

Allan MacRae, Isaiah 7-12, Lecture 5

This is lecture 5 delivered by Dr. Allan MacRae at Biblical Theological Seminary on Isaiah 7-12:

Now we were looking last time at Isaiah 8 and we noticed how the beginning of chapter 8 is very closely tied to the previous chapter. It is dealing with the same situation at least through verse 10 and very possibly through 18. In verse 19 a new section starts, certainly it is somewhere around there, probably right there that the archbishop should have started in his new chapter. There we have the prophet warning against, trying to get guidance from weegie boards, astrology and mediums and other such means. He says that we should consult the Lord for our guidance, and should not look to all of these esoteric sources. If they don't speak according to this word of God they have no light from God.

Then he goes on to show the fate of those people in Israel who would not look to the Lord for their guidance and would not follow his will. Their fate was made clear to them, and he shows the terrible fate they must go through. Of course he is specifically, speaking of the people of Israel but the principle applies to all people at all times.

It is pretty hard between verse 20 and the seventh verse of the next chapter; it's pretty hard to know where to make the break because the division is so gradual, as you have the picture of the darkness and then the coming of the light. The rabbis felt that the archbishop made a mistake, in making the division where he did, and so in the Hebrew Bibles you find that chapter 9 starts with what is verse two in your English Bible. It is true, that if you are going to make a break between chapter 8 and chapter 9 then the logical place to make it would be after verse one, but verse one does lead, very naturally into verse two although not near as naturally as it follows verse 22 of the previous chapter. It leads rather naturally into it and so we are justified in saying that there is one continuous picture here of darkness and gloom. This gloom reaching a climax with the coming of the Assyrian armies, who first enter the land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, a section of Galilee, which was neighboring the other countries and which was spoken of as "Galilee of the nations," or "Galilee of the Gentiles." That was where the darkness first

began to be most bad. Right there in that section, where the darkness was first so great, there he says, light is going to start to come. "The people walking in darkness will see a great light" (Isa. 9:2).

Now we are justified in interpreting in that way. It would be possible that if the end of verse one of chapter 9 ends a section and that verse two began a new section, it would be possible if we just had the Old Testament. But in the New Testament we have the two verses quoted continuously, in such a way as to give us the inspired interpretation that between the last part of chapter 8 and the first part of chapter 9 there is no break, that there is continuous progress to there.

No, the meaning of chapter 8 verse 19 is that we should not look to mediums or spirits for truth. It is not at all impossible that a medium of a spirit might tell us something that is true that we didn't know. But it is equally possible that a lying spirit would speak through them and mislead us and give us something false. I had an uncle who was quite ill; he was visiting us in California when he was very ill. His wife was in Montana and she was not a believer. She went to a spiritist who did not know her, who did not know anything about her as far as we know. She went there looking for counsel and as soon as she came in the room, the medium said "oh there's pain, there's pain", and pointed to the very spot where her husband had this cancer. Pointing to the very spot she displayed knowledge that a human being could not have known, by ordinary means. She said "oh terrible pain" But she said "I don't see any death." and three months later he was dead from the cancer. In other words there was the possibility that the spirit was speaking through the medium or by psychological transfer of some sort which we do not know but which may exist. There was the possibility of knowing present facts but no possibility of predicting the future with any certainty. We are warned here, we are not told that these means may not give you truth but we are warned that a Christian should not use them. They might give you truth but they also might give you error. They might be a lying spirit, just like dreams. God spoke to the apostles in dreams he spoke in the Old Testament through dreams. When we have a dream it may convey some meaning to us or it may be the result of something we ate yesterday, or it may be demon trying to

mislead us. We should get our guidance from Scripture only that is the teaching of these two verses.

Now in the English the “they” in Isa. 8:20 would seem to be probably talking of someone mentioned before, in an English sentence, as similarly in the verses about Emmanuel about the virgin birth, where it said “he.” We would think it was referring to something before but there is a good thing to know about the Hebrew, that in the Hebrew the verb is third singular, third masculine singular, third feminine singular, or third common plural, and that is merely the verb. They may use a pronoun to emphasize, and if they use a pronoun to emphasize it in the Hebrew, there must be some reason for that pronoun. But when they simply use the verb it is the action that is spoken of and it would be most usual that the one referred to would be one previously spoken of but not necessarily, if they would speak it could just as well be translated in English, “speaking should be done in a certain way” as it can also be impersonal. It can be a definite reference to those just spoken of. It is merely a verb, there is no actual “they,” there is just the understanding that it is third plural. You see the point there?

That is I think it is very important to realize that in Hebrew and Greek there are a great many matters that are important in our understanding of the Scripture that we don’t emphasize in class much we simply learn the principles of the language. But we get these into our system and then when we read something in the Hebrew or Greek we automatically know these things. Thus the value is not the ability to figure out some very involved difficult questions that is a real value, but the greater value is that so many common things about a language that are different from ours are obvious to anybody who knows much about it. I’ve often heard people say, “why should I spend time learning Hebrew and Greek? I can’t expect to make a better translation than these Greek scholars who have translated the Bible.” Well we don’t expect you to be able to make it as good a translation or even half as good as the great scholars who have made most of the translations we have. But if you know the language you immediately see that there are some things that are very definite in the original, that are extremely hard to make definite in the English and there are certain things that are indefinite in the original where we

have to render with a definite statement in the English. And so this "they" I would think it would be people in general, "if people do not speak according to this word, they have not light of dawn" (Isa. 8:20).

Of course he is talking specifically of the Israelites, but the general principle applies to all people. I read a book I happened to pick up once in a modernist or liberal book store and saw a book there called "How to become a bishop without being religious." It was written by a Methodist minister. I just opened the book at random and I read this statement, "if you want your people to like you, very often in your sermon, make the statement 'the Bible says' then after you say it, they'll all nod and say that's wonderful and you can go on and say anything you want after that because they won't know anything about what the Bible actually says." And that is the case in modern churches, the people have a feeling that the Bible is right but they've never been taught the Bible and they have never studied it themselves and they'll take anything somebody says, and they'll take it more readily if he says "the Bible says." But Isaiah says, "if they do not speak according to God's word they have no light of dawn." They are false leaders leading people astray, if they are not speaking according to the word. Of course the word makes many things very very clear and there are many points at which there can be differences of opinion. God wants us to search out those matters that are clear.

The New Testament quotes Isa. 8:23 from the Hebrew which is 9:1 in English. The Hebrew divides chapter 8 by adding 8:23 whereas the archbishop put the chapter division after 8:22 in Latin and subsequently in English. So 8:23 in Hebrew is the same as 9:1 in English and 9:1 in Hebrew is 9:2 in English and so forth. The archbishop probably had in his mind that quotation in Matthew 4:15 and 16. This New International Version has many very good features, but one thing I don't like about it is that wherever the New Testament quotes the Old, they have a footnote, but they don't have a footnote in the Old Testament referring to the New. So unless I have it in front of me I often don't remember and I think there was no reference either way. I think it's good to put it in where they do, but they ought to do it in both ways. Then we would see it in connection with the Sermon on the Mount. That was the beginning of our Lord's preaching and he

brought the light first in the very area where the darkness of the Assyrian invasion first came. So Isaiah says “where the darkness begins to descend on this terrible coming of these warriors with the garments rolled in blood and the booted steps of the warriors,” where the first great approach of the darkness that results humanly speaking because of Ahaz’s cleaver scheme, where that begins that is where the light is going to begin, where upon them the light will first shine.

Well the spiritual blank was already there and of course that was already all through the land but history is mentioning specifically the place where darkness had come from the Assyrian invasion. The physical darkness which was the result of the spiritual darkness which is God's punishment of the spiritual darkness, was already there. And so it mentions that area of where the Assyrian invasion began, "the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali and Galilee of the Gentiles" (Isa. 9:1).

Now there was a paper turned into me last week that said, "I have a question coming out of today’s class, Isaiah 9:1 Isaiah makes reference to Galilee of the Gentiles, my question is whether there was a section called Galilee in Isaiah’s day. It also seems that there would be no reason that it would be called Galilee of the Gentiles in his day either. So it seems to me that this is a very remarkable prediction that the area of Zebulon and Naphtali will one day be called Galilee and be populated by Gentiles. Could you comment on this?" And I’d like to comment on it for a second.

I would say that if we have no reference in the early times to Galilee the Old Testament might use a later term, and it might be a wonderful prediction of it. The trouble is it might be very hard to prove, because our information is very slight about a great many things. You go right up here back of this elementary school and you walk into the woods back of the school and pretty soon you come to a long paved area with some side paved areas and the remains of some buildings. Now what are they from? Was there an airstrip there 50 years ago or something? Was there a building there? I don’t know whether you could find out, whether there’s anybody around that knows. Things get forgotten. Very important things get forgotten. History retains only a comparably small amount and so even if the name of Galilee was not found before the New

Testament times it might be a wonderful prediction. But I wouldn't be dogmatic about it because it's so easy for such things to be forgotten when we don't have a lot of records. This is especially true when we write on paper and it all disappears in a short time. I've heard it said that every book in existence today unless special means are made to preserve it will disappear in a hundred years because the paper will just disintegrate. I know some librarians are very concerned about this and trying to find methods of preserving. They say something written in 1800 will last much longer than something written in 1900, because the paper was of much more durable quality up to 1840 when a new method was introduced that made perhaps better paper for immediate use, but less lasting. Of course in those days they didn't have paper. They had to get expensive papyri from Egypt or they had to use potsherds or clay tablets in which case they would have to write in the language of the Assyrians because they had no method of writing their writing on them, no common method.

But in this case if a person would look in a concordance, or you could look in a Bible Dictionary, but if you looked in a concordance, you would find that Galilee is mentioned six times in the Old Testament. It is mentioned in connection with the conquest of the land by Joshua about the king of Kadesh in Galilee twice. Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee and in the passage we were looking at in connection with the background of this passage in 2 Kings 15 we have a reference to Galilee. So we have evidence that that name was common in that early time. So I think it's good for us to know that fact. I hadn't known that myself until I got the question. I looked up Galilee in the concordance and was much interested to learn that fact. So I appreciate the question.

Now we have this statement in Isa. 9:1, "in the past he humbled the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles by the way of the sea along the Jordan." Evidently it is the same area simply another term for it. Now in the King James version that verse is translated a bit differently. In the King James Version, we read "nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation when first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali and

afterwards did more grievously afflict by the way of the sea beyond Jordon and Galilee of the Gentiles.” You see what a difference it is. All modern translations translate instead of "more grievously afflict," "he will glorify or honor." The Hebrew word can be used in either way. It simply means “make heavy.” It can be "make heavy with misery" or "make heavy with glory or honor," since what follows is glory, all recent translators think it is reasonable to think that here it means "glorify or honor." Since it is very often used for a vexation and difficulty the King James translators thought they were more literal in translating it that way. This is just one illustration of many. That when we say we believe in the inerrancy of the Scripture, we do not mean the inerrancy of any particular translation. We mean the inerrancy of that which can be properly deduced from study of the Scripture in the original languages. In Scripture as in any language there will be many places where you cannot be sure exactly what it means.

But we can be sure that here is the picture of darkness and gloom, a picture of misery that comes from the coming in of the Assyrian army there. We are told that in that very area in verse two it is absolutely clear that it is speaking of light and joy and improvement. That in that very area God is going to bring light. So in that area the light dawns in that very area where the great darkness was.

As we go on we find that the reason for it is given in chapter 9 verse 6. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be on his shoulders, and he will be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace, of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.” The fact is absolutely clear, that he is looking at the misery that comes from unbelief, the misery that comes from failure to follow the clear word of God, and then looks on to God's answer in the sending of his son, to bring joy and happiness and understanding as he gives us the wonderful understanding that comes from his preaching of the Sermon on the Mount, and the still greater joy that comes from the salvation that he brings us.

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