

## Allan MacRae, Ezekiel, Lecture 1

Now our course is on the book of Ezekiel. And I like to organize my courses into an outline form which I think makes it easier for you to follow it. And so I'm going to make a Roman numeral I. "Introduction to the Course." And under that capital A will be "The Purpose of the Course." And then under "The Purpose of the Course" we will have number 1. "Introduction to the Book." And you notice we have "Introduction to the Course" and "Introduction to the Book." The word "introduction" has been used in theological circles for many years as a very special way that most of us are not familiar with. It usually means the questions about the origins, authenticity of that precise text, and so on, of a particular book. And so I use the word "introduction" first as one who introduces the course, but then as to purpose, one of our purposes will be to examine the "Introduction to the Book."

Under 1. "Introduction to the Book," we will discuss two sections, which I will merely mention as a and b. a. will be "The Historical Background." The historical background is tremendously important and we will speak about that a good deal this morning a little further on. And then the other part of the introduction we will discuss, b. is "Authorship and Unity." But now as to the purposes, we want you to know something about the introduction to the book but that is not nearly as primary or important in Ezekiel as it is in many other books of the New and Old Testaments. But we will give some time to it.

Number 2. is "An overview of the book." I used to give courses on different portions of the book of Isaiah. I divided Isaiah into four parts. And as we took one of those parts, we would look at every verse and go into considerable detail. Now, in this course we are covering a book that has 48 chapters in it. We certainly can't look at that in as much detail as we might wish. So, one of my purposes in this course will be for you to get a general idea of the book as a whole, an overview of the book.

We will only be looking in detail in certain sections of the book, but we will look

into quite a number of sections because a third purpose of the course is perhaps the most important of all. Number 3. is "Introduction to the Method of Interpreting the Prophetic Book." It is my hope that in this course you will not only learn a good deal about the book of Ezekiel, but that you will get a good foundation in methods of dealing with any prophetic book. I think that is tremendously important.

The tendency of most Americans, and I fear most Bible students now, is to simply read what some man has said about a Bible book or about portions of the book, and then perhaps to master what that man has said. While that man may have a good many things to say, everybody is human and whatever he says is bound to have some error in it. The only thing ever written that is free from error is the word of God. And so, one of our central ideas in this seminary, from its start, is that we would put our emphasis on the word of God. There is no error in what God has said. But anything that a human being has said has errors.

About twenty years ago we had two fellows who graduated from the seminary and went to a seminary in the mid-west to take graduate work because that's how they would get a doctorate degree. And after they had been there a few months, I went to speak at a college in that general area and they came out to see me. And they said, "You can't imagine what an advantage we have over the other students that are working here for the doctorate degree, particularly those who did their undergraduate work at this institution. Because," they said, "if there is a matter to look into, they immediately start looking into a great many commentaries and handbooks, and books concerning the matter. Then they report this man says this and this man says that and they get a whole list of what they think. But," they said, "They are not equipped to go right into the Bible and see what it has to say directly." They said, "We learned in our course in seminary to go directly into the Bible and see what it says and what it means. They recognize we have a tremendous advantage over them." Well, I think that's not merely an advantage in studying something or for advanced study or for the advanced degree. But far more important is the great advantage in making your life count for the Lord if you can go into the Bible

directly and really see what it means.

Now it is entirely possible that one reason why our people have developed this sole reliance on commentaries and handbooks to give them the meaning rather than what the Bible says, is the fact that for such a long time our people have clung to the King James Version. I believe the King James Version was as fine a translation as has ever been made of any book into any language. And the men who translated the King James, or at least revised many of the previous translations, these men were men who were so trained in the Hebrew and the Greek that it would be very difficult to get a group as well trained and with as wide knowledge of these areas today, as those who were back in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. So they gave us a very wonderful translation and not only that, but a translation in most beautiful English. And the result is that great blessing came to the English speaking world through the King James Version. But, they say every cloud has a silver lining, but perhaps you can reverse that by saying every good thing has some bad features about it, or disadvantage to it. And in this case, there has been a very great disadvantage in that the translation was so good that people just couldn't bear to turn away and use any other translation. Every language changes; languages are constantly changing. Someone once said that if George Washington were to speak today, we would not be able to understand what he said. I'm not sure if our current pronunciation has changed quite so much, but it certainly has changed a great deal since King James' times. Language is always gradually changing. And the same is true of the meaning of words and the usages and the forms.

When I was a boy, if you wanted to say that something was very bad, you'd say, "Oh, that's terrific." "The poor fellow, he's so sick it's just terrific." That was what we used that word for. About fifteen years ago, I was asked to speak to a group of students at a certain conference and I said to the students who came to see me. I would suggest three subjects. So I suggested to them three subjects, and one of them said to me, "that's terrific." And, I thought, "Oh he doesn't like it at all. I'll have to see about three other subjects." Then I came to realize that the word "terrific," which when I was a boy meant

very, very bad, now means very, very good. Almost anyone under fifty, I used to say under forty, but I think I can now say under fifty, can hardly imagine "terrific" as meaning anything except very good. While almost anyone over fifty, if you use the word "terrific" to them and mean good, you may find they don't know what you're talking about because it means the exact opposite to them.

The word "science" in the King James Version meant what "philosophy" means today, and the word "philosophy" meant what "science" means today. They've exactly reversed themselves. The word "ghost" in the King James Version means what "spirit" means today. The Holy Ghost, well you don't believe in ghosts as holy, it's nonsense. But we're using an old expression which means the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, the word "spirit" in the KJV means what "ghost" means today. And you won't find the word "ghost" except for the Holy Spirit in the Bible. But you do find that Job says, or one of Job's friends says, "I saw a spirit and I was terrified". It means what we mean by "ghost," but you don't get that meaning from it.

So language often changes its meaning. The result is that many, many people have repeated those beautiful sentences from the King James Version, yet without having any idea what they actually mean. I must confess that I myself, as I use the New International Version largely, am amazed often to have a verse just spring into meaning as I read what I have read over and over before and not stopped to think that I didn't really understand what it meant.

And so we are in a position today where, if we're going to understand the Bible, unless you restrict yourself to the original Hebrew or Greek, you just about have to use some modern translation. I don't know any modern translation that is as good as the KJV was for its day. But I don't think you will understand today what those men meant by their words unless you're going to look every one of them up in a very large etymological English dictionary and see exactly what it meant in those days. But I think that has helped in leading people to feel that they have to go through some commentary to find what the Bible really means.

Now most of the modern translations are a little freer, every one of them freer than the King James was especially where today we don't get much sense out of a passage. When the King James translators couldn't get a sense of a passage and they would just put it down word for word. All your new translations, if they don't get much sense out of a passage they put down what they think it means and they may be wrong. So, none of today's translations are as good as the King James Version was, but for use by people today modern versions are necessary. The New International Version is, on the whole, a very good translation, though it has a number of things I don't like in it. But on the whole, it is a very good translation.

Now, the New American Standard Version is a translation that is a bit more literal than the New International Version. The result is that after you know Hebrew and Greek you can take the New American Standard Version and looking at it you can pretty well know what the Greek and Hebrew were behind the English translation. But often it follows the original so slavishly, that you don't get the meaning, unless you examine it in the original. So I like the New International a little better than the NASB, but we use both of them, as they are the best that we have available today.

You will probably be using various versions and something that is odd in one version you may not see at all in the version you are using, so I hope that we will note places like that occasionally as we go along. You cannot get an exact translation of any book from one language into another. Every translation is to some extent an interpretation. So it is valuable to have various translations so we can compare them.

Now, as I say, one of our big purposes is the introduction to methods of interpreting the prophetic book, and I would say that a good bit of that fits into methods of interpreting any book of the Bible. Here there are three principles I'd like to mention in particular. And the first of these "a." is: "Carefully Examine the Text." Before you pay much attention to somebody's book, and what somebody says it means, carefully examine it for yourself. I think that is the very root of our approach to the Bible, that we get into it and see what we can gather from it. Now you will not initially get the full

meaning of anything, you have to study it. In any sentence that is a translation, it necessarily is a little different from the original. In any sentence in almost any language there is a variety of possibilities of interpretation. So you get into that text itself, and that is much more important than reading commentaries or discussions. I believe that will become more and more clear as we go on in our study of this book.

Then the second interpretive principle small "b." is "Note Alternatives." And this I think is neglected by most Bible students. I think it is very important. "Note alternatives. Our tendency is to read a verse and immediately conclude it means this. We may have exactly the right meaning. But in almost every sentence, in almost any language, there are some word or phrase that is possible to interpret in more than one way. It may seem perfectly obvious to you that a certain way of reading it is what it means, but there's a possibility that the other way to read it is the correct way. You should note the alternatives, even if you are sure that the meaning you give to it is the correct one, yet if you think of the other possibilities when you find something somewhere else, and it is right somewhere else, you will have noticed this and it will be on your mind. Very often there will be two possible meanings of the sentence and you can't tell until you get the whole context clear what exactly the whole meaning is.

I heard of a man to whom someone said, "look out there. Isn't that a beautiful view." And he said, "yes indeed, it is." He was a man who had just learned English and was not as accustomed to our idioms as we are. But then one day he was in a narrow hallway with a case of windows in it and all of a sudden he heard somebody yell, "Look out." And so he looked out the window and along came the thing they were carrying and it hit him in the head. Because the words "look out" as we often to use them means "take care," or "be careful." It doesn't mean "look out" at all. But we use it in both senses. We use it in the sense of "be careful, get out of the way" and we use it in the sense of "look and see what is in the direction that you would call out." And you have to know from context which it is. A great amount of our difficulty in Bible interpretation is with people who immediately grab the most obvious meaning when there may be another meaning

that is equally possible, and you have to see what fits the context best. So this "Noting Alternatives" in whatever you read is, in my opinion, one of the primary principles for study in any part of the Bible or in, perhaps, any other book.

But small "c" is just as important, and that is "To Avoid Preconceptions." And this is where a great amount of misinterpretation comes from. If we look at a passage, we may have certain expectations about what we think it should mean. We therefore assume what it means. What we expect it to mean may be something that is very true. Perhaps it is clearly taught somewhere else in the Bible. But it may not be what that *particular* passage means. Thus such preconceptions keep us from getting the real meaning of the passage because we bring to it a set of preconceptions. So I feel it is usually good as you look at a passage to see what you think it ought to mean, but see if there is another possibility. Avoid being too sure or too certain that your previous idea is correct. Avoid preconceptions.

These three principles enter into this process of interpreting. We will look at passages and I trust that you will learn a great deal about the book of Ezekiel, but I'm even more interested in your getting background that will be helpful in reading any part of prophetic books.

The prophetic books put together are about as long as the whole New Testament. So for us to neglect them is to neglect a very large segment of God's word. But to understand the progress of thought in the prophetic books, we will learn much that is tremendously important for our lives today.

Now capital B, "The Method of the Course." And under that number one "It is primarily a matter of examining the book of Ezekiel itself." And number two, "Assignments." I believe that you will get far more out of the course through doing the type of assignment I will give you. But if you neglect to preview readings for the course or do any study in the course, you will get far less out of the course and out of the next lecture than if you did the work. Partly to help you to avoid neglect, I will give assignments just about every week. But I believe that equally important to the written

assignment is your weekly review of your notes, especially within the first two or three days after the class. If you do that you will remember far more than if you simply leave them to review before a test or examination. So I would like you to understand that an important part of each assignment is to review the notes. To give you an impetus or practice at looking right at the text to see what it means, there is no collateral reading that is primary in this particular course. There are many books on Ezekiel in the library, but I wish you would not look at them before doing a particular assignment. Unless otherwise designated, our assignment will be to look at a passage in Scripture and to make certain conclusions from your own examination of the passage. Then after you do that, then you may look into what people have written in handbooks or commentaries or anywhere else; that it is fine. But that is not a part of the requirement of the course.

Then I'd like to just say a word about student questions. Everybody, occasionally, makes slips of the tongue. Everybody occasionally says something different from what they mean. I believe I do that oftener now than I did when I was somewhat younger. Therefore, I will occasionally say something that is very definitely not what I meant to say. And if I do, I would appreciate it if you would raise your hand and ask a question about it. If I make a statement that is not clear, if you don't know what I mean, I wish you would raise your hand and ask me to clarify. That would be tremendously helpful to the whole class. I am hoping to have a certain amount of time at the end of every hour where we can have something of a discussion or a general raising of questions. And so, if you have questions, something that seems quite important to what we are discussing or serious questions of what I have been giving you incorrectly or something like that, if you would write it out and give it to me, I would greatly appreciate that. Then I'll deal with it in the next class if it naturally comes up in some part of the material I was expecting to cover. Or if I think it is of great enough importance, I will take time in class for it. And if not, I will talk to you in person about it. So that is the attitude I would like you to take regarding questions in class. And so much then for "The Method of the Course."

Now capital "C," I am going to call "Higher Criticism." I already spoke of this



matter in the introduction to the book; this is the second stab at the higher criticism. It is not of tremendous importance in connection with most of our course. But it is of tremendous importance in the broader context to every Christian. Therefore I feel it necessary to take a little time on it now. One hundred years ago, in almost any seminary you would go to, and most colleges you would go to, everyone agreed that the Bible was true. They might not have cared to follow it; they might not have cared to accept what they found was taught there; they might have thought "Someday I'm going to turn back to that, but not now." But, very few would question that the Bible was true.

Today, however, we find in most of our schools, other than Christian schools, that the tendency is toward questioning everything in the Bible. The whole atmosphere and attitude has changed. There is nothing that has been more important in making that change than the higher criticism, which came into the Christian world first, in little groups of students and very erudite professors who would teach it up until about 1880. Then it began to spread out from 1880 on and to be taught more and more widely. Today in practically every university in the world where anything is taught about the Bible the so called "higher criticism" is taught as established fact. In the Sunday school lessons of most of our major denominations the results of the higher criticism are given as established fact. It has undermined faith in the Bible, I believe, more than any other one factor. It is a very difficult thing to deal with, and for this reason, if you mention something about the higher criticism, most Evangelicals just feel what utter nonsense, why waste time talking about that? While if you speak to someone of a modernist perspective, or even slightly modernistic, slightly tinged by modern beliefs taught in some theological seminary, or in a Bible course in the university today, the higher criticism is just so obvious, everybody knows it's true, so there's nothing to argue about. So when you get two people with such obstinate attitudes to try to talk together, you just don't get anywhere. One group thinks it is utter nonsense and the other thinks it's absolutely obvious.

Recently, the higher criticism has been creeping into evangelical circles in a way I

had not realized until the last few months. Creeping in sort of by the back door and so it is very important that we are aware of it. Now it does not enter a great deal in the study of the book of Ezekiel. It does some but not a great deal. But it is so very important and vital that I believe we should have a few words about it in the introduction to Ezekiel. I would like to note that with the so called higher criticism, there are two strands in it. There are two different aspects of it, and it was when these two were combined together that gave it the tremendous force that led it to have such a wide influence, and possibly increasing its acceptance in the Christian world.

Now the first of these two strands I would call "division," but I don't know whether that is the commonly accepted term for it. But it is the taking of documents and dividing them up into alleged sources: J, E, D, and P. Now people began to do this as early as three hundred years ago. There were some who began to divide up the writings of Homer into separate sources. They began taking some classical writing and then extending it to other classical writings, to other ancient books, and then extended it into the study of the Bible. And it is the attitude of saying here is a book and this can be divided up into the original sources prior to the author from which he produced his work. So we can thus divide it based on these alleged sources.

Now, many books are made from combing various sources. I once wrote a statement of purpose for a theological seminary that was being incorporated. And I dashed off a statement of purpose one day, and the next day I dashed off another one. And then on the third day I wanted to make my final draft, and I looked at the two previous drafts and I found that I would take a sentence from this one, and a sentence from that, and then a sentence and a half from this, and a few words from that. Here you have a perfect example of what the higher criticism looks for: two different sources that were combined together to make one final result. But I would challenge anybody to take the final thing that I wrote and divide it into the two sources, source A and B.

But the higher criticism began with the idea that most ancient writings were formed by fitting together various sources by taking a verse, or a chapter, or a few words

even, from one and putting it with some other and combing them together. It was formed from that idea and this idea of dividing up all these pieces into original sources was extended from about 1800 to incorporate the Bible. But until 1876 the Christian world knew practically nothing about it. While groups of scholars had a whole system of analysis of the first five books of the Bible. They worked out in great detail the four sources behind our Pentateuch: J favoring the name Jehovah, E favoring the name Elohim, D for the Deuteronomist, and P for the late priestly, post-exilic writer writing almost a thousand years after Moses. And then another group came along and modified what the first group of "higher critics" had done. And it was an interesting study to see the stages they went through in these various theories and the sources of division of the first five books of the Bible.

But very few people knew anything about it aside from the study that served a general purpose to German and French scholars. It didn't have much in the English speaking world till about 1876. And it got its influence in the English speaking world when combined with the other point I mentioned which I call "development," derived from the theory of evolution. It was the application of the theory of evolution to the Bible that produced the higher criticism as a great force. But it had already been accepted by many German scholars who had agreed on the development of a certain basic document to which other sources were attached, which they thought had formed the Pentateuch.

Then they said everything has developed by evolution. How did the religion of Israel evolve? How did it develop? What are the simple elementary parts of the Bible that were very far back, and what are the more advanced that were added later? And thus we show this development, this evolution, by which the Bible was produced. Outstanding among the German scholars was a brilliant German named Julius Wellhausen. He wrote a book which was about in the clearest German that any German ever wrote, and because usually their books are long sentences, two or three pages in length sometimes, with the verbs coming in the end. And you have to really struggle to follow their precise meaning. But he wrote in a very clear way. Students from England, very pious and earnest

Christian students, who had gone to Germany to study, were thrilled by Wellhausen's lectures and adopted his theories, and went back and spread them through the British Isles. Then they spread over to America. Then by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Wellhausen theory was accepted in just about all the universities and theological seminaries as what had been established as true. Well, now, in combining of these documents Wellhausen took what the previous scholars thought was the earliest sources for the Pentateuch and made them the latest. They just turned the time sequence around. And to see how completely they turned it around would, I think, give somebody a very serious question about the validity of the whole theory of higher criticism.

Now both of these movements--differentiation and evolution--are fundamentally wrong. The idea that there may have been sources in any written thing is a true one. There may have been, but they were not there necessarily. But the idea that people could simply figure out sources is something that simply does not work out that way, thinking that we can isolate the sources this way. That these ideas evolved in such a linear way according to another theory just does not work out either. And the result was that between 1900 and 1930, as archeological evidence was found that didn't fit with the Wellhausen theory of development at all, people began trying to twist the theory to fit the new evidence. Professor Albright said to me, a little before 1930, "There are only two orthodox universities left in Germany and they are not orthodox." By orthodox he meant that they didn't follow the Wellhausen theory right down the line, which most all the Wellhausen scholars followed exactly between 1900 and 1920. And since that time the theory has been twisted and changed by many individual writers, but it is taught as established fact in the textbooks on the Bible used in most theological seminaries and in many religious colleges today. It has a tremendous influence.

Now in this theory of development, as it was worked out, they all agreed about 1900 that the book of Ezekiel was by one human, written by the man Ezekiel, at the time it was said it was written. They agreed that this one book shows the religion of Israel developing from the previous stages of the earlier J and the E and the D documents. Then

the P or Priestly document that the early scholars thought was the earliest one, was the foundation, they argued on the basis of Ezekiel that it was the latest source of the Pentateuch.

But then the methods of division, which had previously been used in the other books, they went on to apply them to Ezekiel. Today, you will find that the modern scholar thinks that not more than a fifth of the book is by Ezekiel. Some won't give any to Ezekiel. Some will say it was not written in Babylon as it claims to be, but was written in Palestine. There are all sorts of diverse theories. Sometimes it seems to me as if it were as if somebody put some boxes, one on top of one another, and he wanted to stand on top of them to reach higher. And then as he stood on the top one he couldn't quite reach where he wanted to go and so he took out the bottom one and put it up on top. Well some of the foundation of higher criticism has been taken out from the bottom and put on top. So the book of Ezekiel fifty years ago most scholars would say there is no question that Ezekiel wrote it. There was no question we have it as he wrote it. Today, most of the higher critical scholars divide it up and give very little of it to Ezekiel.

Well, we are not going to pay a lot deal of attention to those theories in this course. I have told you five years ago that I thought that most of our real Evangelical Christians just didn't pay any attention to this higher criticism; they thought it was nonsense. It was too bad that we can't get our people to realize that higher criticism is destructive. It's hard because when we have young people going to college today, if they are going to take anything on religion, they are going to be influenced by this. It has undermined the faith more than anything else I know of.

I would have said though, that in our group of people that believe in inerrancy, to us it is of no effect. Last year I was shocked to find that some of our fine evangelical scholars, who have for years been known as great evangelical men, and who are ready to sign the statement that they believe in the inerrancy of the word of God, had taken after years of advanced work at institutions like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, which have large Bible departments that mostly destroy the integrity of the word of God and teach

the higher criticism as established fact, that some of them have been so influenced they have been giving the higher critical teachings not as undermining the authenticity of the Bible. They claim that they believe the inerrancy of the word of God, but that for interpretation we must recognize critical methods.

Well, there is such a thing as lower criticism, which is to take that text and see how it has been transmitted to us through scribal copying, comparing the various manuscripts, so important in our Bible study. But any type of criticism that looks into the way the book was originally written, is really putting dynamite under our biblical interpretation. I feel it is very dangerous. So I feel that this movement of the higher criticism today is in some ways an even a greater danger than it was in the past.

Now the main thing, in the part where Ezekiel is concerned, is simply to note that all higher criticism about 1900 agreed that Ezekiel was by one human, and written by the man Ezekiel in the time he claimed. Today, many believe it was written four hundred years later by some unknown person. Others think a few verses were by Ezekiel. But in our study we take the approach that God has given us his word. That Jesus Christ put the seal of his approval on the Old Testament, which he had, and the New Testament in advance, and that these 66 books are God's word. They are free from error. They take much study to determine what different parts of them really mean. We have much to do in comparing them, but we do not make progress by going back and making theories about how they came into existence. What we need is the historic background for their interpretation, and I believe this is to be found in the Scripture itself. And new knowledge of ancient times may help in our understanding in certain places, but it is not necessary to the interpretation of the word. It is complete; it is self consistent, and it is dependable. The book of Ezekiel we approach with the idea that it is the book that God gave us and that where there are places where we don't understand, let's not rush to jump to a conclusion, but see what the alternatives are.

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