

Allan MacRae: Ezekiel, Lecture 13

Now, in chapter 36, verse 26 we have a most wonderful statement. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone." Before that, let's look for a second the end of verse 25, "I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols." There is one of the remarkable things, that through most of the Old Testament the great criticism of Israel is for its tendency to fall into idolatry. That is the great emphasis of the prophets, the great emphasis of most of the books in the earlier part of the Old Testament. But after the exile, Israel showed a remarkable resilience in this regard that they very seldom had any sizable group of the Israelites falling into idolatry since that time. In that one regard, this has certainly been remarkable--the cleansing of them from idolatry. But the statement in verse 27, starting at the end of 26, "I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh, and I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my law," that certainly has been true of many Jews and also of many Christians.

Question: "We don't see idolatry very much in the world today other than maybe to transfer idolatry to materialism. Clearly for most people it's not very common. I'm curious as to what this means in reference to idolatry today."

MacRae's response: I'm not sure. In a way you can confer idolatry onto Christian churches. Certainly in many sections of the world the mass of the Roman Catholics has been considered a form of idolatry. Actually there is no question, I don't think, so much among the intelligent, but that the majority of the Roman Catholics have been idolatrous. They have the Virgin of this place and the Virgin of that and many of them have figures with the likeness of people on them. But among the Israelites, though they had been, many of them, among people who were idolatrous for centuries, there were, I think, on the whole very few after the

exile. Though it is true that materialism today is very certainly another form of idolatry.

Question: "In chapter eleven it speaks about prophesies with the glory filling the temple. Do you think that this really is a part of where Ezekiel was trying to encourage the Israelite people that God had not left them forever, but that although he had turned away his sight temporarily, there would come a day when they would be doing what he said."

MacRae's response: Yes, that is very thrilling to hear, very thrilling. There are many that will take these words, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and keep my laws," many have taken that as simply a picture of the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 and of the Christian Church. I believe that there is a great similarity with this and what God has done in his Christian Church but I believe that God is blessing Israel. Verses 25 and 26 here: I think that they can include the church but the whole context is speaking specifically of the people of Israel, and I don't see how you can get around the feeling that here this is a specific promise given to God's people Israel that has not yet been fulfilled.

We have these wonderful verses about the new heart in 27, 28, 23 and 24 in the next chapter and then in chapter 36, verse 31 he says, "Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices" – now that has been accomplished in the lives of many people and is something that all of us need to have fulfilled in our own lives, for our own wandering from God. Our Savior wants us to know our failure to put him first, but this is something that has certainly not been fulfilled for a great majority of people, whether Israelites or not.

Now in the chapter 37 you have resurrection specifically predicted. In verses 12 and 13 we read, "Therefore prophesy, and say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says. "Oh my people, I am going to open your graves and bring

you up from there. I will bring you back to the land of Israel.””” Israel can be either a figurative statement of turning away from evil and being born again from the kingdom of God. Certainly "I will bring you back to the land of Israel" would seem to be a literal statement. It can hardly be applied to the spiritual life in any reasonable way. "I will bring you back to the land of Israel but I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them." This certainly seems to me a great return to the land of Israel and certainly seems to include a resurrection. In both verse 12 and in verse 13 he stresses and repeats this wonderful promise.

In chapter 37, verses 19, 22, and 24 stress that there is going to be a unity among the people, no longer the division between Israel and Judah. In verses 24 and 25 we have a very strange statement, "My servant David will be king over them and they will all have one shepherd; they will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees; they will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever and David my servant will be their priest forever." We see surely there is a specific promise here of a regime which has never been in history as yet, a regime in which they will live with a leader which God has specifically promised called David. Is this the literal David risen from the dead? Is David here a figure for someone else? We cannot automatically determine between those possibilities.

Verse 26 speaks of an everlasting covenant. "I will make a covenant of peace with them which will be an everlasting covenant." His covenant of peace is an everlasting covenant and 26, 27 and 28: "He is going to put his sanctuary among them forever, his dwelling place among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who makes Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever." These references then seem to look forward to the return of Israel to the Lord. These verses seem to look forward to a greater return than that; they seem to look forward to a time of great prosperity for the people of Israel. They seem to look forward to a time when these people will be filled with a desire truly to

follow God and to do his will. They look forward to a time when they will have a ruler whom God has specifically appointed for the purpose, and the Scriptures say that this is going to endure for a very long time.

Now, as we look forward, a considerable part of this may apply to the millennium. What do you do with the statement that "he will be their prince forever"? Many people have what I think is a false idea of what we mean by the millennium. That is to say, the word millennium of course isn't in the Old Testament anywhere, but the Old Testament is the place I think where we get the proof that there is to be a millennium. There are many texts like these which seem to me to look forward to the millennium. There are three specific passages in the Old Testament which seem to me unquestionably to describe a period of universal peace on this earth, of universal right, universal freedom from fear. They promise that such a period is going to come upon the earth. These three passages are the beginning of Micah 4, the beginning of Isaiah 3 and the early part of Isaiah 11. These three passages, it seems to me give support from which anyone can get of the millennium. These three passages, by any sort of a big spiritualization (or taking place figuratively), it seems to me, implies that the resurrection of Christ to be purely spiritual. It seems to me that there are a million other passages where one might be uncertain but these are clearly not figurative. These three passages remain explicit that such a period is coming.

The word millennium comes from the book of Revelation, which speaks six times of a period of a thousand years. Now the place where I think that the great majority of people believing in the millennium are mistaken is in thinking that the millennium is a period that comes to an end after the thousand years. I have heard people, when asked about that, who have termed it as one unending novel. I don't know what that means. I have heard people speak of God as if there is no time with God, it is just one unending novel. I don't know what that means. I don't think there's any such thing in Scripture to signify that God promises the possibility of things not happening one after another. And I believe God has given

us a vision of a marvelous period of universal peace and joy upon this earth, a marvelous picture from God of a thousand years.

I'm sure that Saint Augustine lay on his death bed in the city of Hippo, in North Africa, and he could hear outside, he could hear the cries of the people, the fugitives and the dying as the hordes were destroying and pillaging throughout that area. Everything had fallen in their hands except for just three walled cities, of which Hippo was one, and it was in that situation as the whole world seemed to be coming to an end that he lay there for a month. If someone had said to him, "The Lord is not going to come back for another 2000 years," I think he would have said, "What on earth are you talking about? Well, maybe he will come next year but the way things look now, I don't see how it could be more than a year or 2 more before he comes!"

It looks as if civilization comes to a complete end. We have the long period of the dark ages then. But the Lord has not come back yet, and we don't know when he's coming. He says, "in such an hour as you think not." I personally would not be surprised if he came today, but I would not be any more surprised if we had another 1000 years before he comes. But I still believe that after the Lord comes there is going to be the glorious millennium period which is so vividly described in the three passages and in Ezekiel that I have mentioned, and which is touched upon in these passages, that we might look forward to that wonderful millennial period.

But at the end of the 1000 years there are certain changes in the administration and this earth may be cleansed, so changed that you could call it a new heaven and a new earth, but the physical strongholds which are in this earth today are simply burned off and the new ones substituted. It is not impossible that it could happen. So I think that the most important thing in our study of the Scripture is to see what is possible, to see what are possible interpretations that are extremely improbable that we can lay aside altogether, and to see what are the areas of real possibilities that we can have in mind.

Now, we have another minute; we do not have time to look at the picture in 37 of the valley of dry bones. In that picture, I don't think anyone thinks that that actually happened at that time. Now it may be a picture of the resurrection that is to occur. If it is a picture, it is a very figurative picture. When I was in college the president of the college taught a class in Bible, and he said, how can there be a resurrection of the body? He said, "Suppose a man is at sea and he falls overboard and he is eaten by a fish and then somebody catches the fish and they eat it - how can those cells ever come together? How can there be a resurrection of the body?" Well, personally I think the body, after the spirit has left it, is like the car you've torn up so you can get a new car. I would never want the same one. Again I don't think that people's physical elements when they are gone from them are of any greater importance than the cuttings of your fingernails or of your hair. You are through with them; they're gone. They have served you beautifully. I think the machine of the body is a wonderful machine that God has given. So it does not seem to me likely that this is a picture of the flesh and bones that have previously been used being brought together.

These dry bones suggest the idea of resurrection certainly, but I believe it is a figurative picture. It is a picture of God's promise that he is going to reestablish that which is as his throne, that he is going to put an end to the misunderstanding, the confusion, the hatred that has come among sinful people but who have known Christ and who were saved, and who were saved by looking forward to what Christ was going to do on the cross. Then He is going to put an end to all the evil and he is going to give us again some kind of body that will be useful to us, a body to reach the world around us. Our first body is a marvelous machine for that purpose, but it doesn't seem to me that it is a literal picture of resurrection. But I believe it is a promise of individual resurrection and also a promise of the reestablishment of Israel as a nation. I think of the measure Judah's wickedness has brought that God is going to have to reestablish it. He has the noble view of a

city that no one will need to preach to its inhabitants because God will put a new spirit in them.

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