

Allan MacRae, Isaiah 7-12, Lecture 9

This is lecture 9 delivered by Dr. Allan MacRae at Biblical Theological Seminary on Isaiah 7-12:

Now, I've had a few questions on the papers that were turned in which were very helpful; calling attention to things that perhaps could be clarified. I'm just going to take a very few minutes looking at some of these. Now in Isaiah 7, there were a couple questions that I'd like to refer to. In verse 15, the suggestion was made whether the "he" there could refer to Isaiah's second son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. But since the second son was not even conceived until the next chapter, unless you have some evidence for saying that the two chapters are not chronologically consecutive, which is often the case but I don't believe is here, I believe we could not consider that as a possibility. There are those who think he pointed to the older son Shear-Jashub who was beside him and said before "he" and that would be a possibility. Personally, I think the better possibility is to think of Messiah as the measuring stick since we're not told when he'll be born. So it would mean if the virgin were already to be pregnant at this time then by that time "he," the Messiah, reached such an age such things would happen.

One of the exam papers gave a very brilliant statement. It said that "curds and honey" referred to the products of cows and bees. I would think we all would know that by this time and there was no further statement on that particular paper. But, I don't think everyone has a clear idea of that. I'm going to say just a word or two more about it. It indicates depopulation, but just how? How do curds and honey indicate depopulation? We find the clue in chapter 7 verses 22 to 24. Where it says in 22, we're starting in 21, "In that day a man will keep alive a young cow and two goats and because of the abundance of milk they give, he will have curds to eat. All who remain in the land will eat curds and honey. In that day in every place where there were a thousand vines worth a thousand silver shekels there will be only briars and thorns. Men will go there with bow and arrow for the land will

be covered with briars and thorns.”

The idea that "they will eat curds and honey" (Isa. 7:22) is that there will be comparatively few people. Plenty of land, but not enough people to till it and so they won't be able to grow vines and the cereals and other things that take a lot of labor. But the cows can simply go out and have plenty of pasturage and plenty of room for the bees and then you would just go and harvest and wouldn't have a lot of work to do. You can use it and compared to the number of people left, there will be plenty of it. So, it shows the coming depopulation.

In chapter 8 verse 8, I take that as definitely referring to Messiah, that this is Messiah's land. It says "the breadth of your land, O Immanuel." I take it that although Messiah is not yet born, he is already existing and this is His land. He is saying, "the depth of your land, O Immanuel". And then I take it that the same thing is said again at the end of verse 10. "For it is Immanuel's land therefore it cannot be permanently taken." Now I never heard before the suggestion that Immanuel here referred to Israel rather than to the Messiah. If there's some evidence elsewhere that Immanuel's ever used that way then that would be a suggestion worth considering. But I don't think these two by themselves would give evidence in that direction. But I'm glad I had my attention called to that possibility.

Then in chapter 28 we are going through these two sections more or less in parallel because as we've noticed, they give every evidence of being written at just about the same time. In one he is talking first to the king, in the other he's talking first to the nobles.

Now then in chapter 28 we have the same situation. When was 28 written? Well it is very clear in the beginning of 28 that he is referring to Ephraim as an existing nation. It is very plain where he rebukes the drunkards of Ephraim and quotes them as saying, "We are going to rebuild." That, "We are able to carry on, regardless." It is quite evident there that this is a situation where Ephraim is still a menace to Judah. And so the timing of the beginning of 7 and the beginning of 28

would seem probably to be identical.

Now in each case, whether Isaiah gave most of the material continuously over the course of one day or a few days or whether he gave part of it and then gave another part a few months or even years later, we have no way of knowing. But in both cases it is evident that it is before 701 B.C. because he is looking forward. That is the big climax he looks forward to in both sections - the deliverance from Sennacherib. So it is somewhere between 735 and 701 in both cases. And in both cases it starts before 730 B.C. I would say that 7 is addressing Ahaz as he is preparing to hold off the attack of Israel and Syria and that chapter 28 is addressing the nobles as they are celebrating his covenant with death; his arrangement with the Assyrians to protect him from Israel and from Syria. Now as it goes on, whether he then imagines in chapter 28 that when he says, “well Assyria won’t be able to protect you. Instead you will have a new great enemy. They answer, “Well, then we’ll look to Egypt for help”. And so he deals with that too. Or whether that section is written later on when after the Assyrian covenant has proven a failure, has backfired on them, then they turn to Egypt. At that time he wrote those rebukes, we have no way of knowing which of the two; whether it is an answer to a possibility they present or an answer to an actual situation. At least it was an actual situation that came.

Who was responsible for sending to Egypt for help? I would think it likely that that was Ahaz. We do not know the precise dates of Ahaz and Hezekiah through here. This is one of the parts in the Old Testament where we have overlapping range and the fitting them together exactly is difficult. We do not have evidence to be sure exactly how they fit together. It would seem most likely that Hezekiah was associated with Ahaz there for a time. But, we don’t know just how they fit together. But I would think it likely that the sending to Egypt was Ahaz’s carrying on his same method and that Hezekiah carried on the method his father was using until it also proved a complete failure.

Now in chapter 28 then, it begins with the rebuke to Israel, which would greatly please the banqueting Judean nobles. But then he turns from that to them. And in verse 7 we notice, “And these also stagger from wine...” I would like it better if it was “also these” instead of “these also” because it could be read “and these also stagger from wine.” But in the Hebrew it’s specifically “also these, they stagger from wine.” And he’s also pointing at the Judean nobles there. Then of course we have in verses 9 and 10, them responding by criticizing him. Is he going to talk to us as if we were little children, telling us how we’ve got to live and what we’ve got to do? We’re grown up and able to stand on our own two feet. So he says, “All right. If you won’t take the gentle words of God, he’ll speak to you with foreign lips and strange tongues. If you won’t take the gentle assurances that He would give if you would trust in him, you will have the harsh invasion of the Assyrians.” So he answers it and he looks forward in verse 16 to the coming one as he looked forward to it in chapter 7 and 8, the tested stone, the precious corner stone. Although in the context it’s not so clear that he’s looking forward to Christ. It could be taken simply as meaning God, but of course Jesus is God so that it doesn’t make much difference with the sense, which of the two ways you take it there.

This chapter was devoted to rebuking them for the alliance with Assyria and chapter 29 goes right straight on from it. It is going – the alliance with Assyria--is going to eventuate in the terrible situation described in the first few verses of chapter 29. The city will be in a situation where its continuance appears absolutely hopeless. God says, “I will besiege Ariel.” This does not mean that the Assyrians actually besieged it. We can well take these terms as figurative here. God says, “I will encamp against you. I will encircle you with towers and set up my siege works against you”. Now of course they were encircled with towers, and siege works were set up against them in 586 B.C., 150 years later by the Babylonians. But in this case, He is saying that, "you will be in a situation as if an enemy were besieging. I will besiege you. I will cause that you are shut in as a

result of the Assyrian forces all around, so you don't dare go outside the strong walls in order to work in your field. All you dare do for about three years is to rush out with an eye out to see if any Assyrian bands are coming near and gather what you can or what grows by itself."

Similarly in chapter 29 verse 6, following where you have the promise of miraculous deliverance, it would seem to me in the light of context, that clearly is figurative language where he says, "the Lord Almighty will come with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with windstorm and tempest and flames of a devouring fire". I don't believe, in the context, that these are picturing actual natural phenomenon. The Lord did not use thunder, earthquake, tempest, and flames of the devouring fire to destroy the Assyrian army. It simply says, "The angel of the Lord came in the night and smote them and in the morning there were all these many who were dead." We cannot arbitrarily rule out a literal interpretation. If somebody wants to suggest that the way God killed all these Assyrians was to send a tremendous storm, thunder, and earthquake and great noise, windstorm, tempest, and devouring fire, we have no way to say that is not a correct interpretation. But my strong inclination is, in the light of the context, that we should say we do not know the method God used. Most likely it was a great epidemic that swept through the Assyrian army. But that the result of the method God used was exactly as if He came down with tremendous force like an earthquake, storm or fire and so on.

The determination in the Scripture of what is literal and what is figurative, as in any great book of literature, is not always easy. There are those who say, "I take every word in the Bible literally". And when somebody says that, I wonder if they've ever read anything in the Bible because, like all great literature, it has many figures of speech. I say always try the literal interpretation first, see if it make sense in the light of the context, but recognize that there are figures of speech in all great literature and we have to interpret passages in light of the context.

I would not say that it is at all impossible that chapter 29 verses 5 and 6 go with what precedes rather than with what follows. That is, the King James translates that “moreover”. The Hebrew word is simple “and”. It can mean “moreover”, it can mean “but”. And it is entirely possible that verses 5 and 6 mean that, I would hesitate about it because of the “suddenly in an instant”. The Assyrians didn’t come suddenly in an instant. That seems to suggest their sudden destruction rather than their coming. But except for that, probably those two verses could be taken with the ones before. But once you get to verse 7, it seems to me that the deliverance is quite clearly there. “So will it be with the hoards of all the nations that fight against Mount Zion.” Most interpreters take from chapter 29 verse 5 on as describing the destruction and I think another point in favor of it is that it says, “Moreover the multitude of your strangers will be like small dust” in the King James. Actually, “it will become,” is the verb "hayah," which is not ordinarily used as a copula unless it is in very late Hebrew.

I went through the examination of that "hayah" once in Genesis 1. In Genesis 1 we have – I forget the number – maybe 50 times, at least a great many times, in the English Bible we have the word “to be”. Like it says, “God saw what He had made and it was good.” And it says, “it was evening and it was morning the second, third, fourth and so many days.” Well I went through all of those and I looked to see how many of them were simply "is" because there was no copula expressed in the Hebrew. Like it says – the Hebrew literally is, “that He saw, that good.” And it doesn’t say that "it was good." In Hebrew it is very common to have the copula understood. In Greek, it also occurs though not as commonly as in the Hebrew. But I found that in all – about half the cases, it was very clear in the context that it was merely describing a situation. There the verb was not expressed. But when it says, “and it was evening and it was morning” it doesn’t mean it was evening and it was morning all at the same time. It means it became evening and it became morning and there the "hayah" is expressed. And I believe the Hebrew verb that is sometimes translated “was” really means “became”, or

“will become”. "God created heaven and earth and the earth became without form and void." That doesn't necessarily mean the earth having already been created became like null and void. It could mean that, but it could mean God created heaven and earth and there came into existence an earth without form or void. But I think that distinction doesn't always come out in the English, but it's immediately apparent in the Hebrew. And in this particular case, you have at the beginning of verse 5, the verb which I would think is best translated like our modern translations all translated “will become”. But I would not be dogmatic about 5 and 6 though I incline strongly to think they go with what precedes. But from 7 on, I incline strongly to think they must refer to the deliverance.

Now in chapter 29, was there anything else we hadn't made clear? Let's see verses 9 to 13 are the rebuke to the people. A rebuke which is taken up by Christ and quoted in part as showing a condition still existing when he was on earth. In connection with that, we have a similar statement in chapter 30 with verses 10 to 11 where they say to the seers, “see no more visions” and to the prophets “give us no more visions of what is right. Tell us pleasant things. Prophecy allusion.” So we have all through both of these, we have these many rebukes to the people of that day, but still valid whenever the condition continues to be the same.

Then in chapter 29 verse 14, he says, “I will astound these people. The wisdom of the wise will perish. The intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.” Here I think he is surely looking forward to a future situation. We find in verse 16, “you turn things upside down as if the potter were to be like the clay. Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘he did not make me?’ You're turning things upside down, I'm going to turn them upside down.” In verse 17, “in a very short time Lebanon will be turned into a fertile field and the fertile field seem like a forest.” That I believe is a clear reference to the situation that Paul describes when Jesus said that he would take the kingdom of God away from you and give it to a nation that would bring forth the fruits thereof. The last verse in the chapter may

point to the grafting of Israel back into the olive tree. We cannot be so dogmatic about verse 24 but I incline quite strongly to that opinion.

Now just a word about chapter 29 verse 22. In 22 and 23, “Therefore this is what the Lord who redeemed Abraham...” It’s interesting here; they’re going back to Abraham who certainly was not saved because of his family, because of his heritage, because of his background. God called him out of the midst of heathenism. God spoke to Him and called him to go out and to go into a far country. The Lord who redeemed Israel says to the house of Jacob, “No longer will Jacob be ashamed. No longer will his face grow pale. When he sees in his midst his children, the work of my hands...” And that I believe fits with the idea that this represents the turning to the Gentiles. “They will keep my name holy. They will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.” Now in the NIV, I noticed, that it is translated, “No longer will Jacob be ashamed. No longer will their faces grow pale when they see among them their children, the work of my hands.” The Hebrew is singular. It is “he”. That doesn’t mean to say the NIV is the wrong translation because nations are often spoken of in the singular with the collective. But it would--if he’s speaking of the nation--it would be more natural to say the “they” and what he does say is “he” and a specific reference to Jacob not being ashamed, seems to me to be imagining their ancestor Jacob. Seeing the situation which as Paul says, “Not all Israelites are of Israel.” And as Jesus said, “God is able to be stones to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.” And Isaiah says, “these are their children, the work of My hand.”

After chapter 29, (it’s a long time ago that we looked at chapters 30 and 31). You all noticed the remarkable parallel. The reference to Lebanon in Isaiah 29:17 here is a reference to something that is outside the land of Israel. I mean, that’s obvious. It is a reference to something outside the land of Israel. It is a reference to something large and prominent that is outside of Israel. When it speaks of Lebanon being turned into a fertile field, it suggests that when he speaks

of Lebanon, he is speaking of that which at present is not fertile. He is speaking of that which seems to be outside the pail which is not producing anything for the Lord. But he says, “The time will come when Lebanon will be turned into a fertile field and the fertile field will seem like a forest.” Jesus said that the vineyard that wasn’t bringing forth grapes – he said that he would take away the vineyard from those – from those husbandmen and give it to those who will bring forth its fruits. It would seem to me that that makes very good sense for the interpretation of this verse and I don’t know any other suggestion that brings much sense to it.

In the historical context, he is saying how they are coming into serious difficulty because instead of trusting God, they’re looking to Assyria for help. This is going to bring you terrible calamity in the coming of Sennacherib. But God will deliver you from that. But in the midst of these things, both in the section from chapter 7 on and in the section here, he looks at the general situation of the nation and rebukes the great bulk of the nation for their lack of interest in the things of God and for their excuses that they use for turning against Him. And he, I believe, has occasional glimpses into the distant future where he sees the coming of Messiah. He sees God’s answer to the unfaithfulness of Ahaz. It is being replaced by God’s own chosen members of the House of David. The unfaithfulness of the nobles here – he looks forward into the distant future when it, for a time, they will be replaced by a nation that will bring forth the fruits there. I think this is quite important to get clear. I’ve gone over it a couple times, rather hastily each time. I wouldn’t be dogmatic on my interpretation of it; there may be those who would differ. But I have not heard any other interpretation that seemed to me to bring a lot of sense out of the passage. And there are many different things that just seem to fit together about it.

He says in Isaiah 29:22, “this is what the Lord says who redeemed Abraham”. Now he specifically calls our attention here to the fact of God having called Abraham, which was not a matter of someone who would say, “I am a descendant of Jacob. I am one of Abraham’s children.” Abraham came out of an

entirely different background. God reached in there and called him and brought him out. It is calling attention to God's electing power to put in the center of His blessing whomever he chooses. It reminds us of what Jesus said that "God is able of these stones to make children to Abraham." Then he, after speaking of the Lord who redeemed Abraham, then says to the House of Jacob, "No longer will Jacob be ashamed." Well, why is Jacob ashamed? He is ashamed either because his descendants are not being true to the Lord, are not carrying on as they should, or he is ashamed because his descendants are being greatly injured, being cut down, and sent into exile. With many of them being killed, their numbers are being tremendously decreased. He's embarrassed or ashamed for either one of these two reasons. But he says, "No longer will Jacob be ashamed. He will see among his children the work of my hands." So it seems to be referring to his bringing in like he brought Abraham. So there are these many things that seem to me to fit into that interpretation. Though as I say, I do not present this as something that we can be dogmatic about, but I say it seems to me to be the best interpretation of these various indications and particularly of the verse about Lebanon.

In chapter 29 verse 23, I would think he sees among them his children and the NIV translation had "they" but I think it's better "he" there. But then you have the "they", "they will keep My Name holy." That refers to his children when he sees those who are true to God, whether Jews or Gentiles I would say; that "they will keep My Name holy."

I would say that there are a number of indications which look as if it refers to the Olive tree, but it is also – I would think that – "you turn things upside down as if the potter said to the clay, 'what are you doing?' You've turned things upside down. I'm going to turn things upside down." All that sort of impression doesn't sound simple like returning from exile. That would be if you didn't have those expressions in there, there's much of it that could be taken that way very well.

I think this is important to remember, that God gave the prophets isolated glimpses of the future and that when the events take place, we can see how

wonderfully what was predicted was fulfilled. But I do not believe that in most cases we can build a detailed picture of the future. I think someone in the time of Christ would have had a very difficult job in putting together from the Old Testament the details of his life. Yet in point after point in the Gospels, they say, "this has fulfilled what was taught by the prophets." When you see what happened, you can see how it was fulfilled. But of course the more we have that we can see how it was fulfilled, the better able we are to make guesses as to things that happened in the future. But he only predicts certain vistas of the future; he does not give us full details. So we are always in a possibility of error when we get beyond the main features as we look to future prophecy.

Well, unless there's some further question on chapter 29, we have noticed in 30 and 31, the parallel between the two; 31 being sort of a summary starting with the folly of trusting Egypt and the last half telling how God will miraculously deliver them from Assyria. Chapter 30 being similar in starting with the folly of trusting in Egypt. I spoke briefly about verse 6 referring to the actual tribute they were sending to Egypt or that they would be sending to Egypt. Ending up with the deliverance from Assyria just as chapter 31 will, but in the middle having, like 29 and 28, rebuke to those who are rejecting the message and predicting punishment for them. I believe that in verse 17 he looks forward to the scattering of Israel among the nations, and yet not annihilate them; scattered, but not destroyed.

When I heard how Hitler's forces in one night attacked synagogues all over Germany and the big attack they made on the Jews there, the beginning of the persecution of the Jews there, the awful persecution. I studied in Germany for two and a half years. I knew many of the Germans. They're wonderful people. I loved the nation. But when I saw that happen, I said, "They are doomed to terrible misery because God protects Israel even though Israel may be largely apostate, they may be forgetful of him, turn away from him. Yet he has promised they will never be destroyed. He has promised that his blessing will be with them; they will have a continuance. Of course Hitler set to work very, very determinedly to utterly

destroy the Jews. He might even have won the war if he hadn't have done that because he diverted an awful lot of energy and expense to the attempt to completely destroy the Jews, but he utterly failed in that determination. As it says here in chapter 30 verse 17 that, "they would be left like a flagstaff on a mountaintop, like a banner on a hill." They still remain in every nation, some Jews. They still remain and they are an indication that the Bible is true; that what God promised he has fulfilled and is fulfilling.

Now we go back to the earlier section, chapters 7 on. We noticed how chapter 8 ended with that passage of terrible misery ahead for the people. He looks to a time of apostasy in which he and the children God has given him are to keep alive the truth within their group. He rebukes the people for consulting mediums and spiritists; going to the dead to get help instead of looking to the living God. In these days he might say looking to astrology and all sorts of foolishness like that instead of looking to God's word as so many are doing now. He describes the misery that is ahead for them. Then he says that in the very area where the Assyrian army entered, the area in which the darkness first came, the land of Zebulun, the land of Naphtali, there "the people walking in darkness are going to see a great light." He looks forward to the preaching of Christ in verse 2 there. So we have this early part of chapter 9, these wonderful predictions of Immanuel. His preaching here is bringing joy to them and in verse 5, he looks way forward to the full out work of Immanuel's work. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning – will be fuel for the fire; a complete end of armament; a complete end of human warfare. Not an end brought about simply because one nation disarms and lets other nations trample over it. That would be no fulfillment of this at all. That's what many of our people are trying to get us to do now. But that's not a way to bring peace, that's a way to make war certain. But he is predicting that time when it will not be necessary for nations to have the booted warriors and the garments rolled in blood. So he looks there way beyond our present time even.

But right in the next verse, he tells what will be the cause from which that will come. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given” (Isa. 9:6). Now that can be just Hebrew parallelism. “To us a child is born, to us a son is given.” It can be just Hebrew parallelism and yet the way it is expressed strongly suggests, now that we know the facts of what happened, the fact that a child was born to Mary but that the son of God was given. So we have there a suggestion of the coming of the One who is both God and man. This is not something on which you could base it in advance that that was for sure exactly how it would happen, but when it comes to pass you see how it accurately fulfilled these words.

“To us a child is born, to us a son is given. And the government will be on His shoulders.” Every Christian must try to put the government on the shoulders of Christ. All who believe in him are members of his kingdom and we try to obey him in all things. But the time is promised when all the nations will be subject to him; when he will establish his government universally, though that is not specifically brought out in this passage except in the reference to verse 5 to the complete end of war in his coming.

They could be a parallelism, but they could represent two sides of the birth of the coming virgin-born One; that He is both a son who is born to Mary, fully human, that is a child born to Mary, fully human, and yet a son of God who is given to be the savior of the world.

Yes, well we better stop there, then we will continue with the latter part of our lecture next time.

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