

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 342

Ezekiel's Dry Bones and the Gospel of John

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Episode Summary

In our last episode we saw how the Gospel of John repurposed parts of Ezekiel (chs. 34, 37:15-28) to describe Jesus as the Good Shepherd who would fulfill the role of God and King David as the rightful shepherd(s) of Israel. As we'll see in this episode, John uses Ezekiel elsewhere, specifically the prophecy of the dry bones being restored to life (Ezek 37:1-4). While we think of this passage as speaking of the future resurrection of the dead, John thinks more broadly about how Jesus connects to the passage.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 342: Ezekiel's Dry Bones and the Gospel of John. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you?

MH: Doing pretty well. We are... I don't know if we want to talk about the start of our Fantasy season, since the week just began. We don't have finals yet. But I'm glad to be in it.

TS: Mike, we can just go the *whole* hour if you want to talk about Fantasy Football. [MH laughs] I'm open to that.

MH: You know, we have to give props, though, to Tim Andrews. Some of the listeners know he won the league, not last year but the year before. And he has the best name. He changed his team's name. Do you remember what it is, Trey?

TS: Yeah, I do, but go ahead and let everybody know.

MH: Second Temple Jeudy-ism (Judaism), for the rookie receiver, Jeudy. I think he plays for Denver, right?

TS: Yeah, that's funny.

MH: Yeah. Second Temple Jeudy-ism.

TS: Hopefully that name change won't give him an extra boost to win again. [MH laughs] Apparently, you're [inaudible] for not picking Dak Prescott on Cowboys quarterback, and I took Aaron Rodgers and I'm getting chewed out for it already. So I don't know...

MH: Yeah, look... Don't even get me started. I want Rodgers to throw all day, but he's going to go through the season handcuffed.

TS: Well, my fellow Cowboys fans out there, don't worry. I got Ezekiel Elliot, so I'm good.

MH: Alright. Well, and you got Cooper, too. That's why I was shocked you didn't take Dak. But you know...

TS: I can't go *all* Cowboys. But I got Cooper and Zeke, so I'm good. So just give me the trophy now. It's over.

MH: Yep. You want to tell everybody how Yahoo rated your draft, Trey.

TS: Please. Nobody listens to that stuff. That's ridiculous. [MH laughs] You always get A+ or the best draft, and you never win, so there you go.

MH: It's not that I *never* win. It's just... I draft well, but that isn't what wins leagues. It's too unpredictable. That's why people play. People get injured and stuff happens. So there's no guarantee. But you came through with a glorious D+ on the draft. So I just wanted everybody to know that.

TS: I actually watch the games and know who, so I don't let some computer tell me what to do. You know? Those little stats that little computers assign to it? Nah. That means nothing. For all of our two or three people out there that actually pay attention to baseball, why don't you let them know how you're doing in the Naked Bible Baseball Fantasy...

MH: Oh, yeah. I'm going to make history. I'm going to make the playoffs in my own league. I've never won the league. So playoffs start next week, and I'm at a comfortable #2, maybe even #1 after this week. But there's four teams in the playoffs. At least I'm in. I usually don't do well.

TS: Yeah. If you end up winning this year, I'm going to petition that it doesn't count, because it's not been really much of a season.

MH: [laughs] Right. It's a COVID-shortened season. Yeah, that's the way it'll go. I'll win the year that everybody can say that it didn't count. That's the way it'll go.

TS: We'll put an asterisk next to your name or the year, or something. Because *I'm* not going to count it. I don't know about the rest of the league. So if they're listening...

MH: On the trophy that I'll get, we'll just put an asterisk on it. How's that? We'll tape an asterisk on it.

TS: Yep. Better yet, just leave it off the trophy altogether. [laughter] Alright, Mike. Anything else going on in the world of Florida? Working on your tan?

MH: Nope. Everything's just trucking along as usual. Although this week, everybody's gone so I'm home alone. My son-in-law is here, but he works and he goes to school, so he's really not in the house much. But I got extra pug duty this week, so it's awesome.

TS: What does that consist of?

MH: I sit on the couch and do Fantasy drafts and work on my stuff, and the pugs just sit there with me.

TS: Nice. Sounds like a perfect day for me.

MH: Perfect.

TS: Awesome.

MH: High productivity.

5:00

TS: Well, also the perfect day is for when people listen to this podcast, they're going to want to know about these bones. What are we talking about today, Mike?

MH: Yeah, today it's more of "How does the New Testament use the Old Testament?" And in the last episode, we looked at John 10. That's the famous Good Shepherd passage. And we saw that John repurposed a couple of passages in Ezekiel 34, because there's a lot of shepherd language there. And in that case, you have the evil shepherds and God is the Good Shepherd. And of course, David is the shepherd of God's people. So all those things are in there, and John finds a lot of useful material in there to talk about Jesus and present Jesus in the God role, and of course as the Son of David.

But in that episode last time, we did get into Ezekiel 37. The second half of the chapter is the one about the two sticks and the restoration of the tribes, and the twelve tribes as one, and linking that to the Good Shepherd. And we talked about how John uses the second half of Ezekiel to present Jesus as the Good Shepherd, obviously, but part of being the Good Shepherd *is* the restoration of

Israel. And today, we want to focus on the first half of Ezekiel 37. This is what the chapter's actually most known for, the vision of the dry bones. But John is going to use that as well. He's not going to let the first 14 verses go by, as noteworthy as the passage is, without applying it to Jesus. And so we're going to talk about how John uses Ezekiel's dry bones vision in his presentation of who Jesus is and what's going on.

Now the way I want to approach this is, you have to think a little bit about this section of the book. And by section, I mean basically Ezekiel 33-37. So if you recall (maybe from our series on Ezekiel, but if not, that's fine, because I'm just going to summarize it here), in Ezekiel 33:21-33, we have the description of Jerusalem being destroyed. Ezekiel is captive in Babylon. He's with a bunch of other Jews who had been deported in the first wave of captivity and deportation. And he is God's mouthpiece in Babylon to his community, describing for them some pretty dismal things. "Okay, we're here. This is bad. But it's actually worse. Because if you think that we're here and then your loved ones back in Judea/Judah are safe, that is not the case. Jerusalem is going to be destroyed. The Temple is going to be destroyed. More of your family are going to get deported." And all this stuff. This is what Ezekiel's talking about, and basically up to chapter 33, "Why? Why is all this happening?" And the answer is basically, "We're just awful. We're apostates. We've had a long history (a couple of centuries' worth) of being apostates. And now we're paying the price." It's the law of sowing and reaping. And then in chapter 33, like I said, we finally get the news... Ezekiel has this prophecy and then it's confirmed by people who come into Babylon and into the community. "Yep, Jerusalem is destroyed."

Chapter 34, though, is a transition. This is where we were last episode. We get more talk about how, "One of the reasons this happened is because we had evil leadership—the evil shepherds." But chapter 34 transitions to this notion that God is going to remove the evil shepherds and he is going to replace them with himself. He is going to be the Good Shepherd who protects the sheep. And again, the new David. God has not forgotten his promise to David (the Davidic covenant). "You're going to be shepherded (all twelve tribes) someday by the shepherd who is David (this messianic descendant)." I'll just read you part of Ezekiel 34. We quoted this last time. But just to give you a feel for it. Verses 20-24 say:

²⁰ "Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad..."

Basically, the fat sheep are the leadership that are just using their positions for personal gain, and all this injustice being shown to the rest of the sheep—the rest of their countrymen. God says to the prophet:

²² I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³ And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

So of course we saw how John, last time, when he's talking and presenting Jesus as the Good Shepherd, he draws... There are a number of specific verbal parallels between John's Greek in John 10 and the Greek Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) in Ezekiel 34. We focused on that last time. Well, if you keep reading in Ezekiel, you'll eventually get to chapter 36. And there you get the promise of a new heart—the coming of the Holy Spirit. It's new covenant language—Ezekiel's section on this new covenant idea. So 33: Jerusalem's destroyed. 34: "Look, we're going to get rid of the evil shepherds. I'm going to be your shepherd. My servant, David, will be your shepherd." And then when you get to chapter 36 here, you get another layer of the promise. I'm going to start reading in verse 20. I'll read a few verses here.

²⁰ ...'These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land.' [MH: They were exiled.] **²¹ But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came.**

²² "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. ²³ And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, 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. ²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ²⁸ You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Now the language there is significant, because that's Leviticus 26 language. Remember Leviticus 26 is a very important passage for eschatology. They're in the land, and then God describes what's going to happen if they become apostate: the land's going to vomit them out. But if they repent, then he will bring them back to the land. And there's the famous phrasing, "You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers. You shall be my people, and I will be your God." And it's repeated here in Ezekiel. And so when the New Testament writers dip into Ezekiel 36 (and this whole section of Ezekiel), they are associating not just an event that happened in the Persian period with two of the tribes partially coming back. No, the people of God are still in exile by the time Jesus shows up. And when the Gospel writers and other writers start attaching Jesus to these passages, the messaging is that this is the person through whom all of this will be accomplished. And we talked in several episodes now about how Jesus, when he rose from the dead and he's going to ascend to the Father, he says, "I have to do that, because the Spirit's going to come." We have the inauguration of the new covenant. The coming of the Spirit, of course... we associate this with Pentecost. You can't read a passage like Ezekiel 36 about being gathered from the nations to their own land, given the Holy Spirit, so on and so forth... You can't read that without thinking of Pentecost. And that's important because Pentecost is not only the reversal of the Babel situation (which I've discussed a lot in *Unseen Realm* and different podcast episodes too), it is also the inauguration of the new covenant. That's what it is. This is the coming of the Spirit, the reclaiming, not only of people out of all the nations, but it starts with Jewish believers from all of the tribes. They are the first converts and they become the missionaries. They become seeds of reclaiming the Gentile populations in the places in which those Jews live. So it's this providential outcome and really usage of the exile that God is using as a mechanism to bring not only people from the nations back into his family, but also Jews (his own). So this is what's going on.

15:00

You keep reading in Ezekiel, "God's going to be our shepherd. He hasn't forgotten about the Davidic covenant. We're going to have a Davidic king, and he'll be our shepherd. And the Spirit's going to come. And we're going to be brought back into the fold. And then we're going to dwell in the land." There's this vision of the end of exile. "And the Spirit's going to be with us and God will be our God, and we will be his people." Then you hit Ezekiel 37 and you get the dry bones passage.

Now we tend to think (and I'll have a few other things to say about this as we focus on these 14 verses) only of the resurrection of individuals at the last day as being what Ezekiel 37:1-14 is about. That is not the case. There's going to be a very specific statement in Ezekiel 37:11 that tells us what the vision is about. And it's not merely/really this idea of the individual resurrection at the last day. We'll get to that in a moment. But you get the dry bones. So that's part of this other complex. It's part of... It follows chapter 34. It follows chapter 36. Both of those are about the restoration of the nation, of the whole people of God. And that's

what Ezekiel 37:1-14 is going to be about, too. And then you keep reading Ezekiel 37 and you run into verses 15-28 and the two sticks that are formed back into one. The two kingdoms (Israel and Judah), now they're back into one kingdom of twelve tribes. And there'll be one shepherd over all of them. We talked about that the last episode.

So this whole section is about the end of the exile being yet future. Ezekiel as he preaches this, this is all future. The exile is going to end at some point. And it's going to end with all of the tribes being brought back. It's going to end with the new covenant—the Holy Spirit showing up. It's going to end with the Davidic shepherd. It's going to end with God as our shepherd. I mean, does this sound familiar? This is New Testament theology right out of Ezekiel. This is Jesus as a deity/messiah/Son of David whose death, burial, resurrection, and ascension launches the new covenant at Pentecost. This is what it is. And at Pentecost, Jews from all over the known world to which they had been scattered/dispersed/in exile (both the ten tribes to the north and the two tribes to the south)... People from all of those tribes come home, hear the message of the Gospel at Pentecost, believe, the Spirit of God has come. They go back into those lands and they start telling Gentiles (they start telling everybody) about what happened to them, what's going on. This is right out of Ezekiel, this whole section.

So for today, I want to fix this in our heads, that Ezekiel 37 contributes not only to a section of the book of Ezekiel about the future restoration of the nation (all twelve tribes) in connection with the coming of the Spirit and, of course, the Davidic divine Good Shepherd. So it contributes to that. But it also is going to contribute (by virtue of the Gospel of John) with how Jesus is presented again as the answer to this (as the counterpart), as the whole point to which all of this is leading. So I'm going to read Ezekiel 37:1-14 and then we'll get into how John reads it, how he thinks about it. So we'll start with verse 1, reading ESV.

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ² And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³ And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD."

20:00

⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath [MH: we’ll come back to this verse, because it sounds kind of odd in the ESV]; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

¹¹ Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.

There’s the key verse. God’s telling us what the vision means.

¹¹ Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ ¹² Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

Well, that’s Ezekiel 37:1-14. And John refers to this oracle of the dry bones in several places. He makes several allusions to this. And the way scholars tell is that they’re looking at the Greek of John and they go back and look at Ezekiel 37:1-14 in the Septuagint (which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) and you just compare vocabulary. And it’s more than just one or two words that are shared. There’s a clustering of words and phrases that the two share. So scholars can tell when a New Testament writer’s looking at something in the Old Testament by using this method. And the first thing that John does with this... Let’s just go here. Because this is sort of our default interpretation (as I alluded to earlier), that we think of this passage as about the general resurrection of the dead at the last day—the physical, individual resurrection of people. And John does reference—he does utilize—Ezekiel 37 in this way. For instance, in John 5 (this is going to be 25-28, I’ll just read verse 25 and then skip to 28) we have this:

²⁵ “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

And then verse 28:

28 Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice...

Now this is clearly a futuristic outlook, on John's part. Very clear. And the reference to the tombs telegraphs right away that he's thinking along the lines of individual, personal resurrection. And it sounds a lot like Ezekiel 37:4, 9, and 12, which read:

4 Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.

9 Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live."

12 Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people.

So again, John is looking at verses like those. And he is (at least in John 5) thinking about a general resurrection. Now I'm going to bring in—loop in—a source here that we used here in the last episode. This is Gary Manning and his book, *Echoes of a Prophet: The Use of Ezekiel in the Gospel of John and in Literature of the Second Temple Period*. And I'll say it again here: don't go out to Amazon and look for this book. It's \$230. So forget that. But if you have Logos, you can get it for \$28. So it makes a whole lot more sense, if you want the book, to get it that way. And I'm going to read a little section from Manning here in relation to John 5. He says:

As many commentators have pointed out, Jn 5:21, 25–26 describes the giving of life in the present, and Jn 5:27–29 describes the final resurrection [MH: those are the verses we just read]. Jn 5:25 describes the new life as already beginning ('the hour is coming and now is'); thus 'the dead' are the spiritually dead [MH: in that context], and those who live are those who listen to the Son of God. Jn 5:28 describes the final resurrection ('the hour is coming'), in which both righteous and wicked are called from their tombs for judgment. The Father gives the Son the authority to give life now (Jn 5:21, 25–26), as well as to raise the dead and pronounce judgment on judgment day [MH: later] (Jn 5:27–29).

25:00

This pairing of new life and final resurrection is one way in which John reveals his understanding of Ezekiel 37...

But, as we've already telegraphed, that isn't all he does. John is far from done with Ezekiel 37. Even when you get to John 10, he uses the second half about the two sticks formed back into one, and the restoration of Israel (all twelve tribes). We've seen that. But he's also going to dip back into the first 14 verses. And that's where we want to spend our time today. He uses Ezekiel 37 (the dry bones vision) to communicate another idea besides just this general resurrection on the last day (like we would tend to think about it). He also sees in these verses (in the dry bones vision) the restoration of Israel—restoration of all twelve tribes of Israel. And this restoration (because John's the one using it—dipping into it) is going to be brought about by Jesus. This is why John is going to reference the passage. Now back to Manning:

John's use of the oracle of the dry bones also suggests that he saw Jesus as the fulfillment of Ezekiel's expectations of new life for God's people [MH: this corporate sense]. The dry bones oracle does not have explicit messianic references, but there are two reasons why John sees the passage as referring to Jesus. First, the dry bones oracle is the second of three related oracles about the coming restoration of Israel [MH: and we alluded to two of them earlier] (Ezek. 36:16–38, the 'new heart'; 37:1–14, the 'dry bones'; 37:15–28, the 'two sticks').

So you get these three parts of this section that is ultimately... All of this material is ultimately about the restoration of the nation (all twelve tribes). Especially the end of chapter 37, it's crystal clear about the two sticks (about the two parts of Israel being joined back together as one stick under one Davidic king). It really couldn't be clearer. Now Manning says:

John has clearly meditated on this oracle [MH: material], since he alludes to it in Jn 11:51–52.

Now we referenced this passage in the last episode, where the Gentiles get looped in to this vision of restoration. Manning says:

Thus, as John considers Ezekiel's vision for the future, he naturally connects elements from these two related oracles, and sees a role for the messiah in all three oracles.

So to repeat my earlier set-up, think about Ezekiel 34-37. You get Jerusalem destroyed. Then you get a whole section (chapters 36, 37, and parts of 34) about the restoration of Israel, all twelve tribes, Good Shepherd, Davidic shepherd, God as the shepherd, all this stuff. Right smack in the middle of that, you have the dry bones vision. So it invariably plays a role in the subject of the restoration of the

nation (all twelve tribes). It's not just about a general resurrection. Manning writes this:

As is often the case with John's use of allusions to the OT, the modifications to the OT material are suggestive of John's view of the people of God. In Ezekiel, the dry bones coming to life symbolizes a national restoration and the giving of God's Spirit, and is offered to 'the whole house of Israel' (Ezek. 37:11).

And verse 11 is the key verse, where God (through the prophet) tells the reader what the dry bones vision is about. "These bones are the whole house of Israel." It couldn't be any plainer. So it is the key verse. There's one more thing, though, (with that in mind) that John is going to do with another verse in this section. So we've got verse 11. This is about the restoration of Israel—all these dry bones. It's actually the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. Ezekiel 37:9 is something that John is going to pick up on. So let's read that verse. I'm going to highlight a few Hebrew words here because there's some variability in terms of how to translate these things. Ezekiel 37:9 (Ezekiel speaking) says:

30:00

⁹Then he [MH: God] said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the *ruach* [MH: which could be translated breath or wind or, of course, Spirit], Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four (*ruchôt*) [MH: it's the plural of *ruach* (the four winds)], O *ruach* [MH: breath or wind or spirit], and breathe on these slain, that they may live."

Now in John 20:22, here's what we read:

¹⁹On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews [MH: this is right after the resurrection], Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²²And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

There are a couple of interesting things here. One, in John... We've already seen this with the Good Shepherd material, among other things. But we're talking about Ezekiel here. In John, Jesus fills the role, not only of the Good Shepherd (the God-shepherd that we saw last time), but he also fulfills the role of Ezekiel (the son of man). Obviously, John and other Gospel writers think of Jesus as the divine son of man in Daniel 7. I mean, there's Daniel 7's son of man. But Ezekiel's also called "son of man" a lot. You know, in John 5:27, he hooks into

this son of man language for Ezekiel, which of course is present in Ezekiel 37. But there his use (son of man) back in John 5 (because he's thinking about this long-term individual resurrection—that's the reason he's in Ezekiel 37 in John 5)... He throws in the idea of exercising judgment, which is clearly not found in Ezekiel 37, but *is* found in Daniel 7. So what John is actually doing is he's taking this phrase, and he knows it's found in both places (Ezekiel 37 and Daniel 7) and he's sort of alternating between Daniel-thought and Ezekiel-thought. That's what he does in John 5. He actually refers to Jesus—loops Jesus into the content of both Daniel 7 and Ezekiel 37 by virtue of this son of man language, and with respect to Daniel, about the son of man being the final judge. That's something you're only going to read in Daniel 7, where the kingdom and judgment is given to the son of man by the Ancient of Days. Here, in John 20:22, though, we don't get Daniel 7 stuff. Instead, it's very clear that he's thinking about Ezekiel 37:9, because of this “breathing on them” language.

So here in John 20:22, the title “son of man” is useful for linking to Ezekiel 37. That's John's hook back into it. Yes, Jesus is the son of man. But here's it's sort of more neutral. It doesn't have this eschatological judgment idea. So there's one thing. If you ask, “Why is John using this phrase?” Well, it's because in this case (because he's going to quote or allude to Ezekiel 37:9 about this breathing thing), he finds it useful that the one described or being told by God to breathe on the bones is called the son of man. And that's a familiar title for Jesus, so that's his hook between what's happening in the Upper Room there after the resurrection and what he wants to say, using Ezekiel 37:9.

The second thing is, in John 20 (that little passage we read) there's a verb there (breathed)... Let me just read it to you again.

He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’

35:00

The verb translated “breathed” is (ἐμφυσάω – *emphusaō*, which occurs only six times in the entire Septuagint. Think of the Old Testament. That's a lot of material. But it's only six times in the Septuagint and only *here* in John 20:22 in the whole New Testament. So this is not a common word. It occurs only here plus six times in the Septuagint. Now of course, it *does* occur one of those six times is Ezekiel 37:9. So there's a high degree of certainty (and by virtue of what's being said here) that John's looking at Ezekiel 37:9 and wants Jesus to be the one breathing life into bones. This is what John is angling for. Of course, in John's scene, it's the disciples. He's sending them out. Now what's going to happen later when they get sent out (when the Spirit comes upon not just the twelve, but upon all believers) that's Pentecost. So this is a lead-in to Pentecost. It's a way for John to link Jesus to the restoration of Israel back in chapter 37 (the dry bones vision) and have Jesus be the link not only back to that, but also the link forward to when the Spirit *does* come and does indwell every believer, which

begins at Pentecost, where Jews from all of the tribes are present in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost.

You see what John's doing here. He's looking at the son of man phrase [and thinking] "When I use 'son of man,' people are going to identify that with Jesus, because that's one of his titles for himself, but they're also going to think of Ezekiel 37, and that's good, because I want them to think about that. I want their minds to go back to Ezekiel." Because Ezekiel is called "son of man" more than any other figure in the Old Testament. So this is a good pool from which to draw for John. And there's something in Ezekiel 37 he wants to link Jesus to, because Jesus has taught them on a number of occasions that "after I'm risen and I ascend to the Father, then the Spirit will be sent." And everybody knows what that means. That's the inauguration of the new covenant and, if they know Ezekiel, it's not just this abstract concept, "Oh, the new covenant's started!" No. It also means the restoration of all the tribes of Israel, which means the end of the exile is here.

All these ideas are tied together. And John wants to present Jesus as essentially the switch that gets flipped where all these things start to roll into motion. And he does this by linking Jesus back to Ezekiel 37:9, the dry bones being breathed into, they receive the *ruach*, which back in Ezekiel 37:9, you could translate it breath or wind. And then you have the reference to the four winds.

So okay, we have that. But that's not where John is taking the term. And there's another place in the Septuagint where this rare verb occurs. It isn't just Ezekiel 37:9. It's Genesis 2:7. And you all probably expected this to come, just because of the way the whole thing is worded there in Ezekiel. But Genesis 2:7 says this:

⁷ then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

So now we have a verbal connection and a conceptual connection between Ezekiel 37:9, Genesis 2, and John. John is going to use language from both Ezekiel 37:9 and the Genesis 2 statement that I just read when he talks about Jesus. We'll get to what's the theology that's being telegraphed here in a moment.

There are still other passages in the Septuagint where this unusual verb is used. The rest of them are used with respect to Elijah breathing life back into the widow's dead child (that's 1 Kings 17:21). And then there are some other uses that are metaphorical. But when it's talking about animation, literally (if I can use that term) putting life into something, whether it's dry bones or Adam in the Garden of Eden or the widow's son. The verb is the same. And it's the one that John uses in John 20. And it's the only time the verb ever shows up in the entire New Testament. So you know that the writer is being pretty careful in terms of

40:00

the terminology he wants to use. If John doesn't want to make these connections back to Ezekiel 37:9, back to Genesis 2:7, back to this breathing life into the dead... If John doesn't want those ideas to be glommed on to Jesus, he'd just pick a different word. But he doesn't. And the word he picks is unusual. It only occurs here in the New Testament. So he wants readers to connect these dots. This is why writer do this kind of thing. The link to Genesis 2:7... Let's just talk about that a little bit. "God formed man from the dust of the earth and he breathed into him the breath of life." That whole notion here is going to become important because of the way Adam (the first man) parallels Israel (the people of God, the twelve tribes). There's a lot that's running under the surface here. But before we get there, I'm going to read you something else from Manning here, the way he summarizes all this. He says:

Perhaps a more striking implication of John's allusion to the creation account is that Jesus takes God's role; in Genesis 2, God breathes on the man, while in Jn 20:22, Jesus breathes on the disciples. Jesus' role in the new creation thus echoes his role in the original creation: 'All things came to be through him...

Remember John said in John 1, writing about Jesus, "All things came to be through him; and apart from him, not even one thing came into being which has come into being. In him was life, and the life was the light of men." So Manning quotes John 1:3-4 to basically say (I'll repeat his point): "In Genesis 2, God breathes on the man, while in John 20:22, Jesus breathes on the disciples. Jesus' role in the new creation thus echoes his role in the original creation." Manning continues and says:

Both Ezekiel 37 and Jn 20:22 are concerned with the giving of God's Spirit. Ezekiel explains the meaning of the raised dry bones in Ezek. 37:13-14, 'You will know that I am the Lord when I open your graves ... and I will give my Spirit in you, and you will live, and I will place you in your land.' Ezekiel pictures the despairing exiles as dead, in the tomb of Babylon. The restoration of Israel is pictured as the restoration of life, God's breathing life back into the dead body.

Remember verse 11: "These bones are the tribes of Israel." Back to Manning:

The restoration of Israel is pictured as the restoration of life, God's breathing life back into the dead body. Ezekiel takes the image of the creation in Genesis 2 and re-creates it. In Genesis 2, God breathes the breath of life into the lifeless man, making him a living being. In Ezekiel 37, after the bodies are reconstructed, God (through the prophet) commands the winds [MH: the *ruchôt*] to bring breath (רוח/πνεῦμα) into the lifeless bodies and make them live. By using the broader term for breath [MH: *ruach*] (רוח/πνεῦμα), Ezekiel is able to carry on an extended word-play (using all three of the meanings of רוח/πνεῦμα) [MH: the Greek of

course is *pneuma*] and connect the image to his 'new heart' theology [MH: which is in the previous chapter, Ezekiel 36]...

Ezekiel's image of the dry bones is thus a prophecy of national resurrection. The nation is currently dead in its despair: 'Our bones have dried up, our hope has perished, we are completely cut off, (Ezek. 37:14). But Ezekiel promises that the nation will be physically and spiritually restored.

Isn't that interesting? You get both parts of it: physically and spiritually restored.

God will not only return Israel to their land; he will also restore the covenant and ensure its permanence by giving his Spirit on his people. They will no longer break the covenant, because God's Spirit will be within them (Ezek. 11:19–20; 36:24–29; 37:23, 28).

45:00

Now that last point, I want to elaborate on that a little bit. Ezekiel is using the same wording (*ruach*) in Ezekiel 37 that he also used in Ezekiel 36. You'll find reference to the Spirit there, because it's a new covenant passage. By doing it in both chapters, he connects the restoration of the twelve tribes with the coming of the Spirit. I'm going to read that again. Ezekiel's using the same wording that he did in both chapters (36 and 37). And when he does that... Both chapters are about the Spirit. One is this new covenant inauguration. The other one has to do with the twelve tribes being raised from the dead. So when he does this, he thereby connects the restoration of the twelve tribes with the coming of the Spirit.

Look, there's no way to correctly interpret Pentecost and *not* have Pentecost mean the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel. And I'm saying it that way because I know there are certain systems of End Times thinking that want all of these passages (like in Ezekiel and other prophets) to be all future. In other words, they resist any sort of realized eschatology. I use the phrase "already, but not yet." There are systems of End Times thinking that there is no "already." It's all "not yet." Now I was raised in one as an original believer, when I came to the Lord when I was 16. We were really... I'll use the phrase "Scofieldian" or "Old Classic." Nowadays Classic Dispensationalism would be Ryrie. But that was our tradition. And it was all "not yet." There was no "already." There was no realized eschatology.

Now things have changed, even within Dispensationalism. But I'm using Scofield and Ryrie as an example, because a lot of your prophecy pundits ("experts" out there on the internet) are still in that mindset. And all I'm doing is telling you, if you look at what John is doing here (even what Ezekiel is doing)... Forget John, just look at what Ezekiel's doing. He's using the same terminology in both places—both oracles. And he connects the restoration of the twelve tribes with the coming of the Spirit, which is the new covenant. I mean, it's so obvious that this happens at Pentecost. This is where it all comes down (literally). [laughs]

You know? This is where it is. And so, you all know me, those of you who listen to this regularly. This illustrates again why eschatology just irritates me. Because people develop systems and they pass systems on and they never do something like, “Hey, let’s look at, when the prophets use this vocabulary in different places.” And then, “Where do the New Testament writers use this? And how do they hook Jesus into it? How are the New Testament writers interpreting these prophetic statements?” [laughs] See, in certain schools of thought, the only time that question’s ever even asked is when it’s about the first coming of the Lord (the messiah). But there’s this whole book of Acts... And the Gospels aren’t entirely about the first coming. They’re also about events that are going to follow the resurrection and ascension. And a good portion of the New Testament, of course, is that same post-resurrective context. And they’re still using the Old Testament. They’re still quoting it. They’re still doing theology with it. It’s not just about, “Well, the Old Testament only talks about the first coming. And now, since we’ve had Jesus here... You know... He rises from the dead, he goes back to the Father. Then all the other Old Testament stuff is only about the second coming.” Like it’s, “The Old Testament can only comment on two things: the coming of the messiah and the second coming of the messiah.” No, it actually comments about stuff in between. The birth of the Church. What are the meanings of some of these events like Pentecost? There is an “already” sense to things that are connected with the future. A lot of the stuff that’s connected with the future (our glorification, the return of the Lord, the kingdom) are already in process. They’re already here. There’s an “already” presence here. It’s the Holy Spirit. He replaces Jesus in that sense. You know? It’s all got “already” stuff. But then there’s this “not yet” stuff, too.

50:00

So again, I don’t want to rabbit-trail too far into eschatology, but if you run across systems that take only the “already” or only the “not yet,” and they can’t see both, those systems can be safely ignored. The people who can’t see that Scripture affirms both sides really aren’t looking too hard and they’re not thinking very well. So they can be safely ignored. And I say the same thing... If you run into a prophecy teacher that claims to have all this figured out, how it all is going to work, how the “not yet” is going to work (“I have a chart right here; I’ve got it all figured out”), they can be safely ignored too. There’s lots of reasons why there’s ambiguity. I don’t want to drift too far into that again because we’ve talked about that a lot, at least that part of eschatology—why the ambiguity is there.

But here we go again. You have a New Testament writer that is very carefully picking things from the Old Testament, in this case to make a specific theological point about the Spirit’s arrival at Pentecost. It is the fulfillment of the new covenant promise and the end of the exile. This is how a Jew who knew his Scriptures well... When they’re in Jerusalem and they’re seeing this stuff happen (and if they live there, they know about this Jesus guy and what he was doing and what was said about him and all that kind of stuff), they’re going to do the math. And they have to either embrace it (which puts them in peril)... “Okay, he really was the messiah. Look at this.” They either have to embrace it (which is

going to hurt, there's going to be some fallout there) or they just have to willfully reject it. They can't own the fact that they had just played a role in the death of the messiah. It's really a climactic event in the whole first century, all the stuff going on. And here you have John connecting Jesus to Pentecost essentially using Ezekiel, which sounds really weird until you actually look at what he's doing. [laughs] One more quote from Manning here. He says:

Although the role of the Spirit in restoration is not described in this passage, no description is needed; the giving of the Holy Spirit fulfills the expectations that are raised within the Gospel of John from the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was the one on whom the Spirit permanently remained, which would allow him to baptize others with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:32–33; cf. 3:34). Thus when Jesus says 'Receive the Holy Spirit,' the reader knows that this is the Spirit that brings new birth (Jn 3:3–8), and allows true worship (Jn 4:23–24), genuine understanding (Jn 6:63), and communion with the Father and Son (14:16–20, 25–26; 16:13–15).

And let me add one other thought. This is also the same Spirit that would be sent in Jesus' absence. All these passages are talking about the same Spirit.

So when you get to John 20, John doesn't have to append a footnote or explain himself again. Everybody who's reading the Gospel of John knows that it's the Spirit again. John's been talking about the Spirit the whole time. And now this is Jesus' initial act, to fulfill this idea that "I'm going to leave and then the Spirit's going to come." It's sort of like a sign act or a symbolic gesture here. Because they're going to go out. They're going to watch him ascend. He tells them to wait X number of days. The calendar lines up. It's time for Pentecost. And boom, there we go. And why wait? Well, it's so that you can get the tribes in the picture. Because it's not just about the coming of the Spirit, it's about the restoration of Israel, and Jesus knows this. "Wait X number of days." Wait till Pentecost. Blah, blah, blah. Because then all of the exiled tribes are going to be represented there, and the Spirit's going to come, and it's game on. Exile is over. And now we are repopulating the people of God, both out of the Jewish presence (the Jewish population, the Jewish community) and the nations (the Gentiles). The Gentiles are automatically part of the picture because these exiled Jews who are here become believers and they go back home, of course. They go back home to their lands, and this is the beginning of reclaiming the nations. It is a coherent, well-seeable picture if we're letting the New Testament writers telegraph ideas to us about how these prophetic passages play out.

55:00

Just in my own experience (I'll just refer to my own experience as a new Christian before I really started getting into serious Bible study), for years, it's like I'm reading the Old Testament, and you're sort of trained to think, "Well, this wasn't about the birth of Jesus or anything that happens with Herod or the cross. So it must all... All of the rest of the stuff must be about the second coming." I was trained in a system that there is no "already" in terms of prophecy. There's

only “not yet.” “Everything is distant future.” And that is not what the New Testament writers communicate. It just isn’t. They communicate both. An “already” *and* a “not yet.” And the two are connected; they’re tied with each other.

So just to summarize, what did we do? What did we learn with this time? First, I would say, during the course of several episodes of the podcast (not just the immediately preceding ones, but we’ve had a few of these others before), we’ve seen Old Testament passages that telegraph the restoration of the twelve tribes in the context of the inauguration of the new covenant and the arrival of the Spirit. That should just be axiomatic by now. And this is another one. It’s another one. What Pentecost is really about on the Jewish side of God’s family is the restoration of the tribes. It spills over to the Gentiles, of course, for reasons that we’ve just talked about.

Secondly, I would say, just commenting as I did on systems of eschatology, a lot of these systems—a lot of what you see by people who “do prophecy”—is that it’s just all future. “It’s only the Millennium.” I remember hearing and reading (both in church and Bible college and things like that)... Reading Jeremiah (the famous new covenant passage) and thinking, “Well, that’s the kingdom. That’s the Millennium. It’s only in the Millennium when this stuff is going to happen or be true.” And that just isn’t the way the New Testament writers reference the beginning of the new covenant—the coming of the Spirit. It just isn’t. And I can just remember that, “Well, if you say that, then you must be an amillennialist.” It’s this “either/or” thinking. You either can only affirm the “already” or the “not yet.” You can’t affirm them both. And that is just wrong-headed. It’s misguided. It’s unbiblical, just to be blunt about it. Because Scripture affirms both. And I’m hoping that episodes like this are starting to inform us of this.

So my advice is, don’t worry about the systems. Try to think about what the New Testament writers are doing with the Old Testament, how they connect it to Jesus. And in this case, it’s not just about the cross event. These aren’t the connections they’re making. They’re also making the connections about the resurrection and the ascension and the arrival of the Spirit, who is, but isn’t, Jesus. They’re doing that, too. So they’re helping you do theology. And this is one of the ways that we should be trained to do theology.

I’ll just end with this. I often get asked, “Mike, how should we study the Bible?” On the one hand, I understand the question completely and I’m glad to hear it, because it tells you people want to do this. They’re into it. But on the other side, the question almost makes me despair, because there’s no checklist method that captures what we’re doing here on the podcast. I can’t make this into a checklist. It defies that. About the best you can do is say, “Look, the way you study your Bible and do biblical theology...” Because when you study the Bible, the objective is to see, “What does it say? How should we think about X, Y, or Z?” The best you can say is, “Look, how biblical theology should be done is it should arise and derive from the text.” That means you have to be able to do exegesis to

some level, which means you have to learn the languages, at least have some facility with it that you can use tools (like software or whatever) to work with these things, or at least know enough about the languages to be able to read serious exegetical commentaries and know what the writers of those books are talking about when they're doing interpretation as field experts.

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So you should aim to become proficient at exegesis at some level, just being able to follow a serious discussion. You should be trained to look for scriptural patterns, including patterns of interpretation by New Testament writers when they use the Old Testament. That's how to study the Bible. Again, I don't have a checklist for that. It's doesn't really conform to, "First do this step, and then that step." It doesn't really work, other than to have these aims. Once you know what the aims are (what you should be doing, what it should produce), then you need to follow tried-and-true strategies to get to those ends, to accomplish those goals. Which means you should have good tools. You should have resources. And I think even maybe more importantly, but just as importantly, learn how to ask good questions. This is something everybody can do.

I'm going to be a little blunt here and maybe slightly offensive here, but an MDiv will not teach you what we're doing here on the podcast. If you take a hermeneutics class as an MDiv student, you're going to get the history of interpretation through different periods of Church history. You're going to get a piecemeal checklist thing for the historical/grammatical approach, which is very valuable. But unless you take an elective course on how the New Testament writers use the Old Testament, you're not getting this. You just aren't. I have taught hermeneutics at these institutions. I've taught three different places. I've taught the courses that I'm supposed to teach at that level. You do not get this. I've also taken the course two or three times in the course of Bible college and seminary, which is unfortunate. But at least a traditional hermeneutics course will give you exposure to tools and exegetical methods with languages. That's the good part. The part that you're not getting is just getting yourself in the habit of looking at how the New Testament writers do theology for you—how they put the pieces together. They do it with patterns. In John's case, he's looking at clusters of vocabulary and phrases. And when you find those... You're not going to get trained to even think about using the Septuagint in a traditional hermeneutics course. You just aren't. You'll first run into the Septuagint if you take a textual criticism class as an elective, or some advanced degree. You just aren't. So what you're actually getting here on the podcast puts you further down the road than a lot of people who have been to seminary. I mean, that sounds audacious and maybe a little crazy, but it's true. It is true in so many respects.

So what I'm hoping you get out of these episodes is a little bit of method. Because what you see the New Testament writers doing, I hope when you see the results of what they're doing, it'll just pop into your head. When you're reading the New Testament, "Does this quote or allude to anything in the Old?" If I have software, "Maybe I should look up the vocabulary here in the Septuagint. Where else did these words occur? And not just one of them, but four or five of

them. If they're landing in the same passage in the Old Testament, that should tell me something. That's a pattern. The writer wants me to look at that for some reason." This is how you do these things. But I don't have a checklist for it. There's no easy way to do it. You just have to try it and practice it. It has to become a pattern of what you do, how you approach things.

So in these last couple episodes with John, I'm hoping this idea is being reinforced, why we're even doing these episodes. And in this case, there's eschatological teaching here, not in the sense of, "Oh, believe this or that." But in the sense of, "Look. You've got to affirm both sides of 'already, but not yet,' because this is what New Testament writers are constantly doing." John does them both with the same passage (with Ezekiel 37). One's way future; the other one's right now (the restoration of Israel). He sees both in the same passage. How does he do that? How does he get away with that? Because he sees Ezekiel saying something in chapter 37 using some of the same terminology he used in chapter 36. And then he connects the dots for you. And he writes what he writes so that you will be able to see both sides of it. This is what he's doing. You just have to develop an eye for it.

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But anyway, we're going to end with that. And so next time we'll hit another one of these passages. I don't know what it'll be yet. But I want to go through a number of these just to take a shot at... First of all, I like it. It's kind of fun. But I also want to take a shot at introducing the audience to the kinds of things you should be looking for, the kinds of questions you should be asking. Because I don't have a checklist for how to do Bible study. What I have is, "This is what the New Testament writers do, so let's try to hook into it. Let's try to follow it. Let's try to detect it. Let's try to observe what they want us to see." That would get us a good distance down the road to thinking well about Scripture.

TS: Alright, Mike. I'm enjoying these last few podcasts. I enjoy it. So hopefully everybody else out there is too. If you are, hey, help us out. Go leave us a review on iTunes or anywhere you consume the podcast, and help spread the word the best you can. Because I think all the episodes are great, Mike, but these last few are teaching us... Like you said, you're learning more than you would in seminary, in some regards. I mean, I don't want to say that and poo-poo seminary out there, but...

MH: Right, right.

TS: But you are. [laughs]

MH: You learn a lot of valuable things in seminary, but there are some things that you just don't get to that scholars pick up, tools that they get added to their belt, as they move toward more advanced degrees. And I just think that this audience is capable of comprehending why scholars do what they do, that you may not get in an MDiv degree or something like that. But we have an audience that's fully

capable of saying, “I get why they do that. And how can we dip into that? How can we put our toe into the water and try some of that stuff out?” Because it has value. I think our audience is capable of doing that.

TS: Absolutely. Alright, Mike. Well, we’re looking forward to the next one. With that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.