

Allan MacRae – Ezekiel: Lecture 6

Now we were speaking last time about section D, under our discussion of "The Trip of Ezekiel." We called D, "Another Description of the Divine Representation" and in that we noticed the fact that it is three times stated that this is the vision he saw at Kebar River. Once it is stated, these were the faces he saw there. Yet, we have the face of an ox in the first description in chapter 1 and here we have the mention of the cherub. There we have a problem of course. Anything written in human language you're going to have problems. We believe that God's word is infallible. But we believe that in the course of the ages there have been errors that have come in, in the course of the copying process. Now in this case the word "shor" which means "ox" and the word "kerub" which we translate "cherub" are so different that it's practically impossible to confuse them. I would say, you can rule out a scribe having made a mistake in copying. Now, of course, it is true that sometimes in copying, you have an idea in your mind and you put something down different than you meant to put. Seeing the word "cherubim" just ahead, the scribe might have made a mistake and written cherub when he meant to have written ox. That's a possibility, but I don't think much of it.

So it seems to me that we probably have to draw the conclusion that the face of a cherub and the face of an ox described are two terms that describe the same thing. We really have no description anywhere of what a cherub actually looks like. We know very little about cherubs for it's rarely named in Scripture. I think we can safely say they are not little boys with wings. We can safely say that. But, as it is, we are left with uncertainty whether cherub and ox appear identical. Whether they appear identical or whether there could have been a mistake in the course of copying.

I always say that if you take any verse in the Scripture, you take one verse of Scripture and you say to me, "Is this verse exactly what was in the original Scripture?" I'd say, "Let's see whether there's any textual evidence of variation in the manuscripts. Let's see whether the ancient translations differ much from what we find here. Let's see if there is evidence of the possibility of an error having crept in. If there is no such evidence, I

say the probabilities are extremely great that this represents the exact original Scripture. But there is always a very, very slight possibility. Thus, in this case, all our manuscripts say "cherub" here, they all say "ox" in the earlier section (chapter 1), so that there is no evidence that either one is in error at all. Yet there is in any case in one verse a possibility that some error crept in in very early days, but that we have no evidence of it. So I say compare Scripture with Scripture. When you find the same thing said in two verses of Scripture or two passages of Scripture, the chance of an error having entered in both in which we have no evidence in manuscript variation is so small as to be practically non-existent. But we must compare Scripture with Scripture to know what it says. So that's our situation on the "cherub" and the "ox."

Then we mentioned capital E, "Ezekiel Prophesized to the False Counselors and then Pelatiah Dies," and I rushed on a little bit there last time to get to the end of the vision and we did not pay attention to what he prophesized to them, what he said to them. What he said was mostly related to a statement that they were making. I don't think that that statement is easy for most of us to understand immediately. They said, "This city is a cooking pot and we are the meat" (Ezek. 11:3). The King James Version says, "This city is a cauldron and we are the flesh." I used to wonder what does that mean? But if you take it as "cauldron," I don't know that we use that word anymore other than when we read Macbeth, but it doubtless means in a large cooking pot. The meat is put in the pot so it doesn't get burned; it gets changed into what you want; it gets cooked without being burned. So this would be a good figure to represent the situation of a Christian going through suffering, going through trouble, you might say, "You are in the pot, God has the heat under it because He wants to make the meat be as He wants it to be, but it is protected by the pot so that it does not get injured. It gets changed as He wants it to be, and not injured." All of us, if we truly belong to the Lord, we have difficulties to go through in life that God allows us to have in order that He may accomplish His good purpose in us. But while this is a good figure for something in the lives of many Christians, Ezekiel says, "This does not apply to you people in Jerusalem here, because you're saying Jerusalem with its big walls around it, we are safe in here. We are the good

meat, and the enemy can come around outside, they can destroy our fields, we can go through a period of difficulty, before they give up and go away. But we are protected. We are safe. We are the meat in the cauldron."

He says, "No, that is not true in your case." He says in chapter 11 verse 7, "Therefore this is what the sovereign Lord says, 'The bodies you have thrown there are the meat. And this city is the pot, but I will drive you out of it. You fear the sword, and the sword is what I will bring against you. You will fall by the sword. This city will not be a pot for you nor will you be the meat in it. I will execute judgment on you at the borders of Israel.'" So he is taking their statement and turning it against them and saying, "This is not true in your case," though it is a figure which can be true in the lives of Christians on various occasions. That's the principle thing that he deals with here in the first part of his prophesying to them.

Then we read in chapter 11 verse 13, while he was prophesying, Pelatiah, son of Benaiah, died. We spoke about that last time, that doubtless God enabled Ezekiel in his vision to see the fact that Pelatiah did die right at that time. He enabled him to see that fact as a further proof that when word reached him, perhaps six weeks later, because they didn't have any telegram or radio in those days, they would hear Pelatiah died, and they would ask when, and find it was the very time when Ezekiel was having his vision. That would be further evidence the vision was from God. We need proof that our visions are from God because Satan can give us visions just as well as God can. Satan tries to lead every Christian astray. So I do not deny that God might give any one of us a vision; he might choose to give us a message directly. That is very unlikely because the Devil can just as well give one, too, and God wants us to be guided by his word. Ordinarily, now that we have the whole word, He does not reveal himself to us in a direct, verbal way.

Then I mentioned last time capital F, "Selective Blessing for the Exiles," Ezek. 11, 14 – 21. There we find that the people in Jerusalem were saying, "These exiles, they are the people that God has allowed to be cast off, taken away as prisoners. We are the real

people of God who are here in the city, and God is going to protect us." They were rather looking down on the exiles and criticizing them. Jeremiah faced the same problem. In one of the chapters of Jeremiah we read how Jeremiah came out to the public square and he held up two large clay pots. One of them was full of good ripe figs and the other one was full of, what the King James says, "naughty figs, so naughty they couldn't be eaten" (Jer. 24:2). Of course, the old English "naughty" simply meant "bad." He says to the people, these are the new people, the bad ones. These in the exile are the good ones. Well, of course, that was a general figure given. It didn't mean all the people in Jerusalem were--bad, by any means, or that all of the exile were good. But the people in Jerusalem were evidently many of them--taking this attitude toward the exiles, and he said to them, "In order to get God's blessing, you don't have to be in a particular place. You don't have to be here where the temple is, you don't have to have these external things. God is a sanctuary for the people in exile. That is, you can know God anywhere in the world. God is a sanctuary to them. They have just as close access to Him as you have, even though you have the external trappings here, you have the temple which God has blessed and where he has revealed himself, but God can reveal himself to people in other places." Here he is defending the exiles against the attitude of these people in Jerusalem who would think themselves better because they hadn't been taken into exile. He says, "I will send you into exile too, those of you who are left after the terrible situation of the destruction."

There's a wonderful statement there in chapter 11, verses 9 and following: "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them. I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws, they will be my people and I will be their God." There's a marvelous picture of God's grace coming to individuals and blessing them. That was chapter 11, verse 19 to 21. It's a marvelous promise which He gives, of taking away the heart of stone and giving the heart of flesh to those who turn to Him.

I would think that primarily this promise was probably for the people He's speaking to immediately, but that it has applications later on. It shows the way God is going to bless individuals by letting His Spirit come into them and cleanse them and free them from their guilt. So much for F, "Selective Blessing for the Exiles."

Then capital G, "The Glory Leaves the Temple." We notice, we didn't mention it last time, but you notice it out of reading this section how "The cherubim with the wheels beside them spread their wings and the glory of the God of Israel was above them, the glory of the Lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain East of it" (Ezek. 11:23). This is a picture of his seeing it in his vision, this picture of the glory of God moving out of the city and moving over to the hills away from there. It was, of course, a picture of the fact that God was going within the next few years to allow Jerusalem to be conquered by the enemy and to be destroyed. But God's glory isn't dependent on any particular place. He may choose to fill his glory on a wonderful way in a certain place. But that we have access to God anywhere in the world. He saw the same glory of God over in the exile in the area by the river there and now he saw it in Jerusalem. The picture of it removing God's grace from there, it shows him that God can continue and will be a sanctuary to them wherever they are if they are true to Him.

Then H we "Return to Chaldea" as we notice, the statement is: "He returned in the vision and then the vision left him. The vision went up from me and I told the exiles everything the Lord had showed me" (Ezek. 11:25). I heard once of someone who was given an anesthetic in order to have a tooth pulled. According to what I heard, this person who had come from Ireland, had a dream in which they went back home and they saw their old friends and they had a lot of experiences there, very pleasant experiences, lasting for several days. Then he came out from the anesthetic and all he said, "Give me some more! I'd like to continue with this." But if it is a true story, it illustrates that your mind can go through a great deal in a brief time. Certainly God can do that if he chooses.

This section of his visit to Jerusalem begins with the elders of Israel there in front of him. When it ends, he told the exiles everything the Lord had shown him. So whether he stayed in this sort of trance-like position for a few minutes, or for an hour, or for a longer time, it does sound as if they were the same people still there to whom he spoke and told what he had seen in his vision.

Then we make a capital Roman Numeral V. "Ezekiel's Prophecies in the Sixth Year of Jehoichin's Captivity." You notice how Ezekiel told us exactly what year each thing happened: the fourth year, and then the fifth year, and now we have the sixth year. And under this, capital A, "The Prince and His People," chapter 12. In the assignment for today I asked you to list the symbolic action and there were really two main ones. The second one was a brief one, the first one has a number of parts to it. He carried his stuff out, and he put it outside there as if he were getting ready to go away. Then he dug a hole through the wall. Now, what kind of a house he had to dig a hole through the wall, we do not know, but there are houses even today that that could fairly easily be done. It is the way it's described: he dug a hole through the wall and the people would see him doing it. They would see him carrying the stuff out, and then they would see him digging that hole through the wall, and as the dust came, they saw him go out through the hole and pick up the stuff and act as if he was going away somewhere. This is another of these symbolic actions. We have quite a number of them in this prophet.

The Lord wants us to find the methods of getting attention for our message. Anything that truly enables it to reach more people is worth considering providing it doesn't bring in something that gives a false impression. We find it's amazing how few people get terribly excited about the little details of the temple service. It is, I think, unfortunate because in the Old Testament, the details were very important for the various ceremonies because people back then did not know much detail about what Christ would do, what his death would mean, what his sacrifice for us would mean, and so on. So God gave them all sorts of ceremonies and forms that would suggest the great truths about God to their minds, and would suggest the fact that God was going to provide a sacrifice

for their sins. All this looked forward, of course, to the coming of Christ. So these forms were important there. In the New Testament you have very little about precise forms of service. There's very, very little in the New Testament in that regard because now we see what happened. We have the full picture of Christ's sacrifice in the New Testament and we don't need to be reminded by these pictures and symbols of it, we are more familiar with the full facts about Christ's work. Therefore, the Lord wants us to use anything that will suggest these great facts to our minds and drive them home to our hearts. But in both Old Testament and New Testament, the important thing wasn't the symbol; the important thing was reality and the relation of the individual soul to the Lord.

Well, symbolic actions may not fully picture what they symbolize, but they give some idea of it, and the prophets use these symbolic actions to drive thoughts home to people's minds and to get people's attention, so that they would listen and get the truth that he wanted to give. It is an important thing for us. There are times when the most blunt, direct presentation can be very, very effective. But there are many other times when some sort of means of getting attention results in getting the truth across much better than a head-on presentation. In these difficult times when Ezekiel and Jeremiah lived, they used these vivid lesson illustrations to attract attention to the idea that they wanted to get across.

There are quite a number of commentators who are very insistent that these were only visions. Ezekiel didn't really dig a hole through the wall, He just told people, "Imagine that I did this. Imagine that I did that." For he wouldn't fulfill the purpose certainly at all. There is a deeper motif in minds in these particular interpreters in trying to, some call it, "spiritualizing," I think it's another misnomer for taking things as being purely symbolical. There are symbols, but there is reality. When the prophet performs an act to attract attention, it is not something in his mind. When God is simply giving a message to the prophet, just between the two of them, God may simply give him a vision, as I believe Ezekiel did at various times. But the object lessons were real.

Now there are two main symbolic actions here. The first was the fleeing which has several parts to it; they are quite clear in the account. The second is the eating in fear, in verse 18 of chapter twelve. "But he was to tremble and shake as he ate," and friends would say, "What's the matter with you?" and he'd say, "Oh, I'm illustrating the way the people in Jerusalem are going to be subject to terror and misery when the siege comes."

So we have these two symbolic actions illustrating the fleeing: through the wall and eating the meal shaking and seeming so nervous, and it attracted attention. People would say, "Oh, you're not feeling well." He'd reply, "Oh, I'm feeling perfectly alright. It's not that. It's not that." "Well, what is it then?" "Well, I'm thinking of what these people are going to go through when Jerusalem is besieged. When they have practically no food and they're looking forward to this city being destroyed."

But then, the second question I asked you was to list the predictions in chapter 12. You might divide the predictions in this chapter into two sections. There were the specific predictions about the prince. There were the general predictions. The specific predictions are in two verses. Five predictions about Zedekiah, chapter 12, verses 12-13. Here there were five specific predictions listed. It's quite easy to see what they are here. One or two of them might be a little bit difficult to understand exactly what they meant if you didn't know the fulfillment. Of course, if you knew the Bible history, you probably immediately realized how they applied to Zedekiah. If you weren't quite sure, you would immediately know to look in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles and see what they tell you about it. You would find that 2 Chronicles tells you very little about this particular thing. But 2 Kings 25 has a rather full account. If you didn't know where to be, it would be very easy to look in a concordance of course and see where Zedekiah is described. It rather fully tells about the end of Zedekiah's time in Jerusalem.

Here we have these five predictions, here in chapter 12, verses 12 through 13. "The prince among them," he doesn't call him the king. "The prince among them." This attitude that Zedekiah was not their real king. Their real king was in exile. But, "The

prince among them will put his things on his shoulder at dusk and leave and a hole will be dug in the wall for him to go through." Well, of course, in the history we find that when the gates of the city were being closely guarded by the Chaldean army and they were preparing to make an attack and try to break their way through the walls or through the gate, that King Zedekiah saw the situation was hopeless and they made a hole in the wall in the place where they didn't think there were any Chaldean soldiers near. Then he and a number of his men came out there in the middle of the night to try to get away. So we have him here taking a minimum of materials with him and a few companions, and digging this opening through the wall, in an unexpected place and going through. "He will cover his face so that he cannot see the land." I suppose it was dark; it was night and he couldn't see it, and he was trying to disguise himself anyway, so that if people did see them, they would not realize that this was the king, for it was particularly important to catch these refugees.

Then the second is: He will be unable to escape. And the Lord says, "I will spread my net for him, and he will be caught in my snare" (Ezek 12:13). Of course, the Babylonians found what had happened, and they pursued him and they captured him. "And then I will bring him to Babylonia the land of the Chaldean." That we are told in Kings took place, they brought him there. "But he will not see it." And I'm sure Ezekiel's friends there must have said, "What's happening? How's he going to be taken to Babylonia and not see it at all? Are they going to cover up his eyes so that he'll never see it?" Well, that wouldn't seem to be the natural interpretation. We find in Kings that when they captured Zedekiah they took him before Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah in the northern part of the country, and Nebuchadnezzar had his eyes put out, and then had him taken away as a prisoner. So he will not see it here, it was a definite prediction of the particular indignity that Zedekiah would suffer, something that very few kings have ever had to suffer. A few have. The king of Denmark who introduced Protestantism into Denmark later became interested in trying to conquer other nations in the area and was

unsuccessful. He was put into a dungeon and remained there for about 20 years before he died. But it is not often that we find that this particular blinding of a king was done.

Though Assyrian/Babylonian kings were rather cruel, but in the case of Zedekiah, there was a very particular reason for having this animosity toward him. It is discussed in Ezekiel 17. We find in Ezekiel 17 an account there in verses 11 to 21 of God's wrath against Zedekiah. We find there in verse 11 of chapter 17, "The word of the Lord came to me, 'Say to this rebellious house, "Do you not know what these rebellious things mean?" Say to them, "The king of Babylon went to Jerusalem and carried off her king and her nobles bringing them with him to Babylon."'" Which of course is looking back at the history to when Nebuchadnezzar had captured Jerusalem and had taken Jehoiachin, whom they considered their true king, and most of his nobles off into captivity. Then he took a member of the royal family and made a treaty with him, putting him under oath. This of course is Zedekiah, the uncle of the young Jehoiachin. Nebuchadnezzar also carried away the leading men of the land so that the kingdom would be brought low, unable to rise against Babylon by having to keep his treaty. He made a treaty with Zedekiah. Zedekiah was supposed to be subject to him. But then Zedekiah, I think it was more the nobles around him, but Zedekiah had at least nominally the authority and was held therefore responsible for what he did. Though I think the reading of the history and the prophet gives me the impression that Zedekiah wanted to do right, he was not strong enough to stand up against these nobles whom the evil king Jehoiakim, his predecessor, had put into power there.

You take the words there and work them out the best you can as to what it says. There are good books written on the study of the layout of Jerusalem, and of course some archaeological work has been done there. You could probably find evidence to make a pretty good guess as to precisely the location where Zedekiah fled. But I don't doubt if there is enough evidence to be absolutely sure exactly what the situation was. It's difficult to excavate as much as you would like there because you have all the people

living there now, and it's hard to get at that. But the escape route would clearly be a place where it wasn't expected that he would come out of the city.

Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, and said, "I will make you king, you must be subject to me. I am taking away all these leaders from the land and you must be subject to me. You must keep friendly relations with me. You must do what I say. But you can be more or less independent." But then Zedekiah sent representatives to Egypt and asked the Egyptians to come and deliver him from the king of Babylonia. Of course, any method he could use to get free from this domination would be good if it did not involve being false to promises he had given. So God in chapter 17 rebukes Zedekiah for that. He says in verse 15, "The king rebelled against him by sending his envoys to Egypt to get horses and a large army." Of course many of the people were saying the Egyptians will deliver us from the Babylonians. We will play one power off against the other and we will be safe. But Ezekiel says, "Will he succeed? Will he who does such things escape? Will he break the treaty and yet escape? Surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, 'He will die in Babylon, in the land of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he despised and whose treaty he broke'" (Ezek. 17:16). And we have some copies, which I have read, written in the cuneiform writing, in the Babylonian language of treaties, which some of these Assyrian and Babylonian kings made with subject nations. In these treaties they always make them swear by the gods of their particular country. They can take a whole series of strong oaths as to being faithful to their oaths. Evidently, Zedekiah had been made to swear in the name of the Lord and call upon the Lord to punish him terribly if he goes back on these promises he has made. Ezekiel here says that God is going to punish Zedekiah for this unfaithfulness on his part. So, you can imagine that Nebuchadnezzar felt a very great dislike of Zedekiah because he's breaking his oath, that he would be subject to him, and looking to the Egyptian to deliver him from Babylon and his oath. So after a long siege of Jerusalem when Zedekiah saw it was hopeless and fled, then when he was captured and brought before Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar decreed this awful fate for him, of having his eyes put

out, and then being carried off to Babylon. So we have these specific predictions made, five predictions made about Zedekiah.

The predictions may not have been absolutely clear perhaps to those who heard them, but when they heard later exactly what would happen, they would see that these predictions that he will go to Babylonia but he won't see it fit exactly with what actually happened. That when he went there he couldn't see anything and then he will die in Babylonia. He never was released. Jehoiachin, on the other hand, Zedekiah's nephew, after more than 20 years in prison in Babylonia, was released and allowed to eat at the king's table and given certain privileges.

The text says that he made a promise, that he took an oath, it does not say that it was made in the name of the Lord. But in view of the treaties that we have discovered in recent years, this is reasonable. So we, I think, we are quite justified in gathering that when Zedekiah made an oath, Nebuchadnezzar made him take an oath in the name of the God of Israel, and used the strongest terms that Nebuchadnezzar's experts could devise to swear that it is as God lives and as he believes in God, and so on, he would carry out his promises. In chapter 17, he's given this rebuke by the Lord, but I mentioned the fact of the treaties, because it helps us to understand why Nebuchadnezzar would treat him that way.

The word "my oath" is used here. It wasn't just a light promise or anything, it was an oath made in the strongest terms, "my oath." So God is punishing him for breaking his word that he had given under such terms.

Then there are the general predictions, which are in the same chapter 12. These predictions from verses 15 on predict the captivity, but they predict that while the great number of people will be killed, there will be those who will be preserved. They predict captivity. They predict preservation. They predict desolation: in verse 20 how the land is going to be desolate. Then in 12:22 and 25, people are saying, "Well, this is all going to happen, but not in our time." Like the people in France in the days of Louis XV, who

said, "After us, the deluge." They said, "We are going to continue with our great luxury and everything going wonderfully with us, but we know things are unsustainable; there's going to be terrible overturning, but it won't happen while we're here." This is the way the people were talking here. Ezekiel says, "No, this is coming very soon." Actually it is within the next six or seven years that these terrible things happen. So the fulfillment was not delayed.

Then in the next chapter he goes on to rebuke the false prophets. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel had to meet the false prophets. It's a remarkable thing how the Bible shows us clearly there were false prophets. There were true prophets. The true prophets said the most terrible things about the Israelites, "A rebellious people, a people of terrible sins, a people who went back on their oath, a people who were disobedient to God." Yet those books were preserved by the Israelite people all through these ages and considered the word of God. Nothing that was written by the false prophets has been preserved in that way. I don't believe there is any other nation on the face of the earth that has preserved and honored the writings of people who taught the nation with anything like the condemnation that you find in the Bible of the people of Israel. It's contrary to all nature. You take most any country and you take the old books they've kept and they tell what wonderful people they are, and so on, but they do not contain long passages of rebuke and condemnation like the Bible does. Yet, the Israelite people have preserved these books because they knew they were God's work. I think that is one of the unique features of the Bible. A very wonderful evidence that God has truly spoke here.

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