

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 147

Ezekiel 33-34

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Episode Summary

On the surface, these chapters finalize the destruction of Jerusalem and the covenant failure of its leadership and people as the cause. But there is more than meets the eye. The notion of a “watchman” prominent in Ezekiel chapter 33 is found elsewhere and has possible connections to the divine council. Ezekiel chapter 34 is heavily re-purposed in the New Testament, especially in casting Jesus in the role of God, the true shepherd of Israel. Lastly, we get a hint of the “already but not yet” theme of biblical eschatology.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 147: Ezekiel chapters 33 and 34. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing?

MH: Pretty good. It's been a really, really busy week so I'm a little tired, but it's been a good week, too.

TS: You went to Arkansas. How was that?

MH: That was great! I mean, the best part about these things is, of course, meeting people that benefit from the content. That's why we do what we do. We want to see people helped in their knowledge of Scripture and their enthusiasm for Scripture. When you go to one of these things, that's what you get. The people are there intentionally, the conversations are great, and you get to more or less see the impact that you're having. So it was great.

TS: And who was it that put that on? You want to give them a shout-out?

MH: Yeah, that was St. Barnabas Anglican Church. Brandon and Shawna Gay were the point people there. They serve in the church there and I guess you'd call him a "lay reverend" in that context. He's an IT guy like you. (laughs)

TS: There you go! Should I become a lay reverend? I like that!

MH: Yeah, there you go! He's very knowledgeable and was really familiar with the content. It was a lot of work to make the event come off, and I'm sure glad it came together. It took months of kind of going back and forth and then it still managed to work out. I'm glad it did.

TS: Did you get any feedback about the podcast specifically?

MH: Oh yeah. There were a lot of people there who listen to the podcast—a lot of them on their commute. Some of them are using it for their personal study time or small groups, that sort of thing. So there were a lot of podcast listeners there.

TS: That's awesome. All right, Mike, slowly but surely we're inching our way toward the end of Ezekiel here.

MH: Yeah, we can see the light at the end of the tunnel!

TS: And real quick, Mike. I see Ezekiel everywhere... Cowboys...

MH: Oh, boy.

TS: I don't know if you watch *The Walking Dead*.

MH: Nah. There's an Ezekiel character in there?

TS: Yeah. There's King Ezekiel and he has a pet tiger. So it's pretty sweet. But we got a new puppy (our first family pet) and of course we named him Zeke.

MH: (laughing) Good grief.

TS: Ezekiel everywhere, so I had to go with Zeke.

MH: So it's not you want to feel like a king... that's not what's going on here?

TS: No, no. See, I can go biblical, I can go Dallas Cowboys, I can go TV. It kind of fits everything. So Zeke was the perfect name for our new puppy.

MH: All right, well... as long as we're talking about that...

TS: You want to throw your pug in? Hey, if you want to plug your pug!

MH: Well, my wife was happy that the pug lost two pounds. So the pug is slightly overweight, as most pugs are. But that just means that I need to sneak him some more treats. (laughter)

TS: Now that you're back.

MH: Right. I'm sure he misses us like we miss him—maybe! (laughing) If somebody's feeding him... that's the criteria right there—where's my cookie?

TS: He's probably glad you're back.

MH: He's healthy. He's trim.

TS: He's lean and mean.

MH: He's been working out.

TS: I need to be doing what he's doing if he's getting lean and mean because... (laughter) I need to stop those treats, Mike. It's hard to give up those treats.

MH: He's a fightin' 23 pounds now. The vet watches him closely. We have both the positive and negative... our vet raised pugs so obviously there's plusses for that, but the minus is that he tends to really watch the weight. We're warned every time we go in there about portion control, because pugs love to eat.

TS: Pugs aren't the only one, Mike. (laughter) If I hear "portion control" one more time, I'm going to vomit.

5:00

MH: There you go. Enough of the pet update, the dog update. Let's jump in before this turns into some kind of other podcast—a pet care podcast or something like that.

TS: (laughing) Pet care podcast...

MH: Yeah, The Pet Care Podcast!

So we've got Ezekiel 33 and 34—two chapters. Again, since we're doing two chapters we'll do our typical pattern and just hit on a few things that are of interest to me, and I think they'll be of interest to the audience, as well. Maybe you've been tracking through Ezekiel. You're going to hear a few things that are familiar in this chapter. If you've been tracking with the lay of the land here, chapter 33 is where we get the report that we've already been told is coming a few chapters ago—the report of the fugitive who escaped Jerusalem when it was under attack and then he finally makes it to Babylon and basically spills the beans there. He gives the report that the city has, indeed, fallen. In conjunction with that, we're going to get some familiar-sounding "this is why all this happened to you, you're this, that, and that other thing" that is so common with Ezekiel. But there's a good bit of new stuff in here. When we get into chapter 34, there are a few things that won't really pop out at you but are important. There are going to be some things that are familiar and some things that are not familiar. But it's all going to be important, believe it or not, with respect to New Testament theology. Believe it or not, we're going to take a little bit of a rabbit-trail toward the end on

eschatology. Yes—if you're driving, you might want to pull over to the side of the road, that Mike is going to do a little bit of eschatology talk. That's not the norm here, but I need to do that to basically set up a little bit what's coming down the line with Ezekiel 38 and 39.

Having said all that, let's jump into chapter 33. It begins with the metaphor of the watchmen. I'll read the first six verses and that will get us into the content here.

The word of the LORD came to me: ²“Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, ³ and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, ⁴ then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. ⁵ He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. ⁶ But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.

⁷“So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me.

(I added verse 7 on there.) Of course, Ezekiel's been doing that the whole time. Here we are 33 chapters in. It's a bit of an odd sort of thing to repeat this idea, but nevertheless, it does tell us that there's more to come. If you remember back in the earlier chapter about Jerusalem's fall, some of this content here actually mirrors content there. It was before the fact, before the city had actually fallen. Now in real time, by the time we get to chapter 33, the fate of the city has already transpired. The reader knows that, but the same material has been positioned here to set up this report from the person who has actually survived the incident.

I want to say a few things about this watchman idea. In some respects it's kind of self-evident, but there are some other things that show up in other passages that utilize the watchman idea that take us in a bit of a different direction, at least potentially. So a watchman was a sentry—somebody appointed to sound the alarm (like we just read). Other texts describe where a watchman might have been, like stationed at the highest lookout post in a town where the roof of the city gate (2 Samuel 18:24 refers to that). Some cities had towers (2 Kings 9:17).

This is where you'd position one of these people, these individuals, to be a sentry—to sound an alarm if there's danger coming to the city.

10:00

In terms of what we get after that sort of basic "I'm appointing you for a watchman and this is what watchmen do; if they neglect their responsibility then their blood is on their own head..." After that, we get into content about the conditions of Jerusalem. I'm not going to read verses 7-20 because it's familiar. We've already see a lot of this stuff. There's a reiteration of the conditions of Jerusalem and the rehearsal of the individual accountability idea, which has been sort of tied to the watchmen here in the first seven verses. It reminds us again why all of this is happening or, in this case, why it happened. The thing that is kind of odd, to make one comment here, in verse 10 we read this:

¹⁰ “And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: ‘Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?’

This sounds like, and this is the way Taylor takes it in his commentary, that the people all of a sudden wake up and say, "Oh! This is happening because we're evil!" In other words, they have this sort of awakening or some kind of consciousness of their own sin—that Ezekiel's message has basically sunk in and the lights have gone on. But we know here in chapter 33 it's too late. Taylor writes, for instance:

For the first time since the book opened, we are shown here that the exiles are conscious of their own sin...

So he's saying something clicked here. But Block actually disagrees with this. I think his reasoning is pretty good. Block writes this in response to verse 10:

The quotation reflects the demoralized state of the exiles. All hope is gone; their faith has been crushed; the darkness is overwhelming. For the first time they admit their own guilt as the cause of their suffering. But is this confession repentance? [MH: So Taylor thinks it is, but Block says, 'I'm not so sure.'] In view of the prophet's response, it seems to be little more than a cry of pain.

And Block says that, in part, because if you keep reading after verse 20 (7-20 is this rehearsal of the people being so bad and in verse 10 they say, "Yeah, you're right!")... If you get to verses 21-33, the people there are described in fairly clear *unrepentant* terms. So Block is skeptical. He says it just sounds like a cry of pain, sort of like an appeal for relief: "Hey, we don't want this to happen. Woe is us." Doom and gloom, and that sort of thing. So he's actually a little jaded when it

comes to the sincerity of the people, and I tend to agree with Block's take on this.

When you get to verse 21, that's when we get the report of Jerusalem's fall. I'm going to read that before I go back to the watchman idea for another thing here that I don't think is very obvious.

²¹ In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, a fugitive from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has been struck down."²² Now the hand of the LORD had been upon me the evening before the fugitive came; and he had opened my mouth by the time the man came to me in the morning, so my mouth was opened, and I was no longer mute.

Apparently, again, Ezekiel had been silenced the night before. We talked about this before. Has he been mute this whole time? Apparently not because earlier passages associated with the impending destruction of Jerusalem gave the impression that he could speak, but here we have a reference to him being mute and then he speaks after the fugitive shows up. Again, it's kind of a technical "which is it" sort of thing, but I think we can have both ideas here because of the little editorial comment that "the hand of the Lord had been upon me the evening before" the fugitive came. So I think we can sort that out and just go with it for what it says. Taylor writes here:

The date here appears to be a full eighteen months after the city's fall [MH: in other words, the real time event happens and then eighteen months later this guy shows up and says "the city has been struck down], and most commentators regard this as being too long and unrealistic a time lag.

We commented on that in an earlier episode. He says that some manuscripts say this and that to try to adjust the time, but Taylor is content to go with the text as is. He says:

Ezra and his company took four months to make the journey over a century later (Ezra 7:9), and so a six-month trip by an exhausted fugitive is not unreasonable for the present context.

15:00

So he says, "Okay, we've got six months here. It looks like it's eighteen months after the city's fall. Six months might be more reasonable." I only bring it up because you could go with either... You could come up with some other reason why it took this long, or you could do some textual criticism and come out with six months and that seems more reasonable. It's not really that important. Ultimately, if there's a text-critical solution, that might be what's going on here. But at any

rate, it's at least a period of some months. If you go by the chronology of Ezekiel and you're going to take the numbers for what they are in the Masoretic Text, this is what you have. Most commentators think there's probably something going on in the manuscripts textually that tightens this up a little bit. Whatever.

The thing I want to focus on here is not so much the city being struck down because we know that's already happened from the earlier chapters. We know this report's coming—fine. We know why all this happened to them. We've had a whole book of that. A lot of the content in chapter 33 is repetitive and expected and there's nothing new here. But the watchman idea... There is something lurking in the background here (at least potentially) that I think we should say something about. In other passages (think wider than Ezekiel here) there is the same language. In other words, there's this "watchman" language that shows up elsewhere that really has a different flavor to it. Let's just jump in here with Isaiah 40. This is from *Unseen Realm* (specifically for those who want to reference the book later it's pages 271-273). I'm going to start in Isaiah 40. This is one of those passages that ends up being related to the divine council. If you just read it in English and you don't really pay attention to certain things in Hebrew you'd never expect that. But this is an important passage and this one is going to lead to another one that has this watchman language in it that is just kind of ironic and makes us think that maybe the watchman means something more. I wrote in *Unseen Realm* on page 271:

We've all read about Jesus' baptism before, perhaps dozens of times—but we have likely missed the context for it. John's gospel (John 1:19–23, 29–31) sets it up this way:

¹⁹And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem so that they could ask him, "Who are you?"
²⁰And he confessed—and he did not deny, and confessed—"I am not the Christ!"²¹ And they asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not!" "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No!"
²²Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?"
²³He said,
 "I am 'the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
 "Make straight the way of the Lord,"'
 just as Isaiah the prophet said." ...
²⁹On the next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"³⁰ This one is the one about whom I said, 'After me is coming a man who is ahead of me, because he existed before me.'³¹ And I did not know him, but in order that he could be revealed to Israel, because of this I came baptizing with water" (John 1:19–23, 29–31).

What's startling is the passage cited by John the Baptist. He identifies himself with the anonymous voice of Isaiah 40:3 that heralded the coming of Yahweh. The significance is obscured in English translations:

- ¹ **“Comfort; comfort my people,” says your God.**
² **“Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and call to her, that her compulsory labor is fulfilled, that her sin is paid for, that she has received from the hand of Yahweh double for all her sins.”**
³ **A voice is calling in the wilderness, “Clear the way of Yahweh! Make a highway smooth in the desert for our God!**
⁴ **Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill shall become low, And the rough ground shall be like a plain, and the rugged ground like a valley-plain.**
⁵ **And the glory of Yahweh shall be revealed, and all humankind together shall see it” (Isa 40:1–5).**

[MH: So this is the passage John quotes about himself. He puts himself into this scene.] In Isaiah 40:1 we learn that God is the speaker. He issues four commands. *All four commands are grammatically plural in Hebrew.* That means that Yahweh is commanding a *group*. The group cannot be Israelites or a collective Israel, since it is Israel that Yahweh is commanding the group to comfort, speak to, and call.

So the Lord isn't asking the people to comfort the people. He's not asking exiled Israelites to comfort themselves. There's a recipient of the command and then there's an object of the command. These commands... their object is the people, Jerusalem, the city, the people who were in exile. But the recipient of the command is this group—whoever this group is. Those of you who have read *Unseen Realm* know where I'm going with this. A lot of scholars take Isaiah 40 and conclude that this is a divine council scene because the command Yahweh is speaking to a group and it's not people because people are the object—they're the ones he wants comforted. He's commanding somebody else to comfort them.

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You have this scene in Isaiah 40 sort of mimicking Isaiah 6 in a number of respects, which is a scene in the divine throne room with the seraphim there. It's a very classic divine council scene—the heavenly host there with the Lord—and they have the same conversation that they have in chapter 40. "Whom shall we send and who will go for us?" And you have this, "Here am I, Lord, send me." In Isaiah 40, the prophet inserts himself into this, and so on. The passages are very similar and so a lot of scholars have taken the view that Isaiah 40 is another council scene—that God is ready to act to release the people from exile and he's commanding some of his heavenly host members to comfort Jerusalem.

You say, "What does all this have to do with the watchmen?" Well, if we look at Isaiah elsewhere, the notion of comforting the people and the notion of taking this message to the people in a positive way, you get some similar phrasing. Like in Isaiah 40 where it says, "How beautiful are the feet of them that bring good tidings and bring good news." That occurs in another passage, specifically Isaiah 52:1-12, which ends right before the "suffering servant" passage. Everybody knows that one. It's the Isaiah passage about the dying messiah and all that sort of stuff. The section right before that has the same language of Isaiah 40 about how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news, etc., and it uses the term "watchmen." I'm just going to read the whole thing. With the backdrop of Isaiah 40 in mind and this divine council stuff, listen to what's said here:

**Awake, awake,
put on your strength, O Zion;
put on your beautiful garments,
O Jerusalem, the holy city;
for there shall no more come into you
the uncircumcised and the unclean.
² Shake yourself from the dust and arise;
be seated, O Jerusalem;
loose the bonds from your neck,
O captive daughter of Zion.**

³ For thus says the LORD: "You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money." ⁴ For thus says the Lord God: "My people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there, and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing. ⁵ Now therefore what have I here," declares the LORD, "seeing that my people are taken away for nothing? Their rulers wail," declares the LORD, "and continually all the day my name is despised. ⁶ Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am."

**⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good news,
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."
⁸ The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;
together they sing for joy;**

**for eye to eye they see
the return of the LORD to Zion.**
⁹ **Break forth together into singing,
you waste places of Jerusalem [MH: that's a key phrase],
for the LORD has comforted his people;
he has redeemed Jerusalem.**
¹⁰ **The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.**

Then there's a verse or two and then we go into the suffering servant passage. Well, here's the question: There's a reference here to "how beautiful are the feet" which is the same as Isaiah 40, which is a divine council scene. And in verse 8 in Isaiah 52, it says:

**⁸ The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;
together they sing for joy;**

What watchmen? The city doesn't have human watchmen. Why? Because the city is destroyed. It even says that.

**⁹ Break forth together into singing,
you waste places of Jerusalem...**

There are no human watchmen to be rejoicing. There is no city. The city is destroyed. The temple is destroyed. Isaiah is looking forward to this time of return, this time of restoration, but the city is just a heap. So who are the watchmen? There are no towers for human watchmen to be looking out or singing for joy and all this stuff. Some scholars have looked at this (I actually dealt with this a little bit in my dissertation) and had this thought: "Maybe if there are no human watchmen over the city, and since this passage uses some of the language of a divine council scene in Isaiah 40, maybe the watchmen here are divine beings. Maybe these are angels. Maybe they are God's emissaries that have sort of kept watch over Jerusalem and over the remnant to make sure that the whole thing didn't just die. Maybe they're the ones rejoicing." It introduces this idea that maybe the term "watchmen" is actually used of non-human entities: divine beings, members of the divine council. A little section from my dissertation here... I'm talking about Frank Moore Cross, who taught for many years at Harvard. I say here:

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F. M. Cross, in his article on the divine council in Deutero-Isaiah, included Isa 52:8 on account of the verse's opening phrase ("your watchmen shall lift up a voice"), which he contended referred to members of the heavenly council. Against Cross' suggestion is the fact that "watchmen" often in Isaiah (and outside that book) refers to the human prophets appointed by Yahweh as spiritual sentries over His people, not divine beings. However, certain apocalyptic texts do make mention of unidentified "watchmen" having a role at the time of the Day of Yahweh [MH's underline]. Other passages that may be taken to refer to watchmen as heavenly beings are Mic 7:4, Jer 31:6, and Jer 51:12. In the contextual setting of Isa 52:8, there are no human watchmen waiting in Jerusalem as it is in ruins. It appears that a group of angelic watchmen-heralds are in view.

Let's just think about this for a moment. Aside from "divine heralds" (members of the divine council), who else would rejoice over Zion's triumph? We have this reference to the return but a lot of this talk is about this ultimate return (the Day of the Lord kind of stuff). Who else would rejoice over Zion's triumph at the end of days and its restoration? You actually get an interesting answer to that if you go to Revelation 14, for instance.

Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. ²And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps...

And so on. There's this line about, "These are the 144,000 who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes." I actually talk about this in the upcoming book (*Reversing Hermon*). The description of the 144,000 as male virgins is actually kind of significant, but I don't want to rabbit-trail into that. What we have here is a reference to the same event in Isaiah 52: the restoration of Zion in an eschatological sense. And who is rejoicing? It's the 144,000 who are humans kinda sorta, but maybe they're also angelic. We have this discussion about the 144,000. Dispensationalists, of course, only think of them as human, but there are other perspectives that look at them as being maybe glorified humans or something like that. Again, others look at them as being more supernatural beings. Is this what's going on here? Have they been guardians of Zion? Is this hearkening back to this idea of divine forces keeping guard over Zion? Is this what's it's hinting at?

There's another passage in Revelation 3:12 that's kind of interesting here.

¹²The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

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This is Zion—the New Heaven and New Earth kind of thing. Revelation 21 gets into this language. There it associates believers... In Revelation 21 it's glorified believers ("the ones who overcome") and are put over the nations—that whole idea. They're the ones who become the guardians of Zion. So you look at some of these passages and here's the point, here's what we're angling for as a possibility. (I'm not married to it; I don't think it's something that I would call really clear.) But there are scholars who wonder if perhaps we have in Isaiah 52 and a few other passages the idea that Zion/Jerusalem... certainly when it was destroyed even after it's rebuilt, because as we're going to see in chapter 34, there was this sense that Israel is always in exile until the Messiah comes because all twelve tribes were not brought back to the land. In the Old Testament restoration it was only two. So we have this sense that in this period where the tribes are not whole—lots of the tribes are still in exile and the city is still under some sort of foreign domination and control—that you don't have the presence of God back in the land, dwelling in the land. And so what you do have in its place are divine guardians over the land of Israel and over the city. What would their function be? Their function would be as sort of placeholders. They are there to make sure that the plan of God doesn't die, the remnant doesn't die—that there *is* a remnant, and this whole kind of thing. It's still Yahweh's turf and they are there to watch over it. Is that a biblical idea? Maybe. I don't think the evidence for it is completely clear, but if you've ever wondered if there is some sort of idea like, "We have all the other nations that have their princes (Daniel 10), and we're told that Michael is Israel's prince," so there you have a sense of a divine being over the territory of Israel. Given that, might we have this other idea as well—that the watchmen aren't always human when they're referred to and they could be divine beings. Just throwing it out there because scholars wonder about it. If you run into it, now you'll know a little bit about why they think that way.

If you go to chapter 34, we have right on the heels of the city being destroyed in chapter 33, we get the prophecy against the shepherds of Israel. There's a lot in this chapter that's going to be real familiar if you've read the Gospels. You're going to pick up a lot of this language associated with Jesus, and that's important. Let's read chapter 34. It's not that long.

The word of the LORD came to me: ²"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding

yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. ⁴The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. ⁵So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; ⁶they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

⁷“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ⁸As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, ⁹therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁰Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

Again, this is really familiar language. We have this “my sheep are scattered” and that’s going to come right out of the Gospels or at least be referenced in the Gospels. What’s going on is the New Testament repurposes this passage in some ways. In some ways the repurposing is obvious, but there are other ways that it’s not so obvious. When Jesus (like in Matthew 9:36) refers to the people of Judea as sheep without a shepherd that are scattered all over the place, the condition of the people in Jesus’ day is therefore cast as the same condition as at the exile, which obviously has terrible associations. It implies that the people were still in exile. They were leaderless. The leadership had not done its job and God is therefore against the negligent shepherds (in Judah in Ezekiel’s day and in Judea at the time of Jesus) and God is going to rescue the sheep. You get into verse 11 here:

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¹¹“For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹²As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³And I will bring them out from the peoples [MH: that’s another way of referring to the nations] and gather them from the countries,

and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country.

The New Testament has Jesus in Mark 6:34 as teaching the sheep many things. Look at what it just said in Ezekiel 34: God says... Yahweh, Elohim, the Lord God says, "I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them. I will bring them out. I will bring them into their own land. I will feed them." In Ezekiel 34, the metaphor is that God will feed his sheep. That's what Jesus does in the Gospels! Teaching them is feeding them. We use this expression today: "Feed the flock of God." That's a New Testament phrase. It means teaching them. So what the Gospels do is the Gospel writers insert or swap out God for Jesus. They put Jesus in the God role of this passage—of Ezekiel 34. Now if you were a Jew who knew Ezekiel 34, you knew that God was the one who does this. And here you have Jesus walking around and saying, "I am the good shepherd. I'm the one who's going to search for the sheep. I'm the one who's going to feed the sheep. I'm teaching the sheep." It's a very clear way for the Gospel writers to align Jesus—to equate Jesus—with the God of the Old Testament. If you just read this stuff in the Gospels... "We get the metaphor—sheep and shepherd. They're all lost and wandering around. Sheep are stupid." This is typically how it's preached. And all that's true, but if you know the Old Testament backdrop to this, the Gospel writers are very transparently aligning and equating Jesus with God. Jesus is fulfilling the role or taking on the role of God in the passage being referenced. It's hard to miss if you know the Ezekiel passage, it's clear that Jesus is occupying the God-slot in all of it. Back to Ezekiel 34:

¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep [MH: again, this is God talking], and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

So again, in Ezekiel, Yahweh is the shepherd. In the gospels it's Jesus. Jesus is the shepherd, the one who does all these things. It's a clear identification between the two. Ezekiel 34:17:

¹⁷ "As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord God: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats.

Well, Jesus is described in the same way in Matthew 25:32! He's judging between the sheep and the goats. But *that* one is associated with the Second

Coming. So here we're getting a mix. Catch this: the Gospel writers are using Ezekiel 34 to cast Jesus in the God role. Sometimes that role is being fulfilled in their present time (when Jesus is on earth and doing his ministry). But in other places, they use the passage to talk about Jesus in a future time (at the Second Coming, when the Son of Man returns). Back to Ezekiel 34:

¹⁸Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet?¹⁹ And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

²⁰“Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, ²²I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

40:00

Did you catch this distinguishing between sheep to sheep? Being an Israelite doesn't guarantee membership in the remnant. The sheep who are selected are the remnant and the sheep who are not selected are not the remnant. But they were all sheep. The messaging here is that just because you're an Israelite, it doesn't guarantee you membership in God's family—in the remnant. The sheep who follow the Davidic shepherd—the ones who are his sheep—those are the ones God is talking about. So you have this sense, even in the Old Testament, that to be a Jew (to be an Israelite) did not guarantee salvation. There's this "believing loyalty" thing I talk about in the *Unseen Realm*, and here it's associated with "my servant David, the prince." Of course, that's Jesus in the New Testament. There was no birthright claim to salvation; it was about being part of the flock of the true shepherd, being part of the flock of the messiah. We get into verse 25 in Ezekiel 34 and we get into some things that are going to take us into this little eschatology rabbit-trail before we close. This section is referred to by scholars as "Yahweh's covenant of peace" or something like that. He says this about the sheep that are really his sheep (not just any Israelite, but the ones who follow the true shepherd):

²⁵“I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. ²⁶And I will make them and the places all around my hill [MH: a

reference to Zion] **a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing.** ²⁷ **And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke [MH: Isn't that a familiar New Testament phrase?], and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them.**

Again, the Lord is going to break the bars of their yoke. Well, Jesus' yoke is easy and his burden is light. This is another reference in the New Testament back to Ezekiel 34. There are lots of them. Following Jesus is cast as deliverance from the bondage of the bad shepherds. The bad shepherds are, of course, the Jewish leadership. That's the leadership that has failed—the leadership after the return from exile. So you've got priests, scribes, Pharisees—a familiar cast of characters... the usual suspects here. When Jesus is saying "take my yoke upon you; my yoke is easy and my burden is light" it's hearkening back to this. It's a clear contrast between who he is and who the evil shepherds are. He, again, is cast in the God-role of the whole chapter. These are not careless references back to Ezekiel 34, they're deliberate references. The Gospel writers know what they're doing. We have a picture here of this covenant of peace and banishing the wild beasts, the sheep are dwelling securely. What's up with that? Let's just finish the chapter. It says here in verse 28:

²⁸They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid. ²⁹And I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations. ³⁰And they shall know that I am the LORD their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord God. ³¹And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord God."

45:00

Now, let's ask a question here. What does it mean to no longer suffer the reproach of the nations? We talk a lot about the nations on this podcast. Some of it is kind of present reality (the reclaiming of the nations during the events of the New Testament and that's the mission of the church), so we've spent a lot of time on that. But here there's this idea of no longer being the reproach of the nations, no longer being a disgrace among the nations (the passage uses that phrase, as well). What does it mean? A related question is, how would we understand the connection of no longer being a reproach to the nations and "dwelling securely" in the land? Believe it or not, this actually takes us into eschatology.

Just a few comments. What do these things mean? What does it mean to be no longer the reproach of the nations, no longer a disgrace before the nations, and

this whole "dwelling securely?" It means at least that they're no longer going to be in exile. God's people are no longer going to be in exile. The exile is going to end. It has a terminus point. They are no longer going to be in exile. They are no longer going to be a disgrace among the nations. They are forgiven and—more importantly—they are going to be restored to the land. Remember, in Ezekiel (we're going to get to this when we get to chapter 37) we'll see that the restoration in Ezekiel's mind of the people of God is not just the two tribes that are going to come back from exile from Babylon. It's all twelve tribes. Restoration—the real end of exile—was viewed when all twelve tribes are brought back to the land. You ask, "When will that happen?" If we look at Ezekiel 36 (which we'll hit next time), verses 22 and following, the restoration of all twelve tribes—catch this (we've actually touched on this before in our series on the book of Acts)—is linked to the idea of the coming of the Spirit. When did that happen? That's Pentecost!

We're getting into this idea of the exile being over, the exile being ended—no longer a reproach among the nations, no longer a disgrace, being brought back into the land corporately and collectively, all twelve tribes. That's associated with the coming of the Spirit, which is at Pentecost. Why am I bringing this up? Because a lot of Bible students, a lot of Christians, look at these passages and think only of a future Millennium. A lot of this stuff transpired and was fulfilled in the period of the book of Acts and in the book of Acts. Because that's where these passages get quoted! They get quoted in the New Testament. Is the New Testament an inspired commentary on the Old Testament or is it not? I would suggest that it is. So when the New Testament starts marking these things and putting these dots together, connecting these dots, we already have in some sense the restoration of the people. We already have the kick-starting of the Kingdom of God on earth again in the first century. No surprise here, this is part of the "already" but then there's going to be a "not yet." "Already but not yet" eschatology is really important and is a consistent Scriptural pattern. It's not that "this is all there is right now, so let's be Amillennialists." Or it's not that "it's all future, so let's be Premillennialists." These are artificial systems in a number of respects. The truth is somewhere in between. Both sides have good things to say, and this is why. There's truth to both of them, to the different views. The "already but not yet" idea is really, really important.

50:00

What about this "dwelling securely" language? It sounds very idyllic. You look at Ezekiel 34: "I'm going to banish wild beasts from the land." In other words, there's going to be no violent beasts. There's going to be all these showers of blessing and things are going to grow and it's going to be abundant produce. It sounds positively Edenic, doesn't it? Yeah, it does. It's connected to "my hill"—Zion. Again, this is Revelation 21 and 22 language here, when these conditions are met in a full sense. That's the "not yet." But we also have to deal with the "already." There's a note here. If you go back to the passage... Let's just go here. We're in Ezekiel 34. You're going to notice something. We have clear references to an ideal condition. This is something that sounds like a new Eden, and we

know that's distant future—the "not yet" part of eschatology. And then we have "already" stuff going on. We have that, too. So we have both already and not yet occurring in the same passage here in Ezekiel 34 verses 25-31. Let's look at it again:

²⁵“I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. ²⁶ And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. ²⁷ And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase [MH: this is Genesis and Edenic language, too], and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them. ²⁸ They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid.... [they shall] no longer suffer the reproach of the nations.

They'll no longer be a disgrace. This "dwelling securely" idea... Yes, there's an ultimate part to it. But in some ways it's also linked to this idea of not being a reproach. How do we understand both parts of this? Well, the passage is a mixture of events associated with Pentecost (the "already") and then a future Kingdom. Dwelling securely is (at least as part of this picture) both in an "already" and in a "not yet" sense. The "already," again, has to do with the idea that you're secure in part because you're in the land. And to be in the land, you have to be delivered from exile. If you're delivered from exile, you're no longer a reproach and a disgrace. The fact that they're in the land has something to do with this phrase.

I'm harping on the "dwelling securely" idea for one reason. This is going to set up something we're going to do in a few weeks. This term, "dwelling securely," is in Hebrew *betach*. It shows up three times in this chapter (Ezekiel 34:25, 27, 28). Guess where else it occurs. It occurs in Ezekiel 38 three times (Ezekiel 38:8,11,13). That's the Gog/Magog passage. Now a lot of people are out there teaching that the Gog and Magog incident (whatever it is) happens during a seven-year tribulation period. But if the "dwell securely" language is used elsewhere in Ezekiel of kingdom-on-earth conditions (and in many regards, it's the final stage of the kingdom because there's no more violent animals and the Edenic kind of language), then it wouldn't make sense to have the same language in Ezekiel 38 refer to the tribulation period, would it?

So where does Gog and Magog show up in the New Testament? Have we looked? Hopefully you have. If you haven't, I'll tell you. It's Revelation 20, which is in connection with the Kingdom, when the forces of evil surround Jerusalem/Zion.

55:00

They surround "my hill" (Ezekiel 34), and of course, the forces of evil are annihilated. This would mean that the Gog and Magog incident would occur right before the Day of the Lord and the New Eden, which is where Revelation 20 is situated—right before Revelation 21 and 22. It would occur sometime right in there—right before the Day of the Lord and the New Eden. That also means that since we don't have the consummated Kingdom yet, then the Gog/Magog thing in some sense happens during the present era, as well. So those who want a hard and fast separation of the Kingdom (it's only future) have trouble with this. Think about when Revelation is. In Revelation 17-29 you have the Second Coming—the King of Kings coming back on the white horse and all that. And then you have chapter 20, which is the so-called "Millennium passage" (because it references a thousand years there six times). And then it's in that passage that you have Gog and Magog referenced. The city is surrounded by the forces of evil and you have Gog and Magog there (Revelation 20:7-9). You go, "How in the world is that even possible?" What a lot of people say is that the Lord returns, we have a thousand year Millennium, then at the end of the Millennium somehow there's evil still out there and it has to be destroyed and then that's when we go into the New Heaven and New Earth. Well, is that really what Ezekiel is thinking? Is that really how we would read it if we were back in Ezekiel 34 and 38? Would we read it at the end of the Kingdom or would we read it in such a way where, "No, they're dwelling securely *before* the Day of the Lord comes because they're dwelling secure and then something has to happen to make these Kingdom conditions real." Whereas if you're looking at the way things look in Revelation 20, it doesn't look like it's consistent. The problem is (we'll get into this with Gog and Magog when we hit those two chapters... I'm actually planning to spend two episodes on the Gog and Magog passage) if you want to have a linear/chronological reading of Revelation and you want to keep Gog and Magog where it is in Old Testament thinking, you actually have to argue that the Gog and Magog of Revelation 20:7-9 is a new or different Gog and Magog. In other words, you have to invent a second one to make the system work.

It's probably not sounding clear at this point because we're going to have to unpack the whole thing in detail. But this "dwelling securely" idea is important because it forces the question of whether we read the book of Revelation as a linear chronology or do we read it some other way? And when we get to Ezekiel 38 and 39, the first episode in which we'll be discussing those chapters we'll just do the nuts and bolts of the passage. Then the second part will be end-times kind of stuff (how do we parse all this). It's difficult because we have these systems going into it that kind of make sense, but then in places they don't make sense. So what do we do? How do we interpret the passage the way the Old Testament sort of situates it? It's a precursor to the ultimate blessing of the Kingdom when the Lord returns at the Day of the Lord. But in Revelation 20 it looks like it's *after* the Lord has returned because the Lord Jesus returns in chapters 17-19 and then we get Gog and Magog afterwards. How does that work? It just seems contradictory.

Again, I wanted to just jump into that a little bit because here we have this language in chapter 34. We get a clear "already but not yet" kind of scenario, because in chapter 34 and the covenant of peace... Some of those conditions were met clearly at Pentecost. Why is it clear that they were at Pentecost? Because no longer being a reproach among the nations—no longer being a disgrace to the nations—means the exile has ended. And in Ezekiel 36 and 37, the exile ends when all twelve tribes are present in the land and the Spirit of God comes. And *that* happened at Pentecost. Jews from every nation in the known world coming back to Jerusalem and the coming of the Spirit. So there's a clear "already" feel to it, but then part of the description is "not yet." And the "dwelling securely" stuff and the Gog/Magog stuff get sort of sucked into that vortex. Again, it's described in association... This Gog/Magog thing is going to happen before we get the consummation of the Kingdom. It's going to happen when the Lord returns. Well, it is or isn't. How do we read that in Revelation 20, when the Lord has already come back in chapters 17-19? We'll try to sort all that out when we get to Ezekiel 38 and 39.

1:00:00

Again, I just wanted to sort of get our feet wet here in this chapter because the language is important. The language is going to get repurposed in the New Testament. Ezekiel 34 is full of New Testament writers drawing on it all the time in the Gospels to cast Jesus in the God-role, as the Good Shepherd, the one who feeds the sheep, etc. So New Testament use of Ezekiel 34 is important—the stuff we think about as the sheep. But this whole Gog/Magog/dwelling securely/already-but-not-yet descriptions are also a big factor. So we'll pick up with that when we get to that point. We're not quite there. We'll get into future restorative eschatology kind of stuff beginning with chapter 37. But next time we'll hit the next two chapters (35 and 36) and then we'll be forced (because of what Ezekiel does) to actually do some eschatology/end-times stuff on the podcast.

TS: Which we all know you're looking forward to... But I am and I know everybody else is! (laughter)

MH: Oh yeah, I can hardly wait.

TS: It's interesting. You hear that so many different ways that it's nice to cover it because it is such a hot topic in church. I've even taken a class on Revelation last year. You get so many ideas and theories and it's just nice to hear you clarify a few things come up. So I'm looking forward to it.

MH: We'll try to clarify what can be clarified. Just a heads-up to everybody: Ezekiel 36 through 39 has a chronology to it. There's an order of events to that. Chapter 36 is very obviously dealing with Pentecost and the New Covenant—the coming of the Spirit. So if you start there in your chronological layout, then the question becomes, "When I look at the New Testament and all this end-times talk, am I going to honor and observe the same order of events in my reading of the New Testament when it draws on these chapters in Ezekiel?" Because

Ezekiel is going to talk about the coming of the Spirit, resurrection, Gog and Magog. There's a chronology to that. If you violate that in the New Testament, that's kind of a problem (laughs). What's being described in the Old Testament is being described for a reason, so is the New Testament consistent with it or not? A lot of people don't care. A lot of people never even ask that question because they work out a system of eschatology first and it's almost entirely New Testament based, and it's almost entirely (if it ever gets to the Old Testament) just dealing with the book of Daniel. And all this other stuff just gets neglected and it becomes filler. We're going to try not to do that. Hopefully some things will fall into place. Where there can be clarity, we'll try to lend clarity, and where there's ambiguity, we just have to live with that.

TS: All right, Mike. I know you've got a plane to catch, so we'll just wrap this up. Next week we're going to do a Q&A show, and then after that we're going to have Fern and Audrey on again. And then I guess we'll be back into Ezekiel?

MH: That's the plan, anyway.

TS: Okay, Mike. We appreciate it. Just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.