

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 135

Ezekiel 19-20

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Episode Summary

These two chapters in Ezekiel rehearse parts of Israel's tragic history in different ways. This episode discusses both chapters, but devotes more attention to several controversial and difficult passages in chapter 20. Ezekiel 19 is a lamentation that uses animal and plant imagery to describe the demise of Israel's last few kings. Chapter 20 reviews Israel's history of apostasy and Yahweh's gracious refusal to abandon them altogether.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 135: Ezekiel chapters 19 and 20. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you?

MH: Pretty good. Feels like we're getting back to work here!

TS: It does! Back into Ezekiel, back into the studio. It's as normal as it can be.

MH: We like normal; we like routine.

TS: Routine is good. I've got all my screens... it's just easier. I don't have to lug all the equipment around, set it up, and break it down. So this is nice.

MH: Well, I'm back with the Productivity Pug. (laughs) I feel better already.

TS: And I'm sure they were happy to see you.

MH: Oh yeah—everybody was happy. It's a long trip. A week is a long time to be away.

TS: It is a long trip; it is. Now are you one of those people that lets your dog lick you in the face?

MH: Morrie, the pug, is not that expressive. His expression actually never changes. If he's running around in circles, then you know he's happy. So he's not a big "lick-in-the-face." He's "how many circles can I run?"

TS: But if he *was*, I mean, are you going to allow that to happen?

MH: No, no... I'm not into that.

TS: Okay, you're not into licking. Gotcha.

MH: No. (laughter) He does something we call the "linger lick." If it's your hand, he'll lick it and then he'll just stop with his tongue out and he'll just look at you, like it's frozen. (laughing) That's about all he does! The circle thing is a big deal—then you know he's happy.

TS: I can't think of a better topic to discuss right before we get into Ezekiel 19. (laughter)

MH: Well, I probably could.

Let's jump in here. Two chapters: 19 and 20. Nineteen is kind of straightforward, even though it uses animal and plant imagery with respect to Israel. It's actually still pretty straightforward. Twenty is less so. There are some content issues in 20 that we'll get into (some controversial passages) that require a little bit more time, as far as this episode. So we'll be stilted a little bit toward chapter 20 here, just because of the nature of the material. But in chapter 19... We might as well just start off by reading the chapter. It's not very long, and from the very beginning of it, it sort of tells you what it is.

So let's just jump in here in the first verse. God is speaking to Israel here, and the word "lamentation" in the ESV is a translation of *qina*, and that is sort of a technical literary term within the Hebrew Bible (and outside, as well). But "lamentation" is a good translation, and we'll get into that in a moment.

And you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, ² and say:

What was your mother? A lioness!

Among lions she crouched;

in the midst of young lions

she reared her cubs.

³And she brought up one of her cubs;

he became a young lion,

and he learned to catch prey;

he devoured men.

⁴The nations heard about him;
he was caught in their pit,
and they brought him with hooks
to the land of Egypt.

⁵When she saw that she waited in vain,
that her hope was lost,
she took another of her cubs
and made him a young lion.

⁶He prowled among the lions;
he became a young lion,
and he learned to catch prey;
he devoured men,

⁷and seized their widows.
He laid waste their cities,
and the land was appalled and all who were in it
at the sound of his roaring.

⁸Then the nations set against him
from provinces on every side;
they spread their net over him;
he was taken in their pit.

⁹With hooks they put him in a cage
and brought him to the king of Babylon;
they brought him into custody,
that his voice should no more be heard
on the mountains of Israel.

¹⁰Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard
planted by the water, [MH: so here the imagery changes]
fruitful and full of branches
by reason of abundant water.

¹¹Its strong stems became
rulers' scepters;
it towered aloft
among the thick boughs;
it was seen in its height

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with the mass of its branches.

**¹²But the vine was plucked up in fury,
cast down to the ground;
the east wind dried up its fruit;
they were stripped off and withered.**

**As for its strong stem,
fire consumed it.**

**¹³Now it is planted in the wilderness,
in a dry and thirsty land.**

**¹⁴And fire has gone out from the stem of its shoots,
has consumed its fruit,
so that there remains in it no strong stem,
no scepter for ruling.**

This is a lamentation and has become a lamentation.

That's the end of chapter 19. We've seen this sort of thing before in the book of Ezekiel. If you remember back in chapter 17, we went through a parable about two eagles that actually described historical circumstances of the rebellious nation. Scholars tend to classify this one, not as a parable, but as a lament because of the word *qina*. Block, however... Even though he recognizes that this is a lamentation, he considers it sort of a parody and not a "true lament." In other words, Ezekiel isn't lamenting what happens. Again, that's a bit of a value judgment. How would we really know what Ezekiel was thinking when God tells him to write all this stuff?

Be that as it may, we've got a *qina*, a lament. Maybe it's a parody, maybe it isn't. We're not going to psychologize Ezekiel too much here. But let's just go with what we know. Taylor has a bit of a summary here that I think is a little helpful in learning what this means. I'm actually going to use this to make some theological comments. He writes in his little Tyndale Commentary:

This poem is the first example Ezekiel has given us of the *qînâ*, variously translated 'dirge', 'elegy' or 'lamentation'. It consists of a composition written in the distinctive mournful tones of the *qînâ* rhythm, in which the two members of the [poetic] couplet are of unequal length in the pattern of 3:2. [MH: beats, segments, accents] Only rarely can this rhythm be caught in an English translation, because in Hebrew the beats are usually one to a word and when translated a single Hebrew word often needs several English words to express its meaning.

to read that! I wonder what I wrote," like he's getting some sort of mystical download or connection between the ethereal deity and himself, where it's all just on one side, as if the product of what we would call "inspired material" is really just a product of the divine mind and not the human. The human is just some sort of fairly useless vessel through which God gives these words. You look at something like Hebrew poetry and it's very deliberate. It's artistic. It's deliberate. It's intentional. It's intelligent. It's very *human*—very human. And the Bible is full of this kind of thing, especially the stuff we're familiar with like Psalms and Proverbs. But here you have in the prophets, you've got these poetic structures. You've got devices and meter and word pairing—all these different things literarily that human beings of the period would do. So if you're aware (even to this sort of elementary level) that there's something intentional going on in the Hebrew text, that ought to affect the way you understand inspiration. It gives you another reason to dispense with this sort of "paranormal notion" of how we got the Bible.

I've said it a number of times before, and I'll say it here again: If you strip the humanity out of the doctrine of inspiration, you undermine the doctrine of inspiration because you come up with a definition that is very, very vulnerable and very falsifiable. So we need to be careful that we get this right. We put the process of inspiration into real time. God picks people, prompts them through whatever means—either directly by his Spirit or through the events of Providence (circumstances of life)—to write something down. So God knew who he was picking, he knew what he was getting, he knew what their intellectual faculties and circumstances were. And, in fact, he's been preparing them throughout their life for this moment, that they would sit down at a desk (as it were) or crouch down in a scribal position (however you want to imagine this) and they would produce something that God, in his Providence, wants put down for posterity. If you strip the human elements out of the Bible and make it this mystical, paranormal thing, as soon as people start to pick up on the human elements in the text, they can use that as a tool to undermine the idea of inspiration. Those things are actually of great benefit to understanding and getting a better appreciation of inspiration as a process and not a paranormal event. It's a very different perspective, but it's a very normal perspective. I think if we believe God acts in real time with real people, this should not be a strange thought. But we're often just taught... This is pejorative the way I'm going to say it, but we're taught a sort of goofy view of inspiration that really doesn't hold up under scrutiny. Anyway, that's the end of my little sermon there about inspiration.

Let's talk about what we just read, as far as the meaning. Even though this is a bit odd because you've got the lion imagery and later the plant imagery, it's not that difficult to figure out what's being spoken about. We have the princes of Israel in the first verse. Now, it's kind of an interesting statement (and we're going to comment on this a little bit more later). You would expect "kings" there, but you don't get that. You get "princes of Israel." And you say, "Why would we expect 'kings?'" Well, if you go through the history, what's being described here is

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actually what happened to three of Israel's kings. In verse 4, we have "the nations heard about him" (one of Israel's "cubs," one of the lioness's cubs, one of the princes who at one point seemed to be a good ruler or at least have some power and authority).

**⁴The nations heard about him;
he was caught in their pit,
and they brought him with hooks
to the land of Egypt.**

I hate to use a word like "universally," but I'm going to because I don't really know of an exception (even though there might be one). Scholars take this basically universally as a reference to Jehoahaz. Jehoahaz was taken captive to Egypt in 609 B.C. We know that from 2 Kings 23:34. He reigned for a very short time (only three months). We know that from 2 Kings 23:31 (a few verses prior to him being taken to Egypt). So that's what happens to him. And he's followed in verse 9 by this description of another one of the princes or "cubs":

**⁹With hooks they put him in a cage
and brought him to the king of Babylon;
they brought him into custody,
that his voice should no more be heard
on the mountains of Israel.**

Well, that sounds a whole lot like what happened to Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin comes to the throne in 597 B.C. (so a little bit after Jehoahaz). He's 18 years old and becomes king after his father (Jehoiakim) dies. We know that from 2 Kings 24:8. He also reigns a very short time (a few months) and his reign is cut short because Babylon sacked Jerusalem. Babylon invades Jerusalem and Jehoiachin surrenders. So he gets captured and taken in custody to the king of Babylon. That's what Ezekiel 19 says. So it's not a very difficult thing to align if you take the books of Kings and you assume in Ezekiel 19 that the princes of Israel are really the kings, it's not that difficult to line these up—to match them. Now that would mean we have another reference to a third one in verse 14 of Ezekiel 19:

**¹⁴And fire has gone out from the stem of its shoots,
has consumed its fruit, [MH: so this is in the plant imagery part]
so that there remains in it no strong stem,
no scepter for ruling.**

So the kingly line is cut off. Well, that would have to be a reference to Zedekiah. Zedekiah is the last of the Davidic line. If that's the case, then Ezekiel 19 is either

foreshadowing what's going to happen in Jerusalem (and that could very well be because we're only a couple chapters removed now from chapter 24, which is the destruction/demise of the city of Jerusalem) or it could have been something that was added after the fact. It's not stated, necessarily, as a prophecy. If you read verse 14, it could be stated very matter-of-factly, like this is something that's already happened. So scholars are divided about whether it's a prophetic idea or it's looking retrospectively. Either way, this is the last of the Davidic line.

Zedekiah had been placed on the throne as a puppet by Nebuchadnezzar after Jehoiachin was deposed and taken to Babylon. We know the story: Zedekiah eventually rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (against Babylon). We know all of these elements from 2 Kings 24. Of course, when word gets back to Nebuchadnezzar, "Hey, you've got a problem here again in Jerusalem with this guy, Zedekiah," Nebuchadnezzar assembles his army and goes back there himself and destroys Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

Again, this is very familiar in terms of the historical detail with biblical history and external history, as well. Just following the story that continues on into 2 Kings 25:6-7, Zedekiah's sons were killed in front of him before he was blinded. They put his eyes out and then he was taken in chains to Babylon. That's the end of the dynastic line until we have the son of David returning in the form and the appearance of the Messiah much later on. That's it. That's where it's drying up. "Stems" is sort of the plant metaphor version of the "cubs" of the lion. The stems are no more; they're burned up. And not only is there no more strong stem, but the *fruit* of its shoots has been consumed. The Davidic line is done. There is no scepter for ruling (Ezekiel 19:14), a very clear reference to the end of the kingship.

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So chapter 19 isn't terribly difficult to figure out if you make the assumption that the princes of Israel are the kings and you go back and look in 2 Kings and the last days of the dynasty—what happens to Jerusalem. It's not a difficult correlation to make. And so I'm with the overwhelming majority here that would see these references as being pretty clear.

Other items of interest... Let's just hit a few other things in the chapter before we transition to chapter 20, where we have some things that are a little more substantive and difficult. The phrase "princes of Israel"... again, it doesn't use the normal word for "kings," which is *melek*. This is *nāśî*, "prince." This has actually happened earlier in the book of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 7:27, for instance, it says "the king mourns; the prince is wrapped in despair." There you have the word "prince" aligned with the word for "king." So it gives you an indication that the word prince is a term that can actually be used for the one who's ruling, so there's an exegetical basis for this notion that the princes are the kings. I'm not going to read it, but Block basically thinks that Ezekiel uses the word "prince" of the later Israelite kings—the ones that are reigning in Judah before Jerusalem gets destroyed. Block thinks Ezekiel uses *nāśî* instead of *melek* to sort of de-dignify them. In other words, Ezekiel has a fairly low view of the rulership, and so

instead of using the word "king" he uses a lesser term that could just speak of a leader. He doesn't want to dignify these guys by calling them the king. That's possible, but again, if you go back to chapter 7 that term is used. But the other term shows up there, and of course shows up here, as well. So there might be something to that. Again, that's just Block's take on it.

The lion imagery is another thing to think about here. Why is that to be expected of what's left of Israel at this time? What's left of Israel was the kingdom of Judah—the two tribes dominated by the one tribe, or the Southern Kingdom dominated by the tribe of Judah. You also have Benjamin there, but you get the two-tribe kingdom in the south known as Judah because most of it is the tribe of Judah. That is very consistent with lion imagery. Lion imagery, again, was associated with Judah in other places. In Genesis 49:9:

**⁹ Judah is a lion's cub;
from the prey, my son, you have gone up...**

Micah 5:8 is another instance where you get this:

**⁸ And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations,
in the midst of many peoples,
like a lion among the beasts of the forest,
like a young lion among the flocks of sheep...**

So we're familiar with lion imagery, especially people who are really into prophecy (Messianic imagery). The Lion of Judah is a very familiar phrase and idea, and here you have it. It's very easy to apply it here in Ezekiel 19. So the imagery of the lions and the lioness and the cubs and all that should not be unfamiliar.

In verse 7 in this chapter there's something to point out here that may or may not be interesting to some listeners. We have here in the ESV:

**⁶ He prowled among the lions;
he became a young lion,
and he learned to catch prey;
he devoured men,
⁷ and seized their widows.
He laid waste their cities...**

It's kind of interesting or odd (and there are text-critical reasons for some of this), but what ESV has translated as "seized" there is actually the Hebrew term *yeda*, which basically everywhere else ESV and most other translations are going to translate as "to know." This is the verb that is used very commonly used for "to know things intellectually," but it's also a sexual euphemism ("Adam knew his

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wife and she conceived"). So this is that same term. If you just translate it that way—"He devoured men and knew their widows, and he laid waste their cities"—that would make a lot of sense. So I don't really know why ESV has "seized." "Knew their widows" would be a reference to the new king taking the old king's harem and having sexual relations with them to assert his authority over the old king and his rulership. This is what you *do*. We see this with Absalom when he displaces David and puts up the tent on the top of his dwelling (or something like that), in full public display. One by one, he has the women of the harem come in and he has his way with them because now they are his. The reason kings would do this is to establish the idea that when these women have children, they are *mine*. In other words, "This is my line now that is taking over the rule. These are my sons." If they're somebody else's sons, they're probably going to end up dead! This is what you do. This is, again, very familiar in antiquity generally, and you certainly have instances of it in the Hebrew Bible. I don't know why the ESV doesn't just make it plain here and say "knew their widows," but that's what it does. So I thought I would mention that.

Maybe the reason some translations do this (even though there's really no precedence to translate *yeda* as "seized")... I've come across arguments where the word "widows" is the issue. The word "widows" is *almenot*, and some people say that's what the Masoretic Text has and "know the widows"... To me it's clear, but some people say it's kind of an odd expression. I don't think it's odd at all, but they would say, "That's a little odd, so may instead of *almenot*, the text should read *armenot*. The scribe messed up the letter." *Armenot* is the word for "citadels." So they would say citadels goes better with cities "(they waste their cities" in the next line). Okay, but you still have then "he (*yeda*) knew their citadels." How does that make any sense? But you'll see that reflected in a few translations and maybe some commentaries if you're studying Ezekiel along with us here. I think the Masoretic Text is just fine here—"he knew their widows." He's taking control of the harem. I don't see what's difficult about it.

Verse 9:

⁹With hooks they put him in a cage...

The word "cage" here is interesting. Taylor notes:

(Heb. *sûgar*) is a loan-word from Akk. *šigaru*, meaning either an animal's cage, or a neck-band with which lines of prisoners were roped together. The word in modern Hebrew means a 'dog-collar'!

So it could be that it's not that the king in verse 9 was put in a literal cage, but it could be a reference to him being collared—having a neck-band put around him and being roped together with a bunch of people, and that's how they went off to

Babylon! In other words, he doesn't get a ride in a cage back, he has to walk back chained by the neck. It's sort of an interesting lexical/cultural kind of note that I thought I'd mention.

Let's go into chapter 20. We get some things in here that are going to take us into the kind of stuff that we like in this podcast, at least: Israelite religion and maybe some of the darker elements of that. There's some controversy here in this chapter when we get to Ezekiel 20. I don't really want to take the time to read the whole thing, but we might end up doing that. What we have here in chapter 20 is, in a nutshell, a description or overview (not necessarily a travelogue, but an overview) of Israel's past history. Naturally, when Israel's history gets overviewed (especially if it's the prophets), it's going to be about how bad Israel was—their constant complaining and rebellion against the Lord. This is going to be described either in prose narrative or it's going to have certain imagery associated with just being a pain in God's neck, so to speak. Just this constant resistance and complaining and rebellion and—of course—apostasy as well. Deuteronomy 32 is another one of these, where the chapter goes through Israel's behavior from Egypt on into the wilderness and how they went astray and worshiped other gods and so on and so forth. That's kind of what you're going to get here in Ezekiel 20.

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Taylor notes that in the process of doing this, there are a number of repetitive themes. One is, of course, the rebelliousness of Israel despite God's mercy. That's going to be a thing that's repeated. Another one is the wilderness wanderings themselves. There's a constant reference to that.

And then, thirdly, the motive of Yahweh's concern for his own name. In this chapter, this is going to be repeated a number of times and *repeatedly* it's the reason why God acts to deliver them. "I'm going to do this for the sake of my own reputation." That language to us is familiar, either through preaching or our own reading of the Old Testament (God doing something for the sake of his name), but sometimes we don't situate that in the context of the Deuteronomy 32 Worldview, where God has decided to elect or choose his own nation, and it's not one of these other ones! He abandons or disinherits the other nations to the lesser gods (to the sons of god in Deuteronomy 32:8), and then he creates Israel from Abraham right after the Babel incident. These are all God's decisions—to disinherit this bunch and to create a new nation from the loins of Abraham (and, of course, Sarah). This is God's decision to do that, so if he just sort of lets them die or fade into history, if he doesn't intervene, if he doesn't save a remnant, then the other nations, of course, and their gods (think about it) could look at Yahweh and think all sorts of things: "You were inept. You were impotent. You couldn't pull this off. What a stupid idea." So God acts in the interest of his own name, his own *person*. I'll say a little bit more about that in a moment, because that's a recurring thing that's sort of a big deal in chapter 20. But there are other things here. We might as well just jump into it here.

20 In the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the LORD, and sat before me. ²And the word of the LORD came to me: ³“Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God, Is it to inquire of me that you come? As I live, declares the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you.

We've seen something like this before. We get the date formula and it works out to July or August of 591 B.C, so we're still a few years from the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Ezekiel was taken in the second wave of captivity. The elders who were there with him (the Jewish leadership that's there in Babylon)... they show up. They've done this before (in chapter 14). They come and sit at Ezekiel's feet. If you recall the discussion back then, maybe they've come again here in chapter 20 in the hope of hearing some news about the homeland. "What do you know? Has God shown you anything, Ezekiel, about what's going on back there? Has God said anything to you about how long we're going to be here? When are we getting out of here?" That sort of thing. It's probably the latter, in terms of God's response in verse 3:

As I live, declares the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you.

Basically, "My timetable isn't going to be arranged and carried out on the basis of what you want. It's just not going to happen." So God isn't very pliant here when the elders show up again (laughs). We've seen earlier in chapter 14 and other chapters why that is. It's because they're just as bad as the generations that have preceded them. "Yeah, you're here and you're alive. You should be thanking God that you're alive. But that doesn't mean that God looks at you as though you're any better than the people who have lost their lives and the people who will lose their lives back in Jerusalem." We talked about that a lot with Ezekiel 18 and the individual accountability issue. Verse 4 is God, again, speaking to Ezekiel:

⁴Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Let them know the abominations of their fathers...

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Now here we're back to this "sins of the fathers" thing, which we just talked about with Ezekiel 18, so the question here would be: does this contradict chapter 18, with its emphasis on individual accountability? And the answer here is the same as it was in chapter 18: no! Remember when we talked about chapter 18, that the "sins of the fathers" language is part of why the exile was happening, but it wasn't the whole basis. Chapter 18 also reminded us that the current generation of Israelites were just as much to blame. So there would only be a contradiction if the current generation was innocent. "Hey, why are we getting punished for the sins of our fathers?" But that isn't the case! They're also just as bad. They aren't innocent. Block writes a nice little summary here:

Yahweh's disposition toward Israel is transparent; to him the nation has historically been merely one of the Canaanite nations. In his development of this thesis the prophet will raise two primary arguments. First, Israel's total depravity is reflected in that the people have been idolatrous since their beginnings in Egypt. Second, enraged by their response to his grace, Yahweh had decided already while they were wandering in the desert to scatter them among the nations (v. 23), but had delayed the punishment until the cup of iniquity was full.

"Hey, you were just like the other ones and I chose you, etc." That act of grace (choosing them when he had disinherited all the other ones) is making Yahweh angry because of their response to it. What do we expect God to think? God is basically saying, "Look, the whole nation in its whole history..." (and this is part of the point of chapter 20—rehearsing the whole history) "...from the day I brought you people out of Egypt up until now, this has been your pattern. You are no more innocent than the generations that preceded you. This has been the consistent, constant pattern."

So what you have in chapter 20, from this point at verse 5 all the way to verse 31 (which is going to be pretty close to the end of the chapter) is a wholesale arraignment or accusation or rehearsal of Israel's apostasy up to the present day. That's the purpose of this chapter (to reiterate this point).

We'll pick up with verse 5:

⁵...and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: On the day when I chose Israel, I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob, making myself known to them in the land of Egypt; I swore to them, saying, I am the LORD your God. ⁶On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands. ⁷And I said to them, 'Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.' ⁸But they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me. None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.

"Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. ⁹But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt. ¹⁰So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. ¹¹I gave them my statutes and made known to them my

rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live. ¹²Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. ¹³But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned.

“Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them. ¹⁴But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out.

So on and so forth. This is the pattern. "This is what you did, this is how you reacted to my grace, and I should have just sort of rid myself of you. But I didn't because of the sake of my name." This is the pattern you're going to get throughout the chapter.

A few things here before we jump back in. Did you notice in verse 5 the wording "on the day when I chose Israel" and it was a reference to Israel being in Egypt there in verse 5 through 9? That takes us into a couple of difficulties, or maybe potential difficulties. Perhaps a better way to say it would be several issues related to the names of God in Israel's history. If you think, "Mike, I don't know what you're talking about here"... Well, did God choose Israel when they were in Egypt? What about the patriarchs? Didn't God choose to create Israel from nothing (speaking theologically there)? They didn't exist, but he obviously used Abraham and Sarah to start the nation. Wasn't that long before Egypt? What's this language about "the day I chose Israel" with the reference to going down to them in Egypt and telling them to forsake their gods and then taking them out of Egypt? What's going on here? I'll give my two cents after reading what Block writes:

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The selective nature of Ezekiel's use of Israel's sacred traditions is obvious. He is silent on Egypt as a house of slavery and on Yahweh's redemptive activity. Israel's history commences with Yahweh's election, self-revelation, covenant, and promise. Why he began his history of Israel in Egypt rather than with the patriarchs is not clear. He was surely familiar with the Priestly tradition of the Abrahamic covenant, by which Yahweh promised to enter into a special relationship with the patriarch and his descendants, and to give them the entire land of Canaan as their own possession (Gen. 17:1–8). Perhaps the prophet perceived the patriarchs as the pious archetypal recipients of God's blessings (cf. 33:24).

²⁴“Son of man, the inhabitants of these waste places in the land of Israel keep saying, ‘Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us to possess.’

So it's evident that Ezekiel knows about the patriarchs (that's Block's point) and that Abraham was a godly man. So why not begin with Abraham? Back to Block:

More likely, he seems to have grasped the full significance of Israel's encounter with Yahweh in Egypt. The patriarchal traditions were too closely linked with El Shaddai, the divine name associated with promises of covenant relationship. But Egypt is the place where promises are fulfilled. According to Exod. 6:2–8, it is as Yahweh, the same God's covenant name, that this transpires.

Now this takes us into this whole issue... I'm going to go to Exodus 6. The key verse is verse 3, but I'll begin in verse 2:

²God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD [YAHWEH]. ³I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty [El Shaddai], but by my name the LORD [YAHWEH] I did not make myself known to them.

So you look at that and source critics (people who would be proponents of the JEDP theory... this is a key verse for them. To them, this justifies dividing up the Pentateuch (the Torah) into sources, one of the criteria of which would be divine names. There's the J source (Jehovah or Yahwist source), then E would be "El" words like *El Shaddai* or *El* or *Elohim* or something like that. So if you're familiar with JEDP, this is one of maybe a good 6 to 8 criteria to divide the Pentateuch/Torah into sources. So this passage is a big deal because it says very plainly (or at least seems to say very plainly):

I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as El Shaddai, but by my name YAHWEH I did not make myself known to them.

I don't want to go off into JEDP. I've blogged about this verse before. There is another way to understand this text where it doesn't draw this hard and fast distinction between the names, so there's that. But for our purposes here, what Block is saying when he brings this up is, "Look, if we take Exodus 6 here at face value, God has appeared to Moses on the mountain (the burning bush incident) where he reveals the name: I am that I am." It's from *hyh* or *hwh* in old Semitic ("I am or I cause to be" or something like that). Again, I have a thing on the website about the meaning of the divine name. You could just go up there and look at it and reading.

At the burning bush, God (in this story, at least) introduces himself to Moses by this particular name. You're going to read lots of stories in your English Bible up

to Exodus (all the way through Genesis) and you're going to see the divine name here and there. People would say that's the sources being brought together and this is editing and Moses didn't write this stuff... We're putting all that aside.

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If you go with the biblical story—if you take Exodus 6 to mean what it says—then this incident (historically speaking, in the flow of Israel's history)... This would be the incident here where we have this covenant name given to Moses. So if we take it for what it is, this is sort of a turning point, and it happens in conjunction with God saying, "I've heard the cries of my people in Egypt. I'm going to send you down there and we're going to get them out and Israel is going to be reborn as a nation." So that might be what Ezekiel is thinking when he says "on the day I chose Israel" when they were in Egypt. This incident may be what he's thinking about—when God comes to Moses and says, "I want you to refer to me now as Yahweh because I am that I am." Yahweh is the third person form of *hyh* or *hwh*. That's where it comes from. This would be a turning point in the history of the people. Maybe this is what Ezekiel is thinking. Maybe this is why he sort of starts the history of the people in Egypt, rather than with the patriarchs. Could be. We don't really know for sure, but it's kind of an interesting point because if you read this it's clear enough in your English Bible. You read Ezekiel 20 and you might think, "Wait a minute! This isn't really when Israel as a people began. It began with the selection of Abraham and Sarah and God's supernaturally enabling them to have a child, and all that stuff. What about all that, Ezekiel? Why are you starting with the people in Egypt?" Well, this might be the reason—the revealing of the covenant name.

I'm in the minority of scholars here, and there are really technical, theological reasons why people would dispute this (none of which, I think, are very compelling, but that's me). I'm with Frank Moore Cross at Harvard (who is now deceased but I think did the most important work here) in concluding that Yahweh means "he who causes to become or to come into existence" and that sort of thing. That would really fit well with the context, because the point is not that there are no Israelites. The point is that Israel is not its own entity—they're slaves in Egypt. And God says, "I'm going to send Moses down there and bring them out, and we're going to rebirth them. They are now going to become a nation. This is something new. And I'm going to cause this to be by my power. I'm going to go down there with acts of power to defeat the gods of Egypt and bring them out and they will be my people." That makes a lot of sense to me. There are reasons why other critical scholars resist that, but I'm not going to bore you with all those details. But I think what Block is suggestion is coherent, that this may be what Ezekiel is thinking. He might be thinking of Exodus 6. He might be thinking of this moment in history and this is why he says what he says in this particular place.

As far as keys to this, just adding a few thoughts to that... You do get a reference to the house of Jacob here. If you think about it and go back to chapter 20, you have here in verse 5:

On the day when I chose Israel, I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob...

Jacob *is* Israel. It's not like Ezekiel has forgotten about the patriarchs because he mentions the house of Jacob. Does that help? I think it helps. We can't say that Ezekiel doesn't know anything about the patriarchs or he doesn't care, so that's the point. We need to factor that in. Secondly, if you think about the whole line here in verse 7 (after God had brought them out of Egypt):

⁷And I said to them, 'Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.'

If you're thinking of the Egyptian story, where would this come in? You could say, "The idolatry kind of did start even before the time in Egypt." Remember the story going back to the house of Jacob. Jacob is told to get rid of the *teraphim* (gods), and we have this specific incident with Rachel, where she pretends she's having her period and she's sitting on the *teraphim* that Jacob wants to get rid of and she doesn't want to get rid of them—that whole episode. So you do have references to Israelites (people in the house of Jacob) that are doing questionable religious things even before they go into Egypt. So we don't read about idolatry in the early chapters of Exodus when the people are slaves in Egypt. We just read about them getting delivered. For Ezekiel to say this in the context of the burning bush event (if he is thinking of that and thinking this is when Israel was called/chosen, that God picked them out of Egypt and he told them to quit being idolaters)... You might look at that and say, "There's nothing in the book of Exodus about their idolatry. Well, you have this thing before they go down to Egypt, so there could have been this thing going on. Who's to say what they were doing in Egypt? That's really what I want you to think about. There's no indication in the Torah anywhere about what the Israelites were doing religiously in Egypt. We don't know if they were all pure Yahweh worshipers. We don't know if some of them sort of redefine the worship of Yahweh in idolatrous ways. We've read that even in the book of Ezekiel itself. People were doing that thinking they were worshiping Yahweh. We don't know anything about what they were doing.

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So for Ezekiel to connect idolatry with the period in Egypt... Even though we don't read about that specifically in the early chapters of Exodus, that should not be viewed as some sort of historical mistake or lead to the idea that Ezekiel doesn't know what he's talking about. He would certainly know better than we do because he's closer to the fact and they're going to have their own traditions and what-not. You could make the argument that even though this is an argument from silence (we don't know anything), it's reasonable to think that the Israelites would have had a mixture of idolatry in there when they were in Egypt because every place else that we read about them (every other moment of their history,

every other period) they're doing that, so why would that be an exception? Again, that's a reasonable argument.

I would add this, though: I think this could be a reference to what happens at Sinai (the whole golden calf incident). And I think if we know how to read that a little bit better we can make an argument (I'll be honest—it's an *implied* argument) that the nation of Israel in Egypt during the period of slavery was not theologically as pure as the driven snow. I think we can make a reasonable argument based on what happens at Sinai. If you remember the story of the golden calf, they're there at the foot of the mountain and we have Moses go up. He doesn't come back for a long time (we know the story). Aaron is weak and is talked into making a golden calf for the people to worship. "This the god (or gods) who brought you out of Egypt" and so on and so forth. And we look at that and we think, "What a bunch of idiots! How is it reasonable at all to have gone through the Red Sea event and then to get to Sinai and look at this golden calf and say it's the God who brought us out of Egypt? It makes them look like morons."

Well... maybe not. Maybe this is what they're thinking; follow along here. This is a calf—a golden calf there at Sinai. In Israelite thinking, this may have been the way they conceived of (wrongly, aberrantly) their God—as a calf, or more particularly, as a bull. You say, "What are you talking about, Mike?" Well, in Genesis 49:24 we have a phrase where the God of Israel is called the "Mighty One of Jacob"—the *abir ya yaaqob*. This is a title of Yawheh in Psalm 132:2, Isaiah 49:26, Isaiah 60:16 (this is much later material. *Abir* (*aleph, bet, yodh, resh*—for those who know Hebrew) is spelled identically to the word for "bull": *aleph, bet* (with a dagesh in it), *yodh, resh*. In terms of consonants, there's no difference here. This is why some scholars think "Mighty One of Jacob" could be translated "the bull of Jacob." (This is the same word you get in Psalm 22 for the bulls of Bashan, by the way, and just bulls generically.) Here's why you should care: because Canaanite "El" (the lead god of the Canaanite pantheon) is referred to as a bull in Ugaritic texts. It's a different term; it's the Ugaritic equivalent of the Hebrew *sor* (bull). The Ugaritic term is *tur*. But here's the point. Since we know that Canaanite El was viewed as the highest deity and we also know (from the Hebrew Bible) that the God of Israel is referred to with the same El term (we can argue about whether it's a proper name or not, but it's just the term for deity. We have El Shaddai, El Elyon, El-this, El-that—all these things for the God of Israel)... In the minds of many Israelites... You've gotta realize, folks, that they don't have Bibles. They don't even have *teachers*. There's no written revelation at all. So when they're thinking of the High God, it's quite plausible to think that at least *some* Israelites would have conflated El from Canaan or Ugarit from the God of the patriarchs. It's very reasonable to think that. So if one of the ways that God is described is a bull and then you make a golden calf at Sinai and say this is the God who brought you out of Egypt, there would be a lot of Israelites who would look at that and say, "Well, yeah—we get that. That makes sense. Let's have a party!"

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It's still idolatry because ... well, we know what God's reaction to it is. We know we're going to get one of the commands about not making graven images. We know all that. But the people there could be doing the same kind of thing we see later in the book of Ezekiel, when they're bowing down to the sun and they think they're worshiping Yahweh because he's the highest God up in the heavens. They're doing sort of the religious math that wouldn't have been strange to many of them. Now, it's worse for the people later in Israel's history in the book of Ezekiel—back with the solar worshipers and all that. It's worse because they *do* have written material. They know they're not supposed to be making images of things in heaven and earth and all that. They know that. Well, the people at Sinai don't have any of that, so it's very conceivable that this act that they do at Sinai made sense to many Israelites there. But then you're going to have some that say, "I think we should wait for Moses to come down from the mountain. I don't know about this because this just kind of looks like what Egyptians would do and what other peoples would do. We should wait for Moses. We don't know if he's dead"... the whole thing playing out.

What I'm saying is Ezekiel, again, might have been thinking of this sort of incident and this sort of religious behavior back at Sinai. If that's the case, that could indicate (here's your implied argument for what's going on with the Israelites while they're in Egypt as slaves) that they were doing this all along. They could have been worshiping the God of the patriarchs along with idols. Or they could have thought of him in these terms. We just don't know. We're not told in Exodus what the situation was. But you get an episode like this, where if you put yourself in that historical context... Again, we can look at it with a wider net here and see how Yahweh is described in certain passages as the *abir* (which can certainly be translated "bull")... We look at that sort of thing, and without them knowing any better, that's what they could have been doing. That could have been Yahweh worship in Egypt during the years of bondage. It's not like God is happy with it because they're slaves. They're slaves in Egypt. God decides at the time of Moses, "Okay, we're going to act. I'm going to get them out of Egypt. We're going to bring them back to this mountain, and you're going to tell them who I am. We're going to refer to me by this covenant name. This is my covenant name. I'm bringing them out. I am making them anew. This is the new birth for the nation. We're going to hit the reset button here. You're going to bring them to this mountain and I'm going to give them my laws. I'll give them my commands and spell out for them how I want to be worshiped and how I don't want to be worshiped."

They could have intuited this much, based on the patriarchs: the patriarchs were commanded to put away other gods, which would have included the making of idols. They could have figured that much out because the patriarchs were required to do that sort of thing. When God does show up, he either shows up as a man or as some sort of luminescence (the fiery flame, the fiery pot that passes between the animals in Genesis 15, etc.). There's no indication that the God of

the patriarchs wanted to have graven images made of him so that people could worship him. If they even passed that much down orally (it didn't have to be written), you would think that when you get to Sinai there's gonna be a bunch of Israelites thinking, "I don't know about this..." So they could say, "My neighbor, Schlomo, over here... We were down in Egypt living in the slave quarters and he had an idol and he called it 'the God of my fathers' (EI whatever) and that's what he did. We didn't really do that. We didn't know why we should be doing that. It kind of felt weird." Whatever.

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We just don't know what was going through the heads of these people. But if they had transmitted the stories orally, making a graven image to worship the God of the patriarchs was not something that you would see or hear or have told to you as the thing to do. But you can see how people would think it's reasonable or okay or allowable because of the terminology that would've been part of this matrix (this complex) of stories.

So when God does send Moses back to Egypt and gets them out, brings them back to Sinai, it's like "this is the reset button. This is where we're going to set the record straight." And they should have waited for Moses! (laughs) Why would they think Moses would go up on the mountain and God would just kill him or let him die after the deliverance at the Red Sea? I mean, come on. Granted, I'm looking at it with 20/20 hindsight here, but I think it's equally reasonable to think you'd have Israelites sitting in the camp thinking, "There's just no way God would just kill this guy or let him die now after all this. We need to wait for Moses. We need to hear what God has to say. We should not be making this calf." And other ones were like, "Hey, it's the bull! It's the God of the patriarchs... what's the problem?" So you're going to have a real difference there, and this could be what Ezekiel is thinking of. Do with that what you want, but again, this is how scholars are going to be talking about this passage and why Ezekiel is thinking about Egypt for the birth and the election of the people instead of Abraham. This is why that would be.

I'm not going to go through the whole chapter. I'm just picking a few things here. In verse 9, we read this reference: "I acted for the sake of my name." For those who listened to the conference interviews, one of the people we interviewed was Carmen Imes. If you didn't listen to that, I would recommend going back to listen to that [Episode 131]. Carmen's dissertation was on linking the idea of "bearing the name"... This is the command "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." The word translated "take" in English is literally the word "bear" ("to lift up")—*ns*. You should not bear the name of the Lord thy God in vain, or worthlessly, carelessly, emptily, that sort of thing. Think of it as a mark. "You people are known by this name. You are associated with this name, this deity—Yahweh of Israel." In her dissertation, she links the bearing of the name idea with the concept of imaging—being a representative—being the image of God. For the kind of stuff that I've written about in *Unseen Realm* and that we've talked about here... That's why I wanted to interview her. I met her a couple years ago

at a regional meeting where she read a paper on this, distilling some of these points from her dissertation and I thought, "Boy, that's really good stuff to make this connection."

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So if we think about that with what we have here in verse 9: "I'm acting. I'm saving Israel. I'm saving these transparently worthless apostates. (laughs) I'm going to act and I'm going to save a remnant. I'm not going to annihilate them for the sake of my name." It tells you that God... Yes, he's acting in self-interest because of the Deuteronomy 32 Worldview. "I am not going to be laughed at by the lesser gods. My decision to disinherit them and create a new people of my own was a good one, and I will restore Eden through this bunch of nitwits" (or apostates, however you want to think about it). "I will work my plan to restore Eden through these people. I will get that done." Again, God always acts to preserve a remnant, and it's not just because he feels bad. It's not because there's anything special about them. It's because of himself. This is what he wants to do, and he will be shown to be right in the end in the minds of the other gods—his rivals. So if you frame it that way (to bring this whole idea of representation in), you could also add this thought. Yes, God is acting out of self-interest, but another one of the reasons why this whole reference to the name is an issue with God is because he does want a people on earth who represent him. He does want a family. He does want Eden restored. Remember back to Eden—creating them as his image? "I want humans to image me, to represent me, to live with me, to participate with me in life in this world (in their world that I've given them)." Got it still after that. So this reference to acting on the basis of his name...sure, it's self-interest. It's about his reputation. But when you tie it into the larger picture, it also tells you that God wants to accomplish the restoration of his original plan. He wants human imagers. These are the people through whom he is going to work the original plan and get the job done. There's a lot of theology that sort of accrues to just these statements about the name that I think some commentators (a lot of them in this case) just generally miss. They don't tie it into the wider concept.

So Yahweh is going to act for the sake of his name because of the Deuteronomy 32 Worldview. "I will be known as superior among the gods. I will be shown to be right. I will be shown to be powerful and to be able to pull this off, and when I do pull it off I will accomplish the Edenic mission. I will have people who represent me and are part of my family in this place. And they will get to participate with me in living in this creation and enjoying it as it was meant to be enjoyed at the beginning." So there's a lot of theology that gets accrued to it—packed onto that.

The last thing I want to mention here is probably the most controversial in this chapter. The rest of chapter 20 is rehearsing how Israel screwed up and the Lord acted on the basis of his name and so on and so forth. When you get down to verse 24, you get a pretty controversial statement (even within biblical scholarship and just other general readers have noticed this). He says:

²⁴because they had not obeyed my rules, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers' idols.²⁵ Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and rules by which they could not have life,²⁶ and I defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn, that I might devastate them. I did it that they might know that I am the LORD.

Now some scholars take this passage to mean that God (and this is a key term, the one I'm going to object to) *endorsed* child sacrifice at some point in Israelite religion. That's how they read this. I think that is quite unwarranted (and of course, I'm not the only one). But just to give you some perspective on how this gets discussed, Taylor writes this:

... although once again God refrains from pouring out his wrath, he does leave Israel with two unhappy legacies, namely the threat of dispersion from Canaan among foreign peoples (23, 24), and the harmful ordinance of the offering of the firstborn (25, 26). The latter presents an acute problem of interpretation. It seems to refer to the unlawful practice of 'passing children through the fire to Molech', a form of child-sacrifice so strongly and frequently condemned in the Old Testament that it may well have happened far more than the occasional times it is mentioned (e.g. 2 Kgs 21:6; 2 Chr. 28:3; cf. 2 Kgs 17:17; 23:10, 13; Jer. 7:31; 32:35). But this could never be described as an ordinance of God. It may be that the ordinance referred to is that of the offering of the first-born with its insistence that everything that opens the womb belongs to the Lord. This is modified by the law of redemption whereby a substitute or a ransom-price can be provided for first-born children (Exod. 22:29; Num. 18:15ff.).

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Now earlier in Exodus (I believe it was Exodus 13), there was this thing about how all the firstborn belong to the Lord—from the animals to the people. And since the animals were sacrificed, some scholars would say maybe they sacrificed babies back then, too, like all the other pagans did. But later in Exodus we get a substitute for the people—the firstborn humans. There's a ransom price. So it's evident that Israel did *not* do this. They did not have child sacrifice back in the early days of the nation. You need to interpret it a different way based on the other passage. Taylor continues:

But the occasional continuance of child-sacrifice was probably due to a misinterpretation of this law, and so Ezekiel could imply that God had ultimately made it so. [MH: basically the law is either ambiguous or God sees it's being misinterpreted and doesn't do anything, but uses it as a judgment] The alternative is to understand these verses in the manner of Romans 1:24, which is saying that the consequence of spiritual perversity is that God 'gives men up' to grosser sins.

So Taylor is saying this could be a reference to Israelites perverting the ransom (the substitute) from Exodus 22 for the firstborn. They start practicing child sacrifice, and God looks at this and knows this is a misinterpretation but he says, "Whatever." He gives them up to their perversion to punish them, a la Romans 1. That's one way to look at it. Other scholars take a slightly different approach. I'm going to read from Greenberg's commentary here. His view is similar to Block's. He says:

Because Israel consistently rejected God's good, life-giving laws, God's condign punishment was to replace them with not-good laws, by observing which one would gain not life but death These are then exemplified by child sacrifice, at once a murderous pagan practice and an abomination worthy of severest condemnation. By this anti-gift God only confirmed the people in their choice of laws countering God's (i.e., confirmed them in their rebellion; cf. vss. 18f.); this choice led them inevitably to adopt the deadly laws of the pagans (cf. Deut 12:31, which illustrates the pagan mode of worship by the custom of burning children).

The shocking idea that God misleads those who anger him into sin, for which he then destroys them, already appeared in 14:9 (the misled prophet) It is essentially the same as God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart so that his ruin might be a lasting object lesson (Exod 9:16; 10:2); or the charge to Isaiah to "dull the people's mind, stop its ears, and seal its eyes, lest, seeing with its eyes and hearing with its ears, it also grasp with its mind and repent and heal itself" (Isa 6:9ff.); or the complaint of Isa 63:17, "Why, YHWH, do you make us stray from your ways, and harden our hearts not to fear you?"

So God says, "I'm not interested in them repenting. I'm going to blind them, close their ears." This is what he tells Isaiah in Isaiah 6:9ff. Again, think of the hardening of the heart issue. We know from the story that Pharaoh also hardened his own heart. And, of course, the people here are going to be hardening themselves, too. But God uses that and sort of cements it (makes it irreversible) at least for a time to punish people that he is angry with. So that's Greenberg's view. That's kind of still in line with the whole idea of God giving them up to their own perversion, but it's a little bit different. It can work with that first idea, but it's a little bit of a different take.

So there you have it. You have Ezekiel 20:24-26. How do we understand this reference? Just to summarize the two (and there are other nuances of these two, but here are the two main approaches):

1. This is a reference to God looking at what's going on and passively or apathetically saying, "Whatever. I'm just going to let you do that because

I'm angry. I don't like you. I want you to be punished. This is part of my judgment on you."

2. The second view isn't quite so passive or apathetic. It's a little more active. God uses the occasion and drives them more into it to increase their judgment and their suffering and so on and so forth. That's basically the nuance.

Both views, again, have the idea of God not intervening, not putting a stop to it, because he wants the people to be judged. It's a difficult passage. I don't think it means that God endorsed (was happy with, approved of) child sacrifice. I think some critical scholars go way, way too far with that. But those who aren't in that camp (Block, Taylor, Greenberg here) are basically looking at it in sort of a Romans 1 mode. And if you go back and read Romans 1 (I would challenge you to do this), there's some pretty bad stuff in there. You have to ask yourself, "Why isn't God helping them see the light and taking them out of this stuff that's self-destructive—all these behaviors in Romans 1 that are self-destructive and are going to bring misery and suffering and death, etc.?" We're back to the situation of God, who is omniscient and knows when we've crossed the line here, and he can decide the means by which he is going to punish evil. That's up to him.

That's the Romans 1 perspective of God's attitude toward Israel. "They're so bad, so apostate, I'm going to either let them do this or I'm going to create some sort of circumstance where I'm going to harden them into doing this to punish themselves. I want them to engage in the self-destruction because I want to destroy them. I want to punish sin."

So no matter which way you look at that, I think what's remarkable in the chapter is where it goes from that point. Because when you hit Ezekiel 20, after all that dark stuff, and you hit verse 33 (and even before that):

²⁷“Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: In this also your fathers blasphemed me, by dealing treacherously with me.

Wherever they saw any high hill or any leafy tree, they offered their sacrifices to other gods and did all this terrible stuff. So God's like, "I've seen all of it before." And then you hit verse 33:

³³“As I live, declares the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out I will be king over you. ³⁴I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out. ³⁵And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there

I will enter into judgment with you face to face. ³⁶As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, declares the Lord God. ³⁷I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. ³⁸I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me. I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

³⁹“As for you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord God: Go serve every one of you his idols, now and hereafter, if you will not listen to me; but my holy name you shall no more profane with your gifts and your idols.

⁴⁰“For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, declares the Lord God, there all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land. There I will accept them, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings. ⁴¹As a pleasing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations. ⁴²And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country that I swore to give to your fathers.

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After all that, God's saying, "Yep. Go ahead, do that. I've seen it all before." And that's kind of a key thought—God has seen it all before. And you know what? He didn't destroy the whole nation. He didn't end the whole thing. He didn't say that this was a terrible idea. He doesn't give up. He preserves a remnant. He says, "Look, you're going to suffer. I've seen it all before. You're going to do this and I'm going to just give you over to it." Some of that reads in the past tense, if you were listening closely. "This is what happened—you were taken away to these other countries" (it's a reference to what happens at the exile, as Jerusalem is about to be destroyed—all this stuff that we've rehearsed time and time again here through Ezekiel). "It's just going to hell in a handbasket. We get it. This is what is going to happen, this is what is happening, this is what has happened. I've been here, done that, with you people for centuries, for millennia. We've been down this road before. But there's still a road, and I'm not going to just turn around and forsake you completely. I'm just not going to do that. I'm not going to just give up and say 'forget it.' I will bring some of you out from the countries where you're going to be scattered. I will bring you back to the land that I

promised to your fathers. I will bring you back and you will be acceptable. I will accept you."

There's still hope at the end of this, is what Ezekiel is saying here. God will save a remnant. This is a consistent message—not just in Ezekiel, but in all the prophets, as dark as they are. Here you even get talk where the people are so bad that God says, "Whatever. I'm going to give you up to your perversion, to self-destruction, and I'm not going to put a stop to it. I'm going to let it play out." But in the end, God can't entirely give up on his people. He always leaves the door open a crack to forgive them, to reaccept them, to bring them back, and to keep kicking the can down the road toward restoring what he really wants. God doesn't want any of this garbage. He doesn't want idolatry. He doesn't want death. He doesn't want any of this stuff. What he wants is what he set up originally in Eden, and he's going to stick with the plan.

So this is a tough chapter. It's dark. Again, it has this Romans 1 feel to it. It sort of is what it is, and God is going to use their own self-destruction to judge them. It doesn't get much worse than that. But even at the end of that, we still have this message that this is not the way the story is going to end. It's going to end a different way. It's going to end a good way, and you'll know that "I am the Lord your God."

TS: Woo-whee! You had your tea, Mike, didn't you? You had a couple extra glasses of tea, didn't you? You got your caffeine in.

MH: (laughs) Got my caffeine in, yeah.

TS: Well, good deal. All right, Mike. Next week we'll do chapters 21-22?

MH: 21 and 22, yep. We're moving up to what will be the transition point—the destruction of Jerusalem and the whole nation is kaput (at least for awhile). We're heading there, but we're not quite there yet. Two more chapters. I think we'll get there in a couple episodes.

TS: All right. That sounds good. Is there anything else you'd like to mention?

MH: I don't think so. We got some good feedback about the interviews, so that was fun. We'll certainly do it again. I'm glad people enjoyed that.

TS: And don't forget, you can see pictures of the interviews on nakedbiblepodcast.com on each episode's page. Go take a look at those pictures if you haven't done so. And I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.

