

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 146

Ezekiel 32

February 19, 2017

Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Episode Summary

Ezekiel 32 is a lament for the empire of Egypt, whose hubris was compared to a rebellious divine council member in the previous chapter (one of the “trees” of God’s garden in Lebanon/Eden). This episode focuses on two items in the chapter. Early in the chapter, the prophet casts pharaoh as *both* a sea dragon and a lion, two seemingly incompatible metaphors. Is this a mistake or is it meaningful? This episode also discusses whether Ezekiel 32:21-28 has anything to do with the origin of demons as the disembodied spirits of the giants.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 146: Ezekiel chapter 32. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike... are you still snowed in?

MH: We are not snowed in anymore, thank goodness (laughing). The pug was getting sick of me.

TS: Not the other way around?

MH: Not the other way around, nope. He's like, "Just get away from me! Go to work!"

TS: Mike, I wanted to mention Randall Price and his team discovering a twelfth Qumran cave? They were successful, they didn't find anything, right?

MH: They found some pottery and they found some text fragments. But that's a big deal to know that there's still other stuff there. Kudos to him in whatever role he played in that process. There were a lot of hands in there. But yeah, it was nice to get that news.

TS: Absolutely. That's pretty neat. All right, Mike. Chapter 32 with week, huh?

MH: Yep. Here we go with chapter 32, right on the heels of Ezekiel 31, which was the episode on the cosmic tree and what that language means and why we have it, what's the point of it. In Ezekiel 32, we have what probably in most study Bibles or most English translations will be labeled something like "a lament over Pharaoh." But we want to stress again that this isn't just a lament over Pharaoh. It's a lament over Pharaoh and Egypt (the country itself). It starts out with Pharaoh as the focus, but then as you keep reading (like around verse 16), it expands to all Egypt and all their multitude. If you wonder why that's important, go listen to chapter 31 and you'll find out why I even point that out. Again, this is not just focused on one person. There are reasons to emphasize that.

In this chapter, we're going to get this lament language, but there are going to be a few oddities in this chapter. I'm not going to read through the whole thing. It's longer than chapter 31 was, but I'm going to camp on a few things that I think would be of special interest for our audience. So let's just jump in here. I'll read the first seven or eight verses and there's going to be one thing in here in particular that I want to spend some time on and try to get people some scholarly information about (if they're interested in it).

So Ezekiel 31, a lament over Pharaoh and Egypt:

In the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me:² "Son of man, raise a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt and say to him:

**"You consider yourself a lion of the nations,
but you are like a dragon in the seas;
you burst forth in your rivers,
trouble the waters with your feet,
and foul their rivers.**

³Thus says the Lord GOD:

**I will throw my net over you
with a host of many peoples,
and they will haul you up in my dragnet.**

**⁴And I will cast you on the ground;
on the open field I will fling you,
and will cause all the birds of the heavens to settle on you,
and I will gorge the beasts of the whole earth with you.**

**⁵I will strew your flesh upon the mountains
and fill the valleys with your carcass.**

⁶I will drench the land even to the mountains

**with your flowing blood,
and the ravines will be full of you.**
**⁷ When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens
and make their stars dark;
I will cover the sun with a cloud,
and the moon shall not give its light.**
**⁸ All the bright lights of heaven
will I make dark over you,
and put darkness on your land,
declares the Lord God.**

We get some celestial language in those first eight verses that is probably a reference (especially in an Egyptian context) to the judgment of certain gods. It's kind of like the plagues. You get these points of connection. But the place I actually want to park on is a little odder than that, and that is early in the description. We have the odd combination here (at least it has seemed odd to lots of scholars) of a lion and a dragon. Those seem like two quite different things.

**“You consider yourself a lion of the nations,
but you are like a dragon in the seas;”**

5:00

And then the rest of it picks up with God taking him out of the water and killing him and throwing the pieces all over the place and all that sort of stuff. We've seen this kind of thing already in Ezekiel in earlier chapters, where we had this dragon (*tanin*, with the lemma *tanim*) situation going on in relation to other oracles of the nations. And we talked about how this is part of the Leviathan complex of ideas—the great chaos monster. It's kind of obvious for our listeners who have been tracking through Ezekiel... That kind of material is going to be familiar to them by this point because it wasn't too long ago that we ran into that.

But here we get that, plus we get this lion thing. It just seems out of place, so a lot of scholars wonder what's going on here. Some scholars will even say there's a textual error here and they'll try to change the text to "have it make more sense." That's a bit misguided. For listeners who are really into this kind of topic (and you can judge it after we go through it a little bit), I'm going to put in the folder that's accessible to subscribers to my newsletter... Again, I have a specific link in the newsletter to a folder that's protected online. You can't just find it. You can't just go there on your own. You have to have the link to a place where I put peer-reviewed material that I discuss in a particular episode, so you can go read and get more detail. I'm going to put this article in that folder. It's by Theodore (Ted) Lewis, who is now at Johns Hopkins. When he wrote this he was at Georgia. He's a Wisconsin grad (for his M.A., anyway), so I know Ted

peripherally. But his article is called "CT [cuneiform text] 13.33-34 and Ezekiel 32: Lion-Dragon Myths." It's from the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* back in 1996.

What this article is about... What Ted is going to do is he's going to go through Mesopotamian material, specifically this one particular text, and he's going to show that if you were a Mesopotamian or were familiar with Mesopotamian thinking, this combination of a lion and a dragon wouldn't be a conundrum. It's actually a familiar way to portray some things. Let me read the abstract, and then I'll read the first paragraph. I'm going to be skipping in and out of this article a little bit so you kind of get the feel for what Ted is doing in the article and also the backdrop to this thinking about Egypt in Ezekiel 32. So the abstract says:

This article presents the full text of CT 13.33-34, a myth which describes a battle between Tish-pak, the chief god of Eshnunna, and a dragon/serpent creature of immense proportions. It further explores the nature of this composite creature having both leonine and serpentine characteristics (with its iconographic representations).

Let me stop there. In the article, Ted has a number of pictures (cylinder seals and what-not) where you get this image of a lion/dragon combination. Back to Ted's abstract:

The Canaanite background of the divine battle with the tannin-dragon creature found in Ezekiel 32 is also investigated. A review of the history of scholarship shows that many have perceived the two parallel descriptions of Pharaoh as a lion and a dragon/serpent to be incompatible. This paper argues that there is considerable textual and iconographical justification for associating these two creatures together as symbols of terrifying power. The paper concludes by comparing and contrasting the two texts.

He gets into the article and he talks a little bit about, "Well, some of you are probably thinking this is like the Marduk text, where Marduk is fighting Tiamat." This is the Babylonian creation story, where the god Marduk has to fight the great chaos serpent, which is called "Tiamat" there in Canaanite texts, like an Ugaritic battle of the sea between the deity and the sea creature. The sea creature is called "Leviathan" or "Lotan," or even "Yamm," which is a word that means "sea" in Ugaritic. So there you get different terms, but it's the same scene, the same idea that the god is going to have to subdue the forces of chaos for whatever purpose. Ted talks about both of those and says we're more familiar with these and they get a lot more press time because it's the battle/creation story and it's a familiar text from Ugaritic stuff. But he's saying *this* text, which isn't known by a lot of people, really accomplishes the same thing, but it's special because you get the dragon described in lion terms. He wants to study this because it's just like

10:00

Ezekiel 32. It has the same sort of telegraphing, the same symbology, the same descriptions as the text that he's focused on. So he says here:

The depiction of the dragon is as astonishing as are its proportions. In lines 5 and 6 he is clearly called a serpent (MU?). . . . An indication that we are not dealing with a simple serpent is found in lines 17, 20, 24 (obverse), and lines 4, 7, 9 (reverse) [MH: it's a tablet, so it has two sides] where the creature is called a *labbu*, a common Akkadian word for "lion" used primarily in poetry . . .

So in part of the description it's called a serpent and in another part of the inscription it's called a lion. So he's like, "Hey, this is just like Ezekiel 32." Ted writes:

The choice of the word *labbu* with its leonine connotations is likely not accidental. I suggest returning to Heidel's notion [MH: he was a famous Assyriologist of an era gone by] of a "composite monster or dragon with leonine and serpentine attributes." This recalls E. D. Van Buren's conclusions...

By the way, if you ever come across any of Elizabeth Van Buren's books on iconography, buy them. She is the leading person on this, but her books are really, really hard to find. They're older and out of print. If you're into this stuff, that's just one of the things to have. Plus, she writes in English (not German) and it's just really good stuff to have.

This recalls E. D. Van Buren's conclusions... that "the dragons of later ages all derived from two main types, the leonine and the ophidian."

"Ophidian is an academic term for "serpentine." So Van Buren, who focused her whole academic career on Mesopotamian iconography (art) says, "You've basically got two kinds of dragons in this material: you get one that looks like a snake and you get another one that's described in lion terms. And occasionally, those two things are put together." Lewis references the *Gilgamesh* epic:

The juxtaposition of serpent and lion reminds us of the snake who steals the plant of life in the *Gilgamesh* Epic (XI: 287) and is also called a *nesu sa qaqqari*, "lion of the ground" (XI: 296). . . .

He's saying that even in *Gilgamesh* you get this combination.

Iconographic representations show that the lion and the serpent/dragon were so closely associated that they could actually be combined into a single composite creature. Several archaic Mesopotamian cylinder seal impressions (see figures 5 and 6) represent paired fantastic creatures with lions' bodies and heads, yet long

intertwined serpentine necks. An exact parallel to this is found on the back of the Narmer palette ...

A lot of listeners are going to have seen these pictures on the internet or whatever. They're usually associated with something goofy like, "Oh, we've got lion/snake hybrids in the ancient world. They were doing genetics..." No, that isn't the point at all. This is why I'm exposing you to Lewis (and it's just awesome if you find Van Buren's work because this is all she did). It's not about genetics, it's about metaphor. It's about the combination of metaphors to telegraph certain ideas drawn from two animals that could easily be (and often were) talked about... Their physical properties, their physical abilities, and even their appearance were repeatedly drawn on to describe something to be feared, something fearful, something that's hostile, the forces of chaos—the things that make our life difficult when the gods want us to have a nice order to life—this kind of thinking. The people from the ancient world would draw on animal motifs to express these ideas. They were very useful and common. Everybody would know what you're talking about when you did this. Occasionally in the artwork, since both lion and serpent motifs were used to describe chaotic forces, sometimes they just combined them. People would understand what's going on because they're both used that way separately, so let's just bring them together and create a composite. It's not about doing weird genetics. Shout-out to Christian Middle-Earth here. This is not what this is about, it's about something different.

15:00

Lewis references another example that you can actually see on something called the "Narmer palette," which is an Egyptian object. It kind of looks like a black stone shield that has the bodies of the lions with long serpentine necks on them. It's pretty familiar. You can find a lot of this stuff on the internet, and a lot of listeners probably have already. So what Lewis' article does (again, I'm giving it to you and I'm not going to go through the whole thing here, obviously)... If you want examples of this and of what meanings would have been attached to it, this is an excellent resource because he's going to go through the Mesopotamian material and then he's going to start talking about Ezekiel 32 and how this helps us understand what Ezekiel is doing. He's in Babylon (this is where he's writing, it's his context) but he's also talking about Egypt. So it's kind of significant that both to an Egyptian and to a Babylonian... this mixture of lion/serpent artwork motif with its attributes and characteristics will be familiar to both crowds/contexts. It's also going to be familiar to Israelites, mostly because of the chaos dragon idea that we've talked about before.

Let me just pull out a few other things that Lewis has to say here. He says:

The dragon's churning in the waters in 32:2b is found also at Ugarit (KTU 1.83.3-7). The enmeshing of the dragon in 32:3 reminds one of Marduk's battle against Tiamat (Enuma Elis, tablet IV.41, 95, 107, 112). The use of the slain carcass as

food for birds and beasts in 32:4 (cf. 29:5) finds a direct parallel in the tannin/Leviathan passage in Ps. 74:13.⁸⁵ The size of the dragon mentioned in 32:5-6 is described by Eichrodt [another scholar] "as being so enormous that its decaying masses [sic] fill the mountains and valleys and its life-blood floods the earth and causes a spate in the watercourses." This too is reminiscent of... Tiamat's huge carcass out of which Marduk is able to fashion heaven and earth...

The tannin-creature [dragon-creature] in Ezek. 32:2 occurs frequently in the Bible, including the parallel passage, also concerning Pharaoh, in Ezek. 29:3-5 **[MH: This is where we first encountered it in the podcast. We talked about the chaos dragon there; you can go back and listen to the episode where we covered chapter 29]**. A study of the descriptions of this creature reveals a mixing of dragon and lion imagery. . . . the tannin is much more than a serpent and not just the crocodile of outdated scholarship. This dragon creature, occurring in parallel to Yam (Job 7:12), Leviathan (Ps. 74:13; Isa. 27:1), and Rahab (Isa. 51:9), is slain by Yahweh, the Divine Warrior.

So again, Lewis just takes you through these passages. We've discussed several of them on the podcast. The point here... If you listened to the previous episode on chapter 31, I kind of harped on this a lot and told you the reasons why, and even encouraged you to go back to Ezekiel 28. But the point here is that Pharaoh—even though Ezekiel 32 starts out with "raise a lamentation over Pharaoh, king of Egypt"—the point of the analogy is not that Pharaoh is being compared to a man who fell. Here, it's so obvious. The point of the analogy is that Pharaoh is being compared to what? To supernatural opposition to Yahweh's order. He's being compared to supernatural forces that fight against Yahweh's ordered world. Just like chapter 31, we have supernatural upheaval in the divine council. Same in chapter 28. Same in Isaiah 14. Same in Genesis 3—all these passages again. These empires, these nations that are allotted to other gods, and those gods are hostile to Yahweh—they don't want the restoration of Eden. They don't want Yahweh's good order on earth. They oppose these things. They are, therefore, consistently analogized to rebellion against Yahweh's will from the very beginning, back in primeval days. It's not just about one guy (Adam) in Eden. It's so much bigger than that. These nations, allotted to other gods who are now hostile to Yahweh... Their rebellious status and stance, their opposition to what God wants to do with Israel to reestablish the kingdom which is Eden on earth makes them prime fodder to be compared to the original rebellion in the divine council at the beginning of God's good world. The analogy is very clear. It's not just about humanity losing immortality. It's about forces that are cosmic in nature rising up against the Most High God and the Most High God having to deal with it. It plays out on earth because that's what the battle is for. It plays out with these nations. We're in the oracles against the nations section. It plays out on earth among these nations because the nations have to be brought under order. The gods (the hostile forces that empower them and rule them through worldly empires like Assyria and Tyre and Egypt and Babylon) must be

20:00

brought under control and the forces that govern them, ultimately... We've done a lot of material on this on the podcast and, of course, in *Unseen Realm*. Those gods are ultimately going to be dealt with and their authority taken away. That's associated with the resurrection in the New Testament. You can reference the episode we did on the death of the gods and the resurrection.

But all of this now (this judgment of the nations), because of what that whole situation represents (being the force of chaos against what God wants to do and what God wants to restore to get back to Eden, back to his kingdom)... Of course the best point of analogy is not one man who loses immortality. It's against a rebellion that's even bigger. Because that man wouldn't have rebelled had not someone from the divine council interfered with Eve and Adam to get them to come over to the side of rebellion. It's much bigger than that. You can't just deal with the problem of death and mortality and fix the world. You must deal with divine rebellion, as well.

This is the part in our theology that we completely overlook. We are so fixated on the Fall and on Adam and Eve and our own condition that we fail to see that if you asked an Israelite, "Why is the world the way it is?" the Fall is going to be part of that picture, but it's also going to be Genesis 6. It's also going to be what happens at Babel with the nations—the allotment of the other gods and the disinheritance/divorcing of the other nations, making them non-family members. All of this needs to be dealt with.

So the point of these analogies is never just this one guy in the garden. It's cosmic. This is so well illustrated in Ezekiel 32 because now when Egypt is compared to something... In chapter 31 it was the great tree, which is not Adam, it's a member of the council, like we talked about last time. And if you've read Lipinski's article from the last episode, you see how flawed the typical approach is. In chapter 32, it's obviously not one man. It's the forces of chaos. Egypt is not compared to a man or a single tree or whatever. He's compared and the nation is compared to the forces of chaos—to the lion/dragon of the seas—all of the stuff that opposes God, which encompasses the supernatural because it's a supernatural metaphor. We're not talking about a real lion or a real lion/dragon. There are no dragons whose carcasses are as big as mountains, okay? We're talking about a supernatural, cosmic, theological, religious metaphor to illustrate not that there's a problem with mortality that we need to fix... no. There's a problem with *disorder* in the very fabric of creation that is attributable to a series of rebellions that began in primeval history all the way forward. It's so much bigger than what commentators will typically fixate on. We are not dealing with Adam and we haven't *been* dealing with Adam. It's just much bigger. Back to Lewis' article. When he starts to summarize things, he says:

CT 13.33-34 and Ezekiel 32 contain similar images. Both deities direct their attacks against antagonists portrayed with leonine and serpent/dragon imagery . . .

25:00

Tishpak's dragon [MH: the deity in this cuneiform text] is a water creature, the "offspring of River," of immense proportions, especially in length (obverse, lines 8-12). Likewise, the dragon Yahweh battles is a water creature (32:2) of enormous size, whose carcass is so huge that it fills mountains and valleys (32:5-6). . . . 1471 in particular, the oracles against Egypt (Ezek. 29-32) are connected with a specific pharaoh, Hophra, known for his challenge to Nebuchadrezzar (cf. Jer. 37:5). Ezekiel illustrates how Hophra's hubris, like that of the king of Tyre, proves his demise.

Again, "You're not going to get away with this. You're nothing special." Look at the theological messaging. God is saying, "Look, this is how I look at you. I look at you as a force of chaos—you and your empire. The whole system. You're a force of chaos, and I'm about dealing with chaos. What I want to do with my world is more than give humanity a cure for what ails them (the problem of death). I want everything restored to its original pristine orderly state. I want my household restored because, ultimately, I'm going to make the whole earth (not just a garden) my household. So this is a lot bigger than you. You're nothing special." And frankly, God is saying, "I can handle the work. My enemies are a lot bigger than you are, and I'm going to deal with them. I'm dealing with them now. Remember the Assyrians? They're not such a big deal anymore. Their gods have been put in their place. And Tyre. And now the Egyptians. And I'm going to get to the Babylonians. Ultimately, we know (because we have the event of the cross and the New Testament and the event of the resurrection) that the ultimate defeat of all these things and the ultimate restoration to order of all these things is linked to the death, burial, and resurrection of the messiah—who was Yahweh as a man on earth to accomplish all these things. Ezekiel doesn't know that yet, but we know that.

So this "judgment of the nations" language is the beginning of saying, "Yep, my people are in exile because they were awful. They were disloyal to me and my covenant... blah, blah, blah... and all these nations have been beating up on them for X number of years, and I'm even going to use the Babylonians to punish my own people. But I'm going to take care of *all* this. This is why the Day of the Lord and the resurrection language in the New Testament... the messaging is, "I am not just the messiah for Israel. I am not just here to give people a home in heaven, to take care of the death problem. I am here because I am reclaiming all of it—every square inch. Nothing is going to be missed. And *this* kind of talk (judging the nations) is the beginning of that. It foreshadows it and puts those things into motion. Of course, it really takes momentum when we get to the cross event. All of this is a precursor to that. Lewis is saying that this is just bigger than one or two people—somebody on earth. Here's another little section:

Ezekiel's portrayal of God's battle against Hophra [the pharaoh at the time] was not written to underscore a Davidic ruler's claim to the throne, but the preeminence of Yahweh as sovereign God and divine warrior in contrast to all

others, deities or mere human potentates like Hophra. The reason for the destruction of Egypt, as the author repeatedly emphasizes using characteristic terminology, is so that all nations, including Egypt, may know "that Yahweh is the Lord."

It's just much bigger than this isolated situation with Egypt. Another thing I want to say in regard to chapter 32... We have the first eight verses there with the lion, the serpent imagery, the chaos dragon, that whole thing again. When we get out of verse 8, we get into another description of how badly God is going to judge Egypt. Verse 11:

30:00

¹¹“For thus says the Lord GOD: The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon you. ¹²I will cause your multitude to fall by the swords of mighty ones, all of them most ruthless of nations.

It's a description of beating up on Egypt. We've had this many times, so I'm not going to camp on that. Instead, let's start in verse 16 and read a section here. He says:

¹⁶This is a lamentation that shall be chanted; the daughters of the nations shall chant it; over Egypt [MH: the whole nation, not just Pharaoh], and over all her multitude, shall they chant it, declares the Lord GOD.”

¹⁷In the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁸“Son of man, wail over the multitude of Egypt, and send them down, her and the daughters of majestic nations, to the world below, to those who have gone down to the pit [MH: Sheol, the underworld]:

**¹⁹‘Whom do you surpass in beauty?
Go down and be laid to rest with the uncircumcised.’**

This would have been particularly frightening to the Egyptians because their view of the afterlife (kind of uniquely) was pretty positive. It's not egalitarian initially in Egyptian religion. The afterlife is a wonderful place, but basically it's for Pharaoh and whoever Pharaoh likes. Gradually in Egyptian religion, this widens and becomes more democratic. So the Egyptians (more than the other nations around them) have a fairly positive view of the afterlife. It's not something to be really fearful about. So when they hear this kind of stuff and they see the Babylonians kicking their butts (laughs) and you have Ezekiel and other Israelite prophets running around and saying, "I told you so; you're nothing special. God used Babylon to judge us and he's going to use Babylon to judge you. Just like we were predicting to our own people that this was going to happen... Guess

what? You're next in line." And then when we get out of chapter 32 in the book of Ezekiel, the message is going to transition to, "Well, you just got destroyed, but guess what? We're in bad shape now, but our nation will rise again because we are the people of God. Yahweh is not done with us." So if you're not included in Israel, this is going to be scary. You're going to see it happening around you and you're going to call your positive view of the afterlife into question because you'd consider that there were some people over in Israel who knew this was going to happen and that would freak you out.

Let's go to verse 20:

²⁰They shall fall amid those who are slain by the sword. Egypt is delivered to the sword; drag her away, and all her multitudes.

And now we get into a section that I want to say a few things about because we get sort of "underworld" language and description here and some interesting terms. Verse 21 in the ESV has "the mighty chiefs." The word there is *gibborim*. Store that away because that's one of the words used in Genesis 6:4 (the "mighty men"). The ESV has "mighty chiefs" here.

²¹The mighty chiefs [*gibborim*] shall speak of them, with their helpers, out of the midst of Sheol: 'They have come down, they lie still, the uncircumcised, slain by the sword.'

²²"Assyria is there, and all her company, its graves all around it, all of them slain, fallen by the sword, ²³whose graves are set in the uttermost parts of the pit; and her company is all around her grave, all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who spread terror in the land of the living.

That language is very similar to Isaiah 14. Let me just refresh your memories there. Again, it's not just Isaiah 14. You get other passages (the ones we've been talking about on the podcast with the oracles of the nations). Here we go with Isaiah 14:12:

**¹²"How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low! [MH: you weren't special]
¹³You said in your heart,
'I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God**

**I will set my throne on high;
I will sit on the mount of assembly** [MH: "I'm going to be lord of the divine council and all this kind of stuff."]...

¹⁵ **But you are brought down to Sheol,
to the far reaches of the pit.**

¹⁶ **Those who see you will stare at you
and ponder over you:
'Is this the man who made the earth tremble,
who shook kingdoms,
¹⁷ who made the world like a desert...**

The focus of the chapter is about the king of Babylon. So Babylon is going to get judged. We have the same kind of language: "cast down," in verse 19 "away from your grave," "you're going to be loathed like a branch," "clothed with the slain, those who are pierced by the sword who go down to the stones of the pit like a dead body trampled underfoot." This is Isaiah 14.

So let's go back to Ezekiel 32. You get the same kind of language about, "Hey, you're going to wind up in Sheol where all these other uncircumcised are, slain by the sword. You're going to have the same fate." So Ezekiel here is writing about the Egyptians and Isaiah is writing about the Babylonians. Same thing. Just store this away.

Let's talk about some of the things that are actually in this verse and then we'll move on. Because in verse 22, we're going to throw Assyria into the mix. All the empires, all the forces that oppose God, all the nations that oppose God are going to wind up in the same place. They're going to wind up in Sheol. They're going to wind up in the underworld and they're not going to rise again. That's the larger point. Let's go look at verse 21. We have a reference to the *gibborim*. They're going to speak to the Egyptians that are going to wind up there out of the midst of Sheol. They've gone down there and they still lie there—the uncircumcised slain by the sword. The uncircumcised being buried with the uncircumcised could refer to several things. Obviously, it could be non-Israelite enemies in Sheol. "You're going to stay in the bad place. You're going to stay *dead*. You're going to stay in the realm of the dead if you're not the people of God. If you're not a member of God's family, this is where you're going to stay." This is the Old Testament theology. Of course, we who live in the New Testament after the cross get the point. You have to be in God's family. In New Testament language, you have to be united to him—part of the Body of Christ and all that stuff—to escape death. We get this. But if you're not part of that family, this is where you're going to stay. You're going to stay in the realm of the

dead. You're going to always be dead. You're not going to rise. We get that. So it could be thinking about that (non-Israelite destiny in Sheol).

It could also refer more simply to an Israelite audience and the fear of not just winding up in Sheol (because even though they were Israelites they still had to believe, they still had to be faithful to Yahweh and all this sort of stuff... it's not just salvation by ethnicity). So it could refer to staying Sheol, but it's even worse than that. In the realm of the dead they thought they would at least get to see mom and dad. The point here could be, "You're going to lie with the uncircumcised. You're not going to see your family members. You're going to be isolated. In fact, you're going to be with people that you consider your enemies—that hate you and you hate them." In other words, it's just making a bad picture even worse. You don't have this reunion kind of thing that the ancient people were expecting. You have the biblical expression, "I'm going to go see my fathers. I'm going to be buried with my fathers." We've talked about this before on the podcast, that Israelites would bury their dead with things that they would use in the afterlife. There was a strong afterlife belief. You hope that you're all going to wind up being taken out of Sheol by Yahweh and be at his side and all that sort of thing. (I've blogged extensively on this.) There's more afterlife thinking going on in the Old Testament than a lot of people realize. But this just makes it worse. "No, you're not going to get to do any of that. You're going to be buried with people you hate who are not part of your family. You don't have any relief there at all."

Allen has something interesting to say here:

The reference to “those slain by the sword” (חללי חרב) together with mention of the “uncircumcised” in v 18 suggests a grimmer experience in the shadowy afterlife than most underwent.

It could be argued (because of what archaeologists have discovered about Israelite burials and those of other cultures) that this is a reference to other groups being separated out so that you won't be reunited with loved ones in other ways. For instance, there is evidence that infants who died before they were circumcised were buried separately in Israelite burials. It gave rise to the notion that they were in a separate place in Sheol because they had not been circumcised yet. Some Jews/Israelites believed that. So the thing to catch here is "separation from loved ones," which makes it just an awful thought. You have no hope of anything positive at all in this cadaverous existence of the underworld. You don't even get to see your child or anything like that. So it's painting a really dark picture.

This is just sort of an add-on here, but other scholars think there was a separate place in the underworld for people who died violently. They were treated

differently in burial in some cases in ancient Israel. So it reflects this idea. The fundamental point to take away is that, especially if he's speaking to the Egyptians and about the Egyptians, but the Israelites are going to catch the drift to: If you're judged by Yahweh, you're not part of the righteous remnant. You're going to spend your whole time in Sheol, but you're going to be separated from the people you care about and the people you love (just trying to make a bad picture even worse).

40:00

Assyria is there in verse 22. Harkening back to chapter 31, Assyria was brought up as, "You think you're special, look what happened to the Assyrians!"

²² **"Assyria is there, and all her company, its graves all around it, all of them slain, fallen [MH: the Hebrew word is *nophelim*] by the sword, ²³ whose graves are set in the uttermost parts of the pit; and her company is all around her grave, all of them slain, fallen [*nophelim*] by the sword, who spread terror in the land of the living.**

Here in verse 22 (and we're going to get into verse 24) we have a reference to "the fallen." This is actually a good place to point people to who say that *nephilim* just means "the fallen ones." Well, actually, if that was the point, you would spell it *nophelim*—just like it's found here. That's what the scribes did with it. It's not what we get in Genesis 6. We have a reference here (and we even have the little phrase attached to it)... "by the sword." This is how you would spell "fallen ones"—those who have fallen in battle or those who fall upon someone else. I point this out because these are the explanations that some people try to offer to get away from *nephilim* in Genesis 6 being giants. That is not the way the text is pointed. It's not the way it's given to us. I have a whole technical discussion of this in *Unseen Realm*, but since we're running into it here... Here you have the textbook examples. This is how you would spell the term if you were talking about just normal human warriors in Genesis 6:4 and nothing more. But that isn't what you have. You don't have that spelling here. *Nephilim* is different than *nophelim*. the scribes knew what they were doing here and they deliberately spelled it one way in one passage and another way in another passage. It's not legitimate to take the way it's spelled here and say that's what it *means* back in Genesis 6:4. Sorry, you don't get to do that. You don't just get to change the way the word is treated because it helps your theology or it doesn't disturb you with having giants (supernatural beings) in Genesis 6:4. You don't get to cheat, in other words.

I'll also say this, though. Because of what we do have here in Ezekiel 32 verses 21-23 here, it's very clear that the *nophelim* are those who have fallen by the sword. There's no suggestion here that we have giants. There's no suggestion here that we have supernatural beings like we do in Genesis 6. So the argument cuts both ways. I don't believe that this passage really gives us much information

about the disembodied non-human dead—in other words, Old Testament antecedents to demons (the spirits of dead *nephilim*). I don't think that's what's in view here because the text doesn't support it. The text clearly has *nophelim be hareb*—those who are fallen by the sword. It's just a reference to warriors. There's nothing overtly supernatural here. Now if the term *rephaim* occurred in this passage, I would think differently. The *rephaim* (the shades) show up in underworld descriptions in other passages. We just don't have that here. *Rephaim* is absent from Ezekiel 32, so I don't think these verses (Ezekiel 32:21-24) are talking about the disembodied *nephilim* spirits that are part of Sheol. You've got to go to other passages to get that. I'm just trying to be consistent with what's in the text. You don't have *rephaim* referenced here and you do not have *nephilim*, you have *nophelim be hareb* ("fallen by the sword"). It's a clear reference to human warriors that were killed in battle. So I don't think you could make that argument here. You could make it in other places, but not here.

In verse 24, it continues:

²⁴ **"Elam is there, and all her multitude around her grave; all of them slain, fallen [nophelim] by the sword, who went down uncircumcised into the world below, who spread their terror in the land of the living...**

45:00

Some would say, "Boy, that sounds like the fallen ones (*nophelim*)" and people want them to be *nephilim* here. "They're running around *now*! They're running around after they were killed, spreading around terror in the land of the living. That's just like what demons did!" Well, the problem is that you can't say that grammatically. You can't say that based upon the Hebrew verbs that are here. Sorry to lapse into the Hebrew here but these are *qal* perfect and other perfect verb conjugations. Perfectivity in Hebrew grammar... It's a grammatical term that refers to viewing a situation from the outside as whole and complete. In other words, when Ezekiel is writing this, it's something that isn't happening after these *gibborim* get slain and then their spirits are released and they go harass people like demons. This is something that he's viewing as already happened. So they're already dead, they're already down there in Sheol because they did this, because they spread terror in the land of the living. That's why they were judged. That's why they were killed and sent to the pit. It's not something they do after they were sent to the pit. It's the reason for why they're down there. They're the uncircumcised enemy. They're judged, they're in Sheol, they're the slain, they're in the pit.

The grammar is clear, the spelling of the term is clear, but when you get to verse 26, this is where you get a lot of the popular discussion about Ezekiel 32 being about dead *nephilim* spirits.

²⁶ **“Meshech-Tubal is there [in Sheol], and all her multitude, her graves all around it, all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword; for they spread their terror in the land of the living.”²**

So they're there because, "for," (*ki* is the Hebrew term there) they were spreading terror in the land of the living. You might think that sounds like just what I was saying. It sure does, but listen to the next line:

⁷ **And they do not lie with the mighty, the fallen from among the uncircumcised, who went down to Sheol...**

They do not lie there with the *gibborim/nophelim*. This is unusual because it has *gibborim* and then you have the consonants that spell out *ne-philim*. You have these two terms occur in the same verse. The only other place that happens is Genesis 6:4. So a lot of people say, "Aha! We've got the two terms that appear in Genesis 6:4 appearing right here side by side in verse 27. We must be talking about the *nephilim* here." There are lots of problems with that. Let me read the rest of the verse and see if you catch the picture before we discuss it.

²⁶ **“Meshech-Tubal is there, and all her multitude, her graves all around it, all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword; for they spread their terror in the land of the living.”²⁷ And they do not lie with the mighty [gibborim], the fallen from among the uncircumcised, who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war, whose swords were laid under their heads, and whose iniquities are upon their bones; for the terror of the mighty men was in the land of the living.²⁸ But as for you, you shall be broken and lie among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword.**

You see the point? Meshech and Tubal *don't* lie with the *gibborim* and the *nophelim* (that some people want to say are *nephilim*). In verse 28, they're going to lie with the uncircumcised. But the *gibborim* and the *nophelim* are there and they are different than the uncircumcised. They're different because they died in honor. They went down to Sheol with their weapons of war. They had their swords laid under their heads. These are descriptions of how you bury good soldiers—the honored dead. There's no way in Israelite thinking that the *gibborim* and *nephilim* of Genesis 6:4 would have been viewed as the honorable dead. So the description alone disconnects the terms from that verse. They were the *problem*. If anybody was *dishonorable*, it would have been those guys because they spawned the historic enemies of the Israelites who were bent on their annihilation. So you have a problem there.

You say, "What about 'iniquities are upon their bones?'" Well, I'm going to read you what Greenberg says because I agree with it. This is his Anchor Bible Commentary. He says:

50:00

Whose iniquities were on their bones. An obscure expression. Since it is the result of their terrorizing (see the next clause), it may refer to some visible stigma set on their limbs as punishment. Cornill [another Old Testament commentator] felicitously emended 'wntm "their iniquities" to šntm (šinnatam) "their shields" (cf. 23:24). Shields on bodies—now mere bones—complement swords beneath heads as the essential weapons of soldiers.

In other words, they're not burying their iniquities, they're burying their shields. Which makes a lot of sense, with the swords being laid under their heads and all that stuff. You say, "That's not fair—you can't just change the text!" Well, here's what it's based on. The word for "their iniquities" begins with an 'ayin. It's 'ayin-vav-nun-tav-mem: "their iniquities." The letter 'ayin is very similar to the letter tsadi in Hebrew, especially in Dead Sea Scrolls. They're very hard to distinguish. So if you assume that the scribe made a mistake and put 'ayin there and you swap in tsadi, you get the word "shields." I suspect that Cornill is right because it makes really good sense in context and it makes sense in the whole paragraph that Meshech and Tubal are not going to be buried. They're the uncircumcised. They're the jerks. They're slain by the sword. They deserve to be in Sheol. Verse 27: "They do not lie with the mighty, with the fallen from among the uncircumcised" (the ones who are distinct from them). They don't lie with them. These are the ones who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war—with their swords under their heads, with their shields with their bones. They were buried with honors. So they're not going to lie with those guys. I think that makes a lot of sense.

Nophelim is the same spelling in Ezekiel 32:27. It's not *nephilim*. So again, I don't think Ezekiel 32 can really be used... Here's the point of all of this: I don't think that this section of Ezekiel 32 can be used to give us much information about the disembodied non-human dead (the origin of demons). I just don't think Ezekiel 32 helps us much with that. To me, it's pretty clearly about the human dead—some of them honorable and some of them dishonorable. All the human dead go to the same place; you die, you go to the underworld. But there are honorable dead and there are bad guys, so I think that's what it's about. Egypt and Assyria, Meshech, Tubal, and all of them... Egypt is going to join in with the company who are buried among the uncircumcised. They are not honorable. That's where they're going to wind up—they're going to be part of the swelling mass of dishonorable dead that are going to spend eternity in Sheol. I think that's the point. So I don't think we can use this passage to really say much about the *nephilim* and the origin of demons. I think other passages you have to go to (like Job 26, Isaiah 14)... You get references to the *rephaim* in these passages, and the *rephaim* are *clearly* something that is associated with the giants. It's the same word and same

spelling in those passages as it is in Deuteronomy 2 and 3. You do not have that here with *nophelim*. It's spelled *nophelim* here; it's not *nephilim* from Genesis 6.

And *gibborim* (as I pointed out in *Unseen Realm*) is not a term that inherently means "giant," even though it's used in Genesis 6:4. David is described as a *gibbor* in certain passages. God himself is described as a *gibbor*. Remember Isaiah 9? "His name shall be called 'Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God.'" It's *el gibbor*. *Gibbor* does not inherently refer to giants—the spawn of the sons of God, the fallen Watchers. It just doesn't. But there are a lot of people out there who assume this and teach this and use this passage—I think, incorrectly.

I wanted to belabor the point a little bit, even though it gets into the little nuts and bolts details of the text. You do not have the same term spelling for *nophelim* as you do in Genesis 6:4. That's point number one. Point number two: *gibborim* does not necessarily means giants. And point number three: the *rephaim* are never mentioned in Ezekiel 32. So you've got three points of disconnect to do any talk of the origin of demons from this particular passage. You've got to go elsewhere for that.

55:00 So let's move on toward the end of the chapter here and we'll wrap up. In verse 31... the whole point of all this is that Pharaoh and the Egyptians are going to be like the Assyrians, the Elamites, like Meshech and Tubal. "You're going to be like all these other dishonorable enemies of mine" says the Lord. "I am going to give you a one-way ticket to Sheol, and that is where you're going to stay. It's really a good set-up because of what's going to happen later. So verse 31:

³¹ **"When Pharaoh sees them, he will be comforted...**

It's the same terminology that we talked about last time in the last chapter. This lemma can be translated "filled with remorse," which is a much better translation here. So I think the ESV messes this up. When Pharaoh sees them, he's not going to be comforted that the masses of his people got killed! How does that make any sense? He's going to be filled with regret, filled with remorse.

³¹ **"When Pharaoh sees them, he will be [filled with remorse] for all his multitude, Pharaoh and all his army, slain by the sword, declares the Lord God. ³² For I [God] spread terror in the land of the living...**

In other words, "You terrorized everybody and now I'm going to terrorize you."

...and [Pharaoh and his multitude] shall be laid to rest among the uncircumcised...

Among the people who are not my people. They are going to be laid to rest... That positive afterlife that Pharaoh is looking for in Egyptian religion, that positive afterlife that the Egyptians think is going to come to them—forget that. He is going to be laid to rest among the rest of the uncircumcised...

**...with those who are slain by the sword, Pharaoh and all his multitude,
declares the Lord God."**

That is how the chapter ends. This is not good news for the Egyptians. Again, it's the one-way ticket to Sheol. "These are not my people. This is their destiny." And in chapter 33 (the subject of the next episode) we get the discussion of Ezekiel being Israel's watchman. The fugitive is going to come to him and report that Jerusalem has fallen. That's going to create a transition point to, "Okay, what I just said was going to happen to you has happened, and God is bringing judgment—not just against the city and the temple, but there are still people back here in Babylon here among the captives... God is cleaning house and he's about to make sure that the people who rule you (the 'shepherds' of Israel is how it's described in chapter 34) get what they deserve. Then and only then can we start talking about the wonderful future that awaits the people of God. Because you're not going to be left here. You're not going to be like the nations who have a one-way ticket to Sheol. This is not your ultimate destiny."

So when we get through chapter 33, 34, and 35 and finish off this judgment language, we hit chapter 37. Everybody knows what that chapter is—it's the dry bones. It's about the resurrection of the nation. That is what we're headed toward. When we get out of the oracles of the nations, which will be the next episode with chapter 33, that's the hinge (chapters 33-36) because we're headed to the destiny of the people of God, not the uncircumcised. They're in Sheol. They got the one-way ticket. The unrighteous will remain in the realm of chaos. That's where they go. And Pharaoh is one of them, and of course other prophets (like Isaiah) are going to say that Babylon is going to wind up there, too. They will never be part of the living again—unlike God's people, who *will* be raised at the last day. That's where we're headed in the book.

TS: All right, Mike. Well, we're making our way towards the end of Ezekiel. We're getting there!

MH: We're getting there! And telegraphing to listeners, when we hit chapters 40-48 (about the temple), we'll probably lump all those together. We'll just do "Ezekiel temple talk" in an episode or two of the podcast. I'm not going to numb you with descriptions of measurements (laughs). It's a big subject because it's controversial. A lot of people out there are thinking these chapters speak of the rebuilding of a new temple in Jerusalem and that maybe we'll get to see it in our lifetime. Other scholars are like, "Nah, not so much. That's really not what it's about." So that's an important section, but if we lump all those together, we are

getting close. We're getting close to working our way through the rest of the book and finishing up with Ezekiel.

TS: Okay, well we appreciate it. I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.