

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 122

Ezekiel 14-15

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Episode Summary

The words of Ezekiel 14-15 were addressed to Jewish elders in Babylon who had come to Ezekiel for a word from the Lord. Knowing they were still idol worshippers in their hearts, God refused to give them comfort. Instead he lowered the boom: Jerusalem's judgment was certain. God's case is presented in language drawn from Leviticus 26, which had foreshadowed Israel's apostasy and expulsion from the land. This episode focuses on this vocabulary and a special interpretive problem of Ezekiel 14.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 122: Ezekiel chapters 14 and 15. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. How are you doing, Mike?

MH: Very good, very good. Here we are, back again with two more chapters of Ezekiel.

TS: Yeah, we've got a long way to go to get through Ezekiel. It's a long one. We're not even halfway there yet.

MH: I know, I know. I was actually thinking about that the other day, wondering, "Boy, we're going to be in Ezekiel a long time." But hey...

TS: The rest of the year, yeah.

MH: That's what won, so we'll have to deal with it! (laughing)

TS: You had your chance to vote if you wanted something else!

MH: Right. Colossians would have been history by now. But here we are in Ezekiel still.

TS: That's okay. Eventually we'll work our way through all of the books, right? That's the goal.

MH: Yep. At some point.

TS: It may take us 20 years, but that's okay. We've got enough material.

MH: No, we're not going to run out.

All right. Ezekiel 14 and 15 today; two chapters. Most of this is going to be chapter 14 because 15 is a really, really short chapter. That's why we're going to group it in with this one, because 16 is a longer chapter. We're going to be parking in different places [in chapter 16]. Again, that's the one that has a lot of the explicit language in it. And for good reason. People are probably familiar with the whole idea (like in the book of James) where spiritual adultery is compared with physical/sexual adultery, marital adultery. That comes from somewhere. That metaphor is very much a part of the Old Testament, and it never gets more detailed and explicit than in Ezekiel 16. That's where we're going to be headed after this, so we're going to gobble up these two chapters and it will be our episode for the day. But most of all, what we'll do here is chapter 14 just because of the length.

Now if you recall from the last episode, chapters 12 through 24 sort of constitute its own section. Specifically, that section is about having to address objections and denials. We had sort of a mix last time—a few more sign acts and then Ezekiel started to be directed by God to address some of the things that were being thrown at him or lies that were being told to the people that should have been listening to Ezekiel. We're going to get more of that here in chapter 14.

As far as the immediate context, here's a short quotation from Taylor's commentary. He writes:

These words were addressed to a particular group of elders who were sitting at Ezekiel's feet (cf. 8:1; 20:1). They had come presumably in the hope of hearing some oracle about the length of their exile or giving news of affairs at home in Jerusalem. The oracle was given, but it was not what they expected.

Or, of course, what they wanted. So in this chapter here (14), our attention is going to again be focused on what's happening in Babylon, as far as the exile. We saw that last time, where Ezekiel was supposed to get his baggage together as into exile in the sight of everyone, then dig through the wall of his house in the sight of everyone. Both audiences are in view: what's going on in Babylon and what's going on in Jerusalem, as far as the impending doom. But the focus here is a little bit more on some of the problems that are arising right where Ezekiel is

at. And so that's why chapter 14 begins the way it does. In verse 1 here, this is what Taylor is referring to:

Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. Ezekiel 14:1

So it's very localized. Now Block also makes the observation of this whole chapter that there's a lot of vocabulary (we're not going to drill down in all the places we could drill down as far as the Hebrew words here)... Block notes that there are a lot of lemmas, or vocabulary, in this chapter that comes from the Holiness Code. If you remember back to our series in Leviticus, the Holiness Code was Leviticus 17 through 26. So this chapter (Ezekiel 14) is going to have links back to that stuff. And that's because what's in view here is Ezekiel...

5:00 Instead of offering encouragement, Block writes:

Instead of offering encouragement, Ezekiel calls on the entire nation to repent of their syncretistic religious commitments or face the certain judgment of the covenant Lord. [MH: Because the covenant with Yahweh has been violated.] Yahweh has a capital case against them, and his judgment is sure.

So if you remember back to Leviticus, especially Leviticus 26, we had all these ideas about the way God wants people to live. A lot of that was associated with not being an idolater, not being a pagan, not being someone who worships other gods. And then chapter 26 was sort of this climax in Leviticus where, "If you do these things, I'm going to be your God, you will be my people, and life will be wonderful. But if you don't, (God was very clear) I will drive you from this land." And that's why Ezekiel is connecting back into Leviticus—the Holiness Code, and in particular, we're going to see a few places where Leviticus 26 again comes into view. And that's because Ezekiel is living in the circumstances that Leviticus 26 described. The people have gone off into idolatry. They are apostate. And they have been (and will be even more) driven from the land. So that whole idea is going to be very clear in Ezekiel 14. It would be especially clear to leadership—especially spiritual leadership—who you would think would have more familiarity with the Torah than the average Israelite. And, of course, Leviticus is part of that, and the Holiness Code.

So let's jump into the passage. We've already read verse 1, but we'll read it again.

Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. ² And the word of the LORD came to me: ³ "Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? ⁴ Therefore speak to them and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: Any one of the house of Israel

who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the LORD will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols,⁵ that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols.

Let's just stop there with the first five verses. This idea of taking idols into their hearts and setting the stumbling block of their iniquity (in other words, these idols) before their faces. What these phrases mean is, "Look, you're bowing down to other gods. You set the idol in front of you. The only reason you'd do that is to make offerings to it, to worship it. And when you do that, that tells us where your heart is. That tells us what you really believe. That tells God who you are aligning your innermost being with, and it isn't him. It isn't Yahweh of Israel. It's other gods." And so God says, "Really? They're coming to *you*..." (He's talking about the elders of Israel coming to Ezekiel and sitting in front of him.) And God has them pegged. He's telling Ezekiel, "They're idolaters. They follow other gods. So now we get to watch them come to you to consult me about what's going to happen." And look at what he says:

⁴Therefore speak to them and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God...

He says, "If this is what you're doing (you're coming to the prophet), *I'll* answer you. *I'll* answer you with the multitude of your idols. I'm going to direct your attention back to what you're really doing and who you really worship. And then what I say to you is going to make sense because what I'm going to say to you is just bad news. You're not going to get encouragement. You're not going to get some promise that I'm going to relent. You're going to get punished. The people back in Jerusalem are going to get punished, and if you're here in Babylon and you're rejecting *even here*... You're in exile! If you still can't get this straight, you're not going to return to the land, you're going to die here." That's the message that we're going to see in this chapter, Ezekiel 14. Let's pick up with verse 6.

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⁶"Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. ⁷For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, I the LORD will answer him myself. ⁸And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the LORD. ⁹And if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the LORD,

have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. ¹⁰ And they shall bear their punishment—the punishment of the prophet and the punishment of the inquirer shall be alike— ¹¹ that the house of Israel may no more go astray from me, nor defile themselves anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be my people and I may be their God, declares the Lord God.”

We'll stop there. That language comes right out of Ezekiel 26. "Be my people; I will be their God." So the only way this relationship is going to be restored is to do what is going to happen: to clean the land, clean house. This is not a comforting, positive message. Let's just go back and pick up a few things. We've had this reference to the elders of the house of Israel coming to Ezekiel and sitting before him, and then we get this assessment. God says, "Yeah, these guys ("these men," verse 3) have taken their idols into their hearts and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces." God knows instantly what they're really about and who they're really aligned with.

Now this expression, "the stumbling block of their iniquity," is peculiar to Ezekiel. This is a phrase he uses. You won't really find it anywhere else. He uses it in chapter 7, chapter 14 a few times (where we're at here), we're going to see it again in chapter 18, and later on in chapter 44. It typically refers to the idols which the people recognized as their deity—the gods or god that isn't Yahweh that they're really aligned with. And this is, above all else (and Leviticus makes this clear in the Holiness Code), the sin that will result in expulsion from the land: *idolatry*. It's worshiping another god. The people who were in Babylon among them—the elders, the people with some authority here, the leadership—they're in Babylon, in exile, they've been driven from the land and they're *still* doing it. They've brought their idolatry with them. Maybe they don't have the idols set up, but we have all this heart language. I'm willing to think that there's kind of both aspects of this. Maybe someone in the exile would have created some sort of idol that they're actually worshiping or bowing down to, something like that. But at the very *least* (with the language here used of exiles) they have idols in their hearts. They are still divided when it comes to their loyalty. Their believing loyalty is not with Yahweh of Israel. It's still to some other god. Now, Block writes this in response to the first two verses:

Perhaps the exiles had become enamored with the Babylonian practices all around them.

Block is thinking, "Well, maybe that's part of it. Maybe the stuff they run into in Babylon... They worshiped other gods in Canaan, in Israel, and even though they're driven into exile, here they go again. Maybe that's it."

More likely, they were inwardly longing for the idolatrous observances (such as had been portrayed in ch. 8) they had left behind in Judah. [MH: In other words, the exile didn't cure them.] Though separated physically from their homeland, they had not yet been weaned of the syncretistic ways that had precipitated their present lot. These pagan commitments remain the most serious obstacle to divine favor...

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Divine favor in this case is, "You're here, you're alive." But Ezekiel in previous passages (and we're going to see it again in this passage) has said, "Well, congratulations, but you could die here, too." The goal here is to have a remnant that *returns*, a remnant that is repentant and that will one day be brought back to the land. Because when Jerusalem falls (if you remember way back when we introduced Ezekiel as a book that we were going to study), there's going to be a point where Jerusalem falls and then Ezekiel's message will transition to one of hope. So we've seen glimpses of the remnant already. We're going to get more of that when we hit this transition point, but what he's saying here is that the fact that they're *still* idolatrous in their hearts. "Wake up, people! You don't want to die here in a foreign land—a land that is not yours by the gift of Yahweh, a land that is not Yahweh's and you don't have his presence with you. That's insane. You need to repent. You need to forsake the idolatry that you brought with you in your heart. Because don't you want to be part of the remnant that goes back, that is restored in relationship to Yahweh in Yahweh's land? Don't you want that?" That's essentially what the text is angling for and what Block is trying to summarize here. Block continues:

In spite of the exiles' fundamental paganism, they presume upon divine grace by appearing before the prophet to demand a message from Yahweh... Such requests or demands for divine knowledge could be made directly or, more commonly, through mediums, to anyone recognized as having an ear with the deity. Since the paganized Israelites understood this to be one of the primary functions of a prophet, and Ezekiel claimed to be a prophet, they would naturally approach him for a word from Yahweh...

The ignorance here is ridiculous. The sun worshipers (the 25 sun worshipers who bowed down thinking they were worshiping Yahweh by bowing down to the sun... we covered this in Ezekiel before)... They think they're worshiping Yahweh. Never mind the fact that what we're doing violates Deuteronomy 14:19-20. They somehow just didn't get that. And here we are with more ignorance. "Oh, well, let's just talk to Ezekiel and he'll get in touch with Yahweh," as though it makes no difference where their hearts are at. They're going to look for truth from Yahweh's prophet. Never mind the fact that our hearts are far from Yahweh. We are not loyal to him. It's just such a disconnect. Back to Block:

The delegates appear to have been serious, considering themselves still to be the people of Yahweh. [MH: depending on their ethnicity] In spite of their syncretistic and overtly idolatrous disposition, however, they were oblivious to the fundamental incongruity of their presence before a prophet of Yahweh. They seemed unaware that Yahweh tolerated no rivals, and that he was under no obligation to respond to any who are determined to keep one foot planted in each of the two worlds—Yahwism and paganism.

I think that's well-said. It really captures the flavor of what we're looking at here in Ezekiel 14. It's totally incongruous. In verse 3 God asks, "Should I let myself be consulted by *them*?" And the rest of what we read is, "Well, yeah—I've got a message for them. It isn't what they want to hear!" And he lets them have it. Look again at what he tells them in verse 6:

...turn away your faces from all your abominations.

"I'll give you an answer... I'm going to set my face against you!" In verse 8, he's talking about the man who does this (who worships another god in his heart and then comes to me for an answer, for help.

I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people...

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In other words, I'm going to make him an example. "I will make you a *public example*." And that's just not the place you want to be. (laughing) You don't want to be in a situation where God is going to make *you* an example of what *not* to do and what *not* to be. And that's God's message to them. It's pretty obvious in terms of application. This is a pretty good thing to keep in mind. It makes me think of "Woe to the people who honor me with their lips but their heart is far from me." This is what we've got here. You can't just live any way you want. You can't just align yourself with some belief system that is contrary to Scriptural truth and then when you get in trouble and you need God's help, then just to run back without repenting. There's the key thought. These people are being portrayed as not truly repentant. They still have idols in their hearts. You can't just assume that because you're going through a proper motion that God is going to give a rip. God wants the heart. He wants believing loyalty. He wants true repentance. You don't just do ritualistic things (or in this case, the thing that you would expect would be logical... "Hey, there's a preacher over there, let's go ask him for help") as though it was like a rabbit's foot. As though you have Ezekiel, or a preacher, or somebody, or *something* else you could consult when you get in trouble, without repentance. There are no rabbits' feet. God is not a vending machine. Just because he's God doesn't obligate him to do something for you. That's what this chapter is really trying to describe here. God is not there just waiting to serve

you without your heart being with him. That is not the way it works. And the chapter is really, really clear on what God thinks about all that.

So we get to verse 12, and in Ezekiel 14:12-20, we read this:

¹² And the word of the LORD came to me: ¹³ "Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it and break its supply of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast, ¹⁴ even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, declares the Lord God.

¹⁵ "If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they ravage it, and it be made desolate, so that no one may pass through because of the beasts, ¹⁶ even if these three men were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the land would be desolate.

¹⁷ "Or if I bring a sword upon that land and say, Let a sword pass through the land, and I cut off from it man and beast, ¹⁸ though these three men were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they alone would be delivered.

¹⁹ "Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off from it man and beast, ²⁰ even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, they would deliver neither son nor daughter. They would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness.

The point is really clear. God says, "Look, I am not obligated to save the mass of this people. I'm not being prevented from judging my people and this land the way I promised I would do back in the Torah." Back in Leviticus 26 we get the whole blessings and cursings thing, as well as back in the later chapters of Deuteronomy. "My hands are not tied from doing this. And if you think that I'm going to NOT do it because there are some righteous left, think again. Even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were among them, only the righteous... The righteous will only be saved themselves. I'm not going to save the wicked and the evildoers on their behalf, because they're there." Again, that is not the way it works.

Now later on in Ezekiel we're going to see things: "The soul that sins, it shall die." The sinner, the wicked, is not going to be saved and delivered or passed over in terms of judgment because of what somebody else does, because of the believing loyalty of someone that's true. They're not going to save the wicked. The wicked are responsible for their own hearts, for the place they're at in their relationship with God. They're either estranged from him or else Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the focus of their believing loyalty. That's either true or it isn't.

25:00

And God's not going to overlook it for the sake of someone else's relationship with him. That's not the way it works. You are responsible. You're responsible for your own response to the truth that God gives you, not someone else's. So it's actually really clear here. And it's pretty telling because, again, the language goes back to Leviticus 26 and this whole idea of throwing all these things at the land: famine, devastation, plague, pestilence, driving the people from the land. The land will not be spared and the covenant violations will not be ignored because there's a handful of righteous people still left. That isn't the way God works. If they're righteous, by implication God is saying, "I know there are righteous in there. I know who they are, and they'll be saved. But *you* won't just because *they* are there. The covenant and the presence of faithful people will not impede judgment." And the rationale for it... Why is God taking such a hard line here? Well, he says, "when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly" and I do all these things to it... "Acting faithlessly" is sort of a clue here. The Hebrew term is a little bit stronger than that English rendering. This comes from Leviticus 26. This is a term that you'll find in Leviticus 26:40, where it says:

But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me...

And so on and so forth. The term here refers to performing treachery. Being "faithless," that's a tough word, but being "treacherous" means betrayal. This is a spirit betrayal. And we know what the terms of the betrayal are because Ezekiel has been talking about the idols that are in the people's hearts. It's all about worshiping another. I don't know how many times we can say this in a series on Ezekiel. (Ezekiel says it over and over and over again.) The issue—the primary issue—and really you could say this is the core of Old Testament theology (and this is why Jesus goes back to the first two commandments): *You don't worship another*. God will not tolerate rivals.

We've used the example of David before. David was a mess. He does terrible things. But the one thing he doesn't do is he never worships another god. So he can screw up with frequency and he can do it spectacularly, and he does. But this is the one thing, the one line he does not cross. In the context of Old Testament theology, he still knew who the true God was and he refused to align his own heart with another god. "Yes, I am a deplorable person. Yes, I committed adultery. I had somebody killed." (And all these things that David does.) "I am awful, I am deplorable. But I'm not going to bow down to another god. I'm going to let the chips fall where they may with the true God. I'm going to confess my sin. I'm going to repent. I'm going to hope that he'll have mercy on me. I am not going to turn my loyalty to another. And this is really emblematic of salvation across the board, across the Testaments. Salvation is something that cannot be gained by moral perfection, and therefore it cannot be lost by moral imperfection.

30:00

The issue is: Where is your believing loyalty? In whom do you trust? Who do you worship? What is the object of your faith? Who is the object of your faith? That is consistently the question. I harped on this in *Unseen Realm* and I'm not going to go any further with it here, but salvation is defined as "believing loyalty." It requires faith: "I believe that Yahweh is the God of gods. In fact, this is true. He has put himself into a covenant relationship with us; with me. Not because I deserve it or have moral perfection. I don't have any moral perfection. It's because God desired the relationship. I'm going to embrace it and trust that he will deliver me from death; he will deliver me in the afterlife. I will be with him forever. I will not be left in the grave." (Again, I'm speaking as an Israelite here.) "I'm going to assume and believe and trust that he will deliver me. He will take me out of Sheol to be with him when I die, and I'm not going to believe that about any other. Period." Again, it's very easy to see how this relates to the New Testament articulation of the message of the Gospel in Christ, because Christ is the same Yahweh incarnate. And by the way, doesn't that put people who deny the incarnation, whether it's some bizarre sect within the Hebrew Roots sect or something else—doesn't that put them on really insecure footing? I would say that it does. It really does. We need to start examining the implications of the theological stuff we say. It's important, and a lot of people will just make willy-nilly statements about doctrine, not realizing the interconnectivity of doctrinal thinking across the board. The Bible doesn't present a smorgasbord of thought when it comes to salvation. It's very consistent. Just thought I'd throw that out.

Now there is a difficulty in this chapter that we need to address. I'm betting it's one that no one in the audience has ever heard before, but this is the kind of thing you'll run into in Israelite Religion in graduate school or in Daniel class or something like that. And that is, the reference to Daniel in this section of Ezekiel 14 is actually a difficulty. Think about it. This is Ezekiel living during the sixth century B.C. He's taken in the second wave of captivity. Daniel was taken in the first wave. So Ezekiel and Daniel are contemporaries. When this is happening in real time (when Ezekiel is preaching) he's preaching to a limited audience—people who are within earshot. So how would those people know that Daniel (the biblical Daniel) is this great example of faith? The book of Daniel, as far as we know, doesn't exist. It was written at the same time, or we guess that because they're living at the same time. And Daniel, of course, is in Nebuchadnezzar's court. He's not out there by the River Chebar wandering around with the exiles and doing servile work. How do they even know about him? The fact that the books aren't written yet... How can Daniel be a reference point here?

And you could ask the same question of Noah. If Genesis 1 through 11 hadn't been written yet—if that's going to be during the exile or a little bit after—do you have the same difficulty there? Job? A lot of evangelicals assume that Job is the earliest book of the Bible. I don't believe that, and most Old Testament scholars don't believe it, either. None of the arguments for Job's earliness is really a good argument. You can turn them around and argue for lateness, as well, or an exilic situation. For instance, "Oh, there's no reference to the Law of Moses, so the

Law didn't exist yet, so Job was written before the Torah." Well, maybe the Law isn't written yet because Job isn't an Israelite. Did you realize that? Job isn't an Israelite. And maybe it's because the people for whom the story was intended don't have the Torah, they don't have the tabernacle, they don't have the temple, they don't have the priesthood because Job isn't an Israelite. I don't want to lapse off into the dating of Job here. A lot of the Hebrew of Job is actually late in terms of the grammar. For the sake of our discussion here, that might present a problem, too. It just depends on when the book was written.

So we've got a difficulty here. You could argue that Noah and Job were likely known to the exiles through tradition. You have the Flood tradition. That's going to be something that was widespread in the Ancient Near East from great antiquity. You could have the Israelite take on this be part of oral tradition. The character Noah would be part of oral tradition before it gets written down. That's certainly workable, certainly possible. You could argue the same for Job because the theme of the righteous sufferer was well-known in the Ancient Near East. Egypt has this material. Mesopotamia has this kind of material—the person who's blameless before the gods and then the gods or the council says, "They're only this way because of this, that, and the other thing." And the whole question of why the righteous suffer, which is a big theme in Job. You have this familiar material so it's very possible that the Israelites could have had this story circulating in their consciousness through oral tradition before Job gets written. Or Job could have been written. We just don't know.

35:00

So Noah and Job aren't really at the heart of the difficulty here. The real heart of the difficulty is Daniel. If this is Ezekiel's contemporary (and by biblical chronology, we know he is), how would the exiles know him as this exemplary figure when the events of his life were still playing out? That's the issue. Now there are a couple of proposals here. One is, people could say that this part of Ezekiel was written after the exile (post-exilic), and that would have given the book of Daniel time to have been written, and whoever is putting this together could have included these names in chapter 14 under inspiration, and there you go. Problem solved. People are going to know who Daniel is because by this time, the book would have existed. You don't have to be living where the king lives to know who this guy is, and so on and so forth, and that's the way that it would make sense. Okay, that's one possibility. The second is we have a post-exilic *editing* of this portion to include Daniel. So one is a composition argument and the other is an editing argument. Kind of six of one and half dozen of another. Both of those work the same way.

The third proposal (and this is the one you'll get if you're in graduate school sitting in an Israelite Religion class or a Daniel class, or even an Ezekiel class, for that matter) is that this Daniel is not the biblical Daniel. Rather, this is Dan'ell, who was a well-known (at least to the people of Canaan) literary figure from Ugaritic material. Now, just a little statement by Block here:

The tale of Aqhat tells the story of a legendary King Dan'el (*dnil*), characterized as "upright, sitting before the gate, beneath a mighty tree on the threshing floor, judging the cause of the widow, adjudicating the case of the fatherless."

In other words, this is a good guy. He's an upright person. And this was a well-known figure because of the Ugaritic material. You say, "What's the evidence for that?" Here's the evidence. I'll give you three lines of evidence for it and then we'll talk about whether this makes sense or not.

The big one, the one that draws attention a lot is the spelling (believe it or not) of the name Daniel. Hopefully even if you don't know Hebrew you'll be able to follow this. "Daniel" in Ezekiel in this chapter is spelled "*dna*" (*daleth, nun, aleph, lamedh*). Four consonants. Literally, if you took the vowels out, it would be *dan'el*, just like the Ugaritic guy. In the book of Daniel (believe it or not), the name "Daniel" is not spelled that way. It's spelled with FIVE consonants instead of four: *daleth, nun, yodh, aleph, lamedh—daniyel*. For those who know Hebrew, the "dah-nee-el," you have the *hireq yodh* in there—the long "i" with the *yodh*. So "Daniel" in Ezekiel is not spelled the way "Daniel" in the book of Daniel is. They are different spellings. And since the one in Ezekiel corresponds to four consonants ("*Dan'el*"), scholars have noticed this. You would *think*, if the guy in the book of Daniel is the reference point here, that Ezekiel would spell it the same way. But he doesn't. The scribes—or whoever put the book of Ezekiel together—they do not spell it the way it's spelled in the book of Daniel. So when scholars notice this and then they think about the chronology here, it's like, "Boy, that's interesting. We wouldn't expect that!"

Here's the second line of argumentation. Ezekiel apparently does know of the Ugaritic *Dan'el*. That's a good assumption to make because Ezekiel mentions *Dan'el* and he uses a lot of Ugaritic material in Ezekiel 28. Ezekiel 28 is a diatribe against the king of Tyre. Remember the king of Tyre is going to be the one who exalts himself above the highest of the gods and says "I sit in the seat of the gods" and refers to himself with the Semitic *El* word and all this stuff. If you've read Unseen Realm you're going to be basically familiar with the use of the Ugaritic material and "the divine rebel" in Ezekiel 28. Well, in that chapter we read this in verse 3:

40:00

**...you are indeed wiser than Daniel [*Dan'el*]
no secret is hidden from you;**

So scholars will say, "Look, the same four-consonant *Dan'el* spelling there is in Ezekiel 28, and Ezekiel 28 is full of Ugaritic stuff. So it's probably a good assumption that Ezekiel—the writer, the person, the prophet, or one of his followers who may have helped put the book together after Ezekiel was gone—that they knew this material and this is the guy they're referring to: *Dan'el*, not the biblical Daniel.

The third line of evidence is that Noah and Job were not Israelites, according to the biblical record. Of course, Noah is living before there was an Israel so he's not an Israelite. And Job, again, is not cast as an Israelite in the book of Job. So the use of *Dan'el*, a Canaanite guy, wouldn't be so bizarre as it seems. So those are the three lines of evidence for saying this isn't the biblical Daniel. It's this guy from Canaanite Ugaritic literature. This upright guy. And again, scholars are gravitating to that view because of those three things and because of the apparent chronological disconnect—because Ezekiel and Daniel are contemporaries. Again, if Ezekiel is preaching about the biblical Daniel, how do the exiles know that that's a godly guy if they'd never met him (because he's over there in the king's palace somewhere) and they don't know anything that's going on? And the events of the biblical Daniel's life are playing out at the same time. So how does that make sense? So this is why scholars go there.

Now here are the problems. There are problems with this idea. One is that it's true (and Block points this out) that the fuller form of “Daniel” with the extra consonant does show up Mesopotamian literature, specifically 18th century B.C. Mari Letters. So the fuller spelling was known, which leads some people to think it doesn't make any difference if the fuller spelling (five consonants) or the lesser (four consonant) spelling is used. They could have been interchangeable. That's possible.

Number two problem is that *Dan'el* of the Ugaritic literature was a pagan. (laughs) He was Ugaritic. He was a Canaanite guy. So he actually worships a god other than Yahweh. Yahweh isn't in the Ugaritic material. So *Dan'el* of the Akaat poem was a pagan. He worships a foreign god and the whole story is much more at home with the Canaanites and the pagans than the kind of people Ezekiel is targeting or naming or describing as loyal, faithful followers of Yahweh of Israel. He's not a Yahwist. In DDD (*Dictionary of Deities and Demons*), they have an entry on Daniel (*Dan'el*) and it goes like this. I'm going to read this to you so you get a fuller picture of *Dan'el*. He's not just a good guy who judges the widow and the fatherless and all this stuff. He's not just this upright guy who can be trusted to judge faithfully. DDD says:

There we find a king named Daniel (*dn'il*) who is initially childless. He supplicates the gods and is given a son Aqhat. The divine craftsman, Kothar-wa-Khasis gives Aqhat a present of a bow. The goddess →Anat takes a fancy to the bow and offers Aqhat silver and gold in exchange for it. Aqhat declines. Anat then offers to make him immortal, but Aqhat refuses to believe her, since old age and death are the lot of humanity. Anat then plots vengeance against him, and kills him by sending her attendant Yatpan in the form of a vulture to strike him down. The bow, however, is broken and falls into the sea. Messengers from Baal relate to Dan'el and his daughter late-born Pughat what has happened. Dan'el beseeches Baal to break the wings of vultures, so that he can rip them open and see if Aqhat's flesh

and bones are in them. Eventually he retrieves his son for burial, and laments him for seven years. . . .

So on the one hand, the *Dan'el* figure of Ugaritic literature is an upright guy, according to the Canaanites—and according to just being a good guy. He's not a wicked cheat and an unjust judge and all that sort of stuff. But he's clearly a pagan. He might be exceptionally wise and exceptionally good in the way he does his job in leadership, but he is a pagan. So if we assume that Ezekiel knows the literature, Ezekiel knows he's a pagan. So why would he include a pagan in this list with Noah and Job?

45:00

What's the way out of this? I would think, if you're listening to this you're thinking, "We've got to veer to one of the two. What we're reading here in Ezekiel post-dates the story of Daniel." Well, okay, you can argue that, and that will resolve the problem. That will resolve the tension and the Israelites would have known who Daniel was, and the reference to Daniel here with Noah and Job would make sense. But then you have the problem of determining when Daniel was written. If any of you have ever studied Daniel with any amount of seriousness, you know there's a huge debate over whether Daniel was written in the 6th century B.C. or the 2nd century B.C. or some combination thereof. You've got issues with the late authorship of Daniel there, as well. This is one of the reasons... it's a reason you wouldn't think of, because usually people who would resist the late authorship of Daniel do so because of prophecy. "Well, you can't have Daniel being written after the fact so that the stuff he says is prophecy about the Babylonians being defeated by the Medes and the Persians and then the Greeks and then the Romans... you can't have that being after the fact because then it isn't predictive prophecy anymore." It's prophecy after the fact, which is a Second Temple genre of literature (that much is true) but it really looks like then you can't take the content of Daniel as predictive prophecy. It's a bit of an overstatement because there's still prophecy going on that post-dates any of the four kingdoms, but we get the point here. There's a big disconnect there if you take the late view of Daniel. This Daniel problem in another book—in Ezekiel—is another reason that a lot of scholars feel we need to defend the earlier authorship of Daniel, sometime in the 6th century. Not just to, again, avoid the problem of prophecy after the fact but also to make sense of Ezekiel's own reference to Daniel as a godly character (because they were contemporaries in the biblical chronology).

So we'll leave it there. I don't want to rabbit trail any further. If we were doing a podcast series on the book of Daniel, for instance, I would just tell you (and I can tell you in summary) that there is no slam-dunk linguistic argument that requires a late date for Daniel. There are linguistic arguments that can support such a claim, but there's no smoking gun—"this *has* to be late because of this feature of the language, the grammar, that I hear." Basically, the linguistic stuff is kind of a stalemate when it comes to the dating of the book of Daniel. And I know

evangelicals who take the late date and still believe in predictive prophecy. They just say you have to find it elsewhere, you don't have it here, you've got prophecy after the fact as a genre, and away we go. So don't equate this in your head that if you take a late view of the authorship of Daniel you're somehow an unbeliever and a liberal and all that kind of stuff. You wouldn't be. I can introduce you to evangelicals who take the late date for reasons they think require them to do that. But I think the honest statement is that the linguistic evidence for dating Daniel late is a stalemate. There's nothing that *compels* it. But since that evidence does exist, people who *are* liberals (we'll set the evangelicals aside for the moment)... people who don't have any sort of confessional commitment, they'll take the data that does support the late date and they'll say, "Hey, we don't believe in this predictive prophecy stuff anyway, so there you go. We're going to argue it's late." Plus the whole apocalyptic genre is a big deal, and Daniel fits better in that period than somewhere else. Of course, that ignores works like Kvanvig, who traces the apocalyptic thinking and material in Daniel like the "son of man" all the way back to Mesopotamia. Again, there is nothing that compels a late date for Daniel. The key word there is *compels*.

50:00 So if you're comfortable with the early date, then what you have to argue here to straighten out this problem in Ezekiel 14 is that we have an authorship of Daniel sometime in the 6th century and it would have *pre-dated* this section of Ezekiel that mentions Daniel. Because we need Daniel as a book and as a person to have some history before people who read Ezekiel would understand the reference to him along with Noah and Job, as being a truly godly example. That's the way you have to approach it.

Now let's go back to Ezekiel 14 and pick it up with verse 21, right after Ezekiel makes the point, "Look, even if these three great men of the faith lived in the land, that ain't going to help. Verse 21:

"For thus says the Lord GOD: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast! ²² But behold, some survivors will be left in [Jerusalem], sons and daughters who will be brought out; behold, when they come out to you [MH: He's speaking to the people with him right there in Babylon who have already been exiled.], and you see their ways and their deeds, you will be consoled for the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem, for all that I have brought upon it. ²³ They will console you, when you see their ways and their deeds, and you shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, declares the Lord GOD."

We'll stop there. Basically, God is saying through Ezekiel, "Look, when Jerusalem meets its end and we get another wave of exiles in here (and the righteous are going to be among them), they'll tell you that what Ezekiel said was true. That God punished Jerusalem, Jerusalem did fall, the temple did fall, and the reason was the idolatry that was going on in God's own house and in God's own place. God was justified in doing this because we violated the covenant, but we're here. God spared us. We were faithful to him and he spared us. We're here now in exile." But then they would be a sign of the fact that God is still being merciful, God is going to preserve a remnant, and the remnant will be brought back to the land, as Ezekiel has alluded to before.

So then the preaching point is really going to be, "Those of you who are here in Babylon, are you going to get rid of the idols in your own heart or not? Are you going to be part of the remnant or not? Because if you don't, you're going to die here. You will perish. You will not see the land again. You're done. This is your destiny right here." So we're starting to get a little bit of a glimpse that Jerusalem's destruction is looming here. This isn't the first one, but it is a bit more pronounced in context, and Ezekiel is a little more blunt. "Yeah, it's going to happen. But when you see people who survive out of it, you're going to know that it was just fine. And these people are going to be a consolation." Because if what Ezekiel said about the doom of Jerusalem is true and came to pass, what he's also said about God's intent to preserve a remnant—that's true, too. Ezekiel wasn't lying there. Just like he wasn't lying with the doom, he's not lying with the good part—the blessing part, the consolation part.

Now let's look at Ezekiel 15 real briefly. It's only eight verses. We will append it to what we've done here with 14. Ezekiel 15 reads:

And the word of the LORD came to me: ²“Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? ³Is wood taken from it to make anything? Do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it? ⁴Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel. When the fire has consumed both ends of it, and the middle of it is charred, is it useful for anything? ⁵Behold, when it was whole, it was used for nothing. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it ever be used for anything! ⁶Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest [MH: Notice he's contrasting the wood of the vine with trees], which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ⁷And I will set my face against them. Though they escape from the fire, the fire shall yet consume them, and you will know that I am the LORD, when I set my face against them. ⁸And I will make the land desolate, because they have acted faithlessly, declares the Lord GOD.”

55:00 That's the whole thing. This is known as the "Parable of the Vine" by Old Testament scholars. Taylor, I think has a nice summary of it, so I'll read that to you.

In this poem Ezekiel likens Israel to a vine, a comparison which has a long history in Hebrew tradition going back at least as far as the blessing of Jacob (Gen. 49:22). Usually the force of the simile is to be found in the fruit-bearing properties of the vine which make it so highly esteemed among men, but which are all too rarely evident in the life of Israel as a nation (cf. Deut. 32:32; Isa. 5:1–7; Jer. 2:21; Hos. 10:1). Ezekiel, however, ignores the fruit, as if to imply that there is no question of Israel producing anything good [MH: **In other words, they're not going to produce anything good, so why even talk about the fruit?**], and instead draws a picture of a wild vine of the forest whose only point of comparison is the quality of its wood. This is notoriously useless, not being firm enough even for making a peg to hang a pot from, and it is of even less value when it has been charred in a fire. The figure used here is of the wood having been thrown on to the fire as fuel, being subsequently snatched from the burning—but for what purpose? The application is then made to Jerusalem: insignificant and not worthy to be compared with the nations and cities round about; then charred in the fires of enemy invasion in the days of Jehoiachin; spared from total destruction in 597 BC, but fit for nothing more than to be thrown back into the fire to be utterly consumed.

Implicit in the parable is the prophet's response to those who imagined that Israel, as the vine of the Lord's planting, was indestructible. Cut down she might be, they thought, but it was only a temporary setback: before long the stock would shoot again and Israel would flourish as she had done in days gone by. Such naive optimism was the object of Ezekiel's incessant condemnation. Israel and Jerusalem were finished.

That's the end of his quote. So chapter 15 basically compares the wood (this wild vine) to trees in the forest. "The trees are really useful, but the wild vines that are found in the forest are worth nothing. The only thing you can really do with them is burn them. And you burn them for a while, and then, "Is there anything left in there that we can still burn because that's the only thing we're going to do with it? Yep? Okay, throw it back on the fire. Make another fire with it." It's the only use for it. It does nothing. It is good for nothing. And Ezekiel is comparing the people of God (the Israelites in Jerusalem) with that. Like Taylor says at the end, "Okay, you were put into the fire in 597 (one of the waves of captivity), and you think that's over. It's actually not. What's left of you is going to be burned again—put back in the fire because that's the only use for you. Nothing good, nothing lasting is going to come from you, because you're like this vine." The metaphor, the

simile, isn't even a *fruit* vine. There's no question. "I'm not going to talk about vines that bear fruit because I'm talking about *you*. You don't bear any fruit, and you're not going to. It's just a moot point. Let's talk about this thing over here that is to be burned up. That's pretty much you."

So chapter 15 lowers the boom, trying to disabuse the people who are hearing this of any notion that God is going to look upon them favorably. Back to Leviticus 26:40, "Though you escape from the fire, fire will still consume them." Leviticus 26:40 basically says, "Even if you escape, you've acted faithlessly. You've committed treachery." The verse says:

"But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me..."

1:00:00

Then I'll reconsider! But Ezekiel's whole point is, "You haven't done that." Back to chapter 14, "Your idolatry is in your heart. You are still acting faithlessly. You are still committing spiritual treachery. You're living Leviticus 26." In Leviticus 26, God said, "The goal is that you will be my people and I will be your God. If you do these things and you repent, then I'll remember the covenant and bring you back. But if you don't, there's nothing to bring back. It's over. You're finished." So God wants to promise a return to the people Ezekiel is ministering to. That's what Ezekiel is for. He's supposed to say these things. His message is, again, that Jerusalem and the temple are finished. They're history. It's over. BUT, those who do repent—those who realize the justification (why this is happening)—they will be among the spared and they will come back. If you don't, you're either going to die in Jerusalem or you're going to die in Babylon. That's it. That's the story.

Now what's really interesting about this... and we'll wrap up with this because I don't want to belabor it again. We've mentioned this in previous episodes. All this Leviticus 26 stuff about "here's what's going to happen," did happen. Both kingdoms were destroyed. One was scattered to the wind and the other was sent to Babylon in the exile and brought back. But yet, when Paul quotes Leviticus 26 about "I will be your God and you will be my people," where does he quote it? He quotes it in 2 Corinthians 6. *Corinthians*—they are Gentiles. He's writing to the Gentiles, to a Gentile church. This thing where circumcision doesn't matter. It's the circumcision-neutral thing we call "the Church," the people of God in the New Testament context. That's where Paul decides to quote the promise, the hope, of Leviticus 26. Paul could have said, "Oh, well this already happened. That's when Judah returned from Babylon." He doesn't do that. He doesn't deny the event occurred—of course he knows his Old Testament history; he knows that the people were brought back. But now he casts Gentiles with Jews. He casts the Church in the same light as the elect people of God (the people who had access to the truth, who had a covenantal relationship with the true God). He takes all that stuff and applies it to the Church. Circumcision doesn't matter. That doesn't

mean Paul denies certain things about ethnic Israel. What it does mean is that he affirms that the way God looks at believing Gentiles is to look at them as though they are the seed of Abraham, and that is precisely what he calls them in Galatians 3 (again, through the hand of Paul). If you are Christ's, you are Abraham's seed—an heir according to the promise. It couldn't be any clearer.

So this, again, is a factor in how we think about "return" language from the Old Testament, and that relates to how we think about eschatology. It relates to how we think about the Church (the people of God)—all these big-picture things. It refers back to "already, not yet" sort of paradigm—that the kingdom is not just for the Jew. These promises are no longer tied to an ethnic group, a people. They don't exclude that people, but they include the Gentile. It's important to notice how these passages are used and repurposed and quoted in the New Testament, since it touches here in Ezekiel 15 and Ezekiel 14—this whole message about what God intends to do in the wake of the impending doom here. We need to have this fresh in our minds as people living long after these events, and people living after the cross. How are we to think about these things?

So we can get a good message from the two chapters—a practical message about "where is our loyalty?" Where is it? And about how we can't assume God is going to bless US if we have idolatry in our heart just because we're part of a group, we're part of a family that has faithful people in it. God is not going to pass over our unfaithfulness (in other words, our unbelief), the fact that we are aligned with some other god or no god at all. God is not going to overlook that because of what someone else believes—because of someone else's faith. It's a good lesson, but also how we should look at ourselves as the Church in our day and age in light of all this.

1:05:00

TS: That's right, folks. Mike did say "lowers the boom..." you did hear that correctly.

MH: Are you going to edit that out? How many times can you say, "You're doomed?"

TS: I love it, I like it. All right, Mike. Well, do you want to let us know what's going on in New York here coming up in a couple weeks?

MH: Yeah, we should mention this. On October 24th, I will be near Rochester, NY. The actual address is Victory Church on Wildbriar Road in Rochester, NY. That will be from 6:30 to 8:00. I'm going to be doing a presentation on the Two Powers in Heaven. It's a good entry point for folks who will probably be getting their first exposure to my content—Divine Council kind of stuff. Looking at Scripture in its own context. We're going to be doing the Two Powers lecture there,

and will also be doing some Q&A afterwards. So that's 6:30 to 8:00, Victory Church, Wildbriar Road, Rochester, NY, on October 24th. That's a Monday.

TS: And also next week is chapter 16—one that people will be eagerly awaiting. (laughter)

MH: Yeah, we'll have to bundle this with the one on 1 Corinthians 11!

TS: There you go. We'll have a rating—Rated R.

MH: There you go.

TS: All right. Well, Mike, we appreciate it. If you haven't done so, please go leave us a review and a rating if you don't mind, wherever you consume the podcast. I just want to thank you all for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.