

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 137

Ezekiel 23

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Episode Summary

Ezekiel 23 essentially takes up where Ezekiel 16 left off. The latter chapter is perhaps the most sexual explicit in the entire Bible, as its theme is to present Jerusalem and Judah as a whore to telegraph her spiritual betrayal of Yahweh. In this chapter both the defunct Northern kingdom (Israel/Samaria) and the remaining Southern kingdom (Judah/Jerusalem) are portrayed as sister prostitutes (Oholah and Oholibah), soliciting every man they can find. The names of the sisters convey the focus well: Israel went into apostasy, and her sister followed her path. And that means the remaining sister, Jerusalem, will come to the same end as Samaria did.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 137: Ezekiel chapter 23. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, what's up?

MH: Well, I got eliminated in our Fantasy Football League, so I guess that's what's up. Less than three points.

TS: Did you talk to your brother about it or anything?

MH: He just sent me a condescending email. I got a Packers hoodie in the mail yesterday so I put it on and took a picture of myself and sent it to him and said, "This is what I was going to get you for Christmas but I thought I'd try it on first." He hates the Packers. (laughter)

TS: He's a Minnesota Vikings fan, right?

MH: Right.

TS: Does he live there? Is that why he's a Vikings fan?

MH: No. I think all Vikings fans are irrational, but it's even worse with him because he doesn't live there.

TS: Well, I'm playing him right now, so I will avenge you. Yes. I will take him out for you.

MH: Good. If you have any Packers, make sure they're in your lineup.

TS: Yep, I've got some Packers and they're in there, so I will avenge you. I promise. Then you can send an email to him for me.

But hey, Mike... We're going to have a contest here! We're announcing it right now. We decided to give away not one, not two, but *three* of your upcoming books about Enoch over the course of the next six weeks. So this contest is going to run until the end of January. What's going to happen is I will pick somebody on social media. What we're going to ask is for you to post a comment on your Facebook page, on your Instagram (if you have it), on Twitter if you do that, if you have a blog and want to blog about it, that's fine. You can do anything about the podcast, whether it's talking about your favorite episode or it's just simply educating people about the show. Any time stamp as of today, December 16... I'm going to start it right now. From December 16, 2016, all the way to January 31, 2017. So I'm going to pick three winners and Mike is going to send you a signed copy of his new upcoming book, which is going to be coming out in February or March. Is that correct?

MH: Yep. Again, so that we're clear, Trey is saying *you* do this, this, and this. He's talking to you, the audience, not me! So I'm not going to do anything. Listeners go out and use your social media connections and outlets and promote the podcast, and Trey will do the choosing.

TS: Nekked Nation! Yeah... if you want to send me a link to whatever you did to my email (treysticklin@gmail.com), that's fine. But I will find you. Trust me. I know how to Google and search all those social media sites, so I will find you. If you want to take a funny picture listening to the podcast, that's fine, I don't care. Nekked Nation out there... creativity. I'm just going to pick three random people. It doesn't have to be the most comments or the most re-tweets or anything like that. I'm going to pick three people randomly over the course of the next six weeks to win these books. We would just ask that you help share ministry, and we're going to reach out to social media and reward y'all by giving away a signed copy of Mike's upcoming book.

MH: It's a good way to promote the podcast. We're going to try to grow the audience, and this is one of the things that we decided to do. There will be other things down the road, but this sounded like a good idea.

TS: Absolutely. And also, next week we're going to have a special Christmas episode. We'll tease that a little bit and talk more about it at the end of this episode.

5:00

MH: We're in Ezekiel still today. The special Christmas episode, of course, won't be in Ezekiel. We can tell you that much right now. But like Trey said, we'll give you a little bit more information when we wrap up here. But today we're in Ezekiel 23. It's a fairly lengthy chapter. Not coincidentally, it's as lengthy as Ezekiel 16. The reason I say it that way is that this chapter is considered something of a continuation of Ezekiel 16. Most listeners will probably remember that one—that's the one that was loaded with the language of sexual betrayal, the "mature audience" kind of episode (laughs) that we had when we hit that chapter. This is going to be more of the same. We're not going to beat the same drum. When it comes up, I'll allude to some things that we talked about in Ezekiel 16, but there's a good deal of that kind of language in this chapter. If you remember listening to the one on Ezekiel 16, I actually did quote a few passages from this chapter to help explain some things back in chapter 16. So there's some overlap here. I want to start off jumping into the chapter here by reading an excerpt from Taylor's Tyndale Commentary on this to sort of set it up. Taylor writes:

The allegory of Israel's history which occupied chapter 16 is continued in this chapter in a slightly different form and in even more repulsive detail. It tells of two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, who represent Samaria and Jerusalem.

Of course, Samaria is the Northern Kingdom. Remember after the days of Solomon that the kingdom had split in two—Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom. Samaria was one of the terms that was used to refer to the Northern Kingdom.

While not described specifically as brides of Yahweh, some such relationship is clearly implied in verse 4, 'They became mine', and in verse 5, 'Oholah played the harlot while she was mine'. The chapter deals with their intrigues with foreign powers, described in the crudest of terms, and with their subsequent downfall. Despite the distasteful theme and the indelicate language, the reader of these verses must appreciate that this is the language of unspeakable disgust and must try to recognize Ezekiel's passion for God's honour and his fury at the adulterous conduct of his covenant people. The feeling of nausea which a chapter like this arouses must be blamed not on the writer of the chapter nor even on its contents, but on the conduct which had to be described in such revolting terms. At the same time it is possible to see that Ezekiel's language shows considerable awareness of the fundamental characteristics of apostasy.

Block adds this thought. He says:

...these oracles are dominated by the language of prostitution (*znh*) and lewdness (*zmm*). If this chapter is recognized as the locus classicus for bawdy vocabulary, it is because it has intensified the sex-related imagery of ch. 16.

I'm not trying to appeal to everyone's prurient interests here, but since people are interested in the fact that the Bible does have this kind of talk in it, for those who subscribe to the newsletter, in the next issue of the newsletter (which I believe will be Issue #11), I'm going to have a link in the newsletter to a folder. In that folder, I've added two articles. So if you're a newsletter subscriber, when you get Issue #11, click on the link and look for the articles by Marvin Pope and Edward Ullendorff. Pope's article is from the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. It's called "Euphemism and Dysphemism in the Bible." Basically, it's an article about this kind of language and how biblical writers tried to express this or that. And Ullendorff's article is called "The Bawdy Bible." That's actually a journal article from *The Bulletin of the School of African-Oriental Studies* from 1979. He goes through a lot of just what the title sounds like: sexually bawdy, sexually descriptive language in the Bible. So those are two good peer-reviewed sources for this kind of subject matter. If you want to know where else in the Bible this matters and where it would help with interpretation, there you go. You're going to have these two articles.

Jumping into the chapter at hand at this point, given that background, we'll just start in verse 1:

10:00

The word of the LORD came to me: ²"Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother.³ They played the whore in Egypt; they played the whore in their youth; there their breasts were pressed and their virgin bosoms handled.⁴ Oholah was the name of the elder and Oholibah the name of her sister. They became mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem.

So there we have the two sisters identified. Right off the bat, there's a reference here to fondling the sisters' breasts, and then there's this reference to Egypt right in the first few verses: "They played the whore in Egypt." So there's some kind of reference to alliance with Egypt. That actually came up in Ezekiel 16 (remember the other chapter that was very explicit). So there was an issue of military alliance with the Egyptians. You couldn't really divorce that from religious apostasy because the prophets preached all the time against creating these alliances because you're supposed to trust in the Lord. He's supposed to lead you in battle and be your defender. When you get treaty ceremonies and all these kinds of things, there's obviously the input or the involvement of the gods of the other side and all that sort of stuff. So this kind of thing was supposed to be avoided for a number of reasons. Here you have a reference to it. We're going to come back to this Egyptian idea a couple of times.

The names themselves actually sort of set the stage to let the reader know that what's actually being talked about, for obvious reasons. We have Samaria and Jerusalem. They're not people, they're not actually women, they're not actually going out and being prostitutes. This is a metaphor. The point of the metaphor is their religious apostasy, and their names actually telegraph that point. Oholah and Oholibah each begin with the three consonants in Hebrew that are used to spell "tent." That's *aleph-he-lamedh*. That becomes an issue because if you're thinking back in Israel's history (and even to the time that there was a temple... we'll return to that comment in a few minutes, as well), this idea of a tent was where religious worship occurred. The most obvious connection is the tabernacle, but there are actually connections to the temple, as well.

Let's just think about this tent idea—this place where worship occurs. Oholah could be translated "her tent." It would be the noun for "tent" and then a suffix for "her." Her tent. If you know a little Hebrew, this is easy to pick up on. What would that mean if Oholah means "her tent" and Oholah is Samaria? This is the elder sister. The part of the metaphor for Samaria... We could sort of think abstractly and say her tent might be an allusion to an alternate tabernacle that was set up in the Northern Kingdom. Or (probably more accurately) an alternate system of worship. It points to religious apostasy. Oholibah literally means "my tent is in her." More on that in a moment, because we would have Yahweh as the speaker saying "my tent is in her." If Oholibah represents Jerusalem, then that's going to refer to the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem—something about this that involves a tent.

Right away, listeners could be thinking that this is Ezekiel's time period and they have a temple, they don't have a tent. Well, kinda sorta. We'll come back to this in a moment. There actually is a connection between the temple and the tabernacle that involves a tent—even in the temple context, the post-tabernacle era. Again, this is just to get our minds thinking here that their names are playing on this idea of a tent and they're going to be adulterous, they're going to be apostate, unfaithful, and disloyal. So their names could be references to tented places of worship. There's precedent for this (maybe a little bit cryptically). Esau's wife's name was Oholibamah and *bamah* is the word for "high place." (That's in Genesis 36:2.) So her name literally means "tent of the high place." A lot of scholars think that that's likely a pagan place of worship and that Esau's wife is named after a pagan cult center. They guess that because it's Esau, and Esau is sort of the oppositional line to Jacob, who is going to be Israel. So it certainly can't be the tabernacle because Esau's line wasn't Israel, it was something else. So the supposition is that her name is a reference to Esau and his family—his contacts and extended family, whatever—engaging in alternative worship. Again, it makes sense on that level, even though we're not given a lot of those details in the Scripture itself. But the name is sort of a telegraphing of the idea.

15:00

Here in Ezekiel 23, we have these two names that are sort of similar. It's supposed to get the reader and the hearer's mind thinking of apostate worship.

And that's really going to be at the core of the whole chapter. So if Oholibah is "my tent is in her" then the name likely points to Yahweh's worship in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem is Oholibah. And then Oholah "her tent" is probably Samaria's tent by abstraction (the other part of the kingdom).

To pick up this one thought that I dropped a few moments ago: this tent thing going on in a temple context in Jerusalem. In 2 Chronicles 29:3-7, we read this (when Hezekiah is cleansing the temple):

³In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. ⁴He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east ⁵and said to them, "Hear me, Levites! Now consecrate yourselves, and consecrate the house of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and carry out the filth from the Holy Place. ⁶For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the LORD our God. They have forsaken him and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD and turned their backs. ⁷They also shut the doors of the vestibule and put out the lamps and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the Holy Place to the God of Israel.

You get this description of the tabernacle trappings inside the temple. In *Unseen Realm* I actually talk about this... There are curtains mentioned. There are parts of the tabernacle mentioned within the temple complex, and all of the tabernacle items are moved inside the temple. Since we have these references to curtains and that sort of thing, the supposition on the part of a number of scholars is that the Holy Place and then the Holy of Holies... If you recall the construction of the tabernacle, that whole area (both the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies right adjacent to it with a veil between those two compartments of the tabernacle)... the structure itself was covered over by these curtains—something like a tent idea. Since you get references to the inner stuff in the tabernacle in those two places, the assumption is that they just moved everything inside the temple and so when you have the giant cherubim in the temple (which is where Yahweh would sit—that's his throne, and then the Ark becomes his footstool) there's still this tent structure within the inner sanctum of the temple itself. If that's the case, then calling Jerusalem Oholibah ("my tent is in her"), that would make sense. In other words, it's referring to the holiest place within the temple. Because of that reference, it's obvious that that's holy ground, it's sacred space. That's where certain crucial implements are—the Ark, of course, and all that stuff. It's going to point to the fact that "I was dwelling in Jerusalem. I'm still dwelling within the confines of this tented structure inside my temple house now, and that's going to become ruined and defiled." Oholibah's behavior (her adultery in this chapter), just like her sister Oholah in the north (that has apostatized long ago and been destroyed by the Assyrians) is going to go off and commit adultery with these other nations. That's a metaphor for the corrupt worship that's going on in Jerusalem. So the names are actually significant as a means to convey the idea

of what's really at the heart of the chapter. It's not the sexual issue, even though that's the metaphor that's used to describe it. It's really about religious apostasy. So in verses 5 through 10, you have a focus on Oholah (the older sister, the one that was the Northern Kingdom). So let's jump into verse 5:

20:00

⁵“Oholah played the whore while she was mine, and she lusted after her lovers the Assyrians, warriors ⁶clothed in purple, governors and commanders, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses. ⁷She bestowed her whoring upon them, the choicest men of Assyria all of them, and she defiled herself with all the idols of everyone after whom she lusted.

Look at the verbs: "she bestowed her whoring upon them," "she defiled herself with all the idols." The verbs tell you that she was the initiator. This wasn't forced upon her. It's not like she had to be talked into it. The Northern Kingdom initiated what was happening, and that's why they get punished. Ultimately, they're not deceived, they're not misled, they're not cajoled, they're not forced into this apostasy. They're doing it of their own free will. Verse 8:

⁸She did not give up her whoring that she had begun in Egypt...

Either that's a reference to the early days in Egypt... Remember back when we were in Ezekiel 20 and we talked about how the golden calf incident might have been a perversion of Yahweh worship, and so the incorrect worship of Yahweh might have even been going on in Egypt while the people of Israel there were in bondage in Egypt. So this could be another reference to that situation. Or maybe this is a reference to an alliance with the Egyptians militarily, because down in verse 19, we're going to get an allusion to that. So whatever it is, the problems (according to verse 8) began with Israel's connection to Egypt. So that's either in the more distant past or it's something more recent. Either way, she's been apostate with Egypt and now she's going after the Assyrians. Continuing on with the rest of verse 8:

...for in her youth men had lain with her and handled her virgin bosom and poured out their whoring lust upon her. [MH: basically, they had their way with her] ⁹Therefore I delivered her into the hands of her lovers, into the hands of the Assyrians, after whom she lusted. ¹⁰These uncovered her nakedness; they seized her sons and her daughters; and as for her, they killed her with the sword; and she became a byword among women, when judgment had been executed on her.

A few notes here. This is more than military alliance because in verse 7 you have a direct reference to idolatry with the Assyrians. So that's the major point; that's

what's driving the bus here. Block has a passing comment here that I thought was worth bringing up. He says:

[The portrayal] represents a continuation of the sexual addiction developed in her youth in Egypt.

Again, by extension, that's an addiction to other gods. There are a number of reference in Ezekiel, Hosea, and Jeremiah that he cites. This language shows up in other prophets (Hosea 5, 7, 10, 12, 13; Jeremiah 22, 30). Again, it's not just Ezekiel. There are other prophets that are pointing this out. The term for "lovers" (*mē`ahābîm* in Hebrew) always refers to an adulterous situation. In other words, it's not just sort of an innocent kind of thing going on. It always refers to some sort of violation.

In verse 10 you have a report of Oholah's fate in three stages (Block points out). If you go back to verse 10, you see that these Assyrians that she's been whoring herself out to "uncover her nakedness." Basically, they have their way with her. "They seized her sons and daughters," and the implication is that they either kill them off or take them into captivity or make them slaves. "And as for her, they killed her with the sword." So her fate comes in three stages. She's stripped bare, her children (the citizens of the Northern Kingdom) are taken captive, and they just kill her. So she prostitutes herself, she loses her children, and ultimately loses her life. And that's the story of the Northern Kingdom. Even though we had it explicitly in verse 4, this helps to identify Oholah as Samaria (the Northern Kingdom) very clearly because they were wiped out by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. There's no ambiguity here to someone who's living in near proximity to the historical events of Samaria, of the Northern Kingdom.

25:00 The next section is Ezekiel 23:11-21. Now the focus changes to Oholibah and her whoredom.

¹¹“Her sister Oholibah saw this, and she became more corrupt than her sister in her lust and in her whoring, which was worse than that of her sister.

In other words, Jerusalem (the place of the Davidic dynasty, the place where the temple was, the place where “my tent was in her”—that’s how Yahweh was thinking of Jerusalem, his holy sanctuary, his tented holy place, the Holy of Holies)... Jerusalem was worse than Samaria, worse than the apostate North that had defected from the united monarchy after Solomon’s death. It’s very plain. You can villainize the North all you want, but Jerusalem’s a lot worse.

¹²She lusted after the Assyrians, governors and commanders, warriors clothed in full armor, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men. ¹³And I saw that she was defiled; they both took the same way.

In other words, both the sisters went down the same path. Now there's an allusion here of the Southern Kingdom sort of courting, or to use Ezekiel's language, "whoring themselves out" to the Assyrians. So when did Judah/Jerusalem do this? It's probably a reference to the incident where Ahaz, king of Judah and Jerusalem, solicited help from the Assyrians during the Syro-Ephraimite War. You can get the reference for that in 2 Kings 16:8. That incident is part of the Isaiah 7 passage. Everybody knows Isaiah 7:14 that says "behold the *almah* (virgin) will conceive and bear a son," and so on and so forth. The whole setting for that is this incident where Judah is in trouble because the king of Syria and Damascus and Ephraim (these two places) are looking like they're going to gang up on Judah. Ahaz, the king in Jerusalem, is worried. He needs help, so he goes out and contacts the Assyrians. This is Isaiah 7:7-9. And this is condemned by Isaiah the prophet, and that's when you get the whole setting about "ask the Lord for a sign that he'll protect you." And Ahaz says, "Ah, I'm too embarrassed. I'm not going to..." (this feigned humility). And then God, through Isaiah, gets mad and says, "Good. The Lord himself will give you a sign then: Behold, a virgin will conceive..." So this is the whole context for it. Apparently, this is the reference that again, they're going out and (if you're sticking with the woman/wife metaphor here) she abandons her husband and goes and (to quote Ezekiel):

... lusted after the Assyrians, governors and commanders, warriors clothed in full armor, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men.

She abandons the one that's supposed to be her protector and then goes off in this other direction. So the metaphor is pretty consistent. Verse 14:

¹⁴But she carried her whoring further. She saw men portrayed on the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed in vermilion,¹⁵ wearing belts on their waists, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them having the appearance of officers, a likeness of Babylonians whose native land was Chaldea.

This is similar, again, to something in Ezekiel 16 that we tracked on when we did that chapter. In Ezekiel 16:17 we had a reference to the "images." These images that Oholibah lusted after were exclusively male forms. Again, that's an item of interest... kind of obvious because of what's going to follow. There's sculpture on the walls. This idea of being portrayed in vermilion probably refers to them being outlined in red, just to make them more prominent artistically. They have male attire, belts, flowing turbans, military officers, what not. Pardon the pun, but just fleshing out the picture of who she was attracted to, to extend the metaphor. Verse 16:

¹⁶When she saw them, she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. ¹⁷And the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love,

So now we're transitioning from the Assyrians to the Babylonians here, which brings us into Ezekiel's day.

...and they defiled her with their whoring lust. And after she was defiled by them, she turned from them in disgust.¹⁸ When she carried on her whoring so openly and flaunted her nakedness, I turned in disgust from her, as I had turned in disgust from her sister.

30:00

So basically, Jerusalem does this and then sort of doesn't get out of the arrangement or the encounter what she wanted, and then we have this adversarial relationship between her and these Babylonians going on. Again, that's a picture of what's going on in Jerusalem. They had tried to "kiss up" to Nebuchadnezzar. Remember Hezekiah actually brought the Babylonians into Jerusalem and showed them all the storehouses and the treasuries and all this kind of stuff. If you remember the story of Hezekiah's life, it's even back then that this was beginning—trying to create a friendly but apostate relationship with Babylon. That goes on for a while, but then it turns against Jerusalem and Jerusalem realizes that. They try to get out from under Nebuchadnezzar. Again, we have two waves of captivities. Nebuchadnezzar set up certain relationships politically to govern the place, but then in Ezekiel's day (which is where we're heading to), Zedekiah winds up rebelling (we talked about that in the last episode last week). Nebuchadnezzar is going to have to show up himself and destroy everything. So this is a metaphorical reference to these events, what's going on here. Of course, God looks at the whole situation and just turns away in disgust, like he did from the Northern Kingdom. He's not going to save them. In fact, he's going to use them (like we talked about last week) as instruments of punishment. We're going to get a little flavor of that again, too. In verse 19, we read:

¹⁹Yet she increased her whoring, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the whore in the land of Egypt ²⁰and lusted after her lovers there, whose members were like those of donkeys, and whose issue was like that of horses.²¹ Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians handled your bosom and pressed your young breasts."

This is very sexual. We had this imagery before in chapter 16, comparing the phalluses of the Egyptians to those of donkeys and their ejaculation like horses. Again, just over-the-top kind of language that we saw in chapter 16, and here it is again. It's trying to make the point that she was this insatiable whore, but it all goes wrong and God is just disgusted with the whole thing. Block, I think, has some interesting things to say at this point, both in this section and a few things that will follow. He has here:

The increasing detail of vv. 14–18 may reflect a concern with more recent history (than Babylon). Are we to see here an allusion to Josiah's ill-fated encounter with

Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo in 609 (2 K. 23:29–30)? [MH: This is where Josiah died.] The lack of information on the motive for and nature of that meeting has led some to surmise the Judean king had aligned himself with the Babylonians, who were rapidly replacing the Assyrians as the dominant power in the ancient Near East. . . . Oholibah (Jerusalem) longed for the sexual arousal she had experienced when the Egyptians had fondled her nipples and caressed her breasts. The coarse speech represents an intentional rhetorical strategy, designed not only to shock the audience but also to reflect Yahweh's disgust with Oholibah's behavior.

Again, it's a reference to the idea that "You were involved with the Egyptians way back, or maybe even more recently. You were involved with the Assyrians all the way back to Ahaz. You dabbled with Egypt again, here with Josiah in 609 B.C. Then it was the Babylonians more recently." Basically, she's whoring herself to whoever she can. Politically, this is what Jerusalem does in the history of Israel in the Old Testament. Instead of doing what the prophets wanted the people and the leadership of Judah to do—to trust God for their military deliverance, to avoid the worship of other gods—they violate the relationship with Yahweh in both respects, and this is how it comes out in this metaphor. Again, they're whoring themselves out to whoever matters at the time, wherever she thinks she can get the most "satisfaction" or benefit from the arrangement. This is what Jerusalem's doing. In verse 22 through about verse 35, we read about what's going to happen to Jerusalem. Of course, we've had a lot of this talk through the whole book of Ezekiel, and it's never good and can be quite violent. In this case, we're going to get some allusions to some things that are going to... If you were an Israelite—either someone who's captive in Babylon already and you had maybe friends and family back in Jerusalem, or if word of this ever went back to Jerusalem (probably not, it's probably the immediate audience here that's going to hear this and just freak out)—but what Ezekiel is going to say next is just going to frighten everybody and try to transmit how bad it's going to be for the people back in Jerusalem. So verse 22:

35:00

²² Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I will stir up against you your lovers from whom you turned in disgust, and I will bring them against you from every side: ²³ the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them, desirable young men, governors and commanders all of them, officers and men of renown, all of them riding on horses.

Of these three names (Pekod, Shoa, and Koa), Taylor notes: uncertainty, with Puqûdu, Sutû and Qutû, Aramaean tribes to the east of the river Tigris which are known from a number of Assyrian and Babylonian inscriptions. All these peoples, together with *all the Assyrians with them* (though many would regard these words as a later insertion), are to be the instruments of God's punishment upon Jerusalem.

So these three terms refer to Aramean tribes that are basically going to join in the fun of destroying Jerusalem. Now Block, I think has an even more interesting point here that I'll paraphrase. He points out that these names are used and vocalized in Hebrew as they are in the Hebrew text to create what he calls a "sinister word play." So these terms, "Pekod, Shoa, and Koa," if you just translated those in Hebrew, it would be "punishment, war-cry, and shriek." So Ezekiel actually uses the names of these Aramean tribes and changes the vocalization a little bit to convey the message that this is what it's going to be like: you're going to be punished, you're going to hear war cries, and you're just going to scream your heads off because it's just going to be that bad. But it actually gets a lot worse in what he begins to describe here. Verse 24:

²⁴ And they shall come against you from the north with chariots and wagons and a host of peoples. They shall set themselves against you on every side with buckler, shield, and helmet; and I will commit the judgment to them, and they shall judge you according to their judgments. ²⁵ And I will direct my jealousy against you, that they may deal with you in fury. [MH: now catch this list!] They shall cut off your nose and your ears, and your survivors shall fall by the sword. They shall seize your sons and your daughters, and your survivors shall be devoured by fire. ²⁶ They shall also strip you of your clothes and take away your beautiful jewels. ²⁷ Thus I will put an end to your lewdness and your whoring begun in the land of Egypt, so that you shall not lift up your eyes to them or remember Egypt anymore.

Basically, I'm going to take the beautiful prostitute and make her ugly. You have a series of atrocities here, and these are actually known explicitly from Assyrian texts. The Assyrians are only part of this mix. You've got the Babylonians, you've got these Aramean tribes... But this is the way that the Assyrians, especially, were known to treat the peoples they had conquered: mutilating a person's face, killing people with the sword, taking the children captive, burning everything, naked exposure of the people, all this stuff. It's designed to say, "I'm going to make the whore ugly so that no one will want her anymore." In a footnote on this passage, Block says this in his commentary:

According to the Middle Assyrian Laws A:15, if a husband catches his wife having sex with another man he has three options: (1) put her to death and kill the lover; (2) pardon his wife and allow the lover to go free; (3) cut off his wife's nose and make the man a eunuch (*ANET*, p. 181) [MH: cut off you-know-what]. The purpose of the mutilation is to make her the object of abhorrence (and of course punish the man).

Nobody's going to want her anymore, and of course we'll make sure the man can't do this anymore. Even more than that, there's another section where Block

gets into the Assyrian stuff. I want to quote you something he quotes from a book by A.K. Grayson, who was an Assyriologist, called *The Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*. These are published in a series of records of the Ancient Near East. I can't remember which king it was, but here's what one of the Assyrian kings says upon conquering a couple of locations. This is actually from Assyrian records:

I felled with the sword 800 of their combat troops, I burnt 3,000 captives from them. I did not leave one of them alive as a hostage. I captured alive Hulaya their city ruler. I made a pile of their corpses. I burnt their adolescent boys (and) girls. I flayed Hulaya their city ruler (and) draped his skin over the wall of the city I razed, destroyed, (and) burnt the city.... Moving on from the city Kinabu I approached the city Tela. The city was well fortified.... I felled 3,000 of their fighting men with the sword. I carried off prisoners, possessions, oxen (and) cattle from them. I burnt many captives from them. I captured many troops alive: I cut off of some their arms (and) hands; I cut off of others their noses, ears (and) extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living (and) one of heads. I hung their heads on trees around the city. I burnt their adolescent boys (and) girls. I razed, destroyed, burnt (and) consumed the city.

When I used to teach Old Testament Survey (and I know I've done it in other contexts), I would refer to the Assyrians as the "Klingons of the Old Testament." It's this kind of stuff that they were known for. This is why when God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh, Jonah wants nothing to do with it. His reason isn't that he's afraid. If you go to Jonah chapter 4, Jonah tells you why he didn't want to go. He believed that if he preached to Nineveh and the Ninevites repented, God would spare them. Jonah *hates* them. He hates the Assyrians. *Everybody* hates the Assyrians. They are the most despicable, cruel, just unthinkably godless (at least in terms of what they do to people)... They're ISIS. They are the ISIS of their day. And Jonah's like, "I don't want to go there because I know that you'll forgive them if they repent. I want them to burn in hell." That's the message: "I want them to suffer because of what they've done to so many people." And this just gives you a glimpse of it. And Ezekiel knows that the people know this stuff, so when he mentions this whole thing about "they're going to go in there and cut the noses off and do this and that..." Ezekiel knows what images are going to be conjured up in the minds of the people who are hearing him. "I've got friends, I've got family, I've got acquaintances... and even beyond that, they're just my people and *this* is what they're looking at. This is what's going to happen to them because of their apostasy."

The whole point when Ezekiel brings this up is just that they are to prepare for the worst. Prepare to hear the worst, because the worst is what's coming their way. It just doesn't get any worse than what the Assyrians are used to doing to people, and they're going to be part of this mix. Again, the Klingons of the Old Testament. This is why Jonah said, "I just want them to burn in hell. I don't want

them forgiven. Period. That's why I didn't go." At the end, if you remember Jonah... When the city of Nineveh does repent and is spared, Jonah is pouting. He doesn't like it. It stinks! For this very reason.

It's easy to look at Jonah and say he's an uncompassionate moron, but look at what he's considering. Let's just allow him to be human. Again, the best parallel we can think of in our day is ISIS. This is the box that you put this kind of thing in. If we think ISIS is bad, they don't have anything on the Assyrians. God forbid that they do what they do, but as awful as that is, the Assyrians would do this on a ridiculous scale. Even if a city surrendered they would do stuff like this. The Assyrian annals and other sources are just filled with this kind of description. You didn't want the Assyrians to be coming your way, let's just put it that way. Verse 28:

45:00

²⁸“For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will deliver you into the hands of those whom you hate, into the hands of those from whom you turned in disgust, ²⁹and they shall deal with you in hatred and take away all the fruit of your labor and leave you naked and bare, and the nakedness of your whoring shall be uncovered. Your lewdness and your whoring ³⁰have brought this upon you, because you played the whore with the nations and defiled yourself with their idols. ³¹You have gone the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand. ³²Thus says the Lord God:

**“You shall drink your sister's cup
that is deep and large;
you shall be laughed at and held in derision,
for it contains much;
³³you will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow.**

**A cup of horror and desolation,
the cup of your sister Samaria;
³⁴you shall drink it and drain it out,
and gnaw its shards,
and tear your breasts;
for I have spoken, declares the Lord God. ³⁵Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have forgotten me and cast me behind your back, you yourself must bear the consequences of your lewdness and whoring.”**

The rest of the chapter, then, is a summary of the judgment on the two sisters. We'll just read it, beginning in verse 36:

³⁶The LORD said to me: "Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Declare to them their abominations. ³⁷For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. With their idols they have committed adultery [MH: getting to the heart of the matter now], and they have even offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me.³⁸Moreover, this they have done to me: they have defiled my sanctuary on the same day and profaned my Sabbaths. ³⁹For when they had slaughtered their children in sacrifice to their idols, on the same day they came into my sanctuary to profane it. And behold, this is what they did in my house. ⁴⁰They even sent for men to come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and behold, they came. [MH: Jerusalem is soliciting all this! This is what they're doing "in my tent"] For them you bathed yourself, painted your eyes, and adorned yourself with ornaments.⁴¹You sat on a stately couch, with a table spread before it on which you had placed my incense and my oil.

Just to be blunt, this is how you made yourself smell good. You get perfumes, oils, incense... We don't have modern bathing back then like we have now. What this is a reference to is getting yourself all dolled up, playing the prostitute, playing the whore, and making yourself look good and smell good. And to make yourself smell good, you're using the incense and my oil. This was reserved for the Holy Place, the tabernacle Presence. Mixing the metaphors of the prostitution and the religious apostasy in these verses, Ezekiel is saying "This is what you did. This is how you acted." Verse 42:

⁴²The sound of a carefree multitude was with her; and with men of the common sort, drunkards were brought from the wilderness; and they put bracelets on the hands of the women, and beautiful crowns on their heads.

So we have a nice picture of the whore reclining on the couch all dressed up, smelling nice and entertaining her clients. This is the picture of Jerusalem. Verse 43:

⁴³"Then I said of her who was worn out by adultery [MH: a little sarcasm there], 'Now they will continue to use her for a whore, even her!' [MH: even though

she's had enough... "no you haven't had enough"] ⁴⁴ **For they have gone in to her, as men go in to a prostitute. Thus they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah, lewd women!** ⁴⁵ **But righteous men shall pass judgment on them with the sentence of adulteresses, and with the sentence of women who shed blood, because they are adulteresses, and blood is on their hands."**

So here's the question... This language is drawn from Leviticus 20:10 and also Deuteronomy 21:21. Here's the question: How do whores and adulteresses get punished in ancient Israel? Stoning! Remember in Old Testament law, the ones who were stoning the guilty were supposed to be the innocent—the more righteous. So look at the image! God is calling the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and these Aramean tribes... "They're the righteous ones in my eyes. I'm using them to get rid of you. There's blood on your hands!" Again, there's reference to child sacrifice occurring in the Most Holy Place. It's as bad as bad can be, so this is table-turning. Taylor writes here:

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The similarity of this penalty [MH: the allusion to stoning for the adulteress, and also those guilty of intentional murder, going back to the offering up of the children] with the state of siege of a city bombarded with sling-stones and incendiary missiles [catapults] can scarcely have been coincidence. The shame of the guilty person's end under Mosaic law will be exactly matched by the fate of Samaria and Jerusalem.

So he uses the Old Testament reference to stoning and those who deserve to be stoned with siege warfare. Again, "this is what's going to happen to you." Verse 46:

⁴⁶ **For thus says the Lord God: "Bring up a vast host against them, and make them an object of terror and a plunder. ⁴⁷ And the host shall stone them and cut them down with their swords. They shall kill their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses. ⁴⁸ Thus will I put an end to lewdness in the land, that all women may take warning and not commit lewdness as you have done. [MH: a reference to the remnant of the people and how this is what they don't want to do because this is what will happen] ⁴⁹ And they shall return your lewdness upon you, and you shall bear the penalty for your sinful idolatry, and you shall know that I am the Lord God."**

And that's where the chapter ends. And the very next chapter, which we'll hit next time (Ezekiel 24) is the siege of Jerusalem. So all of this collectively (not just this

chapter, but a number of preceding chapters) have been leading up to... Of the 23 chapters, most of them have been stuff like this. Chapter 16 and this one, again, use the metaphor of spiritual prostitution. Again, this is why James (we've mentioned this with chapter 16) and other places in the New Testament allude to or actually use this kind of imagery. To be disloyal to Christ is spiritual adultery. If you use that reference in James' writing to Jews in the Diaspora, they're going to know where this imagery comes from. They're going to know that they're being painted with the same brush as the people of God were way back in Israel's history. The adultery metaphor is a common one and a big deal—and frankly, a pretty effective one. For those of us who are married, anyway, we can all relate to this. But, of course, this kind of description with its repetition and its frequency and its wantonness and the insatiable character of it is just way over the top, but it is something that a lot of people can identify with—either, unfortunately, in reality, or at least conceptual. So this is what we've got. This is what we've been leading to.

Next episode we're going to get into Ezekiel's sort of narrative of the siege and the fall of Jerusalem. But this is where everything has been going, and it answers the question of *why*. Why is this happening? Ezekiel has sort of beat the audience over the head with it: "Because you're apostates. You've been disloyal in every way, and in the worst kinds of ways. You've been disloyal to me, so you're going to suffer the consequences. There's no way around it. This is where we're at, and this is what's going to happen."

TS: All right, Mike. Well, that sounds good. Actually next week and the next episode, we're going to get into our special Christmas episode. Would you like to share what we'll be talking about?

MH: Yep. I forgot we were going to do that (laughs). I think people will be thankful to take a break from all this bad stuff! Next time we're going to devote an episode to the birth of the Messiah. I have some stuff out on YouTube about this. What was the actual date of the birth of the Messiah? So we're going to talk about that, and we'll get into some of the content—why that view is either neglected or criticized and how to answer some of those things. So that's what it's going to be. We're going to try to devote an episode to that just in time for Christmas, even though I don't think Jesus was born on December 25th (and frankly, nobody does). But it's a good time to get into whether we can actually know, and if we interpret certain passages a certain way, we can know. What does the date mean? What results from that? What would it have telegraphed to the people of the day about the Messiah?

55:00 **TS:** I'm really looking forward to that one. You also have a blog post about it, so if you want to go on drms.com and read about it, that would probably be good, too.

MH: It's good prep, yeah.

TS: In the spirit of growing this podcast ministry, I just want to remind everybody that we're going to do a little contest. We need Nekked Nation (our listeners out there) to rise up and show social media what serious Bible study looks like (or sounds like, in this case).

MH: It's really awkward after this episode [to call it that]! (laughter)

TS: Let's *expose* the people on FB, Twitter, Instagram, or any other blog or place on the internet where people congregate. I'll reach out to you once I've chosen those winners. But over the next six weeks... contest ends January 31st. Starts now, December 16, 2016. Mike, I think it would be fun to have some funny posts, or... I don't know if you listen to the podcasts in the weird location... If you get a lot of people talking about it or retweeting it. Anything! I'm looking for anything!

MH: I'd like to hear some of that. People have shared some things in email about some of the funny circumstances of listening to this or that episode, so yeah—that would be fun. We'll just leave it open. Whatever people want to put out on social media, have at it.

TS: Do a hashtag: #nakedbiblepodcast, maybe? I'm going to find you one way or another, but if you want to give me a heads-up and send me a link, whatever. If you have a blog post or whatever: treystricklin@gmail.com. We'll get you a signed copy of Mike's new book to be released in the February/March timeframe—spring 2017. Is that right, Mike?

MH: That's what they're telling me.

TS: And briefly, what's that book about again?

MH: The working title is *Reversing Hermon*. For readers of *Unseen Realm*, they're going to know what Hermon is and what that means. The working subtitle is "The Importance of Enoch's Story of the Watchers' Transgression for New Testament Theology." So basically, how that story in Enoch (his version of the whole "sons of God/Genesis 6" thing)... how Enoch's retelling of that story bleeds into the New Testament in a variety of ways. It's going to be a book like *Unseen Realm*. It's an academic book. I could have submitted this book to an evangelical academic publisher, but I wanted to have it be more broad in terms of appeal and access to people, so we didn't go that route. But every chapter is based upon peer-reviewed scholarship. I'm not making anything up. I'm drawing on people's dissertations and journal articles—the same deal. This is what I do. We're not speculating and calling it "teaching" or "theology." This is good scholarship on Enoch and its importance for the New Testament. There's nothing else like it. Even though all this exists in the academic world, *nobody* has taken all that, collected it, and put it between two covers in a single book. I think it's going to be an important book and one that a lot of people will enjoy and get a lot out of.

TS: Watchers—one of my favorite subjects! All right, Mike. We appreciate that and look forward to everybody's posts, blogs, pictures—you name it—on social media about the podcast. We appreciate your support and listening and everything you all do to help share and grow this ministry.

MH: Absolutely.

TS: We just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.