

Allan MacRae, Isaiah 7-12: Lecture 4

This is lecture 4 delivered by Dr. Allan MacRae at Biblical Theological Seminary on Isaiah 7-12:

Now I want to say a few words about the assignment for today. There was much variety in the answers, as would be expected. Most of these assignments are not a test on how well you can do anything but they are intended to get you into the problem, to get you to try to see what you can do with it, and to get the problems in your mind so that then we can discuss them intelligently together. Now in this course there is one thing we can all agree on: that chapters 7-12 are one unit. We don't have time in this class to look at what follows and precedes to see evidence for that, but it is definitely one unit. Perhaps on the scale we were using you would need 4 lines before and after chapters 7-12, then within that area there are many short sections, some of which belong rather closely together. So there are many places where we could make a small division, but knowing where the larger division should be made is not easy. I think the archbishop did one of the worst jobs he did in the Bible in this section, chapters 7-12, because there is only one of the chapter divisions which seems to be reasonably placed. Just briefly we will glance at that now.

You will notice that in chapter 7 we are reading about the attack being made by the people from Samaria and from Damascus and how God is going to protect Judah from them. However, Ahaz has gotten the King of Assyria to come and deliver Judah from them instead. Isaiah said to Ahaz in Chapter 7 verse 16 that, "before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste." Then, in chapter 8 verse 4, he says that, "before the boy knows how to say my father or my mother, the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria." So we have chapter 7 and the first part of chapter 8 very tightly bound together. There is certainly a minor division between chapter 7 and

chapter 8, but I'm not at all sure it's any more important than the other divisions within chapter 7. I hope that we will get time to go into chapter 8 in detail by the end of the hour.

But I want now to look further on to the beginning of chapter 9. You have, I think, at the beginning of verse 19 in chapter 8, a break that is far more important than the break between chapters 8 and 9. Temporarily we have left Damascus, Samaria, and Assyria behind, and we are moving into a different area in verse 19. "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?" Then you have an account of the punishment God is bringing to His erring people. "Distressed and hungry they will roam through the land." They look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness. There's gloom, there's distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but the people walking in darkness are going to see a great light. So at verse 19 there is a very important break, but at the beginning of chapter 9 there is a very slight break. If you look up any of the verses of chapter 9 in the Hebrew Bible, you will find the numbers are different from those in your English versions, because the people who transferred the verse divisions from the Latin Bible to the Hebrew Bible felt that, where it says in verse 2, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light," that that was the place to start chapter 9 (not after the verse before which speaks about gloom and distress and humbling). So in the Hebrew Bible chapter 9 starts a verse later. Actually it shouldn't start at either of the two places. It should start a few verses earlier because we are right in the middle of a transition here. There is a much more important break earlier and a far more important break at the end of verse 7 of chapter 9. I think most everybody thought that there is no substantial break at the beginning of verse 10. The archbishop certainly was asleep when he made that break there.

As I believe most of you noticed, there is a series of four stanzas making one poem, each of which ends with a refrain. One begins in chapter 9 verse 8, and in verse 12 it says, "Yet for all this his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised." Then you

have another stanza which in verse 17 ends with, “Yet for all this his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.” Then another which ends in verse 21 with, “Yet for all this his anger is not turned away and his hand is still upraised,” and finally another which ends in chapter 10 verse 4 with, “Yet for all this his anger is not turned away his hand is still upraised.” So it’s very obvious that you have there a section of four stanzas together, yet he made a chapter of this just at the beginning of the third. You have a connected section there.

Then a new subject begins in verse 5 of chapter 10, “Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my name,” and that continues on and when you come to the end of the chapter you have the Lord destroying the Assyrian empire. He will cut down the forest thickets with an ax and Lebanon will fall before the mighty one, with the great forest of Lebanon standing as a figure for the mighty Assyrian empire that is going to perish. But the next verse says, in contrast to this great Assyrian empire that perishes forever, “that a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit.” So you have the sharp contrast between the last verse of chapter 10 and the first verse of chapter 11. There certainly is a minor break there, because you have the contrast between the destruction and failure of Assyria and the fact that from little Israel, from out of that, is going to come the one who is going to change the condition of the whole world. So while the first verses of chapter 9 and chapter 11 are so very important, and it’s rather nice for us to have them be the beginning of the chapter, yet if we don’t realize that it’s not a major division we lose the progress of thought and their close relationship to what precedes. Of course, at the beginning of verse 12 we have a prayer of praise which goes through the chapter, so I think the archbishop did a good job with that particular point.

So much for this summary of the division. The thing I want to get across is that, in studying any part of the Bible, the verse divisions and chapter divisions can be of very great convenience to find a place quickly; they are extremely valuable for that. But if you are reading almost any chapter, Old or New Testament, I think you are very wise to look at a little bit of the chapter before and a little bit of the chapter after. In Hebrews, for

instance, practically every chapter begins “therefore,” and you could consider the first verse of almost every chapter of Hebrews either a conclusion of what precedes or of what follows. But if you divide them into separate units you lose a great deal of the meaning of each.

Now we have been noticing in chapter 7 these two major emphases: the emphasis on the security of the people and the emphasis on the promise to David, that promise of the righteous king. This is a promise that seemed to have failed since there was such a king as Ahaz, but it’s a promise which he is assured will be carried out. There are two aspects to this promise. There is God’s determination to punish and chastise those who err, those who do not follow him as they should. But there is also the promise that God’s mercy will not be far, that God is going to give deliverance, that he is going to give ultimate complete establishment of righteousness. Those who follow him truly are going to find that everything turns out well in the end. We have both of these themes, you might say, brought out in the section you looked at in chapters 36 and 37. We have the land subjected to the terrible attack from the Assyrians, with all the large cities except Jerusalem captured. Jerusalem was never besieged at this time, but Jerusalem knew that the other cities were taken, that the Assyrian armies were moving back and forth through the land, and no one dared go very far outside the walls for perhaps 3 years. They could go out to their fields long enough to quickly pick whatever they could that had grown of itself, while keeping a lookout lest the Assyrians soldiers be seen approaching. After constantly expecting that great force, which had broken down the walls of all their other cities, to come and attack Jerusalem, God miraculously delivered them. So we have in this section this marvelous deliverance to which we are looking forward, though not so specifically mentioned as it is later.

Now we have, then, constant rebuke for iniquity and a promise that God is going to protect his people, that God is going to work out his righteousness in the end. He is going to give this marvelous deliverance to Jerusalem so that Jerusalem lasts for more than a century longer than Samaria does before it is finally taken; and then it is not taken

by the Assyrians but by the Babylonians.

Now we have looked at everything in chapter 7 really except three verses. Three verses we have touched upon. They are found throughout the section. The two main emphases which we found, particularly in chapter 7, were the security of the people and the promise about the righteous king. Those are the two; and then the first of them you might say has two aspects: the punishment of his people when they go astray but the ultimate victory that he promises. Now they're found throughout but they are emphasized in chapter 7.

Now, in chapter 7 these three verses, verses 14 to 16, we have not looked at closely. I was a little disappointed that there was only one paper turned in to me that raised the question about these three verses, because these three verses present a very serious problem and I am pleased when you note any really serious problems enough to raise a question about it in a paper. But the great problem in these three verses, of course, is that the first verse clearly is a prediction of the virgin birth of Christ and yet verses 15 and 16 so very definitely refer to the immediate situation. Of course those who insist that there is no prophecy of Christ say, "What comfort would it be for Ahaz to have this sign about the virgin birth?" Of course, God is not choosing to comfort Ahaz; he's rebuking Ahaz. But he is comforting the people by giving them the assurance that the house of David will not always be represented by such an unworthy representative as Ahaz; rather that God's own chosen Emmanuel, the son of David, is coming and coming in a miraculous way.

Now in the immediate situation, verse 15 seems to have a very definite relationship. It says, "He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, but before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste." If it says before Christ reaches the age where he has intelligence enough to reach for the warm milk instead of the hot stove, then these two kings disappeared 700 years before the time of Christ. It doesn't seem to have much relevance in that case. There have been

commentators that said that the state in which he will eat curds and honey is a picture of the simple life of our Lord. But we have nothing in the New Testament to suggest that that is what it refers to, and when we look further on in the chapter we find, in verse 22, that all who will remain in the land will eat curds and honey. There will be plenty of pastoral products because the land will be open for the cows and for the bees to freely roam, while there will not be enough people to do much cultivation. There will be a condition of depopulation, a condition of devastation which came as a result of the Assyrian invasions. So verses 15 and 16 refer right back, it would seem, to the immediate situation.

Here we have a problem, a very definite problem. Now some try to get around it by what they call double fulfillment. I do not believe there is such a thing as double fulfillment. If we say ‘there will be great invasions’ then this is plural. There may be two, or three, or six; we don’t know how many. We are giving a plural prediction. But when we say that David became king we are giving a specific event. There is no double fulfillment to it when we say that God picked Saul to be king or that Samuel told Saul he would become king. It refers to one specific event. When we make a prediction which is not a general statement but is a prediction of a specific event, it describes one thing. And if you are going to say, “Well, it has two or three different fulfillments,” it leaves you without much solid ground on which to stand. We have to make a sharp distinction if we think it is giving a principle, because a principle can be fulfilled in many situations. But a specific prediction such as the virgin birth has one fulfillment. Some have tried to say this is the prediction of the birth of Hezekiah, but the evidence is quite strong that Hezekiah is already at least 5 years old at this time. When Isaiah spoke with his father Ahaz, this is definitely not a prediction of the birth of Hezekiah. We have no evidence of any virgin birth at that time to whom this could refer; neither do we have any way in which verses 15 and 16 can refer to Christ. Verse 14 refers to Christ; verses 15 and 16 refer to the immediate situation. Now how do you make the transition?

If you say double fulfillment, that this refers both to Christ and to that time, then

verses 15 and 16 certainly don't refer to the time of Christ. By the time he reached the age of making simple choices, the land of the two kings would be laid waste.

Personally I feel, as a number of commentators do, that what happens is that he speaks of the coming one whom God is going to send without giving any indication of when he is coming. We know he is going to come. We don't know when he is going to come. Then we take his life as an imaginary measuring stick. In other words, we don't know when this virgin birth will occur, but if it were to occur during the present year, then before that time these things would pass. I incline personally very strongly toward that interpretation of the relationship of these two verses with verse 14.

Now there is one other suggestion I have heard made that I would not say is wrong. It seems to me to be a possibility, though I like this one better. When he says 'he' will eat curds and honey, in English that word 'he' is a separate word. But in Hebrew it is merely a part of the verb. There is no definite "he" at all and it could certainly be that "he" is to be understood as Isaiah's son who is with him, the son whose name means 'a remnant will return,' whose name suggests that there is going to be devastation. So there will be only a remnant and then Isaiah points toward the boy beside him and says, "he will eat curds and honey when he reaches a certain age." He says this before the boy, and points to the boy, his son who is with him, and his son who is with him then and there is the measuring stick. Therefore, the change is from Christ to the son who is there, and you might say that he points in that direction during this shift. Now that is a possibility. I personally like the other one better, that he thinks of Christ's age as if he were born now and he gives you a period of time.

Yes, it is not simple by any means; it is a difficult problem. I think we should recognize that it is a problem. But I do not see any escape as Isaiah 7 takes verse 14 as a prediction of the virgin birth of Christ; I think that the quotation by the angel in the book of Matthew, or even if it's simply Matthew's quotation, makes it absolutely certain that verse 14 refers to Christ. Now if we take verses 15 and 16 in light of the rest of the chapter, I don't see any way to escape their referring, not to Christ, but to the immediate

situation in Isaiah's day. And so my personal preference is to think he means that we don't know when Christ will come, but if he were to come now, then before he would reach this age these things will happen. So we use it as a measuring stick to show what will happen in the very near future. That is the interpretation that I prefer. The other one isn't impossible; after all, why did he bring Shear-Jashub along? Was it just for his name, or is there a little more importance to it? But I prefer the first, although I don't think the second is at all impossible.

| Yes, that was Isaiah's son who is mentioned in verse 1, when the Lord told him to take Shear-Jashub his son in verse 3. He said, "Take your son who has this name, 'a remnant will return.'"

It is a sign to God's people. It is a sign to God's people that the house of David won't have to put up with such as Ahaz forever, and it is a sign that Ahaz's clever scheme to deliver the land is actually going to bring trouble rather than deliverance. That's right, the angel did not quote verses 15 or 16, just 14 in Matthew 1.

Yes, but we want to be very careful about arguments from silence. The fact that a verse is quoted and he stops there means that we don't have a New Testament guarantee that the next verse also applies to that time; but it doesn't prove that it doesn't, either. In that case, where Jesus stops in the quotation, some say that's the first coming up to that point and the second coming from there on. I think if you read it closely, that's quite questionable; but that's another area we'd better not get into.

Now, I think that we have covered the main matters in chapter 7 and these matters continue for a few verses into chapter 8. "The Lord said to me." Now, I think I would guess that verse 1 of chapter 8 comes very very soon after what preceded in chapter 7. We are not told that it did, but it would seem to me from the situation that it did. "The Lord said to me, 'Take....'" Well, this word which the NIV translates 'a large scroll,' is a word which occurs very seldom in the Hebrew, and we are not sure exactly what it means. Some people think of it as meaning a tablet or a stone monument or something like that. Just exactly what it was we don't know, but it was somewhere that it could

easily be seen as Isaiah was to write on it in plain letters the words ‘Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz,’ which is the Hebrew for “hasten the booty, hurry the spoil.”

So he puts this sign up. Ahaz is telling his nobles secretly that the Assyrians will come soon, that we’ll be perfectly safe, that we have nothing to worry about; but Isaiah asks Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberekiah who is not the author of the biblical book Zechariah but another Zechariah, to note the fact that, at this time, I have put up this sign. There is trouble ahead; there is difficulty; but a remnant will return. In the meantime, hasten the booty, hurry the spoil.

“Then I went to a prophetess and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the Lord said to me, ‘Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. Before the boy knows how to say *avi* and *emi*,’” the two first sounds that the child is apt to make, daddy and mommy, “before then, the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria.” This is an earlier point than the other boy, you see. The other boy reaches the ability to make simple choices before this point happens. And then we have a small break at the end of verse 4, of course. But here the Lord then speaks to him, and gives a rebuke for the people of the land, mingled with the assurance of God’s continued blessing; rebuke for turning away from God but assurance of continued blessing to God’s people. Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah (in the New Testament there is no SH sound so it makes it Siloam. The pool of Siloam has nothing to do with the Old Testament city of Shiloh, of course.) This people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah (a figure for God’s messages through his prophets and his people), and rejoices over the Rezin and the son of Remaliah of Damascus.

Now, who are the people who are rejoicing over Rezin and the son of Remaliah? Most commentators think these are the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and now God is punishing them. Some think that he refers to the people in the Southern Kingdom of Judah who are turning against Ahaz and think they should support Rezin. I think that the first is the more likely of the two, but probably has the whole people of Israel to some extent in view; that the people of both the Northern and Southern

Kingdoms, instead of listening to the quiet voice of God and looking to him for their protection, are instead using these various human expediences to gain their protection. Therefore the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty flood waters of the river. Now this term ‘the river’ is often used to mean the greatest river in that part of the world, the river Euphrates. It is used here as a figure of great power, a figure for the great force of the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria with all his power will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks, and sweep into Judea, swirling over it and passing through it and reaching up to its neck. Its outspread wings will cover the breadth, not of *the* land, but of *your* land.

Then the next word says, “God with us” or Emmanuel. And most translators insert “O” because he says “your land” and then he says “God with us.” We’ve already been told about the birth of Emmanuel so it’s quite a reasonable conjecture that here Isaiah turns to Emmanuel and recognizes that, though Ahaz is ruling over the land, he is a very degenerate representative of the house of David. It really is Emmanuel who is the true ruler and this is Emmanuel’s land. Even though God permits the Assyrians to overrun the land and brings this punishment for the sins of the people, yet it is Emmanuel’s land.

So you see another reason why this chapter is tightly bound with the previous one. We read there of the birth of Emmanuel, the coming birth, but here we see that Emmanuel is one who is already in existence. He is the true son of David. This is his land and even though the Assyrians run over it there cannot be permanent lasting destruction because it’s Emmanuel’s land. Then he turns and speaks to the nations under the control of the Assyrians as they come and make their eventual attack in verse 30, which they think will result in the destruction of Jerusalem. He says, “Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered. Listen all you distant lands. Prepare for battle and be shattered. Devise your strategy but it will be thwarted. Propose your plan but it will not stand, for Emmanuel --now the NIV translates Emmanuel-- for “God is with us.” Of course in both cases you can translate it “God is with us” or you can transliterate it as “Emmanuel,” both are true. God is with them. This is Emmanuel’s land. Since it is

Emmanuel's land, God is protecting it and watching over it and even Sennacherib's mighty power will not be able to take Jerusalem, because God will miraculously intervene.

As it continues there he is still speaking to the people, so many of whom have turned away from God; and he says, "Do not call conspiracy everything these people call conspiracy." Do not fear what they fear. Do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy. He is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread. He will be a sanctuary. You don't need to try to get the Assyrians to come and protect you. You don't need to look to these human expedencies. God has promised to protect you and he will do it. If you don't trust in him you will not be established, but he will be a sanctuary that is understood to all those who put their trust in him. Isaiah continues, 'but for both houses of Israel' so it's a good reason to think he's thinking of both the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. "But for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will slumber; they will fall and be broken; they will be snared and captured."

At the end of verse 15 of chapter 8 there is a minor break. There is a minor break, not a major one. Up to that point he has been speaking about the way God is going to bring misery on those who are not following the Lord, on those who are not seeking to do his will, on those who are seeking the human expedience instead of trusting in the Lord. As he sees the dark days coming under Ahaz he says, "Bind up the testimony and seal up the law among my disciples. I will wait for the Lord. Who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob? I will put my trust in him who speaks." Does Isaiah speak there or is it Emmanuel, whom we have had referred to twice already in the chapter, speak there? Emmanuel is certainly already the Lord of the land. Emmanuel is God's own King. This is Emmanuel's land; that's why the Assyrians can't completely destroy it. This is Emmanuel's land and Emmanuel may be speaking; or is it Isaiah as Emmanuel's representative speaking on Emmanuel's behalf. So he says in verse 18, "Here am I and

the children the Lord has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord Almighty who dwells on Mount Zion.” So here Emmanuel is speaking through Isaiah; he is giving a principle which was true there, that Isaiah and his followers were keeping alive the true message of God even though so much of the land was turning away from God. They are God’s representatives, he and the followers that God has given him, but it is Emmanuel working through Isaiah.

And so we find in the book of Hebrews, in the second chapter and the thirteenth verse, that these words of Emmanuel are quoted. It says there, “So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers;” then at the end of verse 11 he says, “I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praise.” That is quoted from the 22nd Psalm, that marvelous prediction of Jesus’ crucifixion and of the glory that should follow. Then he says, “And again I will put my trust in him.” Which is exactly the last part of verse 17: I will put my trust in him. And again he says, “Here am I, and the children God has given me.” So the author of the book of Hebrews is justified in quoting these statements as statements by Christ, by Emmanuel, the pre-existing Christ who was working through Isaiah and was in them expressing a principle -- a principle which was exemplified as Isaiah and his little band of followers kept alive the knowledge of God in a nation that was turning away from him to so great an extent. It was exemplified as the followers of Christ went out into all the world to carry the message of salvation.

In the midst of a wicked world God has never promised that, by the gospel, we are going to conquer the whole world. But he has promised that through the gospel we can bring a message of salvation that will reach many, and that he will be with us to save many out of this wicked world. So Emmanuel can say through each one of us, as he said through Isaiah, that if we can put our trust in the Lord; we can look to God to give us followers who will join with us in standing for God.

At the end of chapter 8 verse 18 I feel that there is a rather important break, because in what follows we do not have direct reference to these previous situations. But

we have a warning, first against spiritism; a warning against the practice, doubtless widespread then and certainly widespread in our day, of consulting mediums and spirits in order to try to find what is going to happen in the future. “Should not a people inquire of their God?” he says. “Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word they have no light of dawn.” Then from there, the next few verses show a condition of distress and misery, a condition of suffering. “Distressed and hungry they roamed through the land.” When they are famished, they become enraged, and looking upward they curse their king and their God. Now some take ‘look upward’ as meaning they cease what is wrong and look upward; others take it as ‘no matter what direction you look, you see nothing but misery.’”

When you get to chapter 9, verse 1, you find that there is a difference of translation as to whether God will glorify Galilee of the Gentiles or he will more greatly distress Galilee and the Gentiles. Of course, both of them are true. Galilee of the Gentiles, the area in the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, is the area in the Northern Kingdom into which the Assyrian armies first came, that area in which the darkness first came by the Assyrian attack and conquest. In that very area he says, “The people walking in darkness are going to see a great light,” and the New Testament says that the great light came first in that area because that’s where Jesus began his preaching. Matthew 4:15-16 quotes this passage as fulfilled in Christ.

Well I think I will stop for today.

This is lecture 4 delivered by Dr. Allan MacRae at Biblical Theological Seminary on Isaiah 7-12:

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