

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 141

Ezekiel 25

January 14, 2017

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Episode Summary

Following the prophecy of Jerusalem's fall (Ezek 24), the next major section in the book of Ezekiel is a series of oracles against the foreign, enemy nations that celebrated the city's demise. Seven nations are denounced by the prophet as under Yahweh's judgment. Nearly every book classified among the major and minor prophets contains a collection of such oracles (e.g., Isaiah 13–23; Jeremiah 46–51). This episode discusses the nature of these oracles and discusses how the oracles of Chapter 25 can be read in the context of the Deuteronomy 32 cosmic-geographical worldview of Israel.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 141: Ezekiel chapter 25. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing this week?

MH: Pretty good, pretty good. Football season is still going, so we're limping through the winter here.

TS: Yeah, we have your Packers versus my Cowboys this weekend, so that'll be fun.

MH: My condolences.

TS: To you and yours, yes. If it's a repeat of two or three years ago (whenever that Dez Bryant call was), then I'm not going to be happy.

MH: Yeah, it was a bad call. It's a dumb rule. The rule being what it is, it was the right call, but it's just a dumb rule.

TS: We'll save our listeners. We already had about a 30-minute conversation about it. We don't have to repeat that. They're not interested in football. They came here for Ezekiel, I'll bet.

MH: (laughing) So you're not going to use that like to talk about Ezekiel Elliot or...

TS: That was my segue, Ezekiel Elliot... yep! You got me! Just can't escape the Cowboys everywhere you go. America's team.

MH: End of that. (laughter) 'Merica? Is that a new c'untry?

TS: 'Merican Cowboys.

MH: Well, let's jump in here. This is going to be chapter 25, but before we hit 25, I'm also going to use this episode as sort of an introduction to what this section is. Scholars typically refer to this as "the oracles against the nations." This is something that the prophetic books do. With most of the prophetic books in the Hebrew Bible, there's a section in the book somewhere where we have what are essentially prophecies or prophetic utterances—diatribes—against the nations. A lot of prophetic content is, of course, directed against Israel (God's own people). Just like Ezekiel has been saying, "You've been bad—all this stuff that you're doing—and this is why you're under judgment," and so on and so forth. But then there's always this section devoted to, "Oh, well, we're not forgetting about our enemies. Even though God's using your enemies against you to judge you, God's going to get them, too." These sections in the prophetic books are called "oracles against the nations."

I think the first thing we need to say beyond that brief sort of sentence introduction, is when I use the word "prophecy" here, we're not really talking about predictive prophecy. There will be some elements of what we'll go through in these oracles... These really cover Ezekiel 25-32 (that section of the book), and there are going to be some things in there that are predictive of the future and maybe even some that would trickle out into the distant future—what we would think of as end-times. But a prophecy is just a prophetic utterance. It's something a prophet says. I don't want people to be misled and think we're doing eschatology here. We're not, even if there might be something somewhere in these chapters that could point that way. But that's really not typically what we're doing here. Some pronouncement of judgment is the way to think about it. A lot of times in the prophetic books, these are grouped as collections. For example Isaiah 13-23 and Jeremiah 46-51 (unless you're in the Septuagint, which moves them to a totally different section—and there are possible reasons for that which we're not going to worry about), Ezekiel 25-32, the first chapter and on into the second of Amos. Even in the little Minor Prophets, you're going to have sections of those that are going to do this kind of thing. Basically, that's what an oracle against the nation is: some prophetic utterance of judgment against a particular nation.

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There are Ancient Near Eastern parallels to this kind of thing. We'll sort of get into what happens in these oracles, but I'll give you two examples. In Egyptian literature, there's something called the Execration Texts. (That's a term that scholars have given to these things.) Basically, in certain eras of Egyptian history, we know archaeologically from that field work that something called an Execration Text must have been fairly common. This was not a document that pronounces curses against the enemy. Instead, you'll have the names of countries or the names of people or the names of kings written on objects like a piece of pottery, a pot, a jar, a figurine or something like that, and then that object will be smashed to bits. The idea is sort of like sympathetic magic. Think of a voodoo doll; that's probably the best illustration that we have. So you do something to this object. The object is somehow associated with a person, place, country, whatever. By virtue of the things that you do to the object, that's what you're hoping (when you use this in a ritual context) that the gods will do that entity that's named on your behalf, or as a result of this thing you're doing to the object. So archaeologists have uncovered a lot of these smashed items that when they're put back together have names on them—names of people, places, cities, that sort of thing. So that's a parallel to what we're going to see here. In a sense, an oracle against the nations is some sort of divine utterance wishing or promising the demise of whatever entity is named.

The Mari Texts would be the second example—a text from a place called Mari. These texts are actually known for Ancient Near Eastern prophecy. Ancient Israel was not the only place where you had prophetic activity in terms of a professional guild of people that would go around preaching or go around doing what prophets did—either encouraging a group of people or pronouncing judgment on them or saying "I have a message from God [or in this case 'the gods'] to the king and this is what God says" (this or that god). That kind of activity and language shows up in Ancient Near Eastern texts very noticeably—a preponderance of that material from this place called Mari. If this were a class on ancient prophecy, we could get into that. Some of the terminology used in the Hebrew Bible overlaps with terminology from Mari and so on and so forth. So Mari has been studied by biblical scholars to sort of try to understand what prophets are doing or what they did, how they functioned as a group (especially like the school of the prophets), and certain things they did like sign acts like Ezekiel is doing in this book. Some of that has some parallel to what goes on at Mari, at least in terms of the idea anyway. You do something and you mime something that's going to happen, and that sort of thing. So there are examples in the Mari Texts where you get utterances—prophecies given to the king that condemn some foreign entity, some foreign king or some foreign city. Again, there's sort of a loose parallel there.

By oracle, we should say something about that. So we're talking about prophetic utterances. A lot of commentaries will use the term "oracle" or "oracle against the nations." I did it to introduce the subject today. You should know, though, that this language comes from a specific Hebrew term *maśśā'*, for which "an oracle" is the

best translation. That language is used in the prophets a lot, especially Isaiah. It's really not used in Ezekiel—only in Ezekiel 12:10. So it's not even in this "oracles against the nations" section. So why do we call these chapters oracles against the nations if the term *maśśā'* doesn't show up in them? It's because thematically what goes on in this section is the same as the other stuff in other prophetic books that does use the term. That's just what scholars do. I'll just read you a little statement here from Anchor Bible Dictionary about this.

A *maśśā'* is based on a particular revelation (given to the prophet) of the divine intention or of a forthcoming divine action. A speech or text belonging to this genre was composed by the prophet in order to expound the way in which the revealed divine action or intention would actually express itself in human affairs. Thus, regardless of the overall formal structure they exhibit, all texts belonging to the genre *maśśā'* link descriptions of God's acts or intentions with descriptions of human acts and events in order to present events taking place in the human realm as the manifestation or result of divine initiation.

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If we were doing a word study on *maśśā'*, that would be a useful paragraph to tell you what that term means, but even though the term itself isn't used in Ezekiel 25-32, what I just read there (that whole idea) is very present in Ezekiel 25-32, and that's why scholars use the same language of this particular section in Ezekiel.

As far as the order of chapters 25-32... Our last episode was about the fall of Jerusalem in chapter 24, and if you remember that episode, the news of the invasion and then, of course, the ultimate outcome of the invasion (which was the destruction of the city)... The news of that only reaches Ezekiel and his fellow captives in chapter 33. So between the conversation or sermon in chapter 24 (which you remember from the last episode is when Ezekiel tells the captives that are with him, "God said, 'Mark down this very day that Nebuchadnezzar is invading'" and Ezekiel describes it in more detail)... Between that and chapter 33, they don't know what the outcome has been. They're assuming that what Ezekiel said has actually come to pass. Of course, he's God's prophet. They probably don't want to believe it, but there you go. There's a certain amount of waiting. We talked about that last week in relationship to the chronology that's given at the beginning of the chapter, but you have this waiting period. For the *reader* of Ezekiel between chapter 24 and chapter 33, you've got space. You've got other stuff going on, and what falls into that section (chapters 25-32) are the oracles against the nations. There is some logic to why these things are stuck here. Taylor has a few thoughts about this and then I'll just throw in a few things of my own. Taylor opines (and he's not the only one) that the reason why you have this interval is to sort of heighten the tension for the reader... that the reader has read chapter 24 and is wondering if it happened, that sort of thing. And then you get essentially this delay. In 25-32 or 33, you finally find out, because then the fugitive runs up to Ezekiel and says, "Hey, Jerusalem has fallen." So they

think it's a literary thing to heighten the tension of the reader. That makes good sense. It's a guess, but it's reasonable to argue that (at least literarily).

I think it's more interesting (and frankly, most everybody else thinks it's more interesting) instead of guessing at why they're here is to actually look at them and the order of the nations. They're not strictly chronological. In other words, as you go through chapters 25-32 and you hit all these nations that the prophet is now preaching against, we can't assume that they're presented in the order that they fell. All of these countries that are mentioned here are going to be attacked also by Nebuchadnezzar (by the Babylonians who have come back to destroy Jerusalem). But there are more things happening when Nebuchadnezzar makes this trip to take care of Jerusalem once and for all in his mind. There are other entities—other countries—that he has to deal with. We know this from external history. Egypt is a big one, so Egypt is going to be part of the oracles against the nations. Well, you can't just read the section and say, "Oh, this is the way they were taken, and we're just following Nebuchadnezzar's itinerary here." That really isn't the case. They're not strictly chronological. Some of it is, but other parts are not. You have, for instance, the oracles against Tyre (chapters 26-28) that occur before Egypt, and then the Egyptian oracles are chapters 29-32. But then part of chapter 29 presupposes Nebuchadnezzar defeated Tyre before he defeated Egypt, so there's a chronological indication, but that sort of thing doesn't really fit the other ones so that can't really be it. If you look at the list, what it starts with in chapter 25 does sort of move clockwise through the nations surrounding Judah and then, of course, ending with Egypt, which would have been south of where Judah is. So it seems to be kind of a clockwise geographical kind of listing.

Now, in the list there are seven nations. Babylon is missing. In other words, there's no oracle against Babylon. Why? A lot of scholars have wondered. They're the big bad guy here, so why are they missing? There are several possible reasons. Taylor writes:

15:00 Cooke [another commentator] sees Babylon as standing apart from the other nations, inasmuch as it was the instrument of God's punishment upon Israel.

So that's why it's not mentioned. They're the ones getting used to punish Israel. Continuing:

Skinner goes further and regards the Babylonian invaders as being the instruments of judgment upon all the nations mentioned here, as well as on Israel.

That's possible. Again, we don't have that same kind of language like, "O Edom, king Nebuchadnezzar is going to come get you. He's my instrument against you." You don't have the explicit sort of description with that, but since historically it's

the same person and same invading army, you could make that argument. Some scholars do.

To summarize all that (as far as what they're doing here), all of the reasons are probably literary as far as the placement and the order that they're presented is probably geographical, that sort of thing. The oracles are there theologically, though, to present two ideas. I kind of like the way Taylor summarizes the two facets that way. First, if Yahweh is the God of the whole earth, then he clearly has something to say about the history and destiny of nations other than Israel. The second theological point would be the future prospects of Israel. Whether they are thought of in terms of the Day of Judgment or Davidic messianism (the messiahship of the line of David) or a New Covenant, it must be matched by judgment on peoples who have often flagrantly disregarded the laws by which all mankind are to be judged. So Israel is going to have a future, and part of that future is going to be bringing everything into line underneath a Davidic ruler. So that's the theological point of the judgment here.

So really, two theological ideas are transmitted—frankly, in any list of oracles against the nations. That is that Yahweh is the God of all the earth. He is the one in whose hand is the destiny of any given nation. That's the first theological point. Then secondly, ultimately all these nations are going to be brought back into the fold, brought under the rulership of the line of David. To do that, they need to be judged. It's not just going to happen by itself. This goes sort of hand-in-glove with this portrait of messiah as the son of David; this is what you'd expect. But the messiah is a kingly ruler and, of course, a king is going to have an army, there's going to be conflict, there's going to be fighting, this is part of what a king does—this concept of military dominion associated with the messianic ruler of David. We've talked about this before in other episodes when we did get into eschatology and how the Jews expected that this was what the messiah was supposed to look like, what he was supposed to do. And we can read that in the New Testament, that they had very militaristic expectations. This is part of the reason why. So the oracles are part of that bigger theology of not just the divine warrior (Yahweh abstractly up in heaven exercising judgment on the nations), but more concretely, God doing that through the Davidic ruler, who is his "son" even in the Old Testament. All those things sort of work together to build out the messianic profile. So the oracles of the nations, if you look at it that way, they build off of the messianic expectation—the messianic mosaic. This is what the messiah is supposed to do: he's going to be a military leader and these are the guys that are going to be in trouble, these nations.

I have to mention along with that (and I hope that some of these thoughts have popped into your head because of the way we talk about the nations here and the nations being reclaimed, and also things that I've written in *Unseen Realm* and in other places)... It might occur to you to ask, "Is there some sort of Divine Council Worldview stuff going on here with the oracles of the nations?" The short answer is that I think yes. It's really unavoidable in one sense because we're

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talking about bringing the nations back into the fold, but there are some curiosities. We'll hit a couple of them as we proceed through the oracles (even today and the next episode, and especially when we get to 28 and a few of the other chapters where we're going to hit some of these things)... but just generally when you're talking about the judgment of the nations—Yahweh judging the nations and punishing them for their evil. The prophets often talk about how the act of their judgment will be one side of a coin, the other side of which is that those nations are brought into submission to the line of David. When you're talking about bringing the nations back into the family of God as the people of God, that's Divine Council Worldview stuff. That's Deuteronomy 32 sort of stuff—the nations are under other gods, those gods are hostile to Yahweh, that situation needs to be dealt with, Psalm 82 (the gods are going to die like men and at the end of the Psalm, “rise up O Lord and take back the nations”)... all this kind of talk that we've spent a lot of time either in previous book studies or previous episodes like the "Death of the gods" episodes (we've done a couple of those) and some of this Day of the Lord stuff. This should all be very familiar if you've tracked with the podcast for any amount of time or if you've read *Unseen Realm*.

To that end, if you're a newsletter subscriber, I'm going to put two articles into the folder. You'll have the link to the folder in the next issue of the newsletter. There's a folder that lives online that, if you're a newsletter subscriber, you get the address to. It has articles, book chapters, what-not... things that we talk about here on the podcast that are somehow pertinent to an episode. I'm going to put two more in there. The two articles that I'm talking about are by John Geyer. These are journal articles that are not freely accessible so I can't just post them, but I can put them behind a protected folder and you'll get that if you subscribe to the newsletter. So if you don't subscribe, please subscribe to the newsletter and then you'll get these. The first one is called "Mythology and Culture in the Oracles Against the Nations." The journal is *Vetus Testamentum* and it's from a 1996 issue. I'll just read one of the excerpts—just a little paragraph excerpt. This is a technical article. You may or may not get something out of it. But here you go, from page 141. This is about three quarters of the way through the article. He writes:

The analysis of the oracles against the nations in Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel shows the existence of two different forms [MH: he's talking about literary forms there], one of which is represented only in Amos i-ii and Ezek. xxv. The form which exists otherwise in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel would seem to be a traditional one through which the prophet expressed his contemporary message. [MH: So a lot of the article is dealing with the literary form of oracles.] These oracles show a significant dependence on mythological themes. They do not contain any indictments referring to specific events. Where any complaint is mentioned it has to do with hubris, with a minor god (represented on earth by

the king) claiming for himself the power and glory that belong to the high god alone.

Now the nearest thing that you probably are familiar with is Ezekiel 28, or maybe Isaiah 14. Look at it. Isaiah 14 is in that section (Isaiah 13-23 is oracles against the nations)—Isaiah 14 the so-called "Lucifer" passage. Ezekiel 28... if you've read *Unseen Realm*, you know you have something bad going on in Eden, the Garden of God and the Mountain of God and all that stuff. So what Geyer is saying here is that in these sections, there just seems to be some tale told that draws on what Geyer calls "mythological themes," and what he means by that is that when scholars talk about myth, they're talking about stuff that gets written about where a divine being is one of the characters, one of the actors, in the story. So Geyer is saying a lot of these sections of oracles go after the nations and they go after the kings of those nations, but they seem to regularly draw upon some story of divine rebellion. If you've read *Unseen Realm*, that should be very familiar language to you. So in Geyer's first article here ("Mythology and Culture in the Oracles Against the Nations"), he tries to draw some of this out. I think he actually does something more interesting in the second article. The second article you'll get in the folder is called "Blood and the Nations in Ritual and Myth." Same journal (*Vetus Testamentum*), it's just this one is 2007 so it's a good number of years removed. I'm going to read you part of this because I think it's really kind of interesting. It's going to sound kind of odd, but just hang with him. I would file this under, "Boy, this is kind of interesting. I need to think about this some more. I'm not sure that what he's saying is on target, but it's really interesting." So that's how I process this article. Here's the abstract. Geyer writes:

25:00

In my book *Mythology and Lament* (2004) I suggested that the oracles about the nations might have had their *Sitz im Leben* [MH: that's German for "life setting"] in the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement (more properly called the Day of Purgation) as this developed into the celebration of the Year of Jubilee. The present paper is an initial exploration of that possibility linking ritual, myth and stories about the elimination of the enemy.

There's his connection point. He's going to continue by using the Ugaritic story of the goddess Anat in a famous scene where she's covered in blood.

Anat's blood bath (KTU I 3 ii) is seen as having the same purpose as Lev. xvi in terms of cleansing the sanctuary through blood rites which, in the case of Anat, means the slaughter of the unspecified foe.

We know from Leviticus 16 that it's not about killing off the foe, but the sins of the nation are put on the goat that lives (the goat for Azazel) and it's sent out into the wilderness because that's where sins belong, and all that stuff. The blood from

the goat this is killed is used to cleanse the sanctuary. It's not applied to people, it's about the sanctuary.

Exod. xvii 8-16 is found to be a narrative that applies the same principles and the same ritual setting to the slaughter of a supposed foe. It is suggested that the oracles about the nations fit into the same mythological/ritual setting.

So what he's arguing here in this article is that there's something about the Day of Atonement and other Ancient Near Eastern material where part of atonement (or purgation) of not just the sanctuary... Think about Leviticus 16, where the sanctuary is purged of impurity (the reset button, liked we talked about in the series on Leviticus). That's true. But it's also to sort of atone (using that "atone" language in the English translation) for the nation. It's a national reset button, and that means that the people are also purified, even though the blood doesn't get applied to them. It's about the sanctuary. Any missed impurity at all is taken care of with this ritual (Yom Kippur/The Day of Atonement and all that stuff). We hit the reset button so that the people can be holy and can approach God, and that any sins that would pollute the land would also be reset/taken care of and the land would be purged from impurity. It's very all-encompassing. You get atonement language applied to the land in other passages (we're not going to go back and rehearse all that we did with Leviticus), but Geyer's point is that this ritual seems to sort of kick off or be central to the sanctification of the people and the land and the sanctuary, and as part of that ritual, an enemy has to be dealt with through a blood ritual—some kind of blood-letting or something like that.

You might say it's kind of hit-or-miss. You can see parallels, but you can see problems. Well, I can, too, but the article is still interesting to me because of what he does in it and then applies to the oracles of the nations... Think of it this way: he's saying, "Look, maybe the oracles of the nations are about the destruction of an enemy, (i.e., whatever nation is in view) so that the land can be God's, the land can be restored, we're not under threat of pollution of the land by the foreigners coming in, and if you eliminate the enemies then everybody who's left are the people of God in the land." And he's connecting this with some sort of blood ritual or sacrifice, something like that. So he's actually asking the question, "Is this the purpose of the oracles against the nations?" Because in Ezekiel, the nation has been dealt with; Jerusalem has been destroyed (that was chapter 24) and the iniquity there is going to be purged out of them and out of the land. They've been driven from the land, but we know they're going to be brought back. There is still going to be a future here for the people of God, but before we get to that, we've got to deal with these nations (with the enemies) so that when everything winds up we've got the nations under dominion and we've got the people of God under dominion. They've been redeemed and brought back. We have the Davidic king ruling in the land over a united people who belong to Yahweh. And so the oracles of the nations become part of this picture.

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Geyer just takes it a step further and wonders if the destruction of the nations (which he knows and he's going to talk about—he's very familiar with the divine council kind of stuff as an Old Testament Semitics guy) has something to do with the demise/destruction of the other gods as well with "taking care of divine rebellion," as well. Is that part of the purpose of the ritual, to not only fix the people and that kind of thing, but also to ritually and (in the case of events on earth) physically destroy the enemies of God? You ritually take care of them and "as in heaven, so on earth," that kind of thing. Is this the whole point (or a major point) of the oracles of the nations?

Again, I look at his articles and find them interesting. I don't know if I buy the whole thesis or not, but there's enough here that I'm letting you look at them if you want to. These are technical articles. This is not light reading, but there's enough there to make you go, "Hmmm... Boy, I don't know. That's just something good to think about... something to chew on a little bit." So I'm going to offer those, but I'm actually going to try to be a little more concrete here when it comes to Deuteronomy 32 stuff and Divine Council Worldview stuff toward the end of this episode. I want to get into chapter 25. We'll skim it real briefly. It's actually pretty self-explanatory when you read through it, but I want to return to this point because I think there is a connection that we can all sort of see a little more clearly than what Geyer is doing, but I want to throw out what Geyer is doing just in case you're interested. You can read the articles and do with them what you will.

So let's jump into 25. Again, in terms of the section (chapters 25-32), we're going to have oracles against seven nations. You're going to get five of them in this one chapter! After this chapter we're going to have chapters 26-28, where it's Tyre and then the rest of it's going to be Egypt. They're going to get a lot of attention, and then we have these five smaller groups here in this chapter. And the five are Ammon, Moab, Seir, Edom, and the Philistines. They're the ones that are targeted specifically in this chapter. I think probably the easiest thing to do is just read through the chapter—maybe not all of it, but we might have time to do all of it. Let's just jump in here. So in the first seven verses, it starts against Ammon.

The word of the LORD came to me: ²“Son of man, set your face toward the Ammonites and prophesy against them. ³Say to the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord God: Thus says the Lord God, Because you said, ‘Aha!’ over my sanctuary when it was profaned [MH: like “yeah—get ‘em!”], and over the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when they went into exile, ⁴therefore behold, I am handing you over to the people of the East for a possession, and they shall set their encampments among you and make their dwellings in your midst. They shall eat your fruit, and they shall

drink your milk. ⁵ I will make Rabbah [a city in Ammon] a pasture for camels and Ammon a fold for flocks. Then you will know that I am the LORD. ⁶ For thus says the Lord God: Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the malice within your soul against the land of Israel, ⁷ therefore, behold, I have stretched out my hand against you, and will hand you over as plunder to the nations. And I will cut you off from the peoples and will make you perish out of the countries; I will destroy you. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

He says to Ammon, "Boy, you had a good time watching Israel get the tar kicked out of them, but the same guys who did that are going to take care of you, too." The Ammonites and the Israelites (if you're familiar with the Old Testament), they're not exactly the best of friends. There's a lot of conflict there. You have references in Judges 10 and 11, 1 Samuel 11, 2 Samuel 10, where Israel is getting into it with the Ammonites. Taylor notes:

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After the fall of Jerusalem, their king Baalis appears to have encouraged Ishmael in the assassination of Gedaliah (Jer. 40:14). Their crime in this oracle was that of gloating at Judah's misfortune (3, 6)... and their punishment would be to be overrun by nomadic desert tribesmen (*men of the east*)...

Tribesmen or, of course, the Babylonians themselves. Commentators go either way there. So just think about this. We're not going to go into every one in specific detail, but their specific crime is (to quote the text) "because you said 'Aha!'" (essentially like, "All right! High five!" or something like that)... because you rejoiced over my sanctuary when it was profaned and over the land when it was made desolate, over the house of Judah when it went into exile. That's the reason this is going to happen to you now. So just tuck that away.

Let's put it this way: it has something to do with a nation who's thrilled to see the presence of Yahweh displaced from Yahweh's inheritance—thrilled to see the people of God (Yahweh's children) driven away from their inheritance. Again, I'm saying it this way deliberately. I want you to be thinking in Deuteronomy 32 Worldview terms, because that's really what this is about. They're being targeted because they hate the Most High and they hate his people, and they and their gods want the people of God destroyed. They want the land abandoned. They want to take it for themselves. Again, you have to be thinking in terms of the cosmic geographical ramifications of this to understand why God is basically making a point to tell the prophet, "Okay, all the stuff I said that was going to happen in Jerusalem has come to past, but we're not done there. I want the nations to know that it doesn't end here. I want them and their gods to know that they have not won. It's still my land, this is still my people. So I have a message for them." And you get these oracles, and it happens somewhere in all the

prophetic books to some degree. If you continue on with the chapter, you get verses 8-11, and now it's Moab and Seir.

⁸“Thus says the Lord God: Because Moab and Seir said, ‘Behold, the house of Judah is like all the other nations,’⁹ therefore I will lay open the flank of Moab from the cities, from its cities on its frontier, the glory of the country, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiriathaim. ¹⁰I will give it along with the Ammonites to the people of the East as a possession...

In other words, Moab and Seir are going to get theirs, but look at the accusation again. Why is God angry? What's the point? What sets this whole thing off? What's their specific crime.

Because Moab and Seir said, ‘Behold, the house of Judah is like all the other nations...’

In other words, they're not ruled by the Most High, or the Most High has abandoned them. The Most High has disinherited *them*, too. For someone like an Israelite who is familiar with the cosmic geographical context for this kind of back and forth—this tit-for-tat—it really helps you to read between the lines here. What's sort of lurking under the surface is this worldview of the nations and their gods. "He disinherited them, too. Yahweh has no people. He's done. They're done. The land is ours; let's take it."

Verses 12-14... Now you get Edom. We've spent a lot of time talking about Edom in our episodes about Obadiah, so I don't want to go back and rehearse all that. If you want more on Edom, go listen to the two episodes on Obadiah. In Ezekiel 25 verse 12:

¹²“Thus says the Lord God: Because Edom acted revengefully against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in taking vengeance on them,¹³ therefore thus says the Lord God, I will stretch out my hand against Edom and cut off from it man and beast. And I will make it desolate; from Teman even to Dedan they shall fall by the sword. ¹⁴And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel, and they shall do in Edom according to my anger and according to my wrath, and they shall know my vengeance, declares the Lord God.

Now the specific crime here (like I said before, go back and listen to the Obadiah episodes)... Edom had historically sided with (assisted in some way) the Babylonians when the Babylonians came in and destroyed Jerusalem and the

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temple. Here, that whole sort of thing is worded this way: their specific crime is that they have acted vengefully against Israel. Their punishment is going to be "by Israel's own hand, I'm going to take revenge on you." In other words, Israel is not done with. They're going to come back here. (laughs) "My people are not dead. I have not cut them off entirely, and there's going to come a time when my own people will conquer *you* to make the point."

I don't want to backtrack too far into that. We know that historically, some of this happens in the Intertestamental Period. Taylor notes:

...Although Edom proper was also overrun by Nabateans, the ancestors of the modern Arabs, Edomite survivors were later subdued first by Judas Maccabaeus and then by John Hyrcanus, who incorporated them into the Jewish race by compulsory circumcision.

So some scholars point to that as being the fulfillment. But remember when we talked about Obadiah, that the prophecy against Edom was really fulfilled by the conquest of Adam (humankind—all the nations) through the Gospel. If that sounds kind of strange, go listen to the episodes on Obadiah. We also talked about how certain prophecies in the book of Amos are quoted and used and theologically applied in Acts 15, where Edom becomes paradigmatic for all the nations and Babylon is sort of the source of the problem. Remember, Babylon is where the nations were disinherited (Deuteronomy 32 Worldview). And the solution to that, ultimately, is the overspread of the Gospel through all the nations, which begins in Acts 2 at the hands of God's own people—the Jews who have converted to follow Jesus. After the crucifixion and resurrection, they kick-start the reclamation of the nations. So you have all this stuff in play. Again, if this is unfamiliar content to you, you're just going to have to catch up. You could read *Unseen Realm* and that would help. You could watch the introductory videos on the podcast website and that would help—but especially, listening to the two episodes on Obadiah.

For our purposes here, think about the term "act vengefully." We're going to come back to that.

The last group here, the Philistines, are accused of the same thing.

¹⁵“Thus says the Lord God: Because the Philistines acted vengefully and took vengeance with malice of soul to destroy in never-ending enmity, ¹⁶ therefore thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will stretch out my hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites and destroy the rest of the seacoast.

Now we know historically, the Philistines are a longstanding enemy. Taylor writes:

David finally broke their military ascendancy but they continued to cause occasional trouble during the monarchy, though we have no record other than this oracle of their hostility at the time of Jerusalem's fall. The *Cherethites*, who were regularly linked with [the Philistines], may well be etymologically the same as the Cretans, as LXX translates. David employed them in his standing army of mercenaries, and it is likely that 'the Pelethites' who shared this duty with them were Philistines under a slightly different name. The punishment pronounced on them for their vengeful wrongs done against Jerusalem... is expressed in the form of a play on words: *I will cut off (hikrattî) the Cherethites ('et kĕrĕtîm)*.

After Maccabean times, the Philistines completely vanished from sight as a people and only the names of their cities remained.

That's typically the way scholars look at this. All that's legitimate, but I think there's something more going on here that is missed. Is there a pattern? As we close, this is how I want to wrap this up. Is there a pattern with these peoples and their offenses? Is there something to see here in the Divine Council Worldview?

Well, consider these few thoughts. All of these peoples (that we just went through in chapter 25) had *nephilim* descendants originally in their land. Look at the list: Ammon, Edom, Moab, the Philistines... Just track through Deuteronomy 2 and 3. You're going to get the drift of what I'm saying here. The Transjordan here and the Philistines, they all had that history earlier in Israel's history back in Deuteronomy 2 and 3 (the Annakim). Of course, the Annakim went by that name in particular (those who lived in Canaan proper, the ones that the Conquest was aimed at eliminating—this is all *Unseen Realm* stuff that I wrote about at length), but in the Transjordan they have other names. They had a name for them in Ammon and Moab and Edom, and so on and so forth. Deuteronomy 2 and 3 says they were tall like the Annakim; they were Rephaim... blah, blah, blah. All these places in that oracle have that history.

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Second thought: the first three are clearly cast as hating Yahweh's presence in the region and they also hate Judah's status as elect, as Yahweh's inheritance. They hate the people because they're Yahweh's inheritance. Remember Deuteronomy 32:8-9?

**⁸When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,
when he divided mankind,
he fixed the borders of the peoples
according to the number of the sons of God.**

**⁹ But the LORD's portion is his people,
Jacob his allotted heritage.**

This whole worldview. The other nations hate that, and these specific three are accused... this is why they're going to be judged; this is their crime. They rejoiced at Yahweh's presence leaving his inherited portion, and his physical people (that inherited portion) were destroyed and driven out. So God is going to retaliate for that. Why? Because he has to make the point that this is not where the story ends. You might think it is and that might thrill you, but that's going to wear off pretty quickly because that's not where the story ends.

Third thought: the offense of the last two (the Edomites and the Philistines) are described with the lemmas *naqam* (that's the verb) and *neqamah* (the noun equivalent). It's this idea of revenge or acting vengefully. It's the vocabulary of score-settling. If you actually do a search on this time (maybe not every occurrence but I'm willing to put a number on it: ninety percent or better), this is the lemma used for inter-familial antagonism—sort of fratricidal crime language in the Old Testament. It's really interesting, not only for that reason, that this is the lemma you would use where one (I'll just be blunt here) disinherited sibling wants to take revenge on the one that the father likes—that kind of situation. This is the lemma that is used in the Hebrew Bible for interfamilial fratricidal revenge warfare or killing. This is the one that's used. There are lots of lemmas that could be used to describe what happens to Jerusalem and Judah, but here the crime is specifically this lemma, and I think it's by design. I think it's drawing on the fact that at one point in human history, God had related to all of humanity, but at Babel he disinherited the nations—he divided them up according to the number of the sons of God (again, the whole Deuteronomy 32 cosmic/geographical worldview thing). And God said, "I'm not going to have a relationship with humanity anymore. I'm taking all of the nations that exist. I'm divorcing them and I'm putting them under the authority of these other gods. Of course, the other gods become corrupt (we know that from Psalm 82). They were supposed to be place-holders ruling according to Yahweh's definition of justice, but they don't do that. They're terrible; they cause chaos. Psalm 82 is about judging that. We get that. We've been down that road a lot of times in this podcast and in my other material, but with that in mind, when you use this particular lemma about taking revenge, it's suggestive.

And here's another reason: if you go back to Deuteronomy 32 in the ESV (this is the best place to go because other translations are going to have something totally different)... Deuteronomy 32:8-9 in the ESV is where we incorporate the Qumran language ("dividing them up according to the number of the sons of God"). What people know less of... I've written some things on the website and mentioned it in *Unseen Realm*, as well, but at the end of the chapter (Deuteronomy 32:43)... I discussed this in detail in my *BibSac* article on Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God. Verse 43 is quite different in the ESV

than it is in other translations for the same reason. The Dead Sea Scrolls material that gives us the correct reading ("sons of God") for verse 8 also gives us the correct reading for verse 43. And here's what it says:

**⁴³“Rejoice with him, O heavens;
bow down to him, all gods,
for he avenges the blood of his children
and takes vengeance on his adversaries.
He repays those who hate him
and cleanses his people's land.”**

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Guess what lemma is behind "he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries?" Both instances there... guess what lemma it is? Right! It's the same that we just talked about here in Ezekiel 25: *naqam*—the language of score-settling within the family. Is it possible that the oracles of the nations here are written the way they are to thematically link them back to Deuteronomy 32? To say, "Here it begins—the judgment of the nations after Jerusalem's fall. Now that we've taken care of Jerusalem's apostasy problem and her sin problem, we turn our attention to the nations." Because the story doesn't end here. Is it possible that the oracles against the nations are the beginning of the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 32:43? I think it is!

I think a very careful literate reader of the Hebrew Bible (because *naqam* isn't used that often—it's not like it's hundreds and hundreds of times) would have thought, "Okay... 'Rise up. Rejoice with him, O heavens, bow down to him all gods.' Start bowing now because yes, Israel has been punished but now it's time to bow the knee because you're going to get what you deserve, too. Yahweh is not done with his own inheritance. He is not surrendering his own inheritance. You don't get to go grab it. In fact, you're going to be brought into submission and into the fold. And here it begins." I really do think that there's some connection point here conceptually and intertextually, and that the oracles of the nations are there to sort of prime the pump—get the ball rolling—for the submission of the disinherited nations under the authority of the king of Israel.

We know who the king of Israel is going to be. When these oracles are given, they don't have a king anymore. They're in exile. But who is the king? The king is Jesus, the son of David—all this New Testament talk. When we have the post-cross playing out of the nations being reclaimed, they are put under the authority of him.

Remember when we did the episode about how curious it was how Paul links resurrection language with the defeat of the gods? There's half a dozen passages like this that link the resurrection with the victory over the principalities and powers, over the rulers of darkness, all this geographical dominion language that Paul uses for the powers of darkness. He gets that because he inherits the

Deuteronomy 32 Worldview. It's all the same kind of thing, it just takes a different form. So that's what you're dealing with here when it comes to the oracles against the nations. To penetrate the English text a little bit, to see how people would have read this back in ancient Israel—what would they have been thinking and what would their filters have been for understanding what's going on here?

In our next episode, of course, we'll get into more of these. We've got to go to chapter 32. The next three chapters are going to be about Tyre, and of course, one of those is the big one—the one we typically think of for divine rebellion (events in Eden, that sort of thing). This is the kind of thing that is just lurking under the surface. It's the judgment of divine rebellion and bringing the divine rebels into submission to the king of Israel who, in our context, is Christ. That's the story.

TS: I can't help, Mike, but think that I'm glad I'm on this side of the crucifixion and I know Jesus. I'm glad I'm not having to face the vengeance of God in the Old Testament.

MH: Yeah, really! That's a good understatement (laughs), not only for this. When you say that it makes me think of not just the foreign powers, but all the stuff we covered in Leviticus. Good grief, it's this constant need to do this or that to be ritually pure, but then you can't have access, either. Your access is so limited in so many different ways. And then you could do things and it would be, "Well, it doesn't matter. We don't have a sacrifice for that one. Too bad (laughs). You're either out of the community or you're dead." Yeah, we're doing a lot better.

TS: Absolutely—much better! Next week we're going to cover the next two chapters in Ezekiel, 26 and 27, right?

MH: Yeah, we have to do it that way because 28 just has to be taken by itself.

TS: All right, well, I'm looking forward to 28. We'll get there. Is there anything else you'd like to add to the show?

MH: Nope, that's it.

TS: Ok, Mike, we appreciate it this week and just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.

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