

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 136

Ezekiel 21-22

December 10, 2016

Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Episode Summary

These two chapters of Ezekiel beat a familiar drum: Jerusalem is doomed (21) because of her unrelenting wickedness and apostasy (22). Chapter 21 consists of four oracles “clarifying” for hard-of-hearing Israelites what fate awaited them as Nebuchadnezzar moved toward Jerusalem. Chapter 22 is comprised of three separate sermonettes targeting the evils of the city’s politicians, prophets, priests, and population. The city is cast as worse than Sodom and Gomorrah, as God charges he cannot find a single person (Ezek 22:30) in the city who will put himself on the line to oppose its evil.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 136: Ezekiel chapters 21 and 22. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you doing?

MH: What's new?

TS: The playoffs are new. Congratulations, you made the playoffs in our Fantasy Football league!

MH: I'm embarrassed to say I didn't even look. I thought we had another week. (laughs)

TS: By the skin of your teeth! You made in it. I think you're playing your brother first round.

MH: I've gotta look at that, then.

TS: You do need to look at that.

MH: Yeah, I just thought there was another week to determine that status, but I'll take it! I'll take it limping in.

TS: I should not have said anything. Your brother is going to be mad at me. I should have kept my mouth shut and then...

MH: Well, it doesn't really change the rosters, does it? (laughs)

TS: I don't know! Maybe you've got somebody sitting out, I don't know.

MH: I probably need more help than that! Anyway, at least I'm in. Now I can start my run, I guess.

TS: I think we play each other next, I don't know. If you win, I think we play each other next. Hopefully you won't start your run until next year.

MH: I hear you. I'm a little surprised that I got in—again, one week earlier than I thought it was going to be determined, but I'll take it.

TS: Well, there you go.

MH: Well, we've got two chapters, as you mentioned: 21 and 22. So we want to jump in here. We need to start off by saying that chapter 21 is more or less framed by the last five verses of chapter 20. So I'm going to start by reading those last five verses of Ezekiel 20, and that'll make apparent the segue into chapter 21. So Ezekiel 20:45 is where we're going to start:

⁴⁵ And the word of the LORD came to me: ⁴⁶“Son of man, set your face toward the southland; preach against the south, and prophesy against the forest land in the Negeb. ⁴⁷Say to the forest of the Negeb, Hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree in you and every dry tree. The blazing flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from south to north shall be scorched by it. ⁴⁸All flesh shall see that I the LORD have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.” ⁴⁹Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! They are saying of me, ‘Is he not a maker of parables?’”

Now that last verse and that statement by Ezekiel is sort of the key to get us into chapter 21, because what you have here in chapter 20:45-48 is Ezekiel doing what he's told. He prophesies this. Then apparently either the people who heard this message just didn't get it or they just sort of refused to understand the point of verses 45 through 48, so they accuse Ezekiel of making up parables. "You're talking a lot of gibberish here and we can't understand it." So the misunderstanding or the lack of connection is either genuine or they're just saying that to sort of be evasive (avoid the implications of what he's saying). So

it's not really clear which is which, and it's probably a little bit of both, set in the real context of things.

But that gets us into chapter 21, because what happens in chapter 21 is right after Ezekiel says, "Hey, they're just calling me a babbler and a maker of parables," so God says, "Okay, let's try to make it clearer." So in chapter 21 we get four oracles or four messages in this chapter. There are four distinct units. In these four messages, the fire against the Negeb at the end of chapter 20 becomes a sword directed against Judah and Jerusalem. So you say, "Why would chapter 20 talk about the Negeb and this fire in the south?" Well, we're going to find out a little bit about that as we proceed because Nebuchadnezzar is actually going to sort of invade the area from two fronts—one in the north and one in the south. And this reference here at the end of chapter 20 is really about getting attacked or assaulted from the south (that's where the Negeb is). So it has coherence between the end of chapter 20 and chapter 21, but the way it ends is Ezekiel complaining that they're saying they're not getting it. So God says in chapter 21, "All right, let's try to make it clear."

5:00

So let's jump into chapter 21. You get the first of these four oracles. In the first seven verses you've got a sword (again, the sword sort of replaces the fire at the end of chapter 20). There's a sword drawn and poised to attack Judah and Jerusalem. Then in verses 8 to 17, God tells Ezekiel to start talking about the sword being sharpened—sort of prepared for the assault, for slaying God's enemies (God's people really, who are apostates). The third message is the sword, again, directed toward Jerusalem in a bit more of a violent way. And then, lastly, there's the sword directed against Ammon, and Ammon is in the south. So you get these four basically mini-messages, these oracles. Let's begin in verse 1 to see the first one:

The word of the LORD came to me: ²"Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuaries.

I'm going to stop there already because it might sound odd to the ear that God is telling Ezekiel to set his face toward Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuaries (plural). What's this thing with plural sanctuaries? There's only one temple there (only one temple precinct), so why is it plural? And the answer to this is actually a text critical issue. The Masoretic text has *miqdasim*, and that is just your standard normal Hebrew plural. It ends with *-im*. There are some Hebrew manuscripts that don't have that plural. The Septuagint translates it "their holy places," so also conveying a plural idea, but then some manuscripts don't. If you know a little Hebrew (and I'm not going to belabor this because most listeners are not going to), if you look at the ending of the Masoretic text, it is apparently a misspelling that should not read "the sanctuaries," it should read "their sanctuary" (singular). The way you get to that is that you take out the "i" or the y-consonant in the ending, which is what a few manuscripts actually have—

something that makes a little bit more sense. So this is something that's resolvable. I brought it up because it's a good illustration of how something that the Masoretic text has doesn't really make sense, but the fix is easy. A scribe at some point thought that the "m" on the end was a plural and stuck a "y" in there and made it plural. When you have a singular noun with an "m" in the ending and the "m" is a suffix and it means "their sanctuary" (singular).

So verse 1 and verse 2 are really directed against the temple, just like we'd expect. It's not plural. There's not more than one temple there. So that's an easy fix and an easy example. To continue on, God says:

Prophesy against the land of Israel³ and say to the land of Israel, Thus says the LORD: Behold, I am against you and will draw my sword from its sheath and will cut off from you both righteous and wicked. [MH: here we have a reference to the righteous even suffering the effect of what's going to Nebuchadnezzar's invasion]

⁴Because I will cut off from you both righteous and wicked, therefore my sword shall be drawn from its sheath against all flesh from south to north. [MH: Both sides (north and south); both areas that Nebuchadnezzar is going to invade from. It's going to be a full-out assault from both directions.]

⁵And all flesh shall know that I am the LORD. I have drawn my sword from its sheath; it shall not be sheathed again.

So at the end of chapter 20, we had a reference to the Negeb and the fire that's going to be put in you from the south (again, that's all the Negeb indicates—the south, the southern region). That's referring to one point of entry that the Babylonians are going to use. And the people either didn't make sense of it or, again, tried to deny it (self-denial), and God says, "Okay, let's make the language more plain. Let's talk about swords and let's talk about Jerusalem. That makes it easy for you." But here again, we get the reference to both north and south. So this is pretty self-explanatory. When we hit verse 6, to finish up with the first oracle, God says:

⁶“As for you, son of man, groan; with breaking heart and bitter grief, groan before their eyes.

So God says, "Okay, after you tell them this, act like you're in pain. Act like you're in pain or mourning or something; you're troubled."

10:00

⁷ And when they say to you, ‘Why do you groan?’ you shall say, ‘Because of the news that it is coming. Every heart will melt, and all hands will be feeble; every spirit will faint, and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it is coming, and it will be fulfilled,’” declares the Lord God.

So the reason why he's supposed to act this way and when people ask him is, "Because I know what's coming, and you're going to hear the news soon of what I just described—Jerusalem's destruction, the destruction of the temple (against my sanctuary; against *your* sanctuary). It's all going to be gone, and I know this. I'm telling you what's coming. I know what's coming. And when it comes, this is the response you're going to have. You're going to be in pain. You're going to be overtaken with grief." And so this is another one of these sign acts that Ezekiel is told to do a certain thing to illustrate for them something that is going to have—something that, in this case, is impending.

You get to the second little mini-sermon about the same thing in verses 8-17.

⁸ And the word of the LORD came to me: ⁹“Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord, say:

**“A sword, a sword is sharpened
and also polished,
¹⁰sharpened for slaughter,
polished to flash like lightning!**

(Or shall we rejoice? You have despised the rod, my son, with everything of wood.) ¹¹So the sword is given to be polished, that it may be grasped in the hand. It is sharpened and polished to be given into the hand of the slayer. ¹²Cry out and wail, son of man, for it is against my people. It is against all the princes of Israel. They are delivered over to the sword with my people. Strike therefore upon your thigh. ¹³For it will not be a testing—what could it do if you despise the rod?” declares the Lord God.

The message here is pretty straightforward. God says, "Look, you have despised the rod. Basically, every time I've tried to chastise you, Israel, or warn you or inflict some sort of punishment or convey in some way that your behavior is self-destructive... bad things are happening to you, but it's going to get a whole lot worse. We've had two prior captivities (two prior waves of invasion)." So God is saying, "I've tried to get you to repent, but you haven't listened. So now I'm not going to come to you with a rod—something of wood to beat you or chastise you, to punish you in some way. This time it's going to be with a polished sword—a brand-new, flashing, right-off-the-shelf, razor-sharp sword that's going to do its job. It's going to be a whole lot worse. And we've gotten to this point because you have despised the rod. You've despised every attempt at correction." So he tells Ezekiel, "Tell them this, and then go do something else. Go out there and wail. Cry out and wail like you're being struck down with the sword, like you're under attack (that sort of thing). Strike therefore upon your thigh..." This is a Middle-

Eastern gesture of mourning or calamity. There are other ones that are more familiar, like throwing up the hands, throwing ashes on yourself (on the top of your head), tearing your clothes... this is another one of those. So Ezekiel is told to act like he's under attack, suffering and being put to death by the sword, and then mourning because this is what's going to happen. He continues on with what he tells Ezekiel to do, in order to convey these thoughts about the assault and its aftermath:

¹⁴“As for you, son of man, prophesy. Clap your hands and let the sword come down twice, yes, three times, the sword for those to be slain. It is the sword for the great slaughter, which surrounds them, ¹⁵that their hearts may melt, and many stumble. At all their gates I have given the glittering sword. [MH: in other words, there’s going to be no escape, no way to get out of the city] Ah, it is made like lightning; it is taken up for slaughter. ¹⁶Cut sharply to the right; set yourself to the left, wherever your face is directed. ¹⁷I also will clap my hands, and I will satisfy my fury; I the LORD have spoken.”

15:00

This expression of "clap the hands" really means to bring the hands together. We're not specifically told here, but in all likelihood, Ezekiel had a sword (or something that looked like a sword) and you grip it with two hands. You swing it with two hands. So "clap your hands, let the sword come down twice, three times, cut to the left, fade to the right..." He's supposed to mime the behavior of someone killing people with a sword—again to convey the message that God says, "This is what I'm going to do. I'm going to go in there with a sword." Obviously, he's going to use the Babylonians, but this is the imagery, this is the messaging. "We've gotten to this point because you've despised the rod of correction up to this point—all these prior occasions where, not only did bad things happen to you, but I sent prophets. Ezekiel is not the first attempt here to try to get you to stop worshiping other gods and clean up your act and quit being idolaters." The whole story. Here we are at chapter 21. We've basically been through 20 chapters of this stuff, and this is just Ezekiel. He's not the only one (even in his own time), and he certain has been preceded by a whole line of prophets to try to get them to do the right thing and they just don't. So God says, "This is the point to which we've come, and you've got nobody but yourself to blame."

Now the next one. We have a third oracle or mini-sermon, where the sword again is directed to Jerusalem.

¹⁸The word of the LORD came to me again: ¹⁹“As for you, son of man, mark two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to come. Both of them shall come from the same land. And make a signpost; make it at the head of the way to a city. ²⁰Mark a way for the sword to come to Rabbah of the Ammonites and to Judah, into Jerusalem the fortified. ²¹For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination. He shakes

the arrows; he consults the teraphim; he looks at the liver. ²²Into his right hand comes the divination for Jerusalem, to set battering rams, to open the mouth with murder, to lift up the voice with shouting, to set battering rams against the gates, to cast up mounds, to build siege towers. ²³But to them [MH: the people who will hear this—the Israelites] it will seem like a false divination. They have sworn solemn oaths, but he brings their guilt to remembrance, that they may be taken.

To unwrap this a little bit, what Ezekiel is told to do is essentially make a little map or schematic here for Nebuchadnezzar. It's not like it's going to be deliberate, but the imagery is that God is going to show Nebuchadnezzar how to attack the city. "So make a little schematic or model here and mark two ways for him to come in and attack. We'll make it easy for him, because right now he's kind of trying to decide how he should approach the problem and attack and he's using divination." And we get a few methods of divination here—the whole shaking the arrows, consulting the *teraphim*, looking at the liver, and all that sort of stuff. Nebuchadnezzar, like most Babylonian or other pagan kings are going to do, they're going to consult the gods to see what they should do. And God says, "Let's make it easy for him. I'll tell him how to do this. And Ezekiel, you're my messenger to the fact that I'm going to make the invasion plans as successful or as easy as possible." So again, it shows God's attitude toward the whole thing. He is using Nebuchadnezzar to punish the people back in Jerusalem.

Walton has a brief comment here:

According to verse 20, Nebuchadnezzar hesitated at Damascus whether to attack Rabbah of the Ammonites or Jerusalem in Judah. As it was customary in ancient Near Eastern war campaigns, he resolved the issue by having recourse to divination. He used a series of divinatory techniques in order to determine which route to take.

He could choose either way. One is north, one is south, what does it matter? But this is the whole point. Nebuchadnezzar is trying to plot out a strategy and Jerusalem is going to be the victim of it in any respect. As far as the methods of divination, just a few comments on that. Taylor has a little section here:

Three methods of divination are described. The first is shaking the *arrows*, or *belomancy* (AV is misleading here). In this, arrows were marked with names of people or places, shaken up in a quiver, and one was drawn out, as in drawing lots [MH: in this case, you're drawing arrows]. The second is consultation of the *teraphim*: these were small images of household or ancestral gods, the possession of which played an important part in matters of legal inheritance (cf. Gen. 31:19ff.). They were sometimes used idolatrously or for necromancy and were among the abominations removed by Josiah (2 Kgs 23:24). What they looked like

20:00

or how they were consulted we do not know. But if they were figures of ancestors they would presumably be used as mediums for obtaining oracles from the departed.

We've talked on a couple occasions before about the *teraphim*, briefly. These are apparently humanoid figurines, either of a whole human figure (probably not to scale), or maybe the head and shoulders or something like that. We see them show up in different places. He references Genesis 31 (the Jacob and Rachel situation where she is sitting on the *teraphim* and says "I'm having my period so I can't move from the tent" when people are trying to investigate who brought other gods along and so on and so forth). So they could be small. Then you get the incident with David and his wife, Michal, where she puts a *teraphim* in his bed and the men of Saul who come to attack him temporarily (at least) think it's him in the bed and so they attack, but of course it's not him. So it might have been something bigger, or maybe just the head and the shoulders kind of thing, where it looks like a person. We don't really know, like Taylor says, completely for sure.

We've talked about how *teraphim* might be used both negatively and then sort of neutrally. We do things like this now, even though we don't use them for necromancy (to consult our dead family members, our dead ancestors) for information from the other side). That's really the point of violation—how these things were used. Now, we use things like pictures. We have pictures of our deceased loved ones sitting around the house. Okay, that's to remind us of them. And *teraphim* could quite conceivably have been the Polaroids of that day: images of your departed ancestor. You have them in your house because you not only want to be reminded of them, but in a sense you think that they're still there with you. We think like this, too, because we believe in a spiritual world. But where the boundaries cross is, again, using them for necromancy or using them in a medium-ship kind of thing, where you're trying to solicit information from the other side. They clearly could be used for something that is legitimately called idolatry. But they could also be this sort of neutral thing. It's not really clear, and it's probably a little bit of all of these things, depending on what the person is thinking who might have one. But there are various episodes in the Old Testament where Josiah gets rid of them—all of them. "Just get them out of here." He knows the propensity of the people to use them for idolatry and forbidden practices.

In a nutshell, that's what we're talking about when it comes to *teraphim*. So we have them brought up here with Nebuchadnezzar, again, consulting his dead ancestors (maybe the dead kings who have gone before him): "What should I do in battle?" This is all very familiar with respect to the ancient world and their view of where divine information comes from. So that's why it's mentioned.

The third thing is examining the liver. Back to Taylor:

The third is hepatoscopy, examination of the *liver* or entrails of a sacrificed victim. [MH: typically an animal, obviously] This was a common feature of Babylonian divination and it was carried over into ancient Rome as well. The interpretation of the markings on such organs was one of the skills in which Ancient Near Eastern soothsayers were instructed, as numbers of clay models unearthed by archaeologists appear to indicate.

25:00 Now there are a number of clay models of livers and other body parts that have survived and have been unearthed by archaeologists. If you look at them, some of them are divided up into quadrants and there are little marks on them. There might be a little symbol or something. So that was, again, sort of a template or a "liver cheat-sheet" as to "Well, if it's marked in this certain place, it means this. If it's got a blemish over here and maybe one over there, well then it means that." So there was this whole system of how to "read" the entrails or "read" a liver. Another term you might see with this is extispicy, which is a more general term for examination of the entrails or internal organs or what-not. But this is what they're doing. They had a whole system of interpretation, that if you were someone trained in Babylon to do this sort of stuff, this was your duty as a wise man. You read about them in the book of Daniel. This was part of Babylonian science, which was never divorced from their theology (their beliefs about the gods and how the gods communicated). So this would have been a method of divination that would be common to the Babylonians, but it's common elsewhere. It's just that with respect to archaeology, we've actually had a lot of these things recovered and we kind of get some insight on how this was done or what they thought they were doing when they were reading the entrails. To continue on in verse 24... He says, "Look, Nebuchadnezzar is trying to figure all this stuff out, like where he should build the siege tower or siege ramp, how he should array his troops, etc.," In verse 24 we read:

²⁴“Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have made your guilt to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your deeds your sins appear—because you have come to remembrance, you shall be taken in hand.

Now, just after the mentioning of the divination, God tells Ezekiel, "To the Israelites, they're going to hear about Nebuchadnezzar coming and they're going to know what he's asking his gods (what to do and all that), but they're going to think to themselves that this is false divination and they're okay. But they're not. Nebuchadnezzar is going to show up here, and that will bring to your remembrance why this is happening. You're guilty. You're awful. You've rejected instruction. You're apostates. You're rebels." Then Ezekiel says here, "When that happens, your transgressions are going to be uncovered. Then you'll remember all of a sudden why all this is going on. All your deeds... Your sins will appear

because you have come to remembrance and you will be taken in hand. This is going to happen. That's the point. This IS going to happen, so don't delude yourself thinking God is going to protect you and you're favored because this guy is off asking gods that you know aren't as good as your God. That doesn't matter anymore because you have rejected the true God and he is using Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to punish you. All of that is going to become crystal clear, and it should be already, but either you're kind of thick-headed or you're in denial, but there's going to be no denial when it comes down."

²⁵ And you, O profane wicked one, prince of Israel...

This is a reference to Zedekiah. We saw this language earlier (in the earlier chapters). "Princes" is referring to the kings. And when Nebuchadnezzar shows up, the king at that point is Zedekiah.

²⁵ And you, O profane wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come, the time of your final punishment, ²⁶ thus says the Lord GOD: Remove the turban and take off the crown. Things shall not remain as they are. Exalt that which is low, and bring low that which is exalted. ²⁷ A ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it. This also shall not be, until he comes, the one to whom judgment belongs, and I will give it to him.

Again, Zedekiah gets addressed here specifically because he's in the leadership when Nebuchadnezzar shows up. We know that from the Kings and historical references outside the Bible. He's addressed here as a prince (*nāšî*, not *melek*). We talked about that in a previous episode, that this is Ezekiel's way or God is giving him the language of kind of denigrating him—bringing him down a peg—because of who he is and what he's been doing. "Take off the turban, take off the crown." The "turban" translation comes from a word that means "to wind around." It's used in Exodus 28 in different places there, also in Exodus 29, Exodus 39, and Leviticus in a few places, as something that is part of the high priest's garment—something that's wound around him. There's no indication here that Zedekiah had become more apostate by trying to function as a priest. There's no indication of that, but part of what he wears is a turban or something wound around the head. "Take off the crown" basically means that you're out of a job now. "I'm de-throning you, so you might as well get ready."

30:00 One last comment: In verse 27 when we have "ruin, ruin, ruin" mentioned three times... This does happen in the Hebrew Bible a few times when things are mentioned three times like this. It's a triple repetition: a Hebrew way of forming a superlative. If you're not familiar with what a superlative is, we have like "good, better, best." "Good" is an adjective and "better" is a comparative (one thing is better than another), and then "best" is the superlative. It's a word we used to go beyond comparison, to say "this thing over here is the top of the heap or the *mostest*," to use a silly English equivalence here. But that's what you get here

when you get a triple repetition. It's a way of expressing the superlative. So "a ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it." This is going to be the worst ruin that there's ever been (that's the whole point). It's using the language of hyperbole here and the use of a superlative to make the point come home even more.

I bring that up because I think that's what's going on in Isaiah 6 (this is a total rabbit trail here). "Holy, holy, holy"... there are people that say that's an indication of the Trinity. Actually, it's just the way of expressing a superlative in Hebrew. Incidentally, the Dead Sea Scrolls for that passage in Isaiah do not have three, they have two: "holy, holy." So we don't want to hang things like Trinitarian thinking on the repetition of three words. If it's three there, it's not because of the Trinity. It's to emphasize the fact that the God of Israel is in a class of holiness by himself. There is no one as holy—no deity, no person, whatever. So that's why they're doing that.

The last oracle in chapter 21 is in verses 28 through 32. This is the one where the sword is directed against Ammon.

**²⁸“And you, son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord God concerning the Ammonites and concerning their reproach; say, A sword, a sword is drawn for the slaughter. It is polished to consume and to flash like lightning—
²⁹while they see for you false visions, while they divine lies for you—to place you on the necks of the profane wicked, whose day has come, the time of their final punishment.³⁰ Return it to its sheath. In the place where you were created, in the land of your origin, I will judge you. ³¹And I will pour out my indignation upon you; I will blow upon you with the fire of my wrath, and I will deliver you into the hands of brutish men, skillful to destroy. ³²You shall be fuel for the fire. Your blood shall be in the midst of the land. You shall be no more remembered, for I the LORD have spoken.”**

Double-duty again... Nebuchadnezzar is also going to take care of Ammon. That's going to provide him with a southern beach-head (if you want to use that term). He's going to control the land to the south, which cuts off any escape from Jerusalem. I don't want to rehearse all the things we've mentioned to this point. But the Ammonites are in trouble, as well. They're not going to remain untouched by the events that are to come. Taylor writes here:

In a passage which is very obscure but has obvious affinities with earlier parts of the chapter, especially verses 9–17, the Ammonites are represented as wielding a sword against Israel [MH: They are caught up in this in a negative way, or the land of Ammon is a point from which Israel/Jerusalem can be attacked. So are they getting hit with the sword or are they wielding the sword against Israel?]. This may reflect the period during or after the siege of Jerusalem when the Ammonites joined with others in taking advantage of Judah's plight by attacking and plundering her lands.

Again, they're going to be quick to side with the Babylonians. This sort of hearkens back to Obadiah when it was the Edomites who did this. Ammon knows who their overlord is: Nebuchadnezzar, obviously. They don't want this to happen to them, so there could be a sense of Ammon doing the smart thing by letting Nebuchadnezzar come down there without offering opposition. He cuts off a southern escape, and then they join. Or, we don't know completely whether Ammon is subjugated as part of this process or not. Like Taylor says, the passage is a bit obscure, but it does make you think of Obadiah with Edom. The little kingdoms right around what's left of what used to be Israel (Jerusalem and Judah), they're going to be prone to take advantage and do what's in their own best interest. Ammon, of course, is not on the friendliest terms historically with Judah and Jerusalem, so Nebuchadnezzar is the indisputable boss (obviously). It's Babylon. But what happens here is just not going to be good news for Israelites regardless, whether Ammon has to be coerced a little bit or put under the thumb or whatever, or whether they just freely say, "Let us help! Let us do some killing, too!" Probably a mix of all that. This is not going to be good news. It's included here in the oracle to reinforce the point that "you're not going to have any escape so you shouldn't think you can head out into the desert (the Negeb) and get away. It's not going to happen. You're going to be cut off here." The result is just a disaster.

35:00

And that takes us into chapter 22; we're at the cusp of 22. This chapter has three more oracles. Each of them begins with "the word of the Lord came to me." In this case, we're going to have in these three oracles in chapter 22... In the first one (verses 2-16), Jerusalem is going to get condemned as a city of blood. Ezekiel is going to say this is all happening to you because of all these bad things you've done. The second oracle is going to be using the metaphor of melting down the silver—the whole "refiner's fire" thing (we'll talk about that in a moment). Then the third oracle really goes after the leadership in Jerusalem—the elites. We've seen all these things before. The melting of the silver thing is a little bit new, and we'll make some comments on that. But right on the heels of chapter 21, when the message is "You're doomed and I'm sorry that Ezekiel's first prophecy at the end of chapter 20 wasn't clear. Are these clear enough for you—these next four? You're doomed, and there's going to be no escape." And now we get a repetition again. None of this is new in Ezekiel except the silver thing (we'll say something about that). That's kind of an extra dig, the way it's cast. But here in chapter 22, we get a reminder again of why this is happening. It's because of what they've been doing and what they are.

So the first oracle... Let's go to chapter 22 and we'll get into that one.

And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ²“And you, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Then declare to her all her abominations. ³You shall say, Thus says the Lord God: A city that sheds blood in

her midst, so that her time may come, and that makes idols to defile herself! ⁴You have become guilty by the blood that you have shed, and defiled by the idols that you have made, and you have brought your days near, the appointed time of your years has come. Therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all the countries. ⁵Those who are near and those who are far from you will mock you; your name is defiled; you are full of tumult.

In verse 6, we get this whole listing:

⁶“Behold, the princes of Israel in you, every one according to his power, have been bent on shedding blood.

We could stop there and ask what the shedding of blood is. It could be a reference to sacrificing children, because blood is connected with idols in verse 4. It could be a reference to the kind of thing that... Remember Ahab with Naboth (the vineyard), who had this guy killed so he could take his land. It could be that kind of abuse. "Shedding of blood" could refer to manipulating/using soldiers to do things in conquest or in alliances with pagans that God didn't want done, and you have the taking of life there that shouldn't have happened. It could be all sorts of things: winking at this or that crime, showing favoritism in the legal system... We've seen all these things in Ezekiel, and all the prophets (to be honest with you) consistently rail against this kind of thing. The point is that it's a lawless place. So that's why you're in trouble.

⁷Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you. ⁸You have despised my holy things and profaned my Sabbaths. ⁹There are men in you who slander to shed blood, and people in you who eat on the mountains; they commit lewdness in your midst. [MH: that's a reference to foreign high places to other deities] ¹⁰In you men uncover their fathers' nakedness;

This could almost be a whole podcast in itself, but to uncover the nakedness of the father is actually a Hebrew idiom for either taking... how can I put this and be succinct here? It's not a reference to homosexuality. It's actually a reference to things like adultery and other sexual violations with women. I know it sounds a little odd, but the idiom is wrapped up... You see it in Leviticus, like "to uncover the nakedness of your father" is defined as having sex with your sister or your

father's wife or something like that. It's actually a heterosexual sexual violation. Let's just continue. He begins to unwrap this a little bit more.

...in you they violate women who are unclean in their menstrual impurity. ¹¹One commits abomination with his neighbor's wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; another in you violates his sister, his father's daughter. ¹²In you they take bribes to shed blood...

40:00

And on and on and on. This is going to sound a lot like Leviticus. Remember, Ezekiel is a priest, so this is not an abnormal connection to be describing Jerusalem's violations in Levitical terms (specific points of God's law being violated). So here we have a whole message (I'm not going to read it all the way to verse 16) and you get the idea. Chapter 21 is "Hey, you're doomed and there's no escape." Chapter 22 is "Let me explain again why, in case you haven't gotten it yet" (laughs) after over and over and over and over detailing how wicked they are and how apostate they are. "Let's go through it one more time." And that's what we get in chapter 22 and this first oracle is just a litany of violations of God's law from various places in the Old Testament (of all sorts). You get down to verse 17—the second oracle. This is the one that has a little bit of a difference here with this whole "refining silver" thing.

¹⁷And the word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁸"Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to me...

The off-scouring when you're trying to heat metal to a certain temperature—it makes the impurities flow to the top and you scrape them off. This is a familiar metaphor for the prophets, but there's going to be one thing that's missing from it as we keep going.

...all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are dross of silver. ¹⁹Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have all become dross, therefore, behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. ²⁰As one gathers silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into a furnace, to blow the fire on it in order to melt it, so I will gather you in my anger and in my wrath, and I will put you in and melt you. ²¹I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of my wrath, and you shall be melted in the midst of it. ²²As silver is melted in a furnace, so you shall be melted in the midst of it, and you shall know that I am the LORD; I have poured out my wrath upon you."

Here we put all this stuff in; we're going to make silver. Did you notice what's missing here? The process doesn't result in Jerusalem's purity. He basically says, "You're all dross. You're all crap. You're all just the stuff that we scrape off the top and we throw away. You're the impurity." So the imagery here is not given to tell Israel, "Look, you're going to suffer for a little bit and then you're

going to come out better; you're going to come out purified. I'm just doing this so it'll make you a more pure people for me." That isn't the point. The point is here, "You're all the stuff that I throw away. There is not a good outcome on the other side of this. You're the off-scouring. You are the dross." So it's a familiar metaphor, but it's used in a pretty dark way. Usually people can handle the idea that "I'm going to have to go through this for a little bit of time, but the Lord's going to use this to make me better." The message here is, "The Lord's going to use this to throw you away, to cast you from his sight." It's depressing; it's dark. But as we saw in the last chapter, this is the point to which we've come. Again, "you should all know why."

The third oracle (to wrap up the chapter here) is the one that's directed against the leadership of Jerusalem.

²³ And the word of the LORD came to me: ²⁴ "Son of man, say to her, You are a land that is not cleansed or rained upon in the day of indignation. ²⁵ The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured human lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst.

Did you notice there that there is such a thing as false prophets (people who claim to speak for Yahweh but really are not his)? There's a whole message in that, too! It's the same term used of the good guys (the people that are called): *nābî*. There are plenty of *nebîê* in Jerusalem that God is not speaking to, but they're saying he is. And the result of what they're doing is the loss of life. It's treachery. It's part of the picture here as to why this is happening.

²⁶ Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. ²⁷ Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain. ²⁸ And her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord God,' when the LORD has not spoken.

45:00

Basically, it's a system. The leadership abuses the people and the prophets cover their tracks for them (cover their butts). "The Lord is behind this, the Lord is okay with this, 'thus says the Lord.'" And God says, "I haven't said anything. Now I'm speaking, and you're going to find out that the message is a whole lot different.

So the whole rest of the chapter goes through this about how the prophets are whitewashing what's going on. They're essentially (as Taylor refers to them) "religious tranquilizers." I kind of like that phrase. They're making the people feel

that things are okay, or "I guess the Lord is behind this so this is what we do now, this is the way life is, this is the new normal" (however that's going to become clear in our heads for us to think about it). This is what they're doing. They're endorsing, covering up, calling good evil and evil good (that whole axiom there). This is what's being described here. At the end of the chapter, the people of the land not only suffer, but in verse 29:

²⁹The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without justice.

They're imitating the behavior... "Well, if the leadership is doing this, it must be okay for us to do it, too?" I mean, how familiar is that? I'm not saying that America or any other country is the New Israel (I don't believe that), but I think the analogy is coherent. When the leadership is corrupt, then the people begin to define morality by what the corrupt people say is legal or okay. And this is what you've got! This is what the situation was in Jerusalem. How bad is it? We get to verse 30... Here's how bad it is:

³⁰And I [God] sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none.

In other words, this place is worse than what went on in the past in Sodom and Gomorrah. Remember Abraham interceding with God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah? "Hey, if I can find..." and he works down the number. He gets to ten and God says, "Okay, if you find ten righteous people in there I won't destroy the city." You do the math: there's Lot and he's got daughters, maybe they're married... You can see how Abraham's doing the math in his head and thinking, "Surely we can find ten!" But he didn't. Here you can't even find *one*! To readers or hearers who are going to know the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, you really can't spell it out any more clearly than this. "I sought for a single person—a man among them who would essentially do the right thing—so that I wouldn't destroy the city and I couldn't find any!"

³¹Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them. I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. I have returned their way upon their heads, declares the Lord God."

This is deserved. We've had a litany of reasons given in Ezekiel, and Ezekiel is just one prophet. There is a litany of reasons why all this awful stuff is happening, and it's not something that makes God capricious. God doesn't have a "bad day." He doesn't wake up and say, "Boy, I'm cranky. Let's go punish Jerusalem. That'll make me feel better." No, it's justified because of all the abuses, crimes, and

idolatry in the city. They're getting what they deserve. Unfortunately, that's the case; that's the way it is.

50:00

So here we are again with Ezekiel. Chapter 24 is the chapter where we're actually going to get the destruction of the city—where they get the news that's talked about here, where Ezekiel is told to behave in a certain way because "this is how you're going to react when you hear the news that Jerusalem's been destroyed." We're almost there. We've got one chapter before we get to that point. But it's just been one spiritual beating (laughs) after another in the book. Ezekiel has left the door open in other chapters (he doesn't really here) that God will save a remnant. He's mentioned that before. God will do that. But here at the end of chapter 22, you really can't get any more hopeless than saying, "If there was just one person there that I could count on to essentially reverse this... somebody who I could count on to do something here, to change things, then I would reconsider. But there isn't anybody like that." Yeah, there are people who aren't as guilty as other (so on and so forth)—we get that. Of course there are people who wouldn't like seeing this or that happen to other people or to the Sabbath or to the temple or whatever. But there's nobody here is going to take the personal risk to intervene and stand up for God. There just isn't. So that's where we're at. It's a picture that's dark and depressing. But you have to be honest: Ezekiel and God are telling people that this is what's in store, and this is why it's in store.

TS: Mike, *teraphim* aren't actually entities, are they?

MH: No, I think they refer to something that would be made to either use in some way to contact a dead ancestor (relative), but the object itself isn't... it's not a "critter," if that's what you're asking.

TS: Right, okay. And also, can you expound real briefly about men and covering their father's nakedness?

MH: Yeah, this is really relevant when you get to Genesis 9. What was the sin of Ham? There are lots of different views for what happens with Noah. We know the story (I'm not going to go through the whole story). But the other two sons of Noah take the covering and walk backwards and put it over their father, etc. What was Ham actually guilty of? People think it's a real conundrum because Ham isn't the one who actually gets punished. Remember Canaan is the one who is cursed. A couple times in the chapter, the point is made that Ham is the father of Canaan. The language in Genesis 9 is "to uncover the nakedness of the father." If you take that language and you go to Leviticus, that is a synonymous phrase for what we have here: basically, "to see the nakedness of the father" and "to uncover the nakedness of the father." These are both idioms that mean to defile not the person who is your father, but their wife.

Again, this is really cutting it short and it almost deserves its own episode. But what happened with Noah and Ham, based on Hebrew idiom (because none of these idioms are ever used of homosexual intercourse, they are only used of heterosexual violations)... I think the best explanation for Ham's sin is maternal incest. He violated Noah's wife—his own mother—and she got pregnant and gave birth to Canaan, and that's why Canaan is cursed. Because when Ham does this, he's trying to possess the patriarchal authority. It's kind of the equivalent of having sex with the haram. We talked about that in the last episode, too (what kings would do). But when you did this to your father's spouse, you asserted your authority. "I'm the leader now." And his brothers reject this.

Obviously, Noah is drunk. He's there in the tent. There's a place in the text of Genesis 9 where the suffix on "tent" can (and probably should) be translated "*her* tent." So it's a reference to... Yeah, Noah was in there, might have been naked, maybe had sex with his own wife. But then Ham does it, too, and she gets pregnant with Canaan and that's why Canaan is cursed. It's Noah's statement that "you're not taking over here. I'm going to curse the line that comes from you so that everybody knows that this is not who's going to inherit the tribe." Again, that's a real fast and incomplete way of explaining that whole issue, but key to it is this idiom. Everywhere else you find it... to either uncover the nakedness of the father or to see the nakedness of the father... in the context it always refers to heterosexual violations, not homosexual.

So if you take that back to Genesis 9, it actually can make sense—not only of what happens, but why Ham isn't curse and Canaan is. Of course, Ham is the father of Canaan. That point is made three times in the chapter. There must be some reason why it's made. If you take the maternal incest view, the reason is because this is the result of what Ham did—it's this kid. Unfortunately, Noah has to curse the line because of the way it was created, because what was done was a crime. That's why it's relevant. It's something that we're not really going to pick up on unless we a word study—a concatenation of all the terms involved and we discover that it's idiomatic for a pretty specific set of heterosexual violations.

TS: If you think it warrants a whole show, we'll put it down on our list to do.

MH: Yeah, we could. That was the quick version, but we could unpack it. I get a lot of questions on that. People are familiar with the passage and it just doesn't make sense, especially because Ham is clearly the bad guy but he's not the one that's cursed. How is that right? Well, there is a logic to it.

TS: I think it warrants its own show. That way people can go back and reference it in the future. That would be good.

All right, Mike. Chapter 23 for next week?

MH: Yep, chapter 23. One chapter.

TS: All right, that sounds good. I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.