

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

**Episode 150**

**Ezekiel 35-36**

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### **Episode Summary**

These two chapters seems intrusive. The oracles against the nations ended in Ezekiel 32, followed by the announcement of Jerusalem's fall (ch. 33) and a transition to the future hope of Israel (ch. 34). Chapters 35-36 are an oracle against Edom ("Mount Seir") followed by more restorative language in Chapter 36. This episode of the podcast explains why Ezekiel 35 isn't interruptive because, for the Israelite and OT theology, the judgment of Edom was part of Israel's restoration to her former glory. Chapter 36, more obviously about the future hope of Israel, raises important questions about eschatology. Specifically, many Bible students assume the chapter's comments about the coming of the Spirit and restoration of God's people to the land pertain to a future millennial kingdom. However, the NT quotes the chapter several times, at least two of which have fulfillment in the first century or the OT period itself. Ezekiel 36 therefore raises the issue of whether any element of Ezekiel 36 awaits fulfillment in the distant future—a question that is appropriate the rest of the way (Ezekiel 37-48).

### **Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 150: Ezekiel chapters 35 and 36. 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. Can't complain.

**TS:** Have you ever complained, though? I don't recall you ever complaining.

**MH:** Oh, I've complained. Maybe not on the podcast, but my wife could tell you I've complained (laughs). Guilty as charged.

**TS:** Maybe we should have her on the show and interview her one of these days.

**MH:** I've suggested that to her, but she's a little standoffish on that. I don't know. You can try. Maybe you'd have better luck.

**TS:** She could give us some behind-the-scenes... what's going on.

**MH:** Your accent might work on her, but she's not buying it from me.

**TS:** We'll give it a try! I'll shoot her a message to see if she'll do it.

**MH:** Yeah, why not? That would be our most popular episode. She could just skewer me for an hour and tell you what I'm really like. (laughter)

**TS:** Maybe we should ask people to submit questions for her and get the dirt on you.

**MH:** Yeah, well before you do that, I would suggest that to her and see if she'll come on and do that. Because otherwise you and the audience could be pretty disappointed.

**TS:** You never know. Maybe we'll record it without you, and that way it will be unfiltered.

**MH:** There you go. You can blame it on editing.

**TS:** Right. "Oh, I didn't take that out..." (laughter)

All right, Mike, well I've got to segue into Ezekiel 35! So away we go!

**MH:** All right. Chapter 35 and 36 today. Probably the most obvious question that people are going to have when we hit these two chapters is, "Hey what are they doing here?" We've had the oracles of the nations and we were through those. Then we hit chapter 33 and 34, which was the fugitive's report about the fall of Jerusalem. We were transitioning into the hope of restoration for the city—one final thing that, "Hey this city is basically dirt now and everything's gone and destroyed and this is the reason for it again" (like it wasn't clear the first 25 times that Ezekiel had to say this). Then we were transitioning into something optimistic, and then we get these two chapters. So that's the obvious question. Why is this chapter here when the oracles of the nations are done and we're transitioning?

Well, this is actually part of a transition, even though it doesn't look like it on the surface. And for those who didn't listen to our podcast episodes where we did two on Obadiah that were about Edom, it might be helpful to go back and listen to those prior to this. I'm not going to get into those too much except to say one or two things, but it might help you to see some of this a little bit better. I'm just offering that. We're going to see the Edomites referred to again here in these two

chapters because chapter 35 is a prophecy against Mount Seir, which is one of the geographical designations of Edom and the Edomites, so we're going to get into that again. For those who did listen to those podcasts, I think you'll see how this actually is an appropriate part of the transition to restoration.

I'm going to start here with a quote from Taylor's Tyndale Old Testament commentary because he brings this question up and then tries to sort of summarize why this really isn't as out of place as you would think it is. Taylor writes:

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The Edomites received a brief reference in the oracles against the nations (25:12–14), and the question is inevitably raised why a whole chapter is devoted to them at this particular stage in the development of the book, when the restoration of Israel is the overriding theme. The easy answer is to regard it as interpolated [MH: a lot of scholars will just say that some editor stuck it in there], but that will not bear examination because the oracle has close links with chapter 36, both in the invective style of its prophecies ('because ... therefore') and in the contrasting addresses to the mountains of Edom and Israel (35:3; 36:9). The probable answer is that the Edomites are known to have betrayed their relationship with Israel by plundering their land at the moment when Jerusalem was on the point of collapse, and that this action would account for the virulence of the prophecy as well as its position just after the news of the fall of Jerusalem. Also, if a preliminary to Israel's restoration was to be the removal of her hostile neighbours (the 'wild beasts' of the land, of 34:25?), then again the prophecy of the desolation of Edom is well placed here...

The particular heinousness of these offences [of Edom] is expressed in verses 10, 12 and 13. In reply, Ezekiel states that Edom's claims to land were invalid because Judah and Israel were God's territory (*the Lord was there*, 10), and unauthorized peoples possessed it at their peril.

So this is what we're dealing with in chapter 35. I'm just going to read it through quickly. It's only 15 verses. And with that sort of backdrop, I think you'll see what Taylor is getting at—especially if you recall at least some of what we did with Obadiah (which is all about Edom).

**The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it, <sup>3</sup>and say to it, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out my hand against you, and I will make you a desolation and a waste. <sup>4</sup>I will lay your cities waste, and you shall become a desolation, and you shall know that I am the Lord. <sup>5</sup>Because you cherished perpetual enmity and gave over the people of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment, <sup>6</sup>therefore, as I live, declares the Lord God, I will prepare you for**

**blood, and blood shall pursue you; because you did not hate bloodshed, therefore blood shall pursue you. <sup>7</sup> I will make Mount Seir a waste and a desolation, and I will cut off from it all who come and go. <sup>8</sup> And I will fill its mountains with the slain. On your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those slain with the sword shall fall. <sup>9</sup> I will make you a perpetual desolation, and your cities shall not be inhabited. Then you will know that I am the LORD.**

**<sup>10</sup> “Because you said, ‘These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will take possession of them’—although the LORD was there—  
<sup>11</sup> therefore, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will deal with you according to the anger and envy that you showed because of your hatred against them. And I will make myself known among them, when I judge you. <sup>12</sup> And you shall know that I am the LORD.**

**“I have heard all the revilings that you uttered against the mountains of Israel, saying, ‘They are laid desolate; they are given us to devour.’ <sup>13</sup> And you magnified yourselves against me with your mouth, and multiplied your words against me; I heard it. <sup>14</sup> Thus says the Lord GOD: While the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate. <sup>15</sup> As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so I will deal with you; you shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. Then they will know that I am the LORD.**

So again, the reference to these two peoples (northern and southern Israel) that are collectively known as the "house of Israel"... this is Ezekiel-an language. For the entirety of the land (even though Judah is the who was still surviving up until the time of its destruction), God is saying, "Because you did this at the point of their collapse, now I'm going to get revenge on you." It is part of the transition because you have to have this point of collapse before you can transition to the restoration. So it makes sense that Edom would be specifically targeted.

For those who have not listened to the Obadiah series (episodes 106 and 107), I'll just say this (I don't want to go back and rehearse all that): In the prophets generally, Edom is a place of doom. It's associated with the nations that threatened Israel. It becomes sort of an archetype for the nations that were against the people of God. Edom is sort of the placeholder for that. In turn, Edom is linked to Babylon because Edom helped Babylon destroy Jerusalem and carry the last two tribes into exile. Consequently, payback against Edom was viewed by an Israelite as part of the end of the exile. In other words, when Edom gets the

10:00 tables turned—when it gets what it deserves—that would have signaled to the Israelite mind, "Okay, we took our bitter medicine. We took God's punishment in exile. But now God is going to reverse things. Since Edom was right there at the moment that we collapsed, when Edom gets what's coming to it, that would be a signal that here we go—we're being brought back into relationship with Yahweh. Things are getting reversed." So this would have been viewed as part of the end of the exile and a new beginning for Israel—in fact, the beginning of the new Israel and the renewal of the Kingdom of God on earth.

This is why, back in the Obadiah episodes we gave all this backdrop to Edom and how it plays this role. Edom getting justice served to it was an important signal that the exile had ended and things were going to be made whole again. In Old Testament biblical time, Edom does suffer in the wake of the events here of 586 B.C. That's evident. But we talked in the Obadiah episodes about how in the Gospels, because the end of exile was always viewed as all twelve tribes being accounted for and brought back into relationship with Yahweh, and when you had that it would have signaled the end of exile and so would Edom being given what it deserves.

That whole matrix of ideas becomes important when we notice the prophecy in Amos about rebuilding the booth of David (Amos 9:10-12 and thereabouts). The booth/tabernacle of David being rebuilt... The prophecy talks about getting revenge on Edom, the conquest of Edom. When that passage gets quoted in the New Testament in Acts 15, Edom is viewed not as just the place "Edom" but James chooses to use the Septuagint there where it's not *edom*, it's *adam* (humankind, mankind), which is a term that shows up elsewhere for the nations. The nations are actually mentioned in James' quotation of Amos 9, that the Gentiles would now seek the Lord and be brought back.

So in the New Testament, look at what you have there. You have the resurrection of the Messiah in the book of Acts. Then you have (if you recall back to our series on the book of Acts) the regathering of the nations that begins at Pentecost and there are Jews from all parts of the ancient world. It's not just Persia and Babylon, where Judah was exiled, it's everywhere. Remnants of the twelve tribes are being brought back into the land. They hear the Gospel and then they go back to the nations and begin the process of evangelizing the nations. In James' language, they begin the process where *adam* (going back to Amos' *edom*), where they are brought back into relationship with Yahweh and this becomes the ministry to the Gentiles. In the book of Acts, we traced through how different Gentile and Jewish territories are specifically mentioned in a particular order—the Jew first and then the Gentile. Places that were associated with the Abrahamic possession are mentioned in the book of Acts, just to make the message clear that it's all twelve tribes. It's both parts of the kingdom. There's nothing left over. There's nothing abandoned or forgotten about. And then we transition to the Gentiles to make the same point—it's all the nations that were disinherited at Babel (Deuteronomy 32, Genesis 10). We talk about that in *The*

*Unseen Realm.* All these things were encapsulated in the mind of the people and this *edom/adam* (Edom and then the rest of the nations' connection) is very consistent with Old Testament thinking, even though it looks to us when we're reading the Septuagint that he just changed the word there (it was *edom* and now it's *adam*). Again, there's a reason why that's permissible in biblical theology, because of what these terms represent. James doesn't use the passage out of place. He uses the passage to make a legitimate point—that Edom is paradigmatic of the return of the nations, and so on.

15:00 You have all that backdrop and here in Ezekiel, this is why it would make sense to an Israelite after Jerusalem falls and we begin to talk about what the future hold may be. We include in that transition this comment about Edom, this diatribe, this oracle against Edom. This was a trigger point. This was something that an Israelite would get. "When Edom gets its own, that is part of our restoration. That's just part of what needs to happen." So to an Israelite, this would not have seemed out of place at all, but to us it looks a little quirky. In turn, the reference to all that and to Acts chapter 2 especially, actually creates a nice transition to Ezekiel 36.

So let's just jump to Ezekiel 36. Ezekiel 35 is pretty transparent and we summarized it there. I want to quote from Taylor again as we jump into chapter 36. He writes:

Ezekiel's promises of restoration for Israel began in chapter 34 with the prospect of new leadership in the person of the Lord as the good Shepherd and the Davidic Messiah as his nominee. The future hope is now taken up again with the prospect, first, of a new land and then finally of a renewed people to dwell in it.

That's really what chapter 36 is about. As far as structure, there are different parts of it. The first part of it is an oracle to the mountains of Israel, just like we had an oracle to the mountains of Edom (Mount Seir) in chapter 35. Here we get in the first fifteen verses an oracle to the mountains of Israel, which in and of itself has two parts. That oracle is the first fifteen verses. Verses 1-7 contain a promise or a vow that the nations round about Israel (and Edom in particular) will suffer reproach for the way they treated Israel. Then in verses 8-15, we have a future restoration of the mountains of Israel that Edom helped beat up on (Edom helped in their conquest). So we get this future restoration of Israel and the repopulation of the land by returning exiles. So those fifteen verses are broken up into two sections like that and are an important part of the chapter.

Once we get past verse 15, in verses 16-21 we get a flashback to Israel's past—a flashback that basically explains why God allowed his people to suffer. In these five or six verses it was "concern for his holy name." Remember, the name of God is God's identity—it concerns identity, reputation, his sanctified presence, all that sort of stuff. So when the people become corrupt... This is why in Israelite

thinking and in Torah thinking, the people become corrupt and the land becomes corrupt. That just defiles both God (in terms of reputation and person) but also the place that is supposed to be his dwelling—the place that is his allotted inheritance—this land of Canaan or Israel. So this is why I'm bringing part of the name theology in here that I talked about a lot in *Unseen Realm*. This is part of understanding what's going on here.

After verse 21, you get three short oracles about new blessings, which are to come once this whole process is initiated. I want to be a little selective here when it comes to some of the things in chapter 36 because I'm essentially going to drill down in a few places that I think are the most important. I'll try to sort of set the stage again (just like we did in the previous episode with Ezekiel 33 and 34) that you're starting to get an eschatological flavor to some of the discussion because, naturally, when the subject of Israel's restoration comes up, that is future to the time that Ezekiel is writing. That raises this question of, well, the future that Ezekiel describes—does that mean the remote, distant future that's still future even to us (this whole concept of a future Millennial Kingdom, a future to us in the 21st century, a future regathering of Israel), or is that future something closer to Ezekiel's time (namely, the actual return from exile and then the events of the New Testament)? Which future are we talking about here? That's going to come up again. We brought that up a little bit in that prior episode because we're going to run into again with Ezekiel 37, 38, 39, and even the whole temple vision of 40-48. This question of which future we're talking about in terms of fulfillment for these chapters that remain in the book... Is this remotely distant, or is it something that was closer to Ezekiel's time or the New Testament time, and therefore already fulfilled? That's a lingering question behind all this stuff.

20:00 So when it comes to chapter 36, the first fifteen verses, again, are pretty self-explanatory. You have a vow to the nations round about Israel, that they're going to suffer. I'll just read a couple verses and then we'll start moving through here quickly.

**“And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and say, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD.<sup>2</sup> Thus says the Lord God: Because the enemy said of you, ‘Aha!’ and, ‘The ancient heights have become our possession,’**

This is kind of an interesting phrase. "Ancient heights" actually shows up in Deuteronomy 32:13. It could be sort of the heights of the north idea—the place of the divine council, holy ground, sacred ground—because in Psalm 48 the heights of the north refers to Zion and that kind of thing. You could have some of that here (and I think you do have that lurking in the background conceptually). And if you do, you have the nations (specifically Edom) essentially saying, "We're going

to take Yahweh's land. We're going to take his home spot, his inheritance." And so this is why God reacts to it. Verse 3:

**<sup>3</sup>therefore prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Precisely because they made you desolate and crushed you from all sides, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you became the talk and evil gossip of the people,<sup>4</sup> therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD: Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and the hills, the ravines and the valleys, the desolate wastes and the deserted cities, which have become a prey and derision to the rest of the nations all around, <sup>5</sup>therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Surely I have spoken in my hot jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave my land to themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and utter contempt, that they might make its pasturelands a prey.**

It basically says, "You're not getting away with this!" So the first fifteen verses of this are saying "you're not going to get away with it" and then verses 8-15 are transitioning to restoration of this place to its rightful people and to Yahweh himself. So that's really the first fifteen verses—pretty self-explanatory. You get to verse 16:

**<sup>16</sup>The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>17</sup>“Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. Their ways before me were like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity.**

Just like the menstruous woman would become ritually unclean, ritually impure, (back to our Leviticus series here) and therefore she couldn't go in sacred space lest it be defiled ritually. We talked about what the logic was behind that. That becomes an illustration here. "You've defiled the land" is essentially the point. What you have done has, in fact, defiled holy ground, and this is why all this happened to you. Verse 21:

**<sup>21</sup>But I had concern for my holy name [MH: my presence], which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came.**

How'd we do that? We defiled the land. How'd that happen? Because of this whole litany of sins that we did. Sin among the people of God defiles the land. In New Testament terminology, this is why sin needs to be expelled from the Church—from the people of God. The Church is where the presence of God now is. This is why you get the idea of church discipline when you have an

unrepentant sinner. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5 to put that person out; the community is to deliver him unto Satan. Why is that language there? (I discuss this in *Unseen Realm*.) Because that's where sin belongs. It belongs outside the camp, to use Old Testament language. The idea is you put them outside the camp, outside holy ground (which is the community of believers) with the hope that they will want to come back. The idea is restoration. The key is to repent and then you're brought back into fellowship. So it's a very "holy ground," "sacred turf," kind of idea behind church discipline thinking. Here we have it in its own Old Testament context.

What I want to sort of focus on for the remainder of the episode is verses 22-32. This is the section that talks about putting the spirit within the people of God. I'm just going to read the whole section to the end here.

25:00

**<sup>22</sup>“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. <sup>23</sup> And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name [MH: Here we’re talking more about reputation—“God couldn’t make the plan work—ha, ha!”], which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. <sup>24</sup> I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. <sup>28</sup> You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. <sup>29</sup> And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. <sup>30</sup> I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. <sup>31</sup> Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. <sup>32</sup> It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord God; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.**

**<sup>33</sup>“Thus says the Lord God: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. <sup>34</sup>And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by. <sup>35</sup>And they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.’ <sup>36</sup>Then the nations that are left all around you shall know that I am the LORD; I have rebuilt the ruined places and replanted that which was desolate. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.**

**<sup>37</sup>“Thus says the Lord God: This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their people like a flock. <sup>38</sup>Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”**

That's the end of the chapter. Now here's the issue. There are places in this passage that are very clearly linked to events in the New Testament. Just by way of illustration, let's go back to verse 24:

**<sup>24</sup>I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.**

You say, "Well, didn't that happen at the return from exile?" If you know your Old Testament history, God eventually brings the people back from Babylon into Canaan. We have lists of them in Ezra. They are people from Judah. We do not have all the tribes accounted for in the lists of the returns as the Bible records them, so we have this idea that the ten tribes are still lost. Indeed, when you get to the Gospels (and we talked about this when we did a few episodes on the tribulation period and Jesus and eschatology), the New Testament has this sense that Jews really thought of themselves as still being in exile. They're still waiting for some of these things to happen and for the Messiah to return. The Messiah, who is the Good Shepherd—the True Shepherd—(Ezekiel 34) is going to be linked to what's described here in chapter 36. He's going to be linked to what's described in Ezekiel 37. He's going to be linked to 38 and 39 and all this other stuff. So they view all these things as part and parcel of one big package. In their minds, Israel is still... All twelve tribes have not been restored. And you look and this and think, wait a minute... "You have profaned my name among the nations." That's a problem. "I will take you from the nations and gather you from *all* the countries and bring you into your own land." *All* the countries, not just Babylon or anything that could be associated with the Babylonian/Persian occupation and empire, from which the people of the tribe of Judah returned in the days of Zerubbabel. Here it says "all the countries." So you look at this and

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you go, "Okay, some of this kind of happened at the return in Old Testament times, but the rest of it seems really to reflect a New Testament situation—namely Acts 2." There you have Jews coming back into the land from all the countries round about—not just Babylon and Persia. Again, they hear about the Messiah, they hear about Jesus rising from the dead, three thousand of them believe, and then they go back to these countries and they begin... they're like cell groups. They're like a virus that goes back into the Gentile nations that also will need to be reclaimed to reverse what happened at Babel. They become these agents of evangelism to tell the Gentile about what happened here.

Now when Paul goes into these places, he does go to the Jew first because Jews are going to go back and most of the time they're going to tell their countrymen—they're going to tell Jews—"Hey, our messiah showed up and this is what happened!" They have friends who are Gentiles. Gentiles are going to start hearing about this. We meet them in the book of Acts. You meet random Gentiles that have heard about the messiah and even some that have believed. It's because of the activity... The Gospel has gone into these places because of the events at Pentecost. Paul is sort of going to throw fuel on the fire, so to speak, and just blow this whole thing up once it becomes very apparent that this is also very clearly for the Gentiles (the reports in the book of Acts, the whole Council of Jerusalem thing). Without going down the Acts rabbit-trail here, you have parts of Ezekiel 36 that don't really fit the return from Babylon that we get in the Old Testament. It's bigger than that. You can look at it and say, "Okay, well that happened in Acts 2." Why? Look at verse 25:

**<sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses,**

God says, "I'm going to clean you up from all your idols. I will cleanse you." And that's sort of referenced in Hebrews 10:22. The writer says:

**<sup>22</sup> Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.**

Get it? It's a reference to this Ezekiel 36 idea and the book of Hebrews was written in the first century—this is New Testament times. Verse 26 [Ezekiel 36]:

**<sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.**

When did that happen? When did the Spirit come and indwell people? Well, that is a direct description of—and a derivative thing from—the events at Pentecost in Acts 2. Continuing with verse 26:

**And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.**

You read 2 Corinthians 3:3. Again, this is New Testament stuff. Paul is speaking to Gentiles in Corinth. It says:

**<sup>3</sup> And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.**

The fleshy heart... other translations use words like that in this verse. This is a reference to Ezekiel 36:26 and other passages, like Jeremiah 31 (the New Covenant passages). In verse 27 of Ezekiel 36, it says point blank:

**<sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.**

In other words, the Spirit of God is going to be dwelling in you now to prompt you to not do all this awful stuff again that led to the exile. In other words, you're going to have the Spirit of God indwelling you to help you do this. Again, this is a description of New Testament stuff. This raises—and "propels" really might be a better word—end-times issues and end-times questions. If we can just put it in the form of one question it would be something like this: Is there anything in Ezekiel 36 that wasn't true or that wasn't fulfilled when the exiles returned in Old Testament times, or in Acts 2 (the book of Acts)? Is there anything in chapter 36 that can't be covered by that ground? Maybe—depending on how you read it—verse 35. I'll read that again, starting in verse 34:

**<sup>34</sup> And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by. <sup>35</sup> And they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.'**

Now some would say, "Okay, that's a reference to the New Earth, the Edenic global Eden and what-not. Could be. Others would say it's kind of more generic and just refers to the fact that this land that was desolate and now—with a little hyperbole here—is just flourishing. It's blossoming; it's wonderful, whereas before it was just a dirt pile because of what happened to it. You could read it either way, but verse 35 is the only thing (at least to my reading) that doesn't sound at least *possibly* like it could be accounted for in the historic return and the events of Acts—first century stuff.

Why do I bring it up? The question is relevant because of what follows: Chapter 37—the dry bones. Chapter 38 and 39—the Gog and Magog thing. Even chapters 40-48—the temple vision. We're going to have to ask the same question of these chapters. Are these chapters (like chapter 36, apparently) also fulfilled either at the historic Old Testament return or in the more comprehensive return that included all the tribes in Acts 2 and in the events of the first century in the book of Acts? Should we read those chapters and ask that question? I would say that we have to because scholars do and Bible readers do, but are these chapters that a lot of Christians just sort of reflexively put in the remote distant future—the dry bones vision, Gog/Magog, the temple (they say that's a new temple that's going to be built during the Millennium and all that sort of stuff)... Is it plausible to read all these chapters the same way that we would apparently look at chapter 36? That basically, everything in here is already fulfilled. Now, that in turn is relevant because of the whole Christian discussion of eschatology—the way systematic theologians talk about these things.

The amillennialist, of course, wants *all* this prophetic talk (from chapter 36 all the way to the end book and all the prophetic talk in the prophets) to be about the return from exile—either the historic return, the events of the New Testament, and maybe the Second Coming. If it's the Second Coming, the amillennialist will abstract the talk that deals with the Second Coming. They'll still abstract it to be a reference to just the Church generally. It's never a reference to the nation of Israel. It's never a reference to a literal human antichrist. The amillennialists that I know don't believe in a personal, specific antichrist. The antichrist for them is a symbol of evil that confronts the Church. That's what I mean by abstraction. So an amillennialist will look at all this and the questions that we've asked and say, "It's all about the historic return from the Old Testament, the events of the first century, and the Church. That's it, and now we're waiting for the Second Coming. We're not going to have a literal tribulation period. None of this is about the nation of Israel in any way. None of this is about a real, personal, individual antichrist." The antichrist, again, is sort of a symbolic talk for Satan and evil, that sort of thing. That's the amillennialist perspective.

On the other side, you get militant pre-millers or pre-millers with something at stake—somebody like Hal Lindsey or John Hagee. They're basically committed to the other side of an all-or-nothing question. The amillennialist says it's all the Church abstracted and stuff, but the premillennialists will say, "It's all future. Everything's future. Future, future, future." None of this talk about the prophets and these passages being fulfilled in Old Testament times, and none of it was fulfilled in the first century. It's all remote future. It's all even future to us. So there are a lot of premillennialists who just go all the way with that. They're the other extreme to the amillennialists.

Then you have another model, and this is the model I've sort of been arguing for for a long time. That is: Why does it have to be both of these polar opposite

things? Why must it be an either/or issue? Why must eschatology be either this or that? Why can't it be both/and? And I think it can, and I'm not alone here. The already-but-not-yet model acknowledges that much of the Old Testament prophecy talk in the prophets is already fulfilled in the historic Old Testament return and Acts chapter 2—the events of the first century. But it doesn't abstract what remains in relation to a Second Coming. In other words, it holds out the possibility—or even the likelihood—that there will be a real antichrist. There will be a real tribulation period. The number is incidental. Even among pretty staunch pre-millers, it doesn't matter to many if it's seven years. Again, there's no verse that actually says that. We assume that... that school of thought assumes that. If you're like Marv Rosenthal with the pre-wrath rapture group, they don't assume that but they believe in a pre-tribulational rapture because they define the tribulation as part of the second three-and-a-half year section of the seventieth week of Daniel. There's a lot of variety here.

Again, the issue is that if you're with the already-but-not-yet model and you're not saying that everything's past and you're not saying everything's future—you're in the middle. Frankly, that's just where Scripture points. There's an already-but-not-yet feel to a lot of passages. So yeah—a lot of it's fulfilled already, but we're still going to have some real-time events that we would look at and call a tribulation. We would look and say that this is an antichrist. Some "already-but-not-yetters" include a rapture and others don't, because of the whole splitter/joiner question (are you a splitter or are you a joiner?).

So I wanted to take this opportunity in chapter 36 just to show you why you have these different perspectives. A lot of people listening, I imagine, can't comprehend amillennialism at all because they're raised in a pretty staunch Hal Lindsey/John Hagee kind of thing. They just think amillennialism is out there to deny prophecy whenever they can, like it's some kind of liberal thing. It's just not that at all. They will look at a passage like Ezekiel 36 and say, "Look, is there really anything in here that wasn't already fulfilled in the historic return or Acts 2 at Pentecost?" And for them the answer is, "No, we can account for all of it, so we should." And that's where it will end. They won't think about how going ahead and moving forward when it comes to the Second Coming... that maybe we shouldn't just abstract everything to the Church. Maybe there's a literalistic aspect to this, too. And, of course, the pre-millers are on the other side. But I wanted to show you from this chapter why these different views emerge, especially one that I'm thinking might be foreign to a lot of people, and that is the amillennial view.

We'll be more granular than this as we proceed through some of the other chapters, but again, this sort of sets the stage (like the previous episode on Ezekiel that I did) for this question: What future are we talking about when it comes to when Ezekiel utters these words or writes these words? What future are we talking about? A future near to the prophet or a future remotely distant? Where are we at here? You're going to get a variety of answers, and I want to try

to explain why the different views are what they are as we go through this, and then articulate that my sense of a lot of this is already-but-not-yet. When it comes to the particulars of it, you all know (at least if you've been listening any amount of time) that I believe that prophecy is deliberately cryptic. I don't think we're given granular knowledge of exactly how to articulate all this stuff, and I think that's by design. But glomming onto that idea, I do believe in the already-but-not-yet framework. Within that framework, we get some specificity in some places and in other places we don't. That's deliberate; that's just the way it is. So hopefully you can listen to this episode and get a feel for why people think the way they do moving forward.

**TS:** All right, Mike. That sounds good. I just want to switch gears here and give another quick shout-out again to your colleague friends and their podcast—*The Bible as Literature Podcast*. I just want to encourage our listeners to please go check them out, if you will. Mike, you want to say a little bit about that podcast, please?

**MH:** Yeah. This podcast, *The Bible as Literature Podcast*, is produced by a friend of mine from graduate school—Dr. Rich Benton—and his friend, Father Marc Boulos. Their goal in the podcast is to give substantive content as they work through passages. Their bent (what their niche is) is while they work through a narrative or passage, they're going to hit some historical things and some exegetical observations, but they're really big on genre ("Bible as literature"). Their special contribution is going to be discussing passages with that in mind. Again, there's going to be a lot of genre discussion—what kind of literature is this? And that's a context. There are lots of contexts for Scripture, so I think our audience (who is used to hearing me harp on context all the time—that the right context for interpreting the Bible is the one that produced the thing)... Part of that is a literary approach, and literature occurs in real time. So that's what they try to do on *The Bible as Literature Podcast*. Again, if you appreciate content that's above the Sunday School level, you would like this, as well.

**TS:** All righty, that sounds good. I'm definitely going to check them out. Also, next week is Ezekiel 37, correct?

**MH:** That's correct. The "dry bones" vision. Yep.

45:00

**TS:** Okay, looking forward to it. All right, Mike. Well, with that we'll get you out of here. I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.