a Catholic. He's going to go with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. He's a Catholic priest. So that isn't why he's writing this. He's just saying that for the Israelites, this is pre-incarnation, and anything that we would associate with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ—to an Israelite, well, God is eternal. If he's from everlasting to everlasting, he doesn't die so you can't mourn him. And that's what made this abominable. That's what made it offensive to Ezekiel and the rest of his people, at least those who shared his theology. Verse 15, the chapter goes on:

**<sup>15</sup> Then he said to me, “Have you seen this, O son of man? You will see still greater abominations than these.”**

45:00 I mean, we've been through a bunch of layers of this already, and God—the figure that took Ezekiel by the hair, God of the Spirit, or whoever—brings him to this place and says, “It gets worse than this!” So what's going to follow here is abhorrent for a number of reasons that are going to become apparent. It's abhorrent because it worships the creator as though he were part of the creation, and it's also abhorrent because it involves turning the back—the people who bow down are turning the back—on the presence of Yahweh. That becomes very offensive. Let me just read. I don't want to get too far ahead of myself. Let's just read verse 16 and you'll get the point here—both of them.

**<sup>16</sup> And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the LORD. And behold, at the entrance of the temple of the [MS: Now catch that—at the entrance of the temple of the Lord], between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of the LORD [MS: So their backs are to the presence of God], and their faces toward the east, worshipping the sun toward the east.**

The picture is pretty evident. They're worshipping. The Hebrew term there is *hvh*—bowing down, then *la shamesh*. Bowing down to the sun toward the east. Now this takes us in all sorts of different directions. It's an offense to turn your back on the presence of God, but it really takes us into astral or sun-cult stuff in Israelite religion. Now I want to read a section of DDD, and I'll try to remember to tell you when I'm going in and out of this here. Most of this is going to be from DDD because Lipinski has a nice short article on sun-worship in Israel. I'll just jump in at the beginning here. He says:

As used in the Bible, Hebrew *shemesh* is never an actual divine name. It's never used as a proper personal name. Palestinian toponomy [MS: that's the name of places] of biblical times reflects, nevertheless, the Canaanite cult of the sun god, as shown by place-names like Beth-shemesh, house of the sun, and En-shemesh, the spring of sun, Ir-shemesh, the city of the sun. [MH: Beth-shemesh is found in Joshua 15:10, for example; En-shemesh—Joshua 15:7; Ir-shemesh—Joshua 19:41] All these preserve the memory of sanctuaries devoted to the solar deity. [MH: Of course, the sun is worshiped very widely in the Ancient Near East, so he's saying, "Hey, traces of this show up in Canaanite cult centers that are remembered through these place names in the Hebrew Bible."] Surprisingly enough, Hebrew anthroponomy [MH: those are personal names, people names] does not contain obvious traces of a solar cult.

Then he goes into the example of Samson. Look at the first three consonants in Samson-sms. In Hebrew it's *shin-mem-shin*. Those are the three consonants for sun: *shemesh-shem-shon*.

So:

Hebrew anthroponomy does not contain obvious traces of a solar cult. For Samson's name may simply mean "little son," as suggested by the diminutive suffix *-on*.

That's a feature of Hebrew grammar. You add *-on* to something that makes it little, makes it diminutive. So "little son," is actually what Samson means literally. He says,



Though the Aramaic proper name Shimshai, which shows up in Ezra 4:8-9 and a few other place, could just mean "sunny" or "sun-lit."

50:00

So he's saying there's no real clear evidence that we have a cult of Shamash or Shemesh the sun-god in the Hebrew Bible, even though you have place names that are associated with it. The reason he goes into personal names is that often people would name their kids after the god they worshiped, and he's saying, "Look, in the Hebrew Bible anyway, you don't have any clear examples of someone naming their kid after this deity." So that's probably good evidence that the deity itself, Shamash, as a deity was not worshiped in Israel and therefore not the object of worship here in Ezekiel 8. But the description is nevertheless idolatrous and telling for other reasons, so let's just keep going with some of the stuff that Lipinski says here:

The lack of evident traces of solar worship in Hebrew anthroponomy [MH: **again, personal names**] seems to indicate that the cult of the sun was not very popular in Syrio-Palestine in the Iron Age, contrary to Egypt and Mesopotamia. The sun god was a minor deity for the Phoenicians and the Arameans, despite the role of the Ugaritic sun goddess Shapash plays in literary ritual texts of the late Bronze Age. The Deuteronomistic writer mentions worship of the host of heavens comprising the sun, the moon, and the planets, or the celestial objects only during the half of the century of the reigns of Manasseh and Ammon (2 Kings 21:3 and 23:5). Therefore, scholars generally suppose that this was an Assyrian astral cult which was imposed upon Judah as a symbol of subjection and vassal status. Its condemnation in Deuteronomy 4:19 and 17:3 [MH: **Where have you heard those verses before? Those are part of the Divine Council world view, that you don't bow down and worship the sun, moon, and stars; they get called elohim; that language gets linked to Deuteronomy 32:8-9, the gods of the nations, the sons of god, all this stuff**] reflects the views of the same Deuteronomistic school and does not imply any older practices.

So his view is basically—well, the reason why this shows up here, the reason why it was a problem in Israel was because the Assyrians, as part of not destroying the southern kingdom, or as part of subjugating as much of the Israelite turf as they could—remember Judah gets saved from the Assyrian invasion... We talked a little bit about that before when we talked about the inviolability of Zion. That was the last episode last week. He's saying that Israelites—though the northern kingdom certainly was subject to this and then eventually destroyed. So then his feeling is that there is still some sort of vassalage going on here, that this astral cult found its way into the Promised Land area because of the Assyrians, and then to sort of have good relations with the Assyrians you had Judahite kings adopt some of these worship forms. I think that makes sense. That's not a unique view. What Lipinski's saying here is pretty much the standard way that scholars would look at this. Now he has more to add that's kind of interesting. He says:

The horses and chariots of the sun mentioned in 2 Kings 23:11...

I might as well just look at that verse and read it to you here. This is, again, part of the campaign to weed out the worship of other gods here in 2 Kings 23 it says:

**11 And he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the chamberlain, which was in the precincts. And he burned the chariots of the sun with fire.**

So there were actually horses and chariots of the sun in the temple compound that were destroyed. And so Lipinski says here:

The horses and chariots of the sun, as well as Ezekiel's vision of the men prostrating themselves before the rising sun in Ezekiel 8:16, are somewhat different circumstances. In fact, the horses and the chariots were placed at the entrance to the temple of Yahweh [MH: which is what we just read in the verse] and the men [MH: now catch this] were practicing their cult in the same temple facing eastwards towards the gate by which Yahweh, the God of Israel, has entered the sanctuary. [MH: Of course the effect, though, is still to turn his back on him because Yahweh's in the sanctuary—in the Holy of Holies.] These features indicate that the sun's chariot was perceived as Yahweh's vehicle [MH: remember Yahweh is the rider on the clouds] and that the men seen by the prophet were not sun worshipers (Shamash worshipers) but they were actually devotees of Yahweh. Just as child sacrifice performed in the valley of Ben Hinnom was intended by the people who did it to honor Yahweh.

55:00 Again, it's aberrant worship that people are doing certain things thinking that they're worshiping Yahweh. They presumed they were worshiping Yahweh when they bowed down to the sun, but this was contrary to Deuteronomy 4:19-20. This gets even more interesting because there are vestiges of this in modern Judaism. They think they're worshiping Yahweh by bowing down to the sun, like Deuteronomy 4:19-20 doesn't even exist. It's idolatry, but the people doing it, Lipinski says, they're not thinking, "Oh, we're bowing down to Shamash." They're thinking, "Oh, we're bowing down to Yahweh. We make these chariots to the sun because Yahweh is the sun." They're sort of worshiping the right object but they're doing it in a horrible way. They're doing it in a forbidden way. But this carries over to modern Judaism. Listen to this by Lipinski, this is very interesting:

Relics of this ritual practice are found perhaps in the Blessing of the Sun, the *Birkat HaChama*, a rabbinic prayer service in which the sun is blessed in

thanksgiving for its creation, and its being set in motion in the firmament on the fourth day of the world (Genesis 1:16-19). The ceremony is held once every 28 years, most recently on the 18th of March, 1981. [MH: **That tells you when the book was written.**] It takes place on the first Wednesday of month of Nissan after the morning prayer when the sun is about 90 degrees above the eastern horizon. The blessing starts with Psalm 84:12, "The Lord God is a sun and shield."

It's 84:11 in English order. So that's how the prayer, the blessing, starts. It's an antithetic image that suggests that sunlight granted by the Lord and the protection he provides against heat. The prayer also contains Psalm 19, in which you also have lines about the sun:

**[The sun] like a strong man, runs its course with joy.**

**<sup>6</sup>Its rising is from the end of the heavens,  
and its circuit to the end of them,  
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.**

So that part of Psalm 19 is in this Jewish blessing. The prayer ends with Isaiah 30:26: "The light of the sun (the *or ha hama*) shall be sevenfold as the light of the seven days." Lipinski says:

There can be little doubt that the sun was conceived in biblical times as a vivid symbol of Yahweh's glory. Yahweh's coming is described already in Deuteronomy 33:2 and Habakkuk 3 and 4 as the rising of the sun and his glory comes from the east, according to Isaiah 59:19 and Ezekiel 43:2 and 44:2. While Isaiah 60:19 announces that Yahweh's glory will replace the sunlight when the New Jerusalem will arise. This solar symbolism might have represented a danger for the purity of Yahweh's worship. [MH: **You think? (laughs)**] For the sun, the moon, and the stars are even somewhat personified in Joseph's dream. [MH: **Remember Joseph's dream back in Genesis 37**] Job judges it necessary to profess that he never raised his hand in homage to the sun or the moon, and he even avoids using the word *shemesh*, "sun," replacing it by the word *or*, "light."

So what does all this mean? Well, it means that in ancient Israel you had Yahweh being worshiped as the sun. You had Yahweh being worshiped as a thing he had created. Very clearly, Genesis describes the sun being a created thing, created by God. And so you had Israelites thinking they were worshiping Yahweh when they were violating very clear commands about worship of Yahweh—who to worship and who not to worship. So, on the one hand it's like you can kind of pat the Israelites on the back and say, "Oh, at least they weren't worshiping Shamash or Shemesh, the sun." Well, okay, but they were still

committing idolatry. Again, Lipinski is saying this idea might have logical or even biblical roots because this language used about Yahweh that shows up in the Hebrew Bible is there. But notice that the verses about Yahweh being associated with the sun and coming from the east and what-not, none of those declare that he is a created being or he is a created thing, as if he's part of the creation. And *that* was the problem, that you're worshipping—to use Paul's terminology—you're worshipping the creature instead of the creator, which is Paul's *definition* of idolatry!

1:00:00

Even though there's sort of biblical stuff that you can read and know what they were thinking, depending chronologically on when this or that was written, you could look at certain passages and say, "Okay, this is what they're thinking, this is why they're doing it. It's not so bad." Well, in Ezekiel's mind and in God's mind (because God is showing this to Ezekiel and calling it an abomination) it *was* bad. I think it's a good lesson for us about—yeah, we want to worship God, but there is a way God wants to be worshiped. And there are ways God doesn't want to be worshiped. That's actually important, and it comes out in something like Ezekiel 8 in a pretty dramatic fashion.

So you go through this whole list of abominations and it ends here in chapter 8 with this worshipping of the sun. In verse 17 we read:

<sup>17</sup>Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations that they commit here, that they should fill the land with violence and provoke me still further to anger? Behold, they put the branch to their nose. <sup>18</sup>Therefore I will act in wrath. My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. And though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."

So the chapter ends with God basically saying, "This provokes me to anger." This odd phrase about putting the branch to their nose is something that's kind of interesting. I don't want to spend much time on it, but it's a very odd term in the Targums, which is the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible, the word that is used there refers to "stench." So it's kind of like all these things, instead of being a sweet-smelling savor to me like proper worship is (using the language of Leviticus), God is saying "It stinks. It just stinks." They put the branch to their nose. That is a possible reference, not to something like a branch that had its own aroma. I hate to put it this way—and here we go with Ezekiel being scatological again—but it *could* refer—and this is indefinite, it's only a supposition that scholars have because of what the Targum does with this term, *zemorah*—it could be a reference to basically what you wipe your butt with. Then that becomes the thing—remember the wave offering in Leviticus? That becomes the thing that is offered to God. God says, "This stinks." So again, it's very graphic,

potentially scatological language in Ezekiel for what God really thinks about what he's seeing, what's going on.

Now if we get into chapter 9 here, the text says:

**Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice...**

Think about that. Here we have the speaker to Ezekiel is God. Here God cries in his ears with a loud voice. In other words, God *screams*. He's *angry*. He screams...

**Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, "Bring near the executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand." <sup>2</sup> And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his weapon for slaughter in his hand, and with them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his waist. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar.**

So they go right in to where the image of the creatress is. We have six guys who are executioners. There's a seventh man clothed in linen. Linen was typical attire for priests, but also for angelic beings. (Daniel 10:5, 12:6-7) This is a description that you'd get of an angelic being. Priests and angels are both involved in divine service—this whole heavenly and earthly priesthood thing. Block says here:

Whether this person is a priestly figure or an angelic figure really can't be determined, though his role in the following events seems to argue for the latter.

I would tend to agree, for reasons that we'll get to in a moment. I think it is an angelic figure. It's obvious from this person's equipment that his position in Jerusalem differed from that of the other six men. The other six guys are

executioners. This one isn't. But this one has a writing case with him at his waist. It's actually, without getting too geeky here, a term that's borrowed from Egyptian. It refers to a scribe's writing equipment, *sopher ha qeset*. It has a pen, ink horn, wax writing tablet, what-not, those sorts of things. And it hearkens back—look at the instructions that he's given. It's going to hearken back to something that I think you'll pick up on. Verse 3:

1:05:00

**<sup>3</sup> Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house.**

So it's at this point we've covered astral cults, the image of the creatress, a whole assortment of idolatries going on here. We've got these graven unclean things that are being offered incense to. And God calls out the executioners and this guy with the writing case and they position themselves right there at the altar, and then the glory moves. The glory leaves from the cherubim on which it rested to the threshold of the house. So this begins the exit out of the temple area of the glory of God. And he (God—the God, whoever this is—the anthropomorphized God or the Spirit or whoever from chapter 8) called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing case at his waist.

**<sup>4</sup> And the LORD said to him...**

Now he's identified as Yahweh! "The Lord said to him"... isn't that interesting. Take that back to chapter 8, again this mixed language about is it two beings or is it three now. Here we have the Lord specifically mentioned. Yahweh said to him,

**<sup>4</sup> [Yahweh] said to him, "Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan [MH: in other words, who are grieved] over all the abominations that are committed in it."**

So this hearkens back to—remember we did an episode on the Book of Life? This passage actually got mentioned in passing. It refers to God keeping a record. In this case you have a scribe brought in (an angelic or heavenly scribe, clothed in linen) the picture. And he's the one who's supposed to know, because he's the scribe, he's kept the records, of those who are grieved by the abominations. Put a mark on them. Because that's going to be like the blood on the Passover. I'll come back to that in a moment, as well. It's going to be like the blood on the doorposts. This is going to mark them to keep them safe from what's going to happen. Mark those who are grieved by all these abominations.

And he has a record, he's a scribe, the heavenly scribe. He knows what people are *doing*. If you're interested in that subject, you can go back to that episode of the podcast and listen to it. But Taylor has a note here. He says here:

There's some confusion about the actual movements of the glory of the God of Israel in this section here, because at one moment he's represented by the heavenly figure on the chariot-throne while the next he's Ezekiel's personal guide. Too much accuracy is not to be expected in what was, after all, a vision. We shouldn't press it for detailed explanations. There is, however, significance in the description of the glory moving from the cherubim [MH: in verse 3, the place where the Holy of Holies—where God was thought to reside] to the threshold of the house. This was the preliminary move for the final departure of the Lord from his temple.

It's from this vantage point that he starts giving directions. He says, "Put a mark on anybody who's faithful, who's been faithful." Now the word "mark" there is Hebrew *taw*. It is the name of the letter "t" or *taw* in Hebrew alphabet. It's a sign to mark the faithful remnant. It's a sign to keep them *alive*, to preserve their lives, to save their lives. Of course, the fact that there's even a remnant might be surprising, given what we've just read in Ezekiel 8 and before that, but there is.

Now I don't want to make too much about this sign, but it is kind of interesting. In old Hebrew, not the block Hebrew that you're familiar with seeing today. Block Hebrew the *tav* looks kind of like a doorway with a little appendage on one leg at the bottom. That's what a *tav* looks like. In old Hebrew, though, it was an "x," or as people like to say, it was the sign of the cross. That's what it was! You crossed two lines, you made an x. You crossed two lines and that became known in later times as a cross because the lines were crossed. That was just the way you wrote the old Hebrew letter *taw*, "t." Taylor says here:

Early Christian commentators were quick to notice that in the oldest Hebrew script the letter was written as X, a cross. To the Hebrew reader this meant nothing more than a mark used for a signature...

And there's a biblical reference for that, believe it or not. In Job 31:35 we read this:

<sup>35</sup> **Oh, that I had one to hear me!**

**(Here is my signature! [MH: In Hebrew it says, "Here is my taw, here is my mark."]) Let the Almighty answer me!**

**Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary!**

1:10:00

So to an Israelite, this is like, “sign here,” and you put an x. That's your mark. But again, the shape of it was noticed by early Christians, as obviously maybe this is analogous to what happens at the cross. Now, I don't want to make too much of that, but I also don't want to dismiss it because you have this guy in linen who's the scribe who's keeping track of who's been faithful here, and he's going to mark them with the *taw*, with the cross, to save their lives, to protect them. You're going to have a term used when the killing starts, when the destruction starts: *mashit*, destruction. It also could be translated "the destroyer" in certain passages. That is the term used of the death angel at the Passover event. And so I do think that there is a conceptual analogy here between being marked by the *taw*, marked by the cross, and the blood being applied so that destruction was avoided, or so that destruction passed over you. And we all know that in New Testament theology there is a direct equation—a direct analogy made between the effect of what Jesus did and the passing over the blood, passing over that house at the Passover because the blood had been applied to that place. And so I do think, again, that this is a case...I'm trying to think of who it is, it's Block or somebody that says, "we don't want to make too much of it, but this might be one of those places where the Old Testament writer kind of wrote something that he may not have been specifically aware of but it's a significant foreshadowing." There's more depth to it. It's typology. There's more typological depth, typological theology going on here than people could have realized at that point. I do think there's something to that here, because of the terminology that follows.

So let's just get into what follows here. So he's commanded to put a mark on these guy, those who are grieved at the abominations. Verse 5, chapter 9:

**<sup>5</sup>And to the others he said in my hearing, “Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. <sup>6</sup>Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary.”**

You're going to begin with the priests, the state-sponsorship stuff.

**So they began with the elders who were before the house. <sup>7</sup>Then he said to them, “Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out.”**



Because, again, that was a defilement of sacred space, a corpse. We studied that in Leviticus.

**So they went out and struck in the city. <sup>8</sup> And while they were striking, and I [Ezekiel] was left alone, I fell upon my face, and cried, "Ah, Lord GOD! Will you destroy [*mashkit*] all the remnant of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?"**

Now on one level, it's pretty plain what's going on here. Ezekiel has this vision. All these people are being destroyed. What's the basis of their destruction? They didn't grieve over the abominations. They were somehow... And you say, "Well, how would they know?" Well, folks, this is a divine scribe. God knows who was grieved over the idolatry and who was not. That's a fundamental point in the passage because that's the basis for the decision. On another level, this reflects—this is an allegory—for what Nebuchadnezzar and his men are going to do and what they actually *did* do in destroying Jerusalem, destroying the city. Now the question that we have to ask is, is this episode really an indication that all of the righteous (and there apparently weren't a whole lot of them) were spared in Nebuchadnezzar's invasion. Maybe? It's kind of hard to tell. I don't know how far we should press this vision in a one-to-one equation to what actually happened with Nebuchadnezzar. In Ezekiel 6, God says, "I'm going to use the worst of nations to punish you." Can we press this to say that all those people who avoided idolatry were spared? I don't know. Maybe. I wish it were that clear. It *could* be that case *if*—again, *if*—the use of a term like *mashkit*, which takes us directly mentally, theologically, conceptually back to the Passover event. If that telegraphing is theologically intentional, then you probably *could* argue that if you were not guilty of idolatry, you were spared in the last wave of Nebuchadnezzar's conquest, Nebuchadnezzar's invasion. Now you might still get deported to Babylon. Lots of Jews were deported in the third wave. Maybe you got left behind, who knows, maybe you were able to hide. Who knows what's going on in real time here? But again, you could make that argument if these analogies are intentional. And I kind of think that they are because I think the use of the linen (it's not just priestly, it's angelic), the whole idea of God knowing who's doing what... I don't think that's a normal priest, I think that's an angelic priest because of all the other passages that deal with God keeping records and using angels to be the divine account system, if you want to use a metaphor like that. Plus the reference to *mashkit*, the destroying angel. I think some of these things are sufficient to telegraph the point that God in this last invasion spared the faithful. There aren't many of them, but there was a faithful remnant. Now you

1:15:00

say, "Well, Ezekiel says here, 'are you going to destroy the whole remnant?'" Remember back in earlier episodes where we talked about the remnant. It can be used of different groups and subgroups, so that's not necessarily an argument against what I'm saying. I'm just telling you where I'm at on the passage. I think you can make that argument.

So to wrap up here, the chapter ends this way:

**<sup>9</sup>Then he said to me [God speaking to Israel], "The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great. The land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice. For they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see.' <sup>10</sup>As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; I will bring their deeds upon their heads."<sup>11</sup> And behold, the man clothed in linen, with the writing case at his waist, brought back word, saying, "I have done as you commanded me."**

We get the full picture here. It's not "feel-good" stuff because, hey, it's Ezekiel and we have judgment. It's going to be judgment up to a certain point and then Ezekiel's going to transition to comforting those who are left. And so it's more of the same as we've been seeing in Ezekiel.

I think the two big takeaways here are that God *can* and *does* and *has* and *will* decide to judge wickedness. He will decide to judge evil. We can look at these passages and say, "Well, this is just random. It's a willy-nilly capricious deity." It's not capricious! The standard was, "mark those who are in grief over what's going on." You could go, "Well, what about the kids." Go look at the terminology; it doesn't have to refer to infants. You can argue about this until you're blue in the face. There is a measure, a standard for accountability here, and so that's what we need to look at as far as the text. God *knows*. What better authority would there be? God knows who approved of idolatry. We can argue about the language, you can argue both sides of it, but I think the contextual indications are that God knows who was grieved with what was going on and who wasn't. God is the best judge. He's omniscient. He knows. He's not guessing. And that becomes the basis for what God is going to allow to happen with Nebuchadnezzar in this last wave of the conquest.

1:20:00

And the second takeaway I think is this note about improper worship. They thought, at least some of them... If you're dancing around the Asherah pole it's kind of hard to justify that, even if you say, "That's Yahweh's wife! He wouldn't be mad." Well, yeah, he would because it's not *him*. He doesn't share his glory with another. So that's a little hard, but you can look at them bowing down to the sun thinking they're worshiping Yahweh. Again, you must ignore other commands about creating graven images, worshiping the creature over the creator, all that sort of stuff. It was idolatry. It's what it is. Even though it was well-intentioned. We'll give them the benefit of the doubt and assume it was well-intentioned. Even though that could be the case, God was still angry about it. He didn't accept it. It was, by definition, unacceptable. So again, I think we need to keep these things in mind for the way we do things, just to remind ourselves. Look, what we do matters! How we express our loyalty to God matter; who we assign loyalty to. Believing loyalty matters. The way we express that also matters.

**Trey Stricklin:** All right Mike! Well, that was a jam-packed episode, and you had some help with your dogs in the background there for a little bit! (laughing)

**MH:** Yeah, I heard Mori. He was upset about something.

**TS:** He's probably mad at you. Well, for the sake of time, Mike, do you have anything else you'd like to add real quick? I know next week we're going to be doing another Q&A episode.

**MH:** We'll jump back in with two chapters next time we return to Ezekiel: 10 and 11

**TS:** All right, Mike. Well, I just want to remind everybody if you haven't, please go to iTunes or wherever you listen to us and give us a rating or review, if you don't mind. And I want to thank Mike for another good episode and thank you all for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast. God bless.