

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 156

Ezekiel 40-48, Part 1

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Episode Summary

These final chapters of Ezekiel are known for the prophet's vision of a new temple. However, scattered within that vision is an enigmatic figure referred to as the "prince" (Hebrew: *nasi*). In this episode we discuss whether or not Ezekiel's temple vision should be understood as a functioning building used after the return of the messiah, and how such a literal expectation aligns (or not) with the notion that the "prince" is a Davidic messianic figure. There are serious textual and theological problems for rigid literalism in both respects.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 156: Ezekiel 40-48, Part 1. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing this week?

MH: Very good. Another busy week, but I think pretty productive.

TS: Well, good! You did an awesome job on the Jim Bakker Show.

MH: It was fun. I blogged about it. If anybody has any questions about what in the world Mike was doing on this show, go to drmsb.com. I blogged a few thoughts on it. The bottom line is that we all know he's not a theologian. The good news is that he didn't pretend to be. He was very upfront about that, but he made the effort. He is interested in the content and he's interested in having his audience hear the content, and so that's good. That's a good thing. If any audience out there in the world of Christianity or Christian Middle East needs this content, especially as it relates to the spirit world, it's this bunch. They need it and they're not going to come to me, so I need to go to them. It was a positive experience across the board. He just made the effort. I'm grateful for that.

TS: Absolutely. You could not have articulated the message better. I think the people who need to hear it will hear it, and hopefully they'll become Naked Bible Podcast listeners and go from there and learn.

MH: You have to think it would help. You're either part of the solution or you're part of the problem. You can't be part of the solution if you don't show up.

TS: Absolutely. So, Mike, we're winding down Ezekiel. We only have two more episodes, so what are going to do?

MH: Can you believe it? (laughing) Can we stretch it into five or six?

TS: Technically, yeah. It should be another eight or nine! But how are you going to do this?

MH: Well, chapters 40 through 48... We're going to do this in two parts and we'll just jump in here. These chapters are divisible into three sections. You have three whole chapters (basically 40 into 43) describing the vision of the future temple. I'm not going to sit here and just read through all that and say, "This is what a corner means, this is what a measuring reed is..." We don't need to do that. But it's important to say something about it, and we're going to do that in this episode. Then you get chapters 44 through 46, which are rules governing going into the temple and coming back out. Again, that's not terribly exciting so that's not going to get its own episode. Then in 47 and 48 you have the apportionment of the future land among the people of Israel. So that has sort of this "Joshua" feel to it. None of this material is really going to lend itself to something super revelatory at the granular level. That's the key thought here. If you take these chapters as a whole, there are some things that are not only worth thinking about but that are really important to think about when it comes to what this means, not only for its original hearers but something toward the future—something beyond Ezekiel's own day. Of course, right away there's the big issue of whether we should understand this description literally. "Is this going to be a temple in the future Millennial Kingdom?" and all these sorts of questions.

On a macro level (taking these chapters as a whole), there's a lot of interesting stuff here that needs to get talked about. That's how we're going to approach it. If you're interested, I'm going to send Trey a diagram (basically, pictures that come from Block's NICOT commentary on Ezekiel [New International Commentary of the Old Testament], the second volume, of what the structure would look like and that sort of thing. So you'll be able to look at that, but we're not going to go to the granular level here and talk about how this vestibule is different from the other one over here. We're not going to do that. But if you want a visualization of this content, we'll make that available.

Today we're really going to talk about two issues related to Ezekiel 40-48. The first one is the question of whether we are to understand this vision as a future literal building (this idea of a temple in the Millennial period being a physical structure) that is built either before or in conjunction with the Second Coming of Christ. In other words, is this about a building that's going to be in operation after

the Second Coming? That's one issue. The second is the matter of the *nasi'*, which is a Hebrew term for "prince" in these chapters. The first part... The "prophecy experts" are all over the whole building thing, for right or wrong. The talk about the prince, though, I think gets neglected and is going to ultimately influence the way we need to look at these chapters. So we're going to discuss those two matters as they pertain to this whole collective (Ezekiel 40-48).

Let's start with the first issue. Are we to understand this vision of Ezekiel as a future literal building, i.e., another temple that is in operation after the Second Coming of Christ? I'm predisposed to answer this question "No, it's not about a literal building" for three broad reasons. We're going to drill down into all of these things, but here are my three reasons in a nutshell.

1. You know about my view that the future earthly kingdom is the New Earth, not a one-thousand year interregnum before the New Earth. We talked about that in the last podcast that we did on Ezekiel (38 and 39). So when people ask me if I believe in a coming earthly Kingdom of God with the returned messiah (Jesus) as its king, my answer is, "Yes, I believe the Kingdom will come to earth." But I don't mean the standard Millennium idea when I say that. It's this length issue, this number issue. Again, if that's unfamiliar to you, listen to the last podcast (Part 2 of Ezekiel 38 and 39) and you'll understand what I'm talking about there and why.
2. I think we have to say that this isn't about a future literal building because of the negative arguments against literalism here. That is, there are features of the text that suggest that what's being described transcends literalism. In other words, there are textual indications that don't seem to jibe with literal expectation that Ezekiel 40-48 is really about giving instructions for building this temple that's in operation after the Second Coming.
3. There are positive arguments for seeing the description in Ezekiel 40-48 as pointing to a reality that transcends a physical building. So there are arguments against a literal approach in the text and there are arguments for a more-than-literal approach.

The third one (positive arguments about seeing the description as pointing to some reality that transcends a physical building)... that's really going to be where we land in Part 2 (the next episode, Part 2 of Ezekiel 40-48). We're going to focus on that third element next time (the positive arguments for seeing the description as something that transcends the idea of a literal building). So for today, we're going to park in the other things.

Let's focus on my second reason. We're not going to go back and talk about Ezekiel 30 and 38 and all that sort of stuff about how the New Earth is the Kingdom as opposed to a one thousand-year Millennial reign (six of one and half

dozen of the other). We're not going to go repeat that. So what we're really going to focus on here are the negative arguments that arise from the text against taking this description as a building project in the future—about building a structure in the future.

Within the category of negative arguments, let's just list out a few. I'll use letters here because I used numbers above.

- A. There are disconnections with other Old Testament passages about building the tabernacle and the temple in earlier contexts. There are disconnections with those descriptions and this one in Ezekiel 40-48. There's an article by Moshe Greenberg entitled "The Design and Themes of Israel's Program or Restoration." He notes the following. He talks about the fact that there are instructions for making the desert tabernacle. In Exodus 25-30, there's a narrative describing its building (the actual building of that structure in Exodus 35-40). There's also a narrative description of the building of Solomon's Temple in 1 Kings 6. None of these other passages that describe how to build and the building of these other structures... None of them are really similar to what we have in Ezekiel 40-42 (when we actually get the description of the temple). In fact, Ezekiel 40-42 is actually not a set of instructions for building anything. It's a vision of something that's already built. It's a vision of something that exists. There are no building instructions in Ezekiel 40-48 and specifically chapters 40-42.

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Taylor, who we've mentioned on other episodes of Ezekiel... This is not from his commentary, this is from an essay called "The Temple in Ezekiel" in a book called *Heaven on Earth* about temple/tabernacle stuff throughout the Bible. He writes this:

The first thing to note is that there is no indication in Ezekiel that the construction of such a city and such a Temple was authorized by God. As Allen [another scholar] observes, 'Significantly there is no call to rebuild the temple, only to observe the regulations for rites and offerings ... The new Temple was to be Yahweh's creation built for rather than by his people, as a model of his own being and of his relationship with them.' Instead, Ezekiel is presented with a scenario prepared by God, which he is shown around by his interpreting angel-guide. The new Temple is God's doing. The prophet's only task is to describe it in as full detail as he can.

In other words, there's no command in these chapters to build anything. The prophet just sees this thing that God says, "Go look at that and then describe it," and he does. So that's a disconnect because when you have the descriptions of the tabernacle and the temple in other parts of the Old Testament, there are very clear building plans there—very clear things

that people are supposed to do to create this structure. You don't get that in Ezekiel 40-48. So that is a very obvious (at least to a close reader) outlier. It's something that you'd expect that is missing.

B. There are irregularities in the architecture and the furniture of what Ezekiel describes in chapters 40-48. Again, there are things that you'd expect to see that are not there or there's something odd about them.

- 1) First example: There's an absence (curiously enough) of height dimension in nearly all of the descriptions. In fact, the Hebrew term for height is actually only mentioned two times. One is in Ezekiel 40:5, where it alludes to a wall and the other one is Ezekiel 43:13, where it describes the height of the altar. Greenberg comments on this in page 193 of his article. He says:

There are some notable omissions. With very few exceptions, measurements are of length and breadth only; in other words, the visionary has effectively conveyed only a ground-plan, bounding and describing areas in accord with his basic concern over separation and gradation [MH: sacred space]...

At another point, Greenberg says something about the precision and detail argument, which is affected by this. Just to summarize what he is thinking: How can you say something is really precise... In other words, how can you say God is giving a detailed plan that he wants people to follow to construct this building/object if he never throws in how high/tall things are supposed to be? What would you do as a contractor? Two out of three dimensions are there, but the third one isn't and it's kind of important! Not only that, but there's never any clear description of a roof for the temple, which is really odd. I don't want to be silly about it, but we really don't want birds pooping on sacred space. This is why buildings have roofs, especially if they're holy buildings. You just don't have this.

I think this is noteworthy because one of the things you run into all the time in defense of the idea that this must be about a literal structure that's going to be used by the messiah after he returns is this so-called "detail argument." I just want to throw in my own two cents here. I don't think the detail argument makes much sense, just generally, and here's why. Think about the logic. The more detail something receives, that means we're supposed to take the passage literally. Well, if that's the case, what does that say about the meaning of prophecies that have less detail? Should we take them non-literally, then? There are plenty of Old Testament

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prophecies about messiah that lack detail. In some cases, they're kind of ambiguous. The fact that something is laid out in detail is not an argument against its symbolic meaning later on, either within the Old Testament or with how the New Testament repurposes something.

By way of illustration, Passover is laid out in great detail in two different chapters in the Old Testament. But it's considered a type (it's symbolic) of the sacrifice on the cross later on. When you read the crucifixion accounts, it doesn't mime the steps of the Passover. It doesn't do that at all. But there's a very secure relationship between the two. The equation is made by New Testament authors, nevertheless. There you have a case where something is very detailed and you're not supposed to interpret it literally because the crucifixion doesn't mimic what happens in the Passover, even though there's a very clear conceptual relationship between the two.

So you've got, in essence... Detail is not a hermeneutic. The fact that something is detailed doesn't tell you how it should be interpreted. The fact that it's *not* detailed doesn't tell you how it should be interpreted. The issue is context or contexts, and one of the contexts that's important (that I think is neglected) is how the New Testament repurposes ideas. If you listen to this podcast, you know just in general that I'm kind of big on this idea that the New Testament is an inspired commentary on the Old Testament. So what the New Testament says about the Old Testament ought to matter. I think this is one of those cases. We're going to get into more of that in Part 2 because the New Testament does have a lot of temple-talk in it, and there is no prophecy in the New Testament about the expectation that a new temple will be built. There just isn't. Amid all of its temple-talk, you're not going to find that. Of course, the defenders of a literal approach here would say, "Who cares? We have Ezekiel 40-48 and look at all that detail!" Well, does that tell us how to interpret anything and is it really that detailed? It doesn't have any height, it doesn't have a roof! So what counts as detail/precision? I hope you get the idea that there are disconnections here.

- 2) Another irregularity in architecture and furniture: There are some issues of disproportion (and omission, as well). Greenberg notes:

The massive size of the gatehouses verges on caricature: their dimensions (25 x 50 cubits) exceed those of the main hall of the

Temple (20 x 40 cubits); their length is half that of the inner court (100 cubits)!

In other words, if you actually built this, it's going to look kind of odd. It's going to be pretty disproportionate. He also notes that many furnishings of the Solomonic temple and the desert tabernacle are missing in this description. For example, the ark and its cherubs and the lamp are not there. The only interior furniture mentioned is an ambiguous "altar of wood." Greenburg adds:

Very strange is the absence of a wall around the inner court, to which its three massive gates might stand in relation. No equivalent to the lavers or to the bronze sea appears in the outer court... Where were priests to wash? The notion that the water issuing from the Temple might serve is unlikely, for until it leaves the Temple it is too thin a stream for body washing.

He highlights some of these oddities. Important objects of furniture are missing. If you have a temple and your temple is in operation and we have the whole issue of sacrifices, why would the sacrificial system come back? I'll say something about that a little bit later. I don't think it makes any sense that it would come back. But let's just say, "Okay, Mr. & Mrs. Literalist, it's a real building and now we're going to have sacrifices again." They'll come up with all sorts of reasons why this makes sense that we have sacrifices again even after the cross, but what they won't tell you is that there's no place for the priests to wash. And that's kind of important for Old Testament ritual. They won't tell you that some of the objects that got sprinkled with blood in the Old Testament aren't even there. Oops! Again, there are just these disconnects. These are disconnections that arise from the text. This isn't Mike saying, "I just don't like this view so I'm not going to take it." No, these are problems present in the text (or in some cases, they're not in the text and those absences create problems for this perspective).

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- 3) There's an inconsistency with the boundaries of the promised land. That's going to come later in chapters 47-48, as we mentioned at the beginning. The land here that's talked about in Ezekiel is kind of minimalist. In other words, it's the boundaries of the land that are linked to the Conquest at a very specific time under Moses, Joshua, and David. What about that extra stuff there? To say it a better way, the boundaries here in Ezekiel 47 are roughly those found in the book of Numbers chapter 34, verses 2-12. If you actually compare the boundaries here in Ezekiel 47 and go back to Numbers 34,

here's what's *not* in the description of the land. I'm going to use Greenberg's summary here:

It thus excludes on the north the Aramean kingdoms conquered by David;

Well, if David conquered those kingdoms, why shouldn't they be in the land in the possession of the Israelites later on in this eschatological scene? But it excludes what's conquered by David.

On the east [it excludes] the transjordanian domains of the ancient tribes of Reuben, Gad and half-Manasseh; and on the south [it excludes], Edomite territory down to Ezion-Geber, once part of the Judahite kingdom.

So if you're going to interpret Ezekiel 40-48 literally and say it's about a literal building, look at what the proponents of this view are not telling you. They're not telling you the priests have no place to wash. They're not telling you that important items of furniture to the sacrificial system aren't there. They're not telling you that it doesn't have a height dimension, it doesn't have a roof, there's disproportion with what even is there. And they're also not telling you that if you go look at the description of the land here, there's missing land! There's missing land from the monarchy. There's missing land from the time of Joshua that was conquered and claimed as part of the promised land. It's missing! So how would we legitimize a literal reading of one part of Ezekiel 40-48 and kind of let these other ones slide? I'm suggesting to you that we really can't do that and be consistent.

- 4) Another irregularity would be that there's no clarity for any command for building anything. I've already mentioned this, but we're putting it under here because I want to read a particular passage. Here's the closest you get to any sort of command about building something. It really isn't a command to build anything, but the closest you get is Ezekiel 43:10-12. I want to read those to you. God says:

¹⁰“As for you, son of man, describe to the house of Israel the temple, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and they shall measure the plan. ¹¹And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the temple, its arrangement, its exits and its entrances, that is, its whole design; and make known to them as well all its statutes and its whole

design and all its laws, and write it down in their sight, so that they may observe all its laws and all its statutes and carry them out. ¹² This is the law of the temple: the whole territory on the top of the mountain all around shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the temple.

The only thing they're commanded to do here is observe the temple laws and its statutes and carry them out. They're never commanded to build anything. You can read through the entirety of these eight chapters and you will not find a command to build the thing. That is really odd, to say the least.

- 25:00 C. We're talking about negative arguments against the literalistic approach to this. We had disconnections with other Old Testament passages about tabernacle and temple-building. We had irregularities in the architecture and furniture (four things under that). Next, we have a general incoherence problem of the return to sacrifice. I'm going to explain what I mean here, but I would say that even without the atonement issue... Those who think the Old Testament sacrifices about atonement mean atonement for sin (the popular evangelical approach to the Old Testament sacrificial system)... People think this is about getting moral forgiveness and having your sins wiped away as an individual. In other words, they're superimposing the talk about Jesus onto the Old Testament sacrificial system. If you have listened to our series on Leviticus, you know that doesn't work because that's not actually what Leviticus says ninety-nine percent of the time. The sacrifices are really about purifying objects and purifying sacred space and that sort of thing.

But for the sake of discussion, let's say you're one of these people who takes the sacrifice language of the Old Testament as being about personal atonement for sin. Well, if you're taking that perspective, you've got a serious problem. It has to be correct that the sacrifices are not brought back for this purpose. If they are brought back to atone for personal sin, then I don't know any other way to put it. Then the writer of Hebrews was just wrong. The book of Hebrews makes a big point about how the atoning work of Christ is the key for personal forgiveness—past, present, and future. Folks, you and I were born after the cross. The work of Christ is completely sufficient/adequate to take care of our sin problem. So why wouldn't it be completely adequate to take care of some future person's sin's problem (who is living during a millennium)? If they need animal sacrifices again, the writer of Hebrews (and other passages of the New Testament) are simply wrong. They are errant. That is a huge problem. It's a theological problem, to say the least.

Many, in my experience, want to affirm a literal temple, but when you point out the sacrifice problem they say, "Okay, all right, the sacrifices aren't literal, but the temple still is." Let's think about that. If the sacrifices ought not to be considered as literal, why would somebody consider the temple as being literal? Who needs a temple with no sacrifices? What's the point to having a temple? If Jesus' sacrifice covered us—who lived well after the event—why wouldn't it cover other people who live later in a presumed millennial kingdom. In other words, why would people living in the Millennium need animal sacrifice for atonement? Why? The cross atoned for the sins of the world—everyone who ever lived—past, present, and future. So it would naturally include them, as well. So what do we need the system for? If we don't need the system of sacrifices, why do we need a temple? What good is a temple without a sacrificial system?

Most who would defend sacrifices returning say they will be some sort of memorial or teaching illustration. In other words, "The sacrifices will come back to help people in the Millennium understand what happened at the cross." Okay, let's think about that because, frankly, it's deeply flawed. Why would people need sacrifices as a reminder of the atonement of Jesus? Why not just hand them a New Testament and have them read about it? Why would anybody need sacrifices for understanding how Jesus fulfilled the point of Old Testament sacrificial stuff when they could just read it like you and I did in the New Testament? Where is the prophecy that says there won't be any New Testaments around in the Millennium? Just hand the person a New Testament and say, "Here's what's going on here. There's the returned Christ—the returned messiah—if you want to find out what he did in the past on the cross, read this chapter!" Why do you need to bring the sacrifices back? Are there no Bibles anymore? It just doesn't make any sense.

With respect to modern Jews, they don't have a need of the Old Testament law to be "commemorated" to become believers in the messiah. Since the temple was destroyed 2,000 years ago, Jews have come to Christ just fine without needing to watch a sacrifice to learn what Jesus did! The whole approach just doesn't make any sense. So I think we have a severe coherence problem.

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We'll try to make it better here. Let's say you have someone who wants to defend the literal approach and they understand that the sacrifices in the Old Testament weren't about individual sin (moral cleansing). In other words, we can't impose the talk about Jesus on the Levitical system. (If you don't believe that, go listen to the series on Leviticus). Let's just say somebody realizes that and they say, "Okay, the sacrifices that are going to come back in the Millennium aren't about atoning for sin. They're purification offerings." Again, we have an issue there. On the one hand, it's nice to know that you have somebody here who realizes that the

Levitical sacrifices were about purging or (the word we liked when we were doing Leviticus) they were about "decontaminating" sacred space and sacred objects. That's good. But now the point being made is that maybe this is what we're doing now. When the sacrifices come back because we have a literal temple (and there's no point to having a temple without sacrifices) it's not about personal atonement. People can get saved just like they do today. It's about cleansing sacred space. It's about keeping the temple (the new temple, this great millennial temple) pure and decontaminating it, just like it was in Leviticus.

Okay, well... I'll ask it again. If this is your vision, why do we need to revert to purifying sacred space in the Millennium when *we* (as believers) *are* sacred space, according to the New Testament. See, the New Testament describes believers as the temple. It describes believers as the temple because Jesus referred to his body as the temple and we are the body of Christ. The New Testament says that the Spirit of God (the same glory of God of the Old Testament) "tabernacles" within us. *We are sacred space*. This is why in 2 Corinthians 6, Paul would say things like, "What fellowship does the temple of God have with idols? Don't you recognize that you're the temple of God?" and all this impurity language like in 2 Corinthians 6. This is why the New Testament talks about us the way it does. We are sacred space. So if that's true in the New Testament era (and it is, because that's what the New Testament says), why do we need to build a building and then regularly decontaminate it? Why do we need to do that? I don't see the coherence and the consistency. Why would we revert to purifying sacred space on the ground in a building so that we can be in the presence of God when the Spirit of God is in us? What, in the Millennium believers are no longer inhabited by the Spirit? Is that the point? People rarely think about the ramifications of the literalist approach to this. Again, aren't there any Bibles in the Millennium? Doesn't the Spirit of God reside inside believers, tabernacle within them in the Millennium, making them sacred space? Why do we need this? These assumptions need to be evaluated. These questions need to be asked. I've asked them to myself a good amount, which is why I gravitate away from looking at Ezekiel 40-48 as some sort of command or even vision of something that's going to have to be built later on.

Let's just transition away from that. Those are my negative arguments against the literalistic approach. But our second issue for today concerns the matter of the *nasi'*—the prince—that is talked about in these chapters. I could have included this as a problem for literalism, as well, but I don't want to do that because this is less familiar and it sort of needs to have its own space (its own time and dedicated treatment here). That's the way we're going to handle it. I associate it with literalism because you're going to see that if you take what's said about the prince too literally you're actually going to have disconnections between that figure/character and Jesus, the returned messiah. So it could be another one of

those issues where it's like, "Hey, who's the consistent literalist here?" If you want to take these chapters and talk about the temple then you need to be consistent and look at the prince with the same commitment to literalism. If you do that, you're just going to run into problems. But that's not to say that he has no connection at all to messiah. There might be; there could be that sort of thing conceptually a little bit. But if you're really pressing the text for literalism, it's not good enough to have a little bit of a correlation between Jesus and the prince. You need *all* of it. I realize that talk is probably totally unfamiliar because most people when they read these chapters are fixated only on the building description. They kind of gloss over this prince guy in these chapters, but we need to get into that.

35:00 The starting point for this is to note first off (full disclosure here because we're dealing with the text) that the word *nasi'* ("prince") is, of course, not the same as the word for "king" (*melek*), but elsewhere in Ezekiel those two terms appear synonymous; they do overlap. For that reason, scholars fall into two interpretive categories when it comes to this figure—the prince.

1. The *nasi'*/prince is also the king (*melek*) and probably of the house of David. So there's one school of thought that says the prince is a Davidic king that gets referred to also as king and as prince here in these chapters, just like in Ezekiel 33-37 where there are passages where these two terms overlap. We should take that information and when we read Ezekiel 40-48 we think to ourselves, "Even though he's only called prince here (*nasi'*), we're still talking about a Davidic king." That's the first view.
2. The second view is to say the *nasi'*/prince is *not* a Davidic king, and he's not a Davidic king because at this point in Israel's history they've sort of despaired of having the monarchy return. They've despaired of a messianic hope. This is sort of a standard critical view. Or at least, you don't have a king specifically in view here. That's not really a good argument because I think it's a little bit of an odd hermeneutic to say that the Jews have abandoned a messianic hope here. You're going to have prophecy at the same time period outside of Ezekiel and you're going to have prophecy after the time of Ezekiel that is clearly looking for a future messianic rule. So I think that's kind of an odd approach. I think better for this view is to note that there are specific restrictions in these chapters placed on the *nasi'* that make his identification as the messiah extremely unlikely—and some would say impossible.

So those are the two views. One, who cares if he's called the prince. He's still the king because those two terms overlap. We have a messianic figure here. The other view (that I'll adopt for the sake of our episode) is that we can't really look at this *nasi'* figure as the messiah because there are just too many restrictions placed on him that don't jibe with messiah in general and, frankly, don't jibe with Jesus. I'm going to fall into the second view. I think you can already tell that.

I'm going to quote at length here from an article by a scholar whose last name is Biggs. His first name escapes me right now. I think it's Robert, but I don't want to commit to that. I will put this article in the protected folder for those who subscribe to the newsletter so you can read it if you want. It's called "The Role of *Nasi'* in the Programme of Restoration in Ezekiel 40-48." I like this because, frankly, I could not improve on a better summary of this. I'm really going to skip around a number of pages and mash different sections of his article together, but it's a nice summary of what we're dealing with here. He writes:

The term *nasi'* occurs 18 times in Chapters 40-48, all in Chapters 43-48, and is the only title used for the leader of the future restored community. By way of comparison, *melek* occurs 3 times, all in the brief passage 43:6-9, and all referring to past kings of Judah... The references to *nasi'* in Chapters 43-48 are concerned with the *nasi'*'s relationship to the temple (44:1-3; 45:16-17, 21-25; 46:1-12, 16-18), or the distribution of the land (45:7-9; 48:21-22). It may be that the latter use also has some connection with the temple. The first reference to the *nasi'* occurs in 44:3. This verse prescribes that only the *nasi'* may sit in the east gate of the temple and eat bread before Yahweh. The east gate is permanently closed because the 'glory of Yahweh' has entered the temple through it (43:1-5). The *nasi'* is permitted to eat a sacrificial meal in the gate and it thus becomes something of a cult room, as Zimmerli says, but the *nasi'* is not given any cult functions here or elsewhere...

I should stop here and say that the term "cult" in scholarly lingo is to be equated with doing rituals. Back to Biggs:

40:00

The role of the *nasi'* in relation to the cult is taken up in Chapters 45:16-17, 21-25; 46:1-12. Chapter 45:13-15 prescribes the atonement offering to be made by the people. This offering is to be given to the *nasi'* whose duty it is to provide what is required for the various offerings 'to make atonement for the house of Israel' (vv 16-17). This gives the *nasi'* an important role in the cult. He is not directly involved in making the offerings and sacrifices, but he is responsible for providing the animals and grain so that offerings may be made 'for the house of Israel'. As in 44:3 we see the *nasi'* closely related to the cultic activity, though not actually involved in it. However, in a real sense, responsibility for its proper functioning falls to him... Provision for the celebration of the Passover Festival and the Feast of Ingathering are given in 45:21-25. We notice that the provisions for the sacrifices are to be made by the *nasi'* 'for himself and for the people of the land' (v 22). [MH: Note that—for *himself* and the people of the land]. That is, the *nasi'* is responsible for the effective functioning of these festivals. He is not directly involved in the actual sacrificial action, but he is to ensure that that action may take place. He is not a cultic official, but he supports the operation of the cult... The *nasi'* is of primary interest in 46:1-12, but he is considered in relation to the

people when regulations for movement within the temple are given. Verses 1-8 deal with his honoured position in the cultic celebration. He may stand at the threshold of the inner east gate when it is opened for sacrifice on the sabbaths and new moon celebrations. He is not permitted into the inner court itself, but at the entrance he may observe his sacrifices being offered (v 2)... The position of the *nasi'* and the people in the temple is taken up again in vv 9-10. The specific mention of the *nasi'* going into the temple with the people, and going out with them, suggests some form of procession... Other references to the *nasi'* relate to the position of his land in the allocation among the tribes - Chapters 45:l-8a, 8b-9; 48:21-22; 46:16-18. [MH: **You need to pay attention to this.**] The first of these is concerned with the distribution of the land for the temple, the priests and lévites (vv 1-5), the city (v 6), and the *nasi'* (vv 7-8). There is no mention of the distribution to the tribes in this account. It is rather concerned with those institutions which relate to all the tribes. To that extent the *nasi'* is to be seen in relation to the temple, along with the priests and lévites, but separated from the temple by the priests. This allocation of land appears to give 'geographical' expression to the position of the *nasi'*. He is near the centre of importance, but he is not the centre of importance. That position [geographically] is taken by the temple, next to the temple are the priests, with the *nasi'* next to them... What may we conclude from this discussion? [MH: **Catch these statements here.**] First, the position held by the *nasi'* is one of honour, as his place in the temple shows. He is the only one who may eat bread before Yahweh in the east gate, and make his offerings in the gate (44:1-3; 46:2). Also he is given an area of land which is separate from the tribes. It is central, and near that area set apart from the temple, priests and lévites, and the city (45:l-8a; 48:9-22). Second, although not a priest or lévite, and therefore not permitted to offer sacrifice or serve in the temple, the *nasi'* has an important place in the functioning of the cult. He is to provide, or to ensure that provision is made, for the sacrifices (45:22 and 16-17)... Third, as noted in the first point, the *nasi'* is given an area of land on either side of that set apart for the temple, priests, lévites, and the city. Apart from the honour and importance which this confers on him, there are three important conclusions to be drawn.

1. The *nasi'* is given independence. He has land for his support. [MH: **What does the messiah need with support?**] He will not need to depend on taxes or other means of support from the people.
2. He is forbidden to attempt to extend his land holding by taking that which is allotted to the tribes. He is also directed away from the pattern of earlier rulers who oppressed the people, and pointed toward the promotion of justice and righteousness (45:8b-9; 46:18).

3. He is not permitted to dispose of his land allocation. It has to remain the possession of his family (46:16-17).

45:00

That reference to the family ought to be interesting. I would say this. This is the way we summarize this. Here's the point to all of this: if you are literalizing the passage... Again, my argument is going to be that if you're reading Ezekiel 40-48 and you're insisting on literalism for the building, then we need to insist on literalism for the prince. And if you're identifying him with the messiah (with Jesus), you've got some problems here. Here's why; here are the problems:

1. Why would Jesus be supervising a sacrificial system? That's the role of the *nasi'*. He doesn't do any of the rituals, but he's in charge of making it happen. Why would Jesus be doing that? Consider the problems of the absent furniture here (where do they wash?) and the whole concept of bringing back sacrifices. Now you're putting Jesus in charge of a system that was rendered obsolete by what he did on the cross. It just seems like it's severely disconnected here.
2. Since messiah is also a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, it seems totally incoherent that parts of the cult and the temple complex would be off-limits to him. But that's what you have here if the *nasi'* here is the returned messiah! That's what you have. It just doesn't work.
3. Does the returned Christ have a wife and children, physical descendants? After all, the *nasi'* is forbidden to get rid of his land. It has to stay within his family. So how does that work?
4. How is it that the king of all the earth in the form of the returned Christ has restrictions on what land he can hold?
5. How is it that the messianic king has no political tasks? How does a non-political messiah rule the nations with the rod of iron?
6. Choosing to take the prince-talk non-literally but the temple-talk literally is, to say the least, interpretively inconsistent. But if that's what you want to do, then that's what you're going to do.

What I'm saying is that what we've covered in this episode is there are negative arguments against a literalistic approach (viewing what Ezekiel is describing, viewing the fulfillment of it as a temple that's in operation during the Millennium). It's very problematic, both for those negative reasons and also if you're going to do that, then what about the prince? Are you going to take him literally, too? Is this prince a messianic figure associated with David? "Because, after all, prince and king are interchangeable in other chapters in Ezekiel. It seems like we should do that." Well, if we do that, if we press the literalism, we've got significant

problems here—things that just don't line up with the description of the return of messiah.

Where does this leave us? I would say that if, on the other hand, you abstract the talk about the temple—you make it conceptual/symbolic, something like that, and think about it abstractly... In the temple's case, we get the benefit of having New Testament temple-talk, which is where we're going to focus next week. But if you abstract that temple and prince talk (in other words, you get away from rigid literalism), then you can sort of make some sense of this and you can kind of make it work with a Davidic ruler. Here's what Biggs does. Again, I don't know where Biggs is at theologically, but he argues for a Davidic ruler who isn't a king or a priest. I'm just going to use this for illustration. Obviously, the returned messiah is both a king and a priest, but here's what Biggs does with this. He says:

The emphasis here is on the *nasi'* as a leader rather than a ruler. That is, there is an intentional distinction between the leader of the new community, whose significance is to be seen in relation to the temple, and the pre-exilic rulers whose significance was seen in their political activity which led to compromises in the religious life of the people. Also, as a political figure the king offered hope for the people because he was of the house of David, and therefore heir to the promise to David (2 Samuel 7). In the new community that hope is to be found in the temple [MH: In other words, not in a messiah] which offers the people the way to Yahweh who is the source of their peace and prosperity. The *nasi'* is still a significant figure as he enables the temple to perform its function by ensuring the requirements for sacrifice and celebration are present.

50:00 What Biggs is saying (and a lot of scholars are here with this) is that by this time they'd given up on the messiah idea and on the monarchy, but the temple gave them hope. The temple said to them that they could still worship God and be acceptable to God. It becomes very works-oriented. This is Judaism for its time period, so what else can they do? Of course Jesus, when he comes the first time around, challenges this whole notion. Quite honestly, I think this is why in the temple scene when Jesus chases out the money-changers, he's like, "Look, destroy this temple and in three days I'll build it up." The account is very clear that he's not referring to the structure—he's referring to himself. The body of Christ is the temple. In that conversation, the body of Christ transforms the temple language. If you look at that, then you're going in a whole different direction away from literalism. Frankly, the New Testament does go in that direction. I find it extraordinarily difficult to defend a literal temple view.

I think we need to start thinking on these terms. If we abstract these things, we can have this work because we allow the New Testament to tell us how to read this language. We're not tied up by bringing back the sacrifices. We're not tied up

by explaining the inconsistencies and the disconnections of the temple description in Ezekiel just on their own terms (we went through the list of them here on this episode) and in relationship to descriptions of building the tabernacle and the first temple. We're not bound to worry about that and explain it if we let the New Testament temple-talk essentially just take over at this point. We're also not bound and tied up and hemmed in and concerned with explaining, "Wait a minute, so in the Millennium we have the messiah but then he hires this other guy who's also a Davidic ruler, but he's not a king and he's not a priest, either. He just supervises the sacrifices that come back." What?? We don't have to worry about coming up with some way to make that picture coherent. You do have to worry about all that stuff if you press the literalism.

Next week in Part 2, we're going to talk about what I think is a better approach. I've already telegraphed that I'm on the non-literal side of this. I would refer to it as the "transcendent" side of this or the transcendent reality view (not just worrying about a building).

Let me just give you a little preview of how we're going to approach this next week. There are positive arguments for taking the vision as more than literal, as transcending a building:

1. Ezekiel 48 and the rearrangement of the tribes... There's an issue there that is going to suggest something. I'll just leave it there.
2. There are strong links in Ezekiel 40-48 to the Eden story and the cosmic mountain idea. Chapter 40:2 has "very high mountain, Zion." If you've actually ever been there, it's really not that high. It's not even the highest mountain in the area. That language is cosmic mountain language. It means it's the most important mountain. It's the one that is the focus of God. It gets elevated (pun intended) to high status because it's his domain. Again, this is cosmic mountain talk. If you're familiar with *Unseen Realm*, you're familiar with the concept of the cosmic mountain.

I'll throw in another one. In Ezekiel 47, the water and its effect... Taylor makes the comment:

...that the land and in particular... the barren wilderness of the Arabah and the Dead Sea, transformed into a place of never-ending fruitfulness and healing properties.

They are transformed into an Edenic description. I think that's intentional. I think that speaks of something more than a building. It's this transcendent idea—this is the restored Eden. And the restored Eden... If you just take a peek in Revelation 21 and 22 it says *there was no temple*. When the New Eden comes to earth, when we have a global Eden transformed, John point-

blank says that when the city/Mount Zion (the whole cosmic idea of where God lives) descends, there is no temple. "I saw no temple there." Because you didn't need one! God was the source of light. What I'm suggesting to you, again, is to start thinking more abstractly about this sort of stuff.

3. There's the issue of New Testament temple-talk. We got into that a little bit and we're going to return to it in some more detail later on. An interesting tidbit here... I'm going to go to Bergsma here (and maybe I will put this article in the folder when we do Part 2), but catch this statement. This is from an article by Bergsma called "The Restored Temple as Rebuilt Jubilee." I'm sure some of your boats are already floating just at the title of that article. But listen to this. Greenberg (190) sets this up at one point when he says (commenting on 40-43):

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Mention of the destruction of the city (Jerusalem) in the opening date formula (40:1) presages the antithesis between the following vision [MH: **all this temple stuff**] and the awful event it was meant to remedy. Was the date significant? We know of no event in the year 25 of the exile (571 B CE.) with which to connect this vision; but 25 years is half a jubilee ("the year of release," 46:17), and the number and its double, 50, and multiples thereof (100, 500, 5,000, 10,000, 25,000) recur ahead in measurements of the Temple and the land.

Here's the question: Is that a coincidence or does it mean something? Is it designed to draw our attention to the Jubilee? If it's designed to draw our attention abstractly to the concept of Jubilee, then what we have in Ezekiel 40-48 is a marriage of cosmic mountain stuff and Jubilee stuff. Could that be the point? I'm going to suggest to you that it makes good sense, but it's sure not literalism. And you know what? We need to get away from this notion that non-literal means "not real." I would suggest to you when the Lord returns and if the Jubilee thing is how we should read Ezekiel 40-48, it's still real. These are still real-time events. They're just described in symbolic language. Symbolic language does not mean, "What's being described will not happen. What's being described is not real. What's being described can be dismissed." No, that is a caricature of non-literal interpretive approach. It's a caricature, which is another way of saying it's bogus. It's a straw man.

I hope that gives you a little foretaste of what we're going to get into next time. It's a very interesting possibility. We're going to be dipping back into Bergsma and this whole Jubilee idea and just taking an altogether different approach in Part 2. I'm telegraphing to you up-front that I'm in the non-literal camp here. I don't know that Bergsma's right or anybody else is right. I think the New Testament is right! I think the New Testament drives us in this direction, as well as the problems we talked about today, but I'm not going to claim to have everything nailed down. I just want you to consider a different approach next time in Part 2.

TS: Now the temple is a big part of the Jewish eschatology. Could you touch on that a little bit?

MH: Let's say they started building a temple tomorrow. I'm willing to bet my library (laughs)—so you know I'm pretty serious here—it won't match Ezekiel 40-48. In other words, if people start building a temple even now... If that starts happening, you know what people are going to say: "Oh, this is fulfillment of prophecy! We've got the end-times right upon us!" Okay, but let's just see what they actually build. And if it doesn't conform to Ezekiel 40-48, you're going to have people somehow try to explain that. "This one has to be destroyed and then we'll get the real Millennial temple!" The whole question is just going to churn up again. It'll change directions again and become what it was.

I think in view of just Judaism, any serious Jew would love to see a temple. They would love to see this. Now here's the question, in view of what we talked about today. Let's say the Jews have rebuilt their temple. There it is. Somehow they've pulled this off without causing a third world war. Are they going to look at that as the fulfillment of prophecy? You say, "What prophecy?" You could say on one hand that they might look here at Ezekiel 40-48 and say, "We couldn't build one that big... and we put a roof on it. So it's not the same, but that's okay because this is going to help us worship God. It's going to be part of what we need to get back to. But you know what? To really have Israel restored, we do need a Davidic king. We do need all of the land." And, of course, then they're going to have to fight about what the promised land really is—the boundaries of it. In other words, they could have a temple today, but do they have the other things? And who needs those other things to be satisfied that they're looking at some sort of act of God in a prophetic sense? You're going to have other Jews that say, "Hey, it doesn't matter. After all, Ezekiel 40-48 has this prince guy. We're going to hire some guy. It pays well; it has benefits. We're just going to hire some guy and he'll supervise a new sacrificial system and we're content to not worry about starting a war here that the messiah can win and settle. We're just grateful to have a temple. This is good enough." You're going to have a whole spectrum of opinion on whether this is prophetic fulfillment. "Does this have anything at all to do with prophecy? Does this have *something* to do with prophecy and we're going to be content, or is this like the first installment of other prophecies?" You're not going to have unanimity in thought on any of this—even if you built one today. You're just not. The only way you're going to have tongues really wagging is building exactly what Ezekiel describes, but see, then what's still missing? What is *missing*? The Davidic ruler! Even like a number two guy that's not the messiah like this guy we talked about today in Ezekiel 40-48. Even if you hired or found that guy, what authority does he really have? Is he just a figurehead? "We don't still have a theocracy. We don't have a Davidic ruler. Are we supposed to get that, or have we given up on messiah? Have we given up on the land and we're satisfied now with just having this temple? Is that where we're at now and that's how it's going to be?" A lot of Jews would say, "Good enough. Close enough—horseshoes and hand grenades. Good enough." But you're going to have others

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that say, "No, it's not good enough until it conforms exactly to Ezekiel 40-48, until we have every last square inch of the land God promised to us, and until we have a Davidic king ruling not only here, but we can read the last few chapters in Isaiah, too. He's supposed to rule the world! *That's* good enough." People just don't get into the ramifications of what they're talking about when it comes to this sort of material.

TS: I'll admit, Mike. I've always believed in literalism for the temple, so I'm going to have to go and digest that. What I do know, Mike (I can help people out here), is that the cosmic mountain is not Space Mountain at Walt Disney World. (laughter) So if anybody was confusing the two, I just wanted to go ahead and help people out that might be confused.

MH: I'm sure glad you pointed that out. See, I rode that thing all the time. We used to go to Disney World when I was in Jr. High. We'd go late and I'd just keep getting on that thing!

TS: There you go.

MH: See, the Lord was preparing me to talk about the cosmic mountain there when I was getting whipped around like an idiot.

TS: There you go, Mike. Well, one more to go and we will be done with Ezekiel! Mike, I just wanted to mention that...

MH: Are you going to cry, Trey? (laughing)

TS: No, no.

MH: You're going to break into tears here!

TS: It's taken almost a year, so we should have a "wrap party" or something like they do with movies and what-not because that's a long book.

MH: It is a long book. We're going to have some kind of vote, right? We've talked about what's next.

TS: It's coming up here, probably in June. We'll let them vote for the whole month. We've got two books in the New Testament and one book in the Old Testament. The two in the New Testament are a little bit shorter, so I'm hoping they'll go New Testament this time, rather than back into another *long* Old Testament book.

MH: What we should have done is we should not have done Obadiah so at this point we could say it's two New Testament and Obadiah. There's no choice.

TS: We could do Jude or something. That's only one chapter. (laughter) That's low-hanging fruit. You want to do something like that? That's one episode, probably.

MH: That's still ringing in my head from the last Q&A, so probably not. (laughs)

TS: I want to bring up something else that's funny. I was looking at our Facebook group and Deborah posted a funny Jib-Jab dancing video of us dancing as chickens.

MH: Oh, come on. What do you mean "us?"

TS: Do you know what Jib-Jab is? You can make little videos and you can insert somebody's head, a picture of their face, and have them dance...

MH: Wonderful. I know what I'm not watching later today.

TS: (laughing) But it's funny! I told Deborah and them in our Facebook group that I'd give them a shout-out for that video. So if you have not liked our Naked Bible Podcast...

MH: Are you a friend or an enemy?

TS: It's good, it's funny! You need to go watch it. Everybody go watch it. If you're not part of the Naked Bible group on Facebook, go join it. With that, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.