

## Allan MacRae: Ezekiel, Lecture 4

Now, in the last class we were speaking a bit about the object lessons. And we notice how effective they were. I think you get an idea of that as you began the assignment for today. You read there that Ezekiel was in his house and the elders of Judah were there with him. Then at the end of it it says that he told the exiles all his experiences, so it is quite evident that the attitude of the people toward him was not like it had been when it was necessary to use object lessons in order to get their attention. I think that is a very important thing that in the beginning to reach people with our message, it often is necessary to use some special method of getting their attention; but some people go to an extreme on this with all sorts of bizarre matters and, of course, there are conditions where those would be very out of place. And then again there are situations in which they would very much be in place. But I think it is very important to recognize that God does not want us simply to have the truth and to be able to express the truth; He wants us to get it into the minds and hearts of people.

In the case of Jeremiah and of Ezekiel, there were a number of cases where God told them to do certain physical things that attracted attention. Jeremiah went and buried his girdle by the Euphrates and he left it there a year. Then he took it out; he dug it up and it was as he said, all marred, and he held it up before the people and he said this is the way that Israel has become as a result of its sin. Now that would attract attention and arouse people's interest and make them more ready to listen to what he had to say.

There are a number of commentaries that say that all of Ezekiel's actions--and some of Jeremiah's--were simply envisioned; they didn't really happen. But I think it's very important to recognize that, as we said last time, when Ezekiel ate the scroll that was simply a matter between him and the Lord; of getting the Lord to prove to him the result of His word, and that can very well have been in a vision. God could certainly enable one to eat paper and get value from it, if that was the Lord's will; but it is, I think, quite clearly something that was a lesson to Ezekiel of the fact that God was implanting into his heart, and into his mind certain thoughts, and attitudes and messages He wanted him

to say. All this was between him and the Lord, and it could very well be simply in a vision. But these object lessons, like his lying on his side for the iniquity of Judah and Israel--three hundred and ninety days for Judah and thirty days for Israel simply to say in a vision I did so; and so there's no point in that, he might as well say the thing happened. The object lessons were messages for the people, and I believe that it's important for us to recognize that these object lessons actually were preformed. They are an illustration for us of the fact that God wants us to find methods of getting our truths to the hearts and minds of the people and of getting people's attention to listen to the truth.

If you watch TV very much, your experience is somewhat like mine. You listen to the big networks and you will find something that is interesting, and then they interrupt it with an ad and you're rather disgusted. You'd like to have them continue with the program but many of the ads are so well made and presented that you listen to them and, in fact, enjoy them; quite a number of them. Some of them I've seen five or six times and enjoy them each time. They are well done.

But you turn to public television, which has programming that I like far better than any of the main networks, and you turn to that and once or twice a year they have a period which they try to get people to contribute. And I like public TV so much better that I'm very glad to contribute to it, and I do so occasionally. But when they turn to people talking, trying to get you to contribute, it's so tiresome and so boring I wish they would quit it, and I try to estimate how long it will be until the program resumes and turn it off until then. Actually, I have more sympathy with it than the commercial ads, but the ads are done in a way that attracts and holds attention. Now, I believe that's a big point of these very classes we are taking in Seminary. God wants us to find ways of getting our message across so that people will take it and will be interested rather than our simply trying to give it.

Now, as God said to Ezekiel on two or three occasions, is that we already read he says you give them the truth. And he says whether they take it or whether they leave it, give it to them. God calls on us to give the message; that is our responsibility before the Lord. We are not responsible in the end whether people take it or not. I've known men

who've gone into a place and they've worked and toiled for eight or ten years and had practically no result. And then someone else has come in there and had tremendous results, and often it wasn't because the latter man was much more able, but it was because the former had sown the seed; he had laid the foundation and had made an impression on the people far more than he realized.

Paul said one man planted and another man has reaped. God knows what we are responsible for and how much we actually contribute to be effective. We don't need to say if we don't see results that necessarily we are not effective. But God does want that we should find means of being as effective as possible. And these object lessons, I think, are given to us to help us to understand situations in this background of Ezekiel's message, but also with lessons for us: that God shows the responsibility for each of us in this regard.

Now for today, the first part of the assignment was asking you what was described in chapters eight through eleven? What did they describe? And of course, the superficial reader would say that the angel took a hold of Ezekiel by the hair of his head and carried him across the desert and deposited him in Jerusalem and there in Jerusalem he saw certain things, and he did certain things, and then the angel brought him back. God certainly could do that if God chose to do it. The question is: did he do that, or in this case was it a vision? And I believe that in this case the evidence is quite clear that it was a vision rather than an actual experience, because it was given to him not as a way of attracting people's attention, but rather it was something that he could describe to them, and that would be just as effective that way as it would have been had he made an actual trip to Jerusalem.

So these chapters eight through eleven are the description of Ezekiel's trip to Jerusalem, but it is a trip that we believe he made in a vision and I believe we have quite clear evidence, which I think we should look at for just a minute. We find that the account of the trip begins in chapter eight the first verse, that "he was sitting in his house and the elders of Judah were sitting before him. And the hand of the Sovereign Lord came upon him and he looked and saw this figure" while the elders were sitting in front

of him, so it does not sound like the Lord picked him out of that situation, but he gave him a vision that he could tell them about. That's made a little more explicit in verse three where it says, "The spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and in visions of God he took me to Jerusalem." That term would be strongly to suggest that it was a vision rather than an actual experience. Then in verse eight we read that the Lord said to him to dig into the wall, and he dug into the wall of the temple. If Ezekiel had actually been there in Jerusalem and dug a hole in the wall, they would have called the police; they would have a good deal of excitement over it. I think it's quite evident that this was part of a vision.

Then in these four chapters we find great numbers of people being killed by the angelic messengers and, of course, that is a prediction of what's going to happen in connection with the seige. It is not what actually happened at that particular time; if it were we would have some reference of it in the history. Then in verse twenty four of chapter eleven we read "Then the vision I had seen went up from me," and that would seem to be quite a decisive statement that this was a vision rather than an actual experience that he had.

Then a second thing that I asked you to deal with in the assignment: I asked a question whether the vision of the Glory of God that he saw here was the same as the one that he had by the River Kebar. There most of you said it was; a few said that it was not. It seems to me that the evidence is quite clear in the statements here that it was. Now, I don't say that it was identical. If you were at a rather, dignified gathering somewhere and there you were introduced to a prominent football player, and then you were to meet that player on the field sometime, you might have difficulty if you couldn't see the number on his back in recognizing him, especially if you could not see his face through the mask. His costume on the field would be utterly different than what we had seen before, but I don't think anybody would question whether it was the same man you were seeing; the same man you had seen dressed entirely differently before. This applies to language: that words, most words, can be used in various ways and you have to tell a good deal about the meaning from the context. You can have the same word with two meanings just as the

same man could be dressed entirely differently on two occasions.

Now in this case as to the vision of the glory of God that Ezekiel had seen by the river Kebar, was this the same, I ask? And I would think that the answer to that could be very easily found with certainty by looking at specific statements. Chapter 8, verse four in the very beginning states, "there before me was the glory of the God of Israel as in the vision I had seen in the plain." That would seem right there in the fourth verse to be a decisive answer to that question. But over in chapter ten, we read in the last half of verse fifteen, "These are the living creatures I had seen by the Kebar River." Of course, the living creatures are what was underneath the great expanse that looked like ice above which there was the figure of the man and all of the glory of God and aspects of his character revealed to Ezekiel. Then in the same chapter, verse twenty, we read, "These were the living creatures that I had seen beneath the God of Israel by the Kebar River; and I realized that they were cherubim." And then in verse twenty-two of that same chapter we read, "Their faces had the same appearance as those I had seen by the Kebar River; each one went straight ahead." So we have four different statements here, any one of which you might say would give a complete answer to the question, "Was it the same vision of the glory of God as Ezekiel had seen by the river Kebar? Any one statement might answer the question, but certainly the four together would.

The situation that was slightly different in the third part in the assignment because there I asked you whether the living creatures were the same as Ezekiel had seen at Kebar. You might think that the answer to that would immediately be obvious; if the vision is the same then the living creatures would be the same; and all would say the living creatures were the same. So that by simply reading through you would immediately give a "yes" answer to both questions, and I'm sure everyone would have if it were not for chapter ten verse fourteen.

And, of course, in chapter ten, verse fourteen you read the list of the four faces of the living creatures. I'm sure you all noticed that three of them are identical with those described in the beginning of Ezekiel's ministry. But one of the faces is different. The statement in chapter one was that they had the face of an ox but here it says they had the

face of a cherub. So some answers were quite just fine saying that these faces were not the same faces as he saw before. Yet I don't think anyone should hesitate in saying that the creatures were the same, because we have these positive statements saying that these are the living creatures that he had seen before.

So we have a problem here, don't we? We believe that the Bible is free from error. We believe that whatever it says we can accept as truth. We have three times a statement that these are the living creatures whom Ezekiel had seen by the river Kebar, and we have one verse in which he names the four faces and they do not seem to be the same at all. So we have a contradiction arises here. At least an apparent contradiction. When we face a contradiction like that, we must recognize there is a problem to which the answer may be easy to find, or it may be difficult, or it may even be impossible but it is important in all to give consideration to handling the problem and to try to find what the answer is. God may have a meaning for your own spiritual life. He may have a meaning in it as a basis for some other problem in Scripture. I believe that one of the most important things in studying the Scripture is not simply the truths you get out of it but to notice problems, to notice questions: to notice matters that you can't understand on the first reading and sometimes even on the third. Because the answers to the problems in the Scripture that God has given us are to be found somewhere in the Scripture itself, but if we don't have the question in mind, we are apt to read right over the answer and not see it. I have been amazed time and again after finding a problem in studying a passage of Scripture in which I did not know the answer, I simply put it away in my mind as something to think about. Then when reading another passage either in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, I have found the answer to that problem which I never would have noticed if I would not had the problem in mind.

Here we don't have, I'd say, a major problem, but we certainly have a definite problem. They had four faces, these cherubim, which were under the expanse above which was the figure of a man in the vision of the Glory of the God of Israel that Ezekiel saw. We have these four faces: the face of a man, the face of a lion, and the face of the eagle are identical. But in chapter one we read the "face of an ox," and in chapter ten we

read the "face of the cherub" and is that a contradiction. Well of course the first possibility that one thinks of is do the two faces in some way represent the same thing? Are they synonymous, although at first sight they certainly are not synonymous.

The second question that one faces then is that there can be a textual error. In any verse of Scripture there can be a textual error. I think that is important for us to recognize. God did not give us his Scripture written on tables of metal which could be placed in a room like the standards of weight and length--the official ones in Washington--which are kept in a room and are always kept at the same temperature with the same amount of humidity so that no change shall occur in them. God did not give his Scripture that way to us. He gave his Scripture to men who wrote it down, and these writings were copied and recopied and recopied, and I challenge anyone who copied a book as large as the book of Ezekiel not to make at least one mistake in copying, and probably a number more. Probably even if you read over carefully what you had written and corrected, you will find that some mistake alluded you.

I believe God did that purposefully because he wants us not to take one verse of Scripture and squeeze it hard in order to try to get all the truth out of that one. We can't because a text without a context, as someone has said, is only a pretext. That's perhaps a little strong but every text has to be interpreted in the light of context. There are many words in many a language, and particularly in English, that have very different meanings in one context from what they have in a different context.

I might take a walk through a garden or through a nice outdoor place and say that I saw a very interesting "plants." Then you can "plant" a church. I might take a walk up the road that goes up beside the seminary here, and as I pass the Anderson Pipe Company, I might look at it and say that that is a very interesting "plant." And I know that they use the term "plant" for this company because the man there told me that he was the "plant manager." So the word "plant" is used in two senses, and usually the context will let us know what is meant, but very often it doesn't.

So we have a problem here in Ezekiel. Now, we look at the words in the Hebrew and we find the word "shor" is the Hebrew word for "ox," and the word "keruv" is the

Hebrew word that we translate as "cherub." They don't look a bit alike and it is very unlikely that there would be a simple scribal error. It is possible that when you are copying to have another word in your mind, and you think you're writing one but you write another. That does frequently happen when a group of people are copying things. But usually the two words are similar, so it would not be at all natural to think "shor" [ox] and write "keruv" [cherub]. It would not be at all natural. It seems to me that the idea that it is scribal error, in this case, is really quite unlikely.

Then, of course, the other suggestion is that the words are synonymous, and my first inclination is to think that they are synonyms: that the face of an ox and the face of a cherub would be the same thing. That's my first inclination. But "cherub" isn't a bit like the pictures of cherubs we make today, not the least bit. The word "cherub," plural "cherubim," comes from the Hebrew. We have numbers of cases of it in the Scripture but not a great number, so we do not know a great deal about it.

We had the two cherubs over the mercy seat in the temple. They were over the cover of the chest that was in the holy of holies. We have the two cherubs. Were these two little boys with wings outspread, or were they like oxen with wings facing each other? We have no clear statement anywhere to know between the two. So one could easily make a hypothesis that the appearance of the cherub is similar to the appearance of the ox.

The cherubim, that's plural of cherub, guarded the gate of the Garden of Eden to keep Adam and Eve from returning back to the garden. That fits more with the human figure than with an ox. They did not have total human behavior because they were with a flaming sword, if I recall correctly. So I believe we have to say simply we have a problem here. I do not know the answer.

Sometime ago I would have said the ox was the form the cherub. Of course, it's a bit confused to our minds because we have the four cherubs, the four living creatures are here called cherubs and one of them has the face of either of either a cherub or an ox. So we have to say here that this is a point at which there is something that we just don't know. We can't be dogmatic. In Revelation the four living creatures match the



appearance of those in the first chapter of Ezekiel (Rev. 4:6b, 7).

Now the outline I made of the content here I certainly am not asking you to memorize. You could probably make just as good or better one. But I think it's worth putting it down in your notes and I will read it slowly enough that you can write it. I think it's a help to have an outline of the material you read. And so I'll call Roman numeral IV in our outline, "The Prophetic Visit to Jerusalem," chapters 8-11. And in under that I will call capital A "The Journey," chapter 8, verses one to four. Then capital B, "Defilements at the Temple," chapter 5-18. And you remember that Ezekiel mentioned four different things that he saw at the temple. The first he saw "the image of jealousy." "The image of jealousy" is what the King James Version has. The NIV has "the image that produces" or "provokes jealousy," It's an image that produces jealousy which is, of course, what it means to say, "the image of jealousy."

Perhaps right at that point we should say a word about this word "jealousy." You say, "Isn't that awful how jealous that person is?" For the most part, we use the word that way and none of us is ever proud of being jealous. It is, in fact, a very bad fault in most cases. It means for a person to be irritated with no real reason for it, or to be upset because they don't have something nice that somebody else has. It is a bad term in modern English.

But in the Scripture, while the word is used sometimes in the bad sense, it is ordinarily used in a sense that doesn't mean much to the average American today. The word "jealous" must have meant more to people four hundred years ago. It must have or they would have not have used it. They surely would have thought of a better word if "jealous" did not come rather near conveying the idea of the Scripture at that time.

Today it doesn't. You say, "God is a jealous God" but you say I don't want anything to do with a jealous sort of person. This sets our use of the word today. I wish I could think of a better word, but I am not sure that we have any word that really fits. Perhaps you might say that the word four hundred years ago had a broader meaning including both good aspects and bad aspects, but the good aspects have more or less a disappeared.

Words are constantly changing. The word "nice," a hundred years ago, would have been a rather bad word. "That's a nice man," means a man who's always fussing, making a lot of fuss about little minor points. That was a "nice man" a hundred years ago or at least 150 years ago. Today the word "nice" is a good word where most people would never think of criticizing anybody today if they say that they were nice. So words are just changing like that all the time.

But this word "jealous" has lost the possibility of a good sense in our present culture, but I wish I knew of a good substitute for the word. God's "jealousy" brings out his good features. He is a jealous God and he will not give his glory to another. Elijah said, "I have been very jealous for God" (1Kgs 19:14). "I have been very jealous for him" means that he wanted to have God get what was His due and not to have it taken from him. We would not use the word that way today, so the "image that provokes jealousy" here in Ezekiel was doubtless one of those images that the kings of Judah and of Israel at various times put up near the temple.

You remember that when king Ahaz went to meet the king of Assyria in Damascus, Ahaz sent back the description of an altar that the king said must be put up in the temple, or at least in the temple courtyard. And it was customary to require an image of a pagan deity to be put up to show that you were really subject to him. Ezekiel thought the people should have rather resisted to the death rather than put such a thing up near the temple. So here we have the "image of jealousy" was there by the temple. Ezekiel sees this as the first thing of as defilement, and yet it's not the main thing of defilement, although it is something that you might say they should not have given into, but they had.

But as you go on, you find further defilement. We find Ezekiel digging through the wall and seeing these idols (verses six to twelve) and then we have him coming out and seeing the women weeping for Tammuz, a sort of fertility deity that they thought of as dying when the vegetation died then being brought back to life at another season of the year. The women were weeping for Tammuz; it was part of the religion of some of those areas. It later was a considered the same as the Greek word Adonis and even Shakespeare refers to Adonis in some of his poetry.

Then we have the elders who were facing the east and worshipping the sun (verses fifteen to eighteen). So we have Ezekiel seeing these defilements there and then he comes back to tell the elders what happened in Jerusalem because their tendency, of course, in the exile, was to think of Jerusalem as a great wonderful place where everybody was good, and here we're off in exile, so far away from Jerusalem and if only we could get back there. Ezekiel is trying, however, to bring them to realize that the people in Jerusalem have departed from God's will to so great an extent that God is going to allow Jerusalem to be destroyed.

And so we have these descriptions of the defilement, and then, capital "C" I made, "Selective and General Destruction," chapter 9:1 to 10:7 and that's a very vivid description of a man clothed in linen who goes out and puts a mark on the people who are to be protected from the men who go out and kill indiscriminately great numbers of the people but these individuals are protected. Then we have the man clothed in linen taking fire from under the cherubim and spreading it through the city, which would imply a general destruction. These two visions show two affects on the one hand God protects his people most wonderfully on many occasions. Those who are true to God, I think everyone who truly follows the Lord, can point to times in his life when he narrowly escaped disaster and can praise God for the way that God protected him. In many cases we would certainly come very close to calling it a miracle the way we escape disaster because God protects his own on many, many occasions. Certainly, ordinarily in human life, the material blessings that come to God's people are far greater than those that come to the wicked if you take their lives all together over a span of years. That is true in Ezekiel, he marks those who would be protected from that selected destruction.

But on the other hand, we have the general destruction of the city with fires and we realize that God does not promise the people protectors to every contingency. We must realize that God may choose to have us suffer, to have us be injured, to have us loose out, at case after case, but we can know that if he does he has an individual purpose for each one of us to bless us through difficulty so we can praise God for the way that He protects us from the misery that is the result of sin that is widespread in the world. He

protects us in case after case most wonderfully. We are certainly justified in praising God for those experiences we find difficult that we have in the course of our lives if we try to follow the Lord. And yet, He also may choose to allow us to suffer or to be in certain bad situations, but He has a purpose in it and he does so for our development and for our sanctification for making us into what he wants us to be. And so I think that we have properly discussed these two aspects of God's dealing with His people out of this description in what I call "C" here.

Then capital D, "Another Description of the Divine Representation," 10:8-22, and then capital E, "Ezekiel's Prophecy to the False Counselors and Pelatiah dies." This is another reason why we can say Ezekiel definitely had a vision and not an actual trip because in the vision God ordered him to preach to these people. He preached to them there, and if that had happened at that time in Jerusalem, I think the Jeremiah, who was in Jerusalem serving at the same time, would have mentioned it. So E "Ezekiel's Prophecy to the False Counselors and Pelatiah dies."

What is the most interesting touch in this unit is that while Ezekiel was speaking to them, Pelatiah died. And then Ezekiel said in verse thirteen of chapter eleven, "Ah sovereign Lord, will you completely destroy the remnant of Israel?" We find that he said the same thing when they began killing the multitudes of people in chapter nine: "And I was left alone I fell face down crying, Ah I am all sovereign Lord, are you going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel in this outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem" (verse 8).

Now, some commentaries suggest that Ezekiel (and Jeremiah) engaged in a taunt song, a taunt song in triumph in God's destruction over the wicked. I believe this is a false interpretation. This can fit the impression that some people get from reading Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's prophecies, but I believe that this is a false impression, and these two statements here show that Ezekiel was giving the message that God wanted him to give but his heart was filled with pity for the people, with love for the people of God and with desire to help.

We often call Jeremiah the "weeping prophet." You wouldn't get much of an

impression of that from his book, the book of Jeremiah, but from the book of Lamentations we see how deeply he felt sorrow over the result that the sin of his people brought to them.

So we have here Ezekiel feeling much more keenly this one person whom he knew that died than he did from a general slaughter. And that's true for all of us, that when we see one person who is in some difficulty we tend to feel a longing to help him for it is harder to feel for people in the mass. But God, of course, wants us to have a heart of love and a desire to help all people, particularly those of the household of God. But this is a strange thing to have in the vision, that as he spoke to them Pelatiah died. And why did God give that to him in the vision?

I believe that with a case like this we have to infer an answer. Now whatever the Bible definitely states we must stand upon, but whatever we infer from the Bible it may or may not be right, but we have to infer. Our inference may, perhaps, be somewhat questionable and we have to realize that inferences are not on the same level as what the Bible definitely teaches. But we have this thing here, and Pelatiah died as he was speaking to them, and we are quite justified in saying why in his vision Pelatiah would die while he was preaching to the elders there. I believe that the answer to it is actually as Ezekiel was having this vision--at that very time--this man Pelatiah in Jerusalem did die. And that whatever time it took for the news to come across the desert there, which might be a month, I don't know how long it'd take, might be two months, might be less than a month. But at any rate Ezekiel told the exiles he had seen a vision that Pelatiah died, and when they received their next news from Jerusalem and they heard how suddenly in a meeting somewhere Pelatiah dropped over dead, this gave another evidence that God had actually spoken to Ezekiel, and it would help to increase the confidence in the fact that Ezekiel was actually God's messenger. Now that's not specifically stated but I think that that would be just as strong of evidence as a performance of a miracle. It would be striking evidence. So while Ezekiel was prophesying over in Jerusalem he saw in the vision Pelatiah dying right then and then a month later the exiles hear that he had.

I have tried to tie this together. It's an interesting thought and I find in this study or

in any study it is good to think of possibilities, and if you think of possibilities that are way out sometimes, you may speedily find evidence that they're incorrect yet sometimes the thinking of them will bring to your mind something else you wouldn't have thought of otherwise, and that may actually work out.

There seem to be two types of thinking. I believe there is the "creative" and the "critical," and if we try to do them both at once we don't accomplish either one of them. I think one of the greatest things we can do to advance our ability in most any line of thinking or work is to try to separate the two. For the creative, think of what you might do to improve what you are doing; think of ways in which you could accomplish more things. Make new ideas even if they are far off, even if they seem rather absurd: think of them; think creatively. Don't think of something and just say, "Oh no, that's impossible," and throw it to the side. But think of various possibilities and then as a separate act apply your critical faculty to examining the possibilities and seeing why they won't work, or what's wrong with them, and as you do that often you'll get an insight or you'll see something that can be very useful that you wouldn't have seen if you had not used your creative ability. And I think that's very helpful in studying the Scriptures. Think of any idea no matter how far out, but then don't adopt it until you have criticized it and have examined it carefully to see whether it's valid or not.

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