

## Allan MacRae: Ezekiel, Lecture 8

In reference to the test questions concerning the conflict between God telling Ezekiel to go speak in Ezekiel 3:11, but then in 3:15 Ezekiel is sitting for seven days overwhelmed: How do we understand that? Did God tell him to be silent? Had he not yet told him to speak? Was he just giving him general directions? I don't see anything like that in the passage. So I don't think that is a correct explanation. But I am sure that there are interpreters who take it that way.

Then there is the explanation to suggest that after God gave Ezekiel these commands and God saw how hostile the people were, and Ezekiel realized how strongly they felt, Ezekiel went and sat seven days where they sat. He did nothing. He continued doing nothing. Yet God had ordered him to speak. So God took him back and gave him another vision and told him that now he is to be silent for a time and then to use various object lessons. Now that is a second explanation, which may be the true one. But I am inclined not to think that it is. I incline for the suggestion I have made, but for which there is no proof. Either one of the other two might be correct, but my personal opinion is a third option that Ezekiel was given the command to speak and he proceeded to carry it out, but that got the people so irritated at him that they wouldn't listen further, and then God said "Well, be quiet a while and start doing things showing these signs. And this will allow you to gradually get their attention again."

The second interpretation would be that he did not obey the command. I wouldn't say disobeyed, but it amounts to the same thing in the end. God said do it, and Ezekiel wanted to do it; he wanted to serve God, but he faced a situation and just didn't do it. And, of course, I'm sure that every one of us has had that experience of being in a situation where you knew it was the Lord's will to speak out for him, and you just didn't seem to get up the courage to do it. Everyone has had an experience like that at least once in their lives. But Ezekiel, the one selected to be a prophet and to represent the Lord under these circumstances, was so overwhelmed as that he sat overwhelmed for seven days (Ezek. 3:15). But to me, the third option is the best of the three. But I would not

wish to be dogmatic between them.

This brings us to what I think is one of the most important things in Bible study: to get what God has there for us. The point is not to read into it or draw conclusions that are not clear. It is easy to take a few words and come to a conclusion, but I feel that it is very vital that we look at various possibilities of interpretation. We look at the different possibilities in different passages and then we see how they fit together. I don't think we should ever build conclusions on one verse alone. We should see what God gives that fits together and shows us what he means and what his will is for us. When we study the Scripture that way we're not apt to get led off into wrong tracks into things that are not his will for us. Rather, we are apt to find many things we would've overlooked otherwise.

The fourth question: "Was Ezekiel actually transported to Jerusalem? Give evidence for your answer" (Ezek. 8:7) I asked for evidence, not merely for a statement, and there were several who gave a piece of excellent evidence. Such as if he actually dug through the wall, surely the police would have interfered or there would've been a mob scene. So it was something that was part of a vision and not something that he really did in Jerusalem. There were two or three things like that I had mentioned in class, providing good evidence of this fact, that it was a vision. But the clearest evidence was that it begins with a statement he went up with a vision it ends with a statement the vision went up to him, and there are one or two other statements which make it quite clear (Ezek 8:3; 11:24). Nobody gave much evidence as I would have liked on that question.

Now before we take up discussing the specific points which we have been looking at, I would like to look particularly at the assignments for today. There was a very interesting subject with which we dealt today in this section of Ezekiel. I would like to look with you at the passage about Tyre (Ezek. 26). I assigned a comparatively short section here about Tyre. How many verses was it in this assignment? Those fourteen verses in chapter 26 give a picture of something he says is going to happen to this city of Tyre.

Now, I personally like the word "prediction" rather than "prophecy" when I mean

prediction, though in our common speech the word "prophecy" is ordinarily used to mean the word "prediction." So there is no harm in using it in that sense. But in the biblical usage the word "prophecy" means exactly what the word would etymologically mean. A prophet is one who speaks for someone, who speaks on their behalf. A biblical prophet is somewhat narrower than that. A biblical prophet is one who claims to be speaking for God, or perhaps we should say, one who is a spokesman for God. So a man can be a great prophet and never make a prediction. He can write many chapters of prophecy but never make any prediction. Prediction is one of the means that God gave to enforce the man's message that God will punish them or that God will carry out his good purposes. It's one of the methods, and it's one of the methods of giving evidence that a man really is a prophet. But although in common speech if I say I am going to give you a prophecy, you are thinking I am going to tell you whether it is going to rain tomorrow or something like that. Actually, I would be giving you a prophecy in the biblical sense if I was merely explaining the word of God to you. In a specific sense it would be a prediction if I tell you whether it is going to rain tomorrow.

The prophets, then, are not interested in telling us simply what the future is, although prediction is a very important part of prophecy. It is important because it gives an evidence that the prophet is really speaking from God. It is important because it is a great help in driving home his message. He can say not merely be good, but be good and God will bless you; not merely turn from your sin, but turn from your sin for God will send terrible punishment. It can help drive home his message. It can have an important part in his message and it can be an important authentication of what he says.

Now, as we look at the passages of prediction that we find among the prophets we find that many of these are quite general in character. You will find him telling about one region after another: that they are going to be overthrown; they are going to have suffering; they are going to have destruction; they are going to have troubles. You find a great many very general statements, and of course, such statements could be made just about any place in ancient or medieval history. Or perhaps in modern day in Europe there is hardly a city that has not been subject to tremendous damage through war. General

statements really do not prove a great deal, there is a great similarity in them. But occasionally, we find the prophets saying something that is quite unique, something that is quite different from what he ordinarily says, and this is a very outstanding passage in that regard. Some of the statements that are in it are rather general, "I will put an end to your noisy songs and the music of your hearts will be heard no more" (Ezek. 26:13). Well, about any city he could have said that, anywhere that comes into trouble or difficulty because that would exactly fit. He says I am going to bring ruin to you, to bring difficulty and knock over your walls. That has happened from place to place all over the world.

But in connection with Tyre, he has said some things that I have not found in connection with any other place. We notice in chapter 26, verse 3, he says, "I am against you Tyre. I will bring many nations against you like the sea casting up its waves"-- well that's frequent. That generally happens in many places, "they will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her tower," that is general, it often happens in many situations. "But I will scrape away her rubble and make her a bare rock" (Ezek. 26:4). That is not general.

Jeremiah says that Babylon is going to be destroyed. It is never going to be rebuilt. Wild animals will be there, and that happened in Babylon, though not for many centuries after Jeremiah gave the prediction. Incidentally that word "never" in Scripture is not the an absolute word, but it means "on and on and on; as far as we can see, it does not end." So after a long time, it might be the Lord's will for a change. But most destroyed cities were rebuilt, but Babylon has never been rebuilt. It was just exactly as Jeremiah predicted it to be.

Now he says here that "I will bring many nations against you," in chapter 26, verse 3, "like the sea casting up its waves," that often happens, "for they will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her tower." But then look at this statement: "I will scrape away her rubble and make her a bare rock." That's a very strange thing to say about a city that is destroyed. Why would anybody bother to do that? Down in Williamsburg, Virginia they have done some excavating and they dig down there and find things that were thrown away 300 hundred years ago; they find refuse that include many things that throw interesting light on the life of people there, things that people never even thought about

and just threw them away and eventually got covered up with dirt and remained there. Many a city has been destroyed and been left a heap of ruins, but he says, "I will scrape away her rubble and make her a bare rock; out in the sea she will be a place to spread fishnets." Well, Tyre was right on the shore. You might say that any place could be a place to spread fishnets, except it would be hard to do in the heart of the busy city. "She will become plunder for the nations."

Going on to chapter 26, verse 7, "From the north I am going to bring against Tyre Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon, with horses and chariots of horsemen from the great army. He will ravage your settlements on the mainland and with the sword will set up siege works against you, build a ramp up to your wall and raise a shield against you. He will direct the blows of his battering ram against your wall and demolish your towers." (Well, that happened to many places.) "His horses will be so many they will cover you with dust." Well this shows a great army coming. "Your walls will tremble at the noises of their war horses, wagons, and chariots when he enters your gate; the hooves of the horses will tremble your streets and he will kill your people with a sword. Your strong pillars will fall to the ground. They will plunder your wealth and loot your merchandise; they will break down your walls and demolish your fine houses." All of this could be said about many places perhaps, but then he says, "They will throw your stones, timber, and rubble into the sea." So why would anybody bother to do that? That is a very strange prediction of a big city, that you will throw its stones, timber, and rubble into the sea. "I will put an end to your noisy songs and music of your harps will be heard no more. I will make you a bare rock; you will become a place to spread fishnets." I know these are very strange things to be said about Tyre. I don't remember seeing anything like that in any other place.

It is unusual to some extent because I think a city by the shore, if the city is left in ruins, it might easily become a place for fishnets. So it is somewhat unusual, but not quite so unusual as the other statements because that could also be said perhaps of any city that happened to be at the shore, but it certainly couldn't be said about Babylon or any inland city.

But what did happen is very, very interesting and very unusual. Now this city of Tyre was a city which had been built at about 1600 BC, probably by settlers from Sidon 30 miles to the north. The people of Tyre are even referred to as Sidonians. There was a similarity and relationship between the two cities. Tyre is about 25 miles north of the principle Israelite settlements. Tyre soon came to be more important than Sidon, its mother city, as its ships went all over the Mediterranean. It became a tremendously important center for commerce, and through its commerce it became very wealthy and very important, and very powerful. We read in another chapter that Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city for about 12 years before he was able to overcome it. It became quite a strong place. The city was evidently there on the shore with an isle about half a mile out into the waters of the Mediterranean. But the city was there on the mainland, and Nebuchadnezzar besieged it and obtained control over it. The city continued, it would seem, after that time and was a very important place. But the people, after Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the city, moved largely to an island half a mile out. They took their materials with them and went to this island and made the island their headquarters. So the Greeks, in their histories written a few centuries after this time, referred to the place on the mainland as the "Old Tyre." It was the original Tyre. So the original Tyre, after Nebuchadnezzar's defeat, remained in ruins on the shore. A great number of people had escaped to this island. There they built a large and prosperous city on this island out in the sea. It was very important for some centuries after Nebuchadnezzar's time.

Then Alexander the Great came from Greece to attack the Persian Empire. North of there, he met a great Persian army and defeated them around 330 B.C. The king of Persia offered to give Alexander half of his domain, to turn it over to him and make peace with him. But Alexander wasn't satisfied; he wanted the whole Persian Empire. He refused to make any agreement with the King of Persia. But he did not go on into the heart of the area of Asia in order to defeat the king of Persia. Instead of that, he wanted first to get the whole territory in his way entirely in his hands. Consequently, he turned south down the coast toward Egypt, and city after city surrendered to him. Sidon

surrendered, and other cities surrendered. But Tyre refused to surrender. The people of Tyre had a big navy, and this navy was under the control of the Persians, as Tyre had been part of the Persian Empire for two centuries. Alexander wanted to bring Tyre under his control so that the Persian Navy would not be able to interfere with his lines of supplies. So he came down and here was this island city of Tyre, which had been on the mainland before Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the mainland city.

Alexander's great army could not get at the people on the island. When Alexander came with boats to try to attack them the people of Tyre with their boats were able to drive Alexander away and to protect themselves pretty well. Then Alexander decided that the way to do it was to build a causeway out through the water to the island. His powerful foot soldiers could then march on this causeway and attack the city directly, as he had done with many other cities before that were on the mainland. So he ordered his soldiers to take what was left of the old city and throw it into the water. They took these remains of the mainland city, and they put them into the water. They took the stones; they took the timbers; they took the rubble; the very dust of this great city; they took everything and threw it into the water. When they got a causeway filled about half or two-thirds of the way out, the Tyraeans attacked his soldiers. Suddenly, his builders that were building this causeway were driven away and this disrupted a good part of the work they had done. So then Alexander had to start most of the construction over again. But he worked for nine months building this causeway.

Eventually, when he had the causeway built, his soldiers could come out on it and attack the city. By that time, he had 40 ships from Sidon along with other ships from other places that had come into his power, and they of course were also attacking. So he made his way into the city, and he killed 10,000 people, and the other 30,000 he sold as slaves. So in the case of Tyre, they took the stones, they took the timber, they took the very rubble, they took everything they could get their hands on from "Old Tyre", and they threw it into the water. I know of no other place where this has ever happened. This is well authenticated from the history of Alexander the Great's expedition. You will find that most encyclopedias have reference to his great attack on the city and his building of

this causeway.

Now, some years ago I gave a message in which I gave this, and someone wrote me afterwards that they had mentioned it to a professor of Old Testament in a theological seminary who said, "Well, there is absolutely nothing to that. The city was always on the island, it never was on the mainland. And consequently, it doesn't prove anything at all." Well I mentioned that to a noted archeologist, and he said to me immediately, "Jerusalem was only a few miles south of Tyre and it tells in Scripture how Nebuchadnezzar's horses will be attacking. There will be great dust from the horses and all that; they will fill the air with the dust from the great attacks from the horses against the walls." Well he said, "if Tyre was always on the island, certainly anybody who had lived within 25 miles of the place would have known better than to have made such statements as we do have those statements here and in other places about Nebuchadnezzar's attack and about the horses and the great dust that would be raised by the multitude of the attackers and all that." He thought that was a considerable answer to the criticism. Now, I found a couple of scholarly works in which they disagree with that specific statement: the city of Tyre was built on the mainland. The old Greek idea of calling a place on the land "old Tyre" is simply a myth. There is no foundation to it. The city never was on the mainland.

And the evidence they give for that sounds like very good evidence. They say that in the old Assyrian records, in the Cuneiform writing, it speaks there of Tyre, the city which is "in the midst of the sea." That's from long before the time of Nebuchadnezzar. The Assyrian kings speak of Tyre as the city "in the midst of the sea." Well, that seemed to critics to be pretty conclusive proof. But I looked up these Cuneiform texts and I found in the ancient Assyrian writing that they said Tyre was the city "in the midst of the sea." But then the thought struck me, what do they mean by "in the midst of the sea"? Do they mean it's on an island, surrounded by the sea? Or do they mean that it is a city that is a great maritime city, to which ships come from all over the sea and from which they go, so it's "in the midst of the sea" in that sense? So I said let's see what they have to say about Sidon. Now Sidon, 30 miles to the north of Tyre, was another great commercial maritime city, and it was on the mainland. I looked up a number of the Assyrian references to



Sidon, and they all say exactly the same thing: "Sidon, which is in the midst of the sea." So it seemed to me that the major proof of the critics was eradicated by that evidence which I found. I never have written that up I think I ought to one of these days because it does disturb people, undoubtedly, who hear this prophecy and then hear that answer that is given to deny the prophecy.

I should say, incidentally, the New International Version, I feel, is far more useful to most people today than the King James Version because it's in a language we can understand. The King James has many words that have changed their meaning; therefore, I quite commonly use the New International Version. But all the people who worked on the New International Version, or on any recent translation, practically all of them, have had to get their doctorate degrees in institutions where unbelief was in control, and as a result have had ideas put into their minds sometimes without even realizing it. People who want to stand by the Word of God have had ideas put into their minds without realizing their significance, and that particularly is apt to be the case in the prophets more than in most other sections.

So in this section you notice that the statement is made, in chapter 26, verse 6, "Her settlements on the mainland will be ravaged by the sword." Well now, if Ezekiel said her settlements on the mainland will be ravaged by the sword, that certainly implies that the city was already on the island. But you find that the word here translated "settlements" is simply the Hebrew word "daughters." It is quite reasonable that "daughters" is often viewed as the settlements, the little towns, around a big city; they are her "daughters;" like we speak of a metropolis as a mother city. So the word "daughters" translated by "settlements" is not at all wrong.

But then that word "on the mainland" seems to say the city was on the island, but the word that is there translated "mainland" is only translated "mainland" in the New International Version in this chapter and nowhere else in the whole book. The Hebrew word there is hundreds of times in the Old Testament, perhaps hundreds is a strain, but many times translated "field"; her settlements are in the field; in other words, there are the little villages roundabout the city. Why use of the word "mainland" there? You see,

someone in the committee that made this part of the translation for the New International Version had that in mind and said, "Render that 'mainland'; the city was on the island." But when you look at the Hebrew, you find it doesn't mean "mainland", it simply means "in the field." I don't think the word could ever mean "mainland." If Tyre was on the mainland, it's the natural thing that in the fields roundabout they have the villages, or "daughters," meaning settlements.

So I thought that was one of the most interesting evidences of fulfilled, predictive prophecies. Now there are some people who have the impression--they don't know much about the Bible--they think that every chapter's going to have some prophecy with some predictions about the future; and, of course, this is not true. There's a great deal of predictive prophecy in the Bible, but the greater part of it is not available to us as evidence of God's knowledge of the future because a great many of the predictive prophecies are general in nature. Sometimes they predict there will be a great destruction here or a conquest there and in the course of the few centuries that happened. There are many predictions like that which were of great importance to the people then but are not much use as evidence for us.

Then there are predictions made that we don't know how they were fulfilled because we don't know much about the history. We know about the history of ancient Israel because of the Bible but the history of all these neighboring lands like Moab, Edom, and Ammon had a great deal of history of which we know very little. Then there are predictions of a type which are so general that you couldn't prove anything as far as predictions are concerned. There are some which are somewhat vague and it is hard to tell exactly what they mean. But there are a few places in the Scripture, I don't know many, but there are few like this one about Tyre which I think are tremendous evidential value.

Many prophecies tell of God's wrath. Why should only this one about Tyre have such a statement as this? It is such a strange, unusual statement, and I think an interesting thing about it is to know not merely this is going to happen--and it happened--but you know how it happened. God knew Alexander the Great would want to build that

causeway and would take all those ruins and throw them in the water. We know the way it happened, and in my mind, it is one of the great evidences that God gave the prophet things to say that the prophets did not fully understand, at least they did not see exactly how their prophecies would fully work out, but the things God knew would happen in the future would happen in such a way that these few statements, which would fall in this category, would be so specifically fulfilled as a marvelous evidence that a knowledge transcending any human evidence was present behind the prophet who made the statement.

In the outline, we had mentioned under Roman numeral V, I had called "F" "An Excuse Debunked," and that was chapter 18. I mentioned that the excuse that we can blame our parents. I am sure that God takes into account in his judgment of us factors that have entered in to our background and upbringing I am sure He realizes that all are guilty before God; we all fall far short of what we should be, and you do find people who have been converted from a life of sin and evil and disagreeable backgrounds. Then you see some people who have been raised in a fine Christian environment, who have very attractive moral characters, but no belief at all. And you may say of the latter, "Look how much finer and noble and generous and loving is this man." But in God's sight it is not where they are but in what direction they are moving. A person from a fine Christian background, who does not turn to the Lord, may live a good moral life on the basis of the way he was brought up. You look at him today, but twenty years later you will see he has degenerated in just about every way, and you look under the beautiful exterior and you find selfishness, anger, and meanness. You will see it's not where we are, but what direction we're going in. We all are sinners before God deserving eternal punishment for our sins, and we can't lay the blame on somebody else. So in chapter 18 Ezekiel debunks this argument, "The fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek 18:2). It is a truth that the sins of the fathers do effect the children, unquestionably, but in Gods judgment, each is an individual, and in the judgment, God sees what we decide and what we do; not how we were brought up.

I read you last time chapter 18 verse 32, "I take no pleasure in the death of

anyone,' declares the sovereign Lord, 'repent and live'". Then in capital G; chapter 19, is "Lamentation for Two Exiled Kings." It is very interesting that in verses 3 and 4 he discusses King Jehoahaz, who only reigned three months and in chapter 9 he discusses Jehoiachin, who only reigned three months, but he has nothing about the king who reigned in between. Here you find, as you do often in the prophets, you have one thing discussed, and another thing discussed, and it looks like they come one right after the other, but there is actually a time gap in between them. Just because two things are mentioned one right after the other, it does not mean one immediately follows the other. People want to find errors and contradictions and they easily read into the Scripture what is not there. But we have these few verses in which these two men are highly praised. You wonder how he would praise them so highly when each reigned so short a time. But I think he is not speaking so much of what their character was but how the people regarded them and how miserable they felt when one, Jehoahaz, was taken off and moved to Egypt when he seemed to be the best of the brothers; and the other one, Jehoiachin, who was taken off to Babylon. And then the latter verses, 10-14, speak of the nation in general and how God is bringing His punishment upon it.

Edited and narrated by Dr. Perry Phillips

Initial Editing by Ted Hildebrandt

Student editor: Alli McPhedran

Transcribers: Jared Kuipers, Eric Wolak, Rob Hinckley, Billy Gawlak, Martin Maloney