

Allan MacRae – Ezekiel: Lecture 7

I believe I gave you Roman numeral V, which I called "Ezekiel's Prophecy in the Last Half of the Sixth Year" from Ezekiel chapters 12 to 19. Under that I made capital A, "The Prince and His People" in chapter 12. We discussed that chapter last time; there were some very interesting things in it.

The next chapter is chapter 13, which I will call B, "The Rebuke of the False Prophets." It has some very strong statements in it about false prophets. We have a number of such statements in the book of Ezekiel. We have many times as many in the book of Jeremiah, which was written at the same time as the book of Ezekiel, except that while Ezekiel was giving these messages to the people in the Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah was giving similar messages to the people in Jerusalem. There in Jerusalem, evidently Jeremiah ran into a great many false prophets. In fact, in the book of Jeremiah there are many accounts of his conflicts with them. Sometimes you would think he was almost standing alone. Jeremiah was actually prophesying there in Jerusalem, at the same general period, during these years. Jeremiah, of course, had much more personal difficulty than Ezekiel had. He was even put in the dungeon for a time. He went through very difficult experiences at this time. But in the book of Jeremiah, you find the evidence that there were a considerable number of people who were considered to be prophets, who were saying, "God is soon going to bring the exiles back. He's going to protect this city. You people are the meat in the cauldron. You are the meat, this city is the pot, the big strong walls around it are going to protect us from any attacks by the Babylonians. We are going to be safe here. God is going to bring the other people all back. Our country will continue as it was before." But Jeremiah said repeatedly, "This is not the case. God is going to destroy Jerusalem. He's going to kill great numbers of you and send the rest into captivity." Ezekiel was giving the same message over there, among the people who had already been exiled into captivity to Babylon.

Now, it is a most remarkable thing that we have none of the books of the false prophets preserved. We have no reason to think that it was only Jeremiah and Ezekiel who wrote books. It would seem just as reasonable for them also to write or at least for other people to write down what they said and put them together into books. Certainly there were many people who were saying, "Those are the true prophets." It is a marvel of history that these are the books which have been preserved, these books which speak so critically of the people of Israel. And events that immediately followed proved that Jeremiah and Ezekiel had correctly predicted what would happen. These books and those written at other periods use the most scathing language about the people. I don't know of any other case where, as a nation, there has been preserved early writings that spoke critically of the people the way that these do. Yet not only have these books been preserved, none of the books of the people who were telling them what marvelous people they were, how much they had accomplished and all that, none of those books were preserved, while in other nations, that's the sort of thing that they have preserved. But beyond that, they've even considered that these books are God's word. They have revered them. They have tried to protect each word of them from being altered in the course of copying, and they have revered as their sacred books, books which use such scathing language about their people all the way through. Now somebody may say, "Well, but that's the way Jews are. They are a very timid people who have great lack of self confidence, and they just feel like they can never make progress..." and so on. But I don't think that many people get that impression of the Jews.

I remember one time when I was talking to a young Jewish professor at the University in Pennsylvania, and I remarked to him how remarkable it is that every monotheistic religion in the world, Christianity, Judaism and Muhammadism, have root in this little land of Palestine. Not only that, but every system of alphabetic writing that is known anywhere in the world has come from either from this region has spread out, or has been artificially formed by someone who is familiar with the alphabet developed in this region. I said isn't that remarkable. He said, "Oh, yes, that shows you what brains

can do.” Well, there was no self-effacing attitude there. The Jews have preserved these books with such tremendous care; these books which speak so terribly about their nation. It’s really miraculous. It’s nothing but the Lord's wonderful working that has caused this unique development to have occurred.

They say that once Frederick the Great, who was a very able man and who put his little region of Prussia on the map and built it up into a very strong and powerful center, which eventually got control of all Germany, that Frederick the Great, the great patron of all terror, that Frederick the Great once turned to his chaplain, because the people as a whole were very pious and they didn’t keep up the court chaplains and all that, and he said, “Give me in a word some evidence that Christianity is true.” They say the chaplain answered, “The Jews.” It is of course one of the great evidences of the truth of Christianity, that this little group from ancient times, when all the other groups have disappeared or become assimilated, that this little group has lasted through the years, and above all that they have preserved these books which speak so slightingly of them as a nation. In so many, many places they have preserved these and revered these as the sacred books. It’s one of the tremendous proofs.

Well now, how did they come to accept the true prophets and not the false prophets? How does it come about? Certainly, we know that God works in a wonderful way. In this 13th chapter we have this very strong rebuke of false prophets to which the chapter is devoted. As I said, Ezekiel had to meet the false prophets but they were far more visible in Jerusalem itself; Jeremiah had far more contact with them than Ezekiel had. But in the course of this chapter, which is largely devoted to the attack on the false prophets, we find verse 10, which is a rather typical verse, “Because they lead my people astray saying, ‘Peace’ when there is no peace.” And that’s a description of the false prophets' message that we have, that we find a great deal in the book of Jeremiah who says, “Cursed are they that say, ‘Peace, peace.’ when there is no peace.” Jeremiah says that repeatedly. Giving people false confidence, false hope causing them to be satisfied with unrighteousness, if only they could have peace. Winston Churchill said that when

people are willing to give up justice and liberty for the sake of peace, they will soon find that they have neither liberty nor peace. It doesn't work that way. Of course, we see that in our world very strongly today.

I wish we had time to spend on this chapter, but we don't, so I will just call your attention to its great central theme. But it is worth thinking a little bit, though the chapter doesn't specifically deal with it, about this question: How would they know who the true prophets were? Of course the Scripture tells us that there were cases where God enabled prophets to perform miracles. That was the first test of a prophet. Not all the prophets performed miracles, but in some cases God worked in a supernatural way to convince people that these men were prophets. God did that in connection with the life of Christ and with the establishment of the early church. He worked in a supernatural way to assist in it. We have no evidence that God continues such activities to this day. God certainly can if He chooses. But in the early days when Christianity was like a little flame where this little group of mostly uneducated people were going out and telling about Christ, you might say a breath of air could extinguish it. In those times God protected the little flame until it became a substantial force.

Once it was a substantial force, history would seem to show that God ceased to give the protection that He did to that little flame. We find, for instance, that North Africa was one of the great centers of Christianity. We find that there Christianity was as powerful for several centuries as anywhere in the world. God permitted North Africa to be overrun by the Muslims until there's not one Christian to ten thousand people in the area. It is strictly forbidden by the law of Islam for persons to change their religion. Many missionaries have worked there all their lives and have had only two or three converts in the course of their time. No, they probably had a number of secret converts, but as far as Christianity's being a force in that area, it just has not been for fifteen hundred years, while for several centuries that was one of the greatest centers of Christianity.

The early missionaries went out across Asia and great numbers of people in Persia and in China, in all those regions, were reached for the gospel. There are evidences that

during the early centuries of this era, say starting around 400 AD and going up for some centuries after that, there were thousands of Christians in those areas. God permitted that it should be wiped out in those areas. He now allows things to proceed according to whether his people are faithful to Him or not; whether they follow Him and reach many for the Lord, or whether they turn aside. When you realize that 80%, I believe, of the money that goes for spreading Christianity through the world comes from the United States, and you see the forces against it in our country today, it makes you simply realize that God will accomplish what He chooses. But this supernatural protection He gave to the early church, we have no right to expect today, although we cannot say that God may choose not to give it.

Now, a second great proof of a man who was a true prophet is very similar to that miracle--in fact it is one of the greatest miracles--that is the power to predict the future. That of course is an evidence that we still have available to us today because we see many statements, not a tremendous number, but a very considerable number of statements in the Bible that simply no human being could foresee what would happen. These have come out in just the way predicted in the Scripture. The predicting of the future is a second great evidence of who is the true prophet. God used these in helping to protect his true prophets against the forces against them in those days.

But in the Pentateuch he repeatedly warns that even if a person does what seems to be a miracle, even if a person predicts the future and the prediction comes true, if the prediction does not fit with the teaching of Scripture, they are not to be followed because the Devil can perform miracles; the Devil can make good guesses about the future though the Devil cannot foresee the future with certainty as the Lord does. But the Devil has far more evidence on which to make guesses that any one of us has. Therefore, the Devil can make satisfactory guesses about the future. But God has wonderfully worked in His supernatural way to give us the sixty-six books that are the true revelation. When we have the full sixty-six books, we do not need supernatural revelation today because he

wants us not to go by what other people say, not even to go by what the great scholars or great theologians have said, but to go by what we find in His word.

Edited and Narrated by Dr. Perry Phillips

Initial Editing by Ted Hildebrandt

Transcribed by Hejzlarova