

## Allan MacRae, Ezekiel, Lecture 5

In Ezekiel 3:17 the Revised Standard Version (RSV) is, on the whole, a good translation and it is not at all strange that the makers of the NASV had it before them. But in this case, it undoubtedly misled them. Ordinarily, the RSV is a good translation so long as it is not dealing with any matter of great importance. Generally, it's a very careful, scholarly translation. But whenever it deals with a messianic prediction, it will go to any length to get rid of it, even giving some of the most absurd translations. Like in Psalm 2:12 where it says, "Kiss the son, lest he be angry." Well, the RSV says "kiss his feet," instead of "kiss the son." They have a footnote "Hebrew obscure," and yet the very same word "son," a rare word for son but it occurs in one place in the Proverbs, and there they translated it "son". So there is no excuse for their not translating that way in Psalm 2. They do not believe in messianic prophecies, so when they encounter a messianic prophecy, they twist it. But otherwise, they have worked out some very fine scholarly interpretations, and it is not at all strange that the NASV and NIV sometimes get an idea from them and follow it. But in this particular case, the RSV took something that definitely was not in the original and they put that in, and the NASV was misled by them in relation to it.

All that the Hebrew says in Ezekiel 3:17 is 'and'; there is no 'when', there is no 'whenever', there is no 'so', there is no 'therefore'; there is just 'and'. But the Hebrew word "and" is a much broader word than our English word "and." This Hebrew word "and"--in Hebrew-- "v<sup>e</sup>" occurs thousands of times in the Old Testament is translated, "and" in a great many cases. But for instance, in the six chapters of the Book of Daniel (they are in Hebrew), the word is translated "and" a great many times but it is translated "then" (now this is in the King James), twenty-two times, translated "therefore" eleven times, translated "so" nine times, translated "also" eight times, translated "but" seven times, translated "yeah" six times, translated "even" six times, translated "for" twice, translated "that" twice, translated "thus" once, and translated "yet" once. That's just in six chapters. So you can see that the word "and" in Hebrew covers a wide area, much wider than it

does in English. Consequently, there are many cases where it makes it very clear to decide exactly what the context means and use the English word that will fit it, and all translations do that. But in this particular case, the NASV made a translation which has absolutely no warrant because "whenever" gives the idea that whenever God speaks or whenever he doesn't speak Ezekiel is to follow. In the context it seems to me that God is just saying, "What I'm going to say now is of great importance; listen to it and follow." So I do not feel that there is an apparent contradiction between this strong charge given to him to speak and the fact that so few verses after (vss. 24-27) he is told to be quiet and say nothing. So without the word "whenever" in verse 17, there appears to be a contradiction between verse 17 and verse 24.

Now there are two other possible explanations for this apparent contradiction that I think are much better than inserting "whenever" into verse 17 where it does not belong. And one of those, of course, is that Ezekiel was so overwhelmed with fear facing the situation that even though God said to him, "Their blood will be on your hands if you don't do it," he still sat there and did nothing. And so God said, "Alright, come out to the field again and I will give you another view of the glory of God and see if this will wake you up, and then if this doesn't wake you up we'll suggest that you do something else." Well, that does not fit with the picture of Ezekiel that we get in the rest of the book. He was not hesitant to speak.

I personally feel that the correct explanation of it is one that I have already mentioned to you, which not only fits the context, but also gives meaning to the next chapter. It is a meaning, I think, you could get without my interpretation, but becomes more clear when you have this interpretation. I believe, that between these two verses, 3:15 and 16, that right there Ezekiel did what God had ordered. He went out among the people and he spoke to the people and he just poured himself out to them in urging them to turn to the Lord and to do the Lord's will, and to turn from their sins and so on, and that the people got the attitude where they wouldn't listen to him. (A person can get into that sort of situation). And particularly in this situation Ezekiel had a message for the people that they did not want to hear because they felt this was so utterly unpatriotic, for

Isaiah had already said God would protect His city when Sennacherib attacked it and now Ezekiel says that God is not going to protect His city; He is not going to bring the people back to Jerusalem. Instead of that, He is going to destroy it. So under the circumstances when the people won't listen to him anymore, now God gives him something that will make them listen. God uses a different method. And so I will call capital B, "The Unmentioned Period of No Success." It is a gap between verses 15 and 16, but I can't be dogmatic about this. I may be wrong on it, but I think it's very likely since it fits all of the situations.

Then capital C, "The New Procedure." In this situation God gives a new procedure. This new procedure is from 3:22 to 7:27. All of that is closely related together in this section. Under that, number one is "A Period of Silence." The people will not listen to Ezekiel anymore. Now he doesn't say anything, so we will use a different method. That's number one "Period of Silence," 3:22-27.

Then we have number two, "The Object Lesson," 4:1-5:4, and what follows is an object lesson, and here we have something that is completely different from what we have when Ezekiel ate the scroll. When Ezekiel ate the scroll, it was between God and Ezekiel. It represents God getting a message and a great deal of material into Ezekiel's mind and heart. And is it a figurative expression for that? Is it a vision he had? Was it actually a literal experience? We don't know for sure.

But there are a number of commentaries that say that chapter four is a vision that Ezekiel had. Ezekiel then went and told the people that in a vision he made a picture of Jerusalem, laid siege against it, and measured out his food and his water to indicate that there was going to be a great siege of Jerusalem.

A number of commentaries say that, and it makes absolutely no sense at all, in my opinion. We find commentaries that take that position. One commentary I was looking at said that many of Jeremiah's object lessons were simply Jeremiah imagining them and then told the people about them instead of actually doing them, and they said all of Ezekiel's are that way as well. To me, that is utter nonsense. This is the new method that God uses to get the truth across. There's many a man that batters his head against the

stone wall trying to get God's message across when he could go around the stonewall and get the message to the people directly by using a different method.

One time in winter, I was up in northern Pennsylvania, and I wanted to camp for the night. I was told by somebody that there was a hunting cabin where they had a shed in the back of the cabin that was open, and I could get in there out of the wind, the cold, and the snow and sleep for the night. I wanted to do it. I came to the place as it was getting near dark, and I tried to open the door and it wouldn't open. I shoved and I pushed, but I had no success. I thought, "well now, is this locked?" I can't get in but, these people told me it was open and I could get in; it'll be awfully cold if I have to sleep out on the ground in this weather. After I pushed and shoved for quite a while I said, "there must be some other way." I looked and I saw a little a cord hanging down from the upper part, and I reached up and pulled the cord, and that went through to the inside and it pulled up the latch and the door opened. There was a way of doing it that got success. In all Christian works there is always a possibility that there is one way that will bring you immediate success and then there are other ways that you're just jamming your head against the stone wall.

And here there was a situation where God said, "We'll use a different procedure." And so we find in the beginning of verse one, chapter four, that the Lord said, "Now Son of Man take a clay tablet." Now the NIV says "clay tablet," which I don't think is such a good rendering. The Hebrew word is never used for that sort of thing that I know of here in any of the translations I've noticed. But it's a word which occurs a good many times for bricks, like in a brick wall for building a house or something. The King James translates it as "tile." I think of it as something that was perhaps three or four feet across and maybe more or less that square around. It's something sort of a big brick, or tile. God says, "Take this," and he says, "put it in front of you and draw the city of Jerusalem on it." So it was big enough that he could give a representation of the city of Jerusalem, and to do that merely in a vision, what would the sense of that be? It makes sense to do it so that people would look at it so that it would attract their attention. Here are all these people who are longing to go back to Jerusalem as soon as possible. They are hoping to

get back to their homeland. So they are hoping to be freed from captivity and go back there and Jerusalem would be a strong place. They see this picture of Jerusalem showing the various gates and the walls and the features of it. It interests people; it attracts their attention. So he builds this and I would take it literally, when it says "Lay siege to it."

How do you lay siege to a picture when you go through the form of something that represents a siege? So I can imagine Ezekiel as going out into the main square of this old town Tel Aviv. Maybe his house was right on the main square; maybe it was near it. But in the day before we had automobiles, it was quite common in our own country to have people put up exhibits in different places (these may still be used today), and people come by and look at them. If something looks interesting, they stop; if it doesn't, they go on.

I can well imagine that was the situation there and that other people had exhibits up. But Ezekiel puts this tile, or this representation of Jerusalem, down and people come by and they say to their child, "Well look, there's Jerusalem. There's the Dung gate. There's the Sheep gate, and over there, that's where I used to live, and you see these different things; isn't that interesting?" So here's this sizeable picture on the ground of Jerusalem and it attracts attention.

Obviously about that crazy fellow that comes to us giving us these wild messages they said, "I wouldn't bother with him." Someone says, "You shouldn't say anything now? Why worry about what he might say; look at the picture he's got there isn't that interesting?" So they come by they look at it, and they find Ezekiel lying down beside it, and they find him holding up an iron skillet or something in front of him as if he's protecting himself from people throwing stones at him from the city. So he is going through the motions of making an attack on the city. As for all the people-- they don't believe this foolishness that Jerusalem's going to be attacked; God's going to protect it, they assume. But it's interesting to see the picture where the child says, "What's the man doing? What's he doing?" "Oh, he's doing some fool thing, representing cities he's going to be besieging. We don't believe that's going to happen, but look at the picture, isn't it interesting?" And so he attracts attention without offending people or driving them away.

He shows us this picture and he goes through the motions of this, and then he's told, "Lie on your left side; I'll put the sin of the house of Israel on you. You're to bear their sin for the number of days you lie on your side. I've assigned you the same number of days as the years of their sin. So for 390 days you will bear the sin of the house of Israel." Now, how is 390 years, the years of Israel's sin counted? We don't know. We don't know what it refers to specifically. But then after he's done that we read again, "This time on your right side and bear the sin of the house of Judah. I've assigned you 40 days a day for each year." Now, why is Israel 390 days and Judah 40 days? We don't know. It's interesting that 390 and 40 makes 430, and we were told that that's the number of years that the Israelites were in Egypt. We are told that so it fits with that number that we got earlier. But the exact interpretation, we don't know.

But he would lie there on his left side and God said he would put ropes around him so he couldn't move. I would think that's probably meaning God would enable him to lie perfectly still. So nobody gets frightened that he was going to get up and start rebuking the people for their sin or anything, he was just lying there, holding up this pan as if he were going to be put under siege. And he probably puts up a sign, "day 1," because nobody would count the days, how many days he had lain there? In fact, I doubt if it actually means he was to lie there for 390 days. His visions began the 5<sup>th</sup> month of the 5<sup>th</sup> year, and his next experience begins in the 6<sup>th</sup> month of the next year. Now, 430 days would run just short of 14 months, not 13 months from the fifth month of one year thru the sixth month of the next year unless both end months were counted inclusively. So some say, "Oh, that doesn't fit. It's impossible, it must be a vision, just imagined it." I don't think so, but I think that he didn't, necessarily sit there actually 390 days. After maybe 3 hours he changed the sign to "Day 2 of the sin of Israel," and then when he gets to the 350<sup>th</sup> maybe, he puts up another sign "Day 1 of the sin of the house of Judah." Whether he did that or did that after, whether he had 2 days or 3 or 4, how he did it, I don't know; perhaps it varied. But he has these signs designating the number of days, and it's all for arousing people's interest.

Then as we go on, we find that we read in chapter 4 verse 9, "Take wheat and

barley, beans and lentils, millet and spelt; put them in a container and make bread for yourself. You're to eat it during the 390 days you lie on your side. Weigh out 20 shekels of food (about half a pound), to eat each day all together. Eat it at set times." People would look as he would chop it up: "What's the man doing? Look, what's he doing?" "Well he's cooking his food." "Why is he measuring it out that way, look he's just taking a little bit of it." "Well, it must represent something. Probably means he's saying that Jerusalem's going to get into a situation where they don't have much food, where they have to measure it out little by little." His actions aroused people's interest. People themselves would guess as to what it meant. So Ezekiel begins to get the message across and they begin to look at him, not as a common scold that causes a lot of misery, but as a man who's doing interesting things. The people say, "Well, of course, we don't believe that that's going to happen to Jerusalem, that they're going to be scarce on food; we don't believe that. But still it's interesting how he illustrates it."

Now somebody spoke of his having to eat unclean food. Now what's unclean about wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet or spelt? I'm not sure; I don't know anything that could be unclean or wrong with those. I don't remember any scriptural place where any of them is said to be unclean. What it represents is scarcity of food during the siege that he's suggesting is going to come to Jerusalem. So he weighs out this little bit each day, and also measures out little bits of water every so often, and he measures it carefully, so the suggestion is that there's going to be a time when they have practically no water, and you have to measure it out.

The Lord says it this way, "The people of Israel will eat the defiled food among the nations where I will drive them." But just before the Lord said that, he said, "Eat the food as you would a barley cake; bake it in the sight of the people using human excrement for fuel." Right there Ezekiel protests, "Then I said, 'Not so Sovereign Lord! I have never defiled myself. From my youth until now I have never eaten anything found dead or torn by wild animals. No unclean meat has ever entered my mouth'" (Ezek. 4:14). Well there's no mention of his having any meat there. No unclean meat had ever entered his mouth, and there was a limit to what he could stand to do. And the Lord says,

"Very well, I will let you bake your bread over cow manure instead of human excrement." The people speak about how he hasn't eaten defiled food. Well, I don't remember where in the Scripture it speaks of the kind of fuel you use, but it would have been a very disagreeable experience for him to use human excrement. I think the Lord showed his mercy and he showed his kindness. When the situation was brought so clearly before him, the situation was lack of food, lack of most everything, having just a little fuel, a little water, having to measure out when the Lord gave him the command, and Ezekiel found it very displeasing, and the Lord said, "Well, we will let you do it an easier way."

Now, in the days of the people crossing the plains, the so-called Western Migration on the American plains where there were no trees and no fuel people used buffalo chips for their fuel. I found that in the east that cow manure is often used for fuel. I've never seen it done, but it would bring out more clearly the fact that there is going to be a time where Jerusalem would be in tremendous deprivation, tremendous difficulty because of the great siege that is ahead.

Well, Ezekiel goes ahead, and he represents these "mute shows" you might say that he was going to go through. The Lord has closed his mouth; he's not to speak, but he attracts the people's interest and attention by what he does. He gets them to thinking better of him, to be more willing to listen to him.

Then in the beginning of chapter 5 he says, "Take a sharp sword and use it as a barber's razor to shave your head and your beard. Then take a set of scales and divide up the hair." You can imagine cutting his hair and his beard and dividing it up with a scale into three parts. "You burn a third of the hair with fire inside of the city, you take a third and strike it with a sword all around the city, and scatter a third to the wind indicating the fate of the people in the city when the great siege comes." (Ezek. 5:3) And then he goes and he gives the message to the people about how this is going to happen. By this time people are doubtless asking him questions, and he begins giving the Lord's message. The people are not closing their ears to him; more of them are ready to listen, and gradually he gets a following among the people.

Now, I asked you for the assignment today to look at chapter 6, verse 11. I have here a little book on Ezekiel published by the InterVarsity press, written by John B. Taylor, a discussion of Ezekiel, and it has some very good things in it. I think that it is a godly discussion of Ezekiel. But I think Mr. Taylor has read too many modernist commentaries and discussions, particularly those that talk about source criticism and redaction criticism.

I think this because when you come to this particular verse, he has a statement that seems to be about as nonsensical as I can imagine, but probably it was in one of the modernist commentaries he looked at. He says, "A fresh oracle is introduced with a formula, 'Thus says the Lord God.' It is a kind of triumph song at the vindication of God's honor and judgment. Clapping the hand and stamping the foot were gestures of scornful delight more attuned to the Ammonites of Ezekiel's time than to the Christian reader of today. The triumph song was however a literary device in Hebrew poetry which could even be put into the mouth of God without any sense of inappropriateness." He continues, "Perhaps in keeping with the style of the triumph song, the phrase, 'Say Alas' should properly be rendered, 'Say Hoorah'." What Taylor says has no relevance to the whole situation and this idea was probably originated by someone who says this part of Ezekiel was written 100 years later by this particular redactor or something.

When you read 6:11 in the light of the context, it is of course perfectly clear what it means, that God has now been telling Ezekiel to give the message. He said in the beginning of chapter 6, "Set your face against the mountains of Israel; prophesy against them and say, 'O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Sovereign God.'" (Ezek. 6:2) By this time Ezekiel is so used to being so quiet that he needs a little bit more "umph" in him. He needs to say his message in a way that will attract attention and reach a larger crowd, and so he said, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says, 'Strike your hands together and stamp your feet and cry out 'Alas!' because of all the wicked and detestable practices of the house of Israel, for they will fall by the sword, famine and plague.'" God says to Ezekiel, " Speak 'till we know they'll hear you. Stamp your foot. Clap your hands. Get their attention."

I think it's a good public speaking lesson that God inserted into what he gave Ezekiel and he kept it in the Scripture in order to lead us to get the example of finding ways of getting the message across; finding effective ways and of getting a variety of gestures and force in what we present so that people are ready and willing to listen to us. To call it "a triumph song" in this context is utter nonsense. But it is the Lord telling Ezekiel, just as before the Lord was helping Ezekiel, to make the situation be less unpleasant for him and yet could still represent the figure he wanted to give of how short they would be on fuel. So the Lord made it easier on Ezekiel, but now he says, "Now you're too quiet. Now you want to stamp your feet and clap your hands and get your word across." I wish I could get that in to all of our graduates that they should speak in a way that would attract attention and hold attention; their work is going to be many times as effective that way. So in this book of Ezekiel, God has inserted what I think are tremendously useful emphases to help us all in our service to the Lord.

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