

Kings and Prophets 13-03-01a

This is Friday, the 1st of March, 2013. We're continuing our study of Kings and Prophets. We're going to be in First Kings Chapter 3. We'll take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer and then we'll begin.

Father, it's a privilege and a great encouragement for us to gather in your name, to focus our attention and spend our time to gain a better understanding of your word. To receive the blessings that come as we converse and share our enthusiasm and our common interest and motivation in pursuing the wonderful opportunities and potentials that you have given us through our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for this passage of scripture.

We thank you for the truth that it contains and the meaning that it holds for us. We pray that as we study tonight that each one will be blessed, will be challenged, will find in the pages of your word those truths that will be meaningful and will stick with us in the days ahead that will inform us and impel us to fulfill that calling for which the Lord Jesus Christ died and that prepares us for our future with you and with him. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

We have been looking at the kingdom that was handed to Solomon by his father, David. We saw some very interesting significance in the four individuals who are listed as needing to be dealt with. We looked last time at the inception of the kingdom, the appearance by God to Solomon.

This is something that is somewhat unique in the annals of the kings of Israel that God would appear as he does to Solomon. And we saw Solomon's request for wisdom. This, of course, is in 1 Kings chapter 3. And it tells us that in verse 5, at Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night and said, ask, what shall I give you? Now, this is better than finding any lamp in the desert sands.

This is better than any traveling itinerant genie. Or if God himself appears to you and says, make your request, that's unique. And what's particularly fascinating to me is if you keep your finger here and turn over to 2 Chronicles chapter 1. 2 Chronicles chapter 1. And we don't have time to do this.

I've got these pages side by side in my Harmony. This is James Newsome published by Baker. It's a synoptic harmony of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.

And I don't know if you want to pick this up or not. I like it because, as you can see, things that are unique to kings are in a single column. If it's in Kings and Chronicles, you've got them side by side.

So it's similar to what you would have in a gospel parallels. And for this study, for my purposes at least, it's very helpful. But one of the things that is very noticeable in this section is the differences.

Just look at the blocks. You can't read the words from where you are. But if you look at the blocks, this is the account in Kings and in Chronicles of the very same episode.

And what you see in one column is what's not in the other. Now, this is proof. And you can do this.

Get two Bibles is my suggestion. I thought, let me try to print this up and hand it out. And I thought, scan it, put it on the web.

And I thought, no, just get two Bibles. Open one to Kings. Open the other to the parallel in Chronicles.

And just put your finger on each and go back and forth and look. Because here's the point. As we have seen in the gospels, as we have seen elsewhere in the Word of God, there is more than one absolutely right, absolutely inspired way to tell a story.

And it isn't an error if one account gives one sort of verbiage and another account gives another. I'll give you just an example. In Kings, it says at Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night and God said, ask what I shall give you.

In Chronicles, it gives a lengthy account of Solomon speaking to Israel after he became king and he went up to the bronze altar before the Lord, which was at the tent of meeting and offered a thousand burnt offerings upon it in that night, God appeared to Solomon and said to him, ask what I shall give you. Now, those words are verbatim in both accounts. The words of God, you would expect is that initial greeting, if you will, would have stuck in Solomon's mind.

And I doubt that there'd be much variation in that. Then Solomon said to God, now in Chronicles, Solomon says, thou has shown great and steadfast love to David, my father, and has made me king in his stead. That's one line.

That same section in Kings, Solomon said, thou has shown great and steadfast love to thy servant, David, my father, because he walked before thee in faithfulness and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward thee, and thou hast kept for him this great and steadfast love and has given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O Lord, my God, thou has made thy servant king in place of David, my father, although I am but a little child, I do not know how to go out and come in, and thy servant is in the midst of thy people whom thou hast chosen. One is a summary, the other is more detailed.

They are both inspired. They are both correct. You can go through the rest of this account and much of the rest of what we will see that has parallels in Kings and Chronicles and see this illustrated time and again.

The other thing it tells you is, what if we only had one account? What if we just had the short version in Chronicles instead of the long version in Kings for the prayer? Here's what was actually said in Kings. Here's the summary in Chronicles. It doesn't say it's a summary.

It says, this is what Solomon said. But this is Solomon in so many words. This is Solomon in an indirect quote.

You have more of a direct quote in Kings at this point. Other places, it is Chronicles that is verbose and it's Kings that is a summary or a distillation or the essence of what was said. We take this for granted in human conversation.

We say, I said, she said, or if you're younger, well, he goes and I go and he goes and I go. And if you're really younger, well, she's like, quote, and I'm like, quote, and she's like, quote, and I'm like, quote. And we will rephrase.

We will summarize. We will change the wording around. It's the essence.

It's the gist. It's the basic content that we're getting across. It is important to remember this so that we do not press into unnatural shapes the language of the word of God, that we allow God to do the same thing in his account to us that we do in conversation with each other and in communication with each other.

And it is a dangerous thing to not be sensitive to this in various passages of Scripture. So this is if you get a parallel or open two Bibles, it will make the point better than I can express it. You look at this and you say, wow, these are way different.

And yet if I read them for comprehension, I come away with the same realization of what happened. But the stories are told in different ways. Now, the essence here, and as we move forward in the account of Solomon, God grants him wisdom.

And I sort of skipped over the illustration of Solomon's wisdom that was given in chapter three, verse 16 of First Kings, 16 through 28, basically. This is an entire half a chapter devoted to the story of the two women and the baby in the sword, a very famous account. And I just have a couple of observations on this.

I'm not actually even going to review the story in detail. I think you're familiar with it. But just in outline form, there are two women.

One has a baby three days later. The other one has a baby. They're in a house by themselves.

And the second woman, the woman with the younger child, that child dies in the night. So she gets up in the middle of the night and puts the dead baby of hers next to the woman and takes the three day old child and takes it for her own. And when they wake up in the morning, the woman is horrified.

Her baby is dead. But when she looks more closely, wait a minute, this is not my baby. The other woman says, yes, it is.

This is my baby. And this ends up going to the Supreme Court of Israel, which is King Solomon. And they stand before him.

And the woman who has had her living child taken is the one who tells the story. So then Solomon says, bring me a sword. And a sword is brought before him.

And the king says, divide the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other. So the woman who is the actual mother is horrified at that thought and says, no, let her have the child. Just don't kill it.

The other one says, that's a great idea. Divide the child and neither one of us will have a child. And Solomon deduces from this who the real mother is.

Give the first woman the living child. By no means kill him. She is his mother.

And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered. And they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice. Now, first, and I've just got three observations on this, because I'm dedicated to going pretty fast.

Number one, these are not princesses in the palace. These are not the wives of noblemen. These are harlots.

These are these. This is two prostitutes. And the reason they're alone in the house, there's no man around because they're not married.

They are whores and they're in a whorehouse. And they're the only two in this house when this baby death and exchange takes place. Isn't it interesting that in giving the single example, Solomon is allegedly the wisest man who has ever lived.

The example of his wisdom is deciding a case in the lowest stratum of society that you could imagine. This isn't an example of statecraft. This isn't a wonderful coup of international diplomacy.

This isn't a brilliant military decision or strategic intervention. This isn't an engineering problem solution where he designs an aqueduct or solves the garbage collection problem or staves off an invasion by a foreign power. It's a case of two whores fighting over a child.

That's the example of King Solomon. You can also derive a clue, secondly, as you read the story, because when you listen to the woman tell the story, the woman whose child she alleges has been taken, she says, We were together. No one was with us in the house except the two of us in the house.

This woman's son died in the night. Why? In verse 19. Because she rolled over on him.

She smothered her own son. She crushed her own child. And what would a normal reaction be? I try to think of a modern analogy.

I don't know that people roll over on their children that much, but you've read stories of someone who is absentminded and leaves their child in a car seat in the hot sun, goes in to buy

beer or something and comes back out and their child has perished. What would a normal, healthy reaction be to the death of a child by one's own personal negligence? A normal person isn't going to look around and say, you know, there's another baby in the house. Let me just get that one and everything will be fine.

I will have a child and it will be as though I didn't mess up. So there's not acknowledgement. There is no apparent grief, remorse, repentance.

I have fixed this problem by my own efforts. I have gotten me a child and I will maintain the lie. And you can't prove otherwise.

How are you going to prove that it's your child? So this detail, I think, gives Solomon insight as he weighs whether the story is true or not. But the third thing you say is, who would make up a story like this? Let's say that the woman woke up and her son had actually died. You don't go to the king and say, the babies have been swapped.

That's really my child over there. Why would the lady who's got the dead baby make this story up? You know, the expedient thing is to do what the first woman actually did. I mean, if you're going to try to remedy it, but you wouldn't.

The woman who swapped the babies didn't want to be in front of the king. She figured she had solved her problem. But if you were actually someone whose baby had died in the night, would your solution be, I think I'll go to court and go all the way up and see the king of the land.

And so if you look at the clues, you can see how Solomon had a basis for pretty well knowing what happened without a huge flash of divine insight. But the other interesting detail is, look at verse 17. My Lord, this woman and I dwell in the same house.

I gave birth while she was in the house. Verse 18, then it happened the third day after I had given birth. The third day.

How many places in the Bible do you have the third day? And without speculating on the connection of this three-day period to any other three-day period in Scripture, one of the things that Solomon would have deduced is which woman is more likely to know her child. One that has been lovingly staring at that baby and carrying it around and feeding it and nurturing it for three whole days or someone who had their baby that day. Because this episode takes place the night after the second baby is born.

This is the woman's first night to have the child. And she does not dispute that hers is the younger child. So the first lady didn't kill her child the first night or the second night or the third night through carelessness or inattention or rolling over.

This other lady rolls over on her child the first night and it's dead. So these clues in the calm light of day, you think there's a strong probability that the lady telling the story is probably telling the truth. And so Solomon now, it isn't a matter of which story is true, but how to

demonstrate that it's true.

This is the Perry Mason trick. Perry can figure out what happened, but he's got to get somebody to spill it on the stand. You've got to find the missing piece of evidence.

You've got to find a way to get people to reveal the truth. There is no new evidence brought in to decide this case. The evidence is strictly hearsay.

It's the account. The genius in this is not that Solomon figures out which story is true. We can figure that out.

The real brilliant move is figuring out how to prove his insight, how to demonstrate that he's right. And this is something that the Lord Jesus, a long distant descendant of David and Solomon, is also going to do. And it foreshadows the revelation of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

This woman who swapped the babies thinks it's inscrutable, thinks it's unprovable, thinks that her calumny and her betrayal and this evil action is hidden away, because it's all in her heart. It can't be proven by anything on the outside. But in the presence of Solomon, the inner thoughts of her heart are revealed, just as the inner heart of the real mother is revealed, because both of them betray their true feelings.

One woman loves the baby and doesn't want it killed, even if she has to lose it to save its life. The other one says, divide the child. When he says, bring the sword, the other said, let him be neither mine nor yours, but divide him.

And she'd rather see the child die than have the first woman get him back. And so that's the real genius, that's the brilliance. Now, the application of this, in my suggestion, what occurs to me in looking at it, here is King Solomon, arguably, until the Lord Jesus comes and presides over the Millennial Kingdom, the greatest king in history, certainly in Israel, the most prosperous, most notable king, in the sense of extent of his kingdom and the wealth, the prolific productivity and so on.

In that aspect, he's untouched and unmatched. He is still a synonym for just incredible prosperity to this day. But this seemingly insignificant case from two seemingly insignificant people winds up taking a half a chapter in the inspired word of God as an illustration and a demonstration of God's answer to Solomon's prayer.

And Solomon said, Lord, give me wisdom so that I can go in and out before this people and rule the nation and do these large kingly things. But God chose this as the demonstration because what's really important? It's this illustration of revealing what is in the heart. And in the same way, we look at details of our lives and think, well, this is insignificant, this is small, this isn't at a statecraft level, this isn't at an international political level, this isn't the economies of the nations, this isn't the movements of the world, this isn't a great earth-shaking issue in any way, shape, or form.

But think about this baby story. In God's eyes, things have a far different level of significance and level of weight. And what we think is insignificant, who cares about a harlot's baby? The thing's an illegitimate child.

And being a prostitute down there, can you imagine the Pharisees even deigning, even condescending to listen to such a case? You are altogether sinful. How dare you bring your desecrated, polluted, defiled self into my presence? Get the hints. And here's Solomon.

And this is what God chooses. It's important to think about the small things in our lives, because there are large lessons in small things. And this is probably in the great law library of Israel for generations to come.

This case, from a legal point of view, from the scribes writing down the treaties and the diplomatic negotiations, and Solomon talking, did Solomon have any conversation, any diplomatic interaction with Pharaoh before he married his daughter? Where's that conversation? What was traded? What was the agreement? Where's the treaty and the covenant between Pharaoh and Solomon? Here's the nation of Egypt. We have not one word of that mentioned. But this gets half a chapter.

He that is faithful in that which is least, ah fortiori, is going to be faithful in those things which are much. And if we can learn to master the small problems, the charge of the flea, the attack of the mosquito, and discipline ourselves to think in terms of God's plan and God's purpose and our responsibilities before him, those are far more frequent. There are a lot more mosquitoes than there are elephants, right? So where can we really hone and practice our skills and get good at faith and righteousness by faith and laying hold of our inheritance by faith and reflecting the glory of God by faith? It's in these small tests.

So we should value these. We should pay attention to them. We should treat them the way Solomon treated this case because look at the weight it carries.

And Solomon probably didn't have an inkling when he decided this case that this is going to be the one out of his entire career, this is the one that would survive in the eternal word of God as the representative example of his wisdom. But he was careful and he was faithful. What if he had waved these people away? Harlots, what are you talking about? Bring me the ambassador from the Hittite Empire.

Bring me the Moabites and Edomites. I've got serious stuff to do. What are you bothering me with a couple of prostitutes for? He that is faithful in that which is least.

So it's a really important observation that it is the little things. If you can get the little things right, the big ones will take care of themselves. And it is really true that old thing about for want of a nail, the war is lost.

Remember that old sequence? For want of a nail, the horseshoe was lost. For want of a horseshoe, the horse was lost. For want of a horse, the king or somebody important was lost.

And because he wasn't there, a big decision didn't get made. And the battle was lost. And because the battle was lost, the war was lost.

And it all came back to this one horseshoe nail. I think that's kind of what this represents. Now, secondly, we're going to move into Chapter 4. And if you have subtitles in your Bible there, it says Solomon's administration.

And you've got Solomon's princes. And all we are going to be able to do in the interest of time is take representative examples. So we're going to skip over, really, the 12 officers in Solomon's cabinet and what they presided over.

I will tell you that my preliminary research into these is fascinating. There's a tremendous amount of meat. This is like looking at the genealogies.

And the more you look at it, the more it unfolds. And it's almost tragic that we can't just go verse by verse and really pull at least the mountaintops out of these. But there's an equally interesting example that's a bit further in.

But you can see, and the biggest key is, if you can just get a strong, if you want to do this for your devotions for a week or two, most people would say, well, go to a psalm and do your devotions. If you want to do something fun and just give yourself a little challenge, get a strong and do the first half of Chapter 4. Just look up the meaning of the names. Look at where these guys are.

Look at what they preside over. Check the history of the place they preside over. And then look at their name.

And that's just the threshold. You're standing on the welcome mat to open a door and look into a vast realm of really interesting things. It's particularly interesting relative to the history of Israel.

But we'll see something similar as we go forward. Look at verse 20. Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea.

This is 1 Kings 4:20. Numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude. Why is this significant? What was the promise to Abraham back in Genesis? Abraham, I will make your descendants like the sand on the seashore. Step outside the tent.

Look at the firmament. See all of those stars? That's how numerous your descendants would be. And you think anybody that's done genealogy, you realize how humanity proliferates in an astonishing way from a single individual.

Let's take ourselves. Let's say you're married and you have a child. Let's just take any abstract couple.

Here's a couple and they have a child. And then that child is going to go find somebody to get

married. And they're going to have a child and they're going to get married.

So here we are. We're all the product. Every man is the son of a son of a son of a son of a son of a son going back to Noah.

Every single one of us is descended from Noah. Everyone. Nobody not descended from Noah.

We're all related. Well, how many parents have you got? Two. How many grandparents have you got? Biologically speaking.

It's an unfair question for my set of siblings because we've got like eight. But grandparents, four. Great-grandparents, eight.

Two greats, 16. Three greats, 32. Four greats, 64.

Five greats, 128. You're equally related to all 128 of your three great-grandparents. Four greats, there's 256 people that contributed DNA at the four greats level to whoever you are.

At the five greats, 512. Six greats, 1,024. And it just keeps exponentially going back.

And you go back ten generations, you're related to hundreds of thousands of people equally. And so it becomes a little bit of an exercise in selective interest to say, well, I'm just going to follow the one that my last name came down through. Well, okay.

But Abraham is the father of a multitude as numerous as the sands of the sea. And if you go back and count the generations, it works both ways. And if you have one son and then he's got two sons and Jacob has 12 sons, it multiplies in an incredibly rapid way.

So if you say, well, I'm descended from the Duke of Earl in Scotland or something, well, you and a half a million other people. But Solomon is presiding over Judah and Israel and this incredible multitude. In verse 21, he reigns over all kingdoms from the river.

This is the Euphrates, by the way, which this is pretty much the maximum extent the land has ever enjoyed, to the land of the Philistines as far as the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. And then it talks about the economics and more of the governors.

But skip down to verse 29. And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. Solomon's largeness of heart is as large as the population, the sand on the seashore.

Are those two prostitutes a couple of those grains of sand? Are they daughters of Abraham? Yes, they are. And he cares about that little surviving child and wants to restore it to its mother. Thus Solomon's wisdom, verse 30, excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt.

Now, why does it keep coming back to Solomon's wisdom? There is a point and we're going to cover it after the break. What we have seen in this first session is as great and as numerous as things may be in our lives, any one grain of sand may be what God focuses on, may be what God uses to bless someone else or to make a point in the eternal case before the angels and before humanity that will come up at the judgment seat. It is a dangerous thing for us to decide that something is not important.

If it is a circumstance in our lives, if it is a decision point that requires the application of the word of God, then who knows but God how important it may be. And it is just as important to be faithful in the small things as it is to be faithful in the large. In fact, one helps us with the other.

Well, we're going to take our break. When we come back, we're going to pick up at verse 30 and 31. And this is going to be our example and a representative one of how important these seemingly insignificant details are.

Does it make a difference that we know the name of the governor of a particular region? Does it make a difference that we know exactly what Solomon's wisdom was like? When we come back, we're going to see that, yes, it actually does. Let's pause here and take a break.