

Allan MacRae, Isaiah 7-12, Lecture 12

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

When I asked you some time ago to note the importance of the various divisions you noticed, that this is a far more important division than the chapter division at the beginning of chapter 9 and still more important than the one at the beginning of chapter 10. In fact that division at the beginning of chapter 10, I think the Archbishop, of course, certainly must have stumbled at that point and he made his mark where he didn't intend to because I can't believe that he would not see that you have four stanzas, each of them ending with the same phrase and put three of them before and the fourth one after with a short change of thought before and after this poem of four stanzas. I can't believe he would do that intentionally, so I feel that it must've been that something happened to make him move hurriedly or turn his attention away from care at that particular point. So we have here what should be one chapter in Isaiah 9:8-10:4--a chapter with four stanzas.

"The Lord has sent a message against Jacob, it will fall on Israel" (Isa. 9:8). Now what is "Jacob" and "Israel." We use the term "Jacob" as the man who was the grandson of Abraham. We speak of "Israel" as the nation, but actually God changed Jacob's name to Israel. So, in Genesis, there are many places where he is called Israel and there are other places where he still continues to be called Jacob even after God had changed his name. Later on it is quite common to refer to the nation by the term "Israel," but occasionally the nation is referred to by the term "Jacob," particularly in parallelism. And so, I believe in the context here it is not referring to the individual Jacob, but referring to his descendants and that these two are parallel, as Hebrew parallelism. "If we send a message against Jacob, it will fall on Israel."

But then another question comes to us, is he here talking about the Northern kingdom of Israel, which was the greater part of the region of Israel. What we now call Israel today, was Philistia in ancient times. What was then Israel included what we refer to as the West Bank because it is related to the west bank of the Jordan River, just like

California is on the west bank of the Mississippi River. It is the "West Bank," but it really was Israel in ancient times. When the kingdom was divided in two parts the larger part was the Northern Kingdom composed of ten tribes with Ephraim at their head. So it felt it was "Israel" and in order to avoid confusion the southern part is quite generally called Judah. After the Northern kingdom was destroyed, naturally the Southern kingdom again would be what you meant if you referred to Israel. But the word "Israel" here could mean both parts, or it could mean the Northern kingdom. "And when you go right on to the next verse, "all the people will know it--Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria" that suggests the Northern kingdom in Isaiah 9:9. Then as you look on through the whole poem, he is referring, in the first part to the Northern Kingdom and in the later part to the Southern Kingdom so I was inclined to think that this first part of it, "the message will fall on Israel" refers to the whole and then he talks first about the northern part and then about the southern part.

He says in Isaiah 9:8, "the message is sent against Jacob, it will fall on Israel." Then he speaks specifically of the Northern kingdom, "All the people will know it--Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria--who say", the next verse, "the bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with dressed stone. The fig trees have been felled, but we will replace them with cedars." A wonderful attitude when you have a great flood, when you have an earthquake, when things are bad, you don't sit down in discouragement and say, "Isn't it awful? What can we do?" You get busy, rebuild. You rebuild it stronger than it was before. And so, if it were not for the part that I skipped, the last part of verse nine, we would say this is describing a very fine and commendable attitude of persistence and diligence, but unfortunately, commendable as it is from one view point, it is actually an attitude which receives God's condemnation because it is said with pride and arrogance of heart.

If we have a natural catastrophe, if something goes wrong with us because of our own mistakes and we find ourselves crushed, it is wonderful if we get up and say we are going to rebuild better than before. We're going to make something better than we had before we made this mistake or before this catastrophe came. But if what comes, comes

because God has sent it to us in order to show us the error of our ways, then the thing we should do is repent before him and to seek his forgiveness rather than to stand up and defy him and say well, what we had has been injured, but we're going to rebuild better than before. So this verse 10, would be a wonderful model for us when catastrophe comes that is not due to our sin or do to our mistakes, but when it is said with pride and arrogance of heart then it deserves God's condemnation.

It goes on to say in Isaiah 9:11-12 how the Lord has strengthened their foes against them and they come from all sides and there "devour Israel with open mouth. For all this" or "in all this" I think would be better, "in all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised" (Isa. 9:12). The Hebrew simply is, "in all this." The word "in," is sometimes used to show the means why all this would not be out of place the most natural translation is, "in all this." The translation "for all this" is a rather natural guess in the light of context at the end of this first stanza but it doesn't fit the succeeding stanzas. So I wish that the King James had been more literal and the succeeding versions hadn't simply followed the King James in this translation. You can't be exactly literal in any translation. There are many things that if you just put word for word into English they don't make sense. You have to take context into consideration in any translation. But there is no word "yet" in the Hebrew at this point and the word they translate "for" actually means "in". Well in this context with the first phrase here "in all this his anger has not turned away", is more clearly expressed to us than by saying "for". Yet for all this God is not satisfied he has brought these calamities upon them but they have not repented. His anger is still against them. The "yet for" in light of context fits perfectly right here, but it does not fit in the later stanzas. It is more literally "in" or simply "in all this".

Then we go on to the second stanza in Isaiah 9:13-17: "But the people have not returned to him who struck them nor have they sought the Lord Almighty. So the Lord will cut off from Israel both head and tail." Now there is a figurative expression. The word "head"—how does a nation have a head? An individual has a head, but how does a nation have a head? It is a figurative expression! But whether you should call "head" a

figurative expression, there may be differences of opinion. Because very frequently figurative expressions come to be used so much, that they come to lose their sense as figures and become literal ways of expressing an idea. So we speak of the head of a nation, it's originally a figurative expression, but the "head" as we use it is simply a literal expression. "He's the head of a nation," that is a literal expression now. But the word "tail" isn't. It is definitely still figurative. "The head and the tail he will cut off from Israel." The Israelite—no individual Israelite had a tail—the nation as a whole did not have a tail. It's simply a figurative way of saying top and bottom. He is cutting off all parts of Israel. He will cut off both head and tail.

Then the next two expressions are very clearly figurative. "Both palm branch and reed." The "palm branch" refers to the beautiful top of the palm tree, like the head it is the beautiful thing that stands out. But "the reed" is the little bushes down by the creek and these thousands of little bushes down by the creeks don't amount to anything. The point is nobody will escape God's wrath. They will not escape it because they are such great important leaders that they say, "Oh well nobody will touch me. I will run away and take my money with me and be perfectly safe in some other country no matter what happens." No, he says they will not escape neither "the head nor the tail, neither the palm branch nor the reed." The people in position of leadership, in most every country in which there has been a revolution or an overturning in recent years, the leaders have escaped and taken great sums of money with them to live in affluence in other countries. He says that will not happen there. The leaders will suffer as well as the people.

But then you could look at it from the other viewpoint, you could say well, they could sweep over the country and destroy the leaders—the people that have money, that have influence, the people that have standing, the people that have skill they will be taken into captivity, but the rank and file of society will be content with whatever leadership they have. They are not going to suffer. But he says they will suffer too. Both the head and the tail, both the palm branch and the reed. So there are four expressions all of which were originally figurative expressions but the head has become at this time a *literal expression* but the other three are definitely *figurative*.

A literal expression is using a word that is commonly used to point to the thing we are referring to. A figurative expression is a comparison usually not expressed as a comparison but actually substituting for the thing which you are referring to. Anybody who says he takes the whole Bible literally is of course talking nonsense because the Bible is full of figures of speech. But very often a figurative expression is clearer and more understandable than a literal expression would be. So to say you don't take the Bible all literally doesn't mean you don't take it all as true and doesn't mean it is necessarily harder to understand. There may be places where figures are very difficult to understand or there are different possibilities of interpretation. I like to think of figures of speech as like salt that is sprinkled over a dish and it tremendously improves the dish to sprinkle a little salt over it. Every writing of importance has figurative speech! But if you pour a whole bucketful of salt on it, you ruin the thing. So when people take a part of the Bible as entirely figurative, they are reducing it to nonsense. As I read what one man said about the book of Revelation, he said, "We should remember it is a symbolic book and everything in it is a symbol and nothing in it stands for what it says." Well that's reducing its nonsense. It is a wonderful book of symbols it has many wonderful symbols but at least three fourths of it has got to be literal or anybody can make it mean anything he wants to if it is all figurative.

Question from Mr. Kim "What's the difference between figurative and allegorical?" Allegorical is carrying the figurative idea to a much further point. A figure is a word or a single expression that represents something else. An allegory is where you have a whole story in which all of it represents something entirely different from what is originally presented there. An allegory can mean anything and if you know what he's trying to get across then the allegory can increase your understanding of it and it would be very helpful. But if you don't know what he is trying to get across you may get something entirely different from an allegory than what was intended if you are not careful.

Question Mr. Liken, "On the third and forth days it says 'in one day God made the final day', they somehow broke through the wall and on the twelfth, the city was taken on

in one day, in twenty four hours.” Yes, it’s just a question how literally you’re to take that. I saw a very intelligent man, a man who has written some very good books about the Scripture; wrote an attack on people for taking a stand on inerrancy and I was amazed at that and he said in it ‘people who stand for inerrancy of the Scripture have to do all kinds of a twisting such as saying that the "days" in Genesis are not "days." Well, what do we mean by "a day"? The common idea that people have is that a "day" is a period of twenty-four hours, but if you would write down every time you used the word “day” for the next month I would be surprised if one of them referred to a twenty-four hour period. A day does not mean a twenty- four hour period, a day means a period of activity and is used in Genesis as “there was a day between darkness and darkness, a period of light between two periods of darkness.” If I meet you tonight at 11 o’clock somewhere and I say, “Isn’t this a lovely day?” you’d say, “What are you talking about? This isn’t day at all!” We don’t use the word “day” to mean twenty-four hours unless we are figuring interest on a loan or we are making airplane time tables. Otherwise, we never use it to mean twenty-four hours. It means a period of activity. When Jesus said, “Abraham saw my *day* and was glad.” He didn’t mean Abraham saw a particular twenty-four hour period, he meant that he saw Jesus’ period of activity. So here where it says "in a single day" in the context clearly it means a narrow space of time. But I don’t think we can carry it to the point that it necessarily means between two periods of darkness. Now it might have been but we don’t know enough about the precise detail of the conquest, to know.

Well then he continues here in chapter 9 verse 15, he says, “The elders and the prominent men are the head. The prophets who teach lies are the tail.” That’s a little bit of satire or sarcasm I don’t know which because these prophets think that they are the people who are giving them true wisdom and telling them what they should follow when actually Isaiah says that these folks are so really unimportant that they can just be considered as the tail. He makes his criticism of the prophets but he’s going to take off head and tail; the Lord will cut off "those who guide this people and mislead them. Those who guided are led astray. Therefore, the Lord will take no pleasure in the young men nor

will he pity the fatherless and a widow for everyone is ungodly and wicked, every mouth speaks vileness. Yet for all his anger is not turned away" (Isa. 9:16-17). That's utter nonsense! "Yet in spite of their wickedness his anger is not turned away"—that doesn't make sense! The passage before he is going to give them this terrible punishment and "yet in spite of that his anger is not turned away." But this stanza describes their wickedness and in spite of that his anger will not be turned away. That doesn't make sense and the Hebrew doesn't say that. Somebody long ago translated the first one very well and in the right context, and most translations simply follow it in the other stanzas but the Hebrew there is no "yet theirs," "not even" and most lines in Hebrew tend to start with "and." But this doesn't even start with that. Rather it just says "in all this his anger is not turned away; his hand is still upraised" in all this wickedness that he has just described his anger is not turned away.

Well, we have the other two stanzas that we have to go on to, but if you can look ahead a little into the rest of chapter 10 and 11 just to have it in mind as we discuss it, I think it will add to the value of our next meeting.

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