

Kings and Prophets 13-03-15a

This is Friday the 15th of March 2013. We continue tonight our study in the Kings and Prophets. We're in the days of Solomon.

We're looking at the descriptions of his kingdom, his personal attributes, and focusing in particular on what the Bible says about his wisdom. And then we have taken just a brief time to look at the book of Proverbs, which preserves some of that wisdom and other wisdom that was added therein too. Let's take a moment as we resume our study tonight to go to the Lord in prayer, focus our concentration, lay aside the distractions and issues that might be clinging to the flaky edges of our minds, and cultivate the active ministry and presence of God's Holy Spirit so that the time that we spend will be profitable and will help to prepare us for the days and the ages that are to come.

Shall we pray? Father, thank you for granting us this time in our existence. We find ourselves located in a particular place, part of a particular family, raised and conscious in a particular time of history of the human race. And as we look at the large picture of your work of creation and of sustaining this planet and the life that is on it, you're dealing with the angels and the future that has been described for us in the pages of your Word.

We realize what a privilege it is to be a part of such a grand design and such a magnificent purpose. We also thank you for the immediate and the personal contact that we have with you as your children through the Lord Jesus Christ. And in the midst of such great and grand things, we know that you are our personal Heavenly Father.

You have given us individual gifts. You have a plan for our lives that comprises every detail, every circumstance, zeroes down to record and analyze and judge the very thoughts and intents of our hearts. And in the midst of these things, we can only express our thankfulness for the Lord Jesus Christ who made it possible for us to be raised from the dust and from the earth and from the mundane and from the temporal and the temporary and made a part of these eternal things and brought into relationship with you, yourself, and with Him.

We thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. We pray that as we seek a better understanding and a fuller knowledge of your Word that He will be our teacher, that He will give us comprehension and perception and recollection of these things at the time where it becomes pertinent for application and for implementation. We know that the life you have called us to can only be lived in that power.

And this is a necessary step in being thoroughly equipped for every good work. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, in 1 Kings, we have noted with some interest the descriptions of Solomon. As I said earlier, he is said to have created these proverbs in chapter 4, verse 32 of 1 Kings. He spoke 3,000 proverbs and his songs were 1,005.

And generally speaking, as we look at the book of Proverbs, we see a distinction between the two-line mashals, the distiches that the Germans identified as they organized and wrote about so much of Old Testament scholarship back a century and a half ago. But we also see some extended proverbial material such as you find in chapters 2-9 where wisdom is personified, walking the streets, warning the young man against the intrigues and the deceptions and the allurements that can ruin his life and lead him astray. And those are more extended things.

And you would expect that some of these might actually have been set to music. Solomon had a rich heritage in the word of God set to music from his father David. And so these songs may have been an extension.

There were tunes that were commonly known in Israel. I remember way back in the 1970s, there was an article that came out in the newspaper saying that some of the ancient tunes, the melodies from Israel had been recovered because they were encoded in the text by means of the vowel points. Well, our pastor at the time was a Dallas Seminary graduate and had majored in Hebrew and Old Testament and explained to us the absurdity of this theory since the vowel points did not exist in David's day or in Moses' day or in the days of the prophets.

Vowel points were a later invention and addition by the scribes who as Hebrew started to be a lost language wanted to preserve proper pronunciation and understanding of what the ancient words were. If any of you have been watching the new series on the Bible that has come out on, I forget, Lifetime or History Channel or something, there is a similar anachronism. They should have hired me at some exorbitant amount to be their advisor.

I could have straightened them out on many inelegancies and faux pas that they have committed, the most egregious of which is the tables of the law that Moses brings down and the other ancient Hebrew writings that you see. There was the note that David gives to Uriah to take to the front and you get a glimpse of the note and it's written in Hebrew and you say, oh, isn't that authentic? Well, no, because it's the Aramaic square script which was not in use in David's day. It wasn't in use in Hezekiah's day.

Next time you're at the house, refresh your mind by looking at the Hezekiah tunnel inscription I have hanging on my wall. That's the old Hebrew. That's what would have been used by Moses and in David's day and by the writing prophets and indeed virtually all of the Old Testament authors used the old Semitic alphabet, not the later Aramaic square script that came in to use probably during the captivity in Babylon and Persia and beyond when Aramaic supplanted Hebrew.

Remember Ezra and Nehemiah in those days when they tried to go back and read the old Hebrew, somebody had to translate. Well, suffice it to say that this is just a glaring... I mean, to me, this is like seeing a marine with his captain's bars on at a 90 degree angle or something. I mean, you look at this and you just go, oh, I can't even... I couldn't even focus on the rest of it.

I just thought, what have they done? Of course, this was a frequent experience throughout the

thing because we're reviewing the high points of the Bible and the highest points, I mean, I think they can only get to an elevation of about 150 feet. So most of the high points have been completely skipped. No Joseph, no Egypt, no famine, no Pharaoh's dreams, no seven years of plenty.

Well, anyway, I digress. What we're looking at here though is Solomon's literary output. And by the way, while I'm digressing, let me put the rest of another canard that I'm really getting tired of hearing and seeing.

People who say, oh, the Old Testament in particular was written by primitive men who were just, you know, sandal-dragging goat herds and scratched something on a piece of broken pottery and this became the Old Testament. The authors of Old Testament Scripture were highly educated. You know what the rate of literacy was in the ancient world that had an agricultural economy and most people were lucky if they could make marks to count.

If somebody even knew how to write, they were the literati, they were the luminaries, they were the intelligentsia, they were the elite because they could write. And this was a rare thing. These were the creme de la creme.

Look at who's producing these things. They are national leaders. Prophets were national leaders.

They were like the equivalent of ambassadors or governors or cabinet members in our state department or in our executive branch or our judiciary. These weren't some guy sitting out on a rock with a staff in one hand and a wayward goat in the other. These were very carefully selected men God chose because they thought deeply.

What does God put in their hearts to write and to communicate? It isn't, well, if you want your goats to live, be sure and don't let them eat this sawgrass that has a funny fern growing next to it or some weird agricultural information or here's how to grow your crops. This is deeply philosophical, deeply intellectual. It embodies social criticism.

It involves governmental critique, review and rebuke of unfair and unjust governmental policies, of social trends, of the decline of morality and of social values. This is why, of course, the Bible has been prized and valued for centuries as representative of some of the finest literary output that the human race has ever produced. If you ever, especially you young people, if somebody comes along and says, I can't believe you believe this bunch of myths and legends written by a bunch of sheep herders that were primitive and lived thousands of years ago when less than 1% of the world's knowledge existed.

Remember what I'm telling you. By the way, the liberal scholars that say, well, the Bible was compiled and put into a canonical form back in about the 6th century B.C., well, do you know who else was functioning and writing in the 6th century B.C.? Homer, Hesiod, Plato, Confucius, Buddha, Mahavira, other greatly respected, philosophical, deeply thoughtful, deeply perceptive

Pythagoras would be contemporaries, right? Does anybody think Plato was some kind of rock-chucking, shallow water waiter? People still can't digest everything that Plato had to offer. Homer and the truths that he embedded in his writings, he used a narrative in the Odyssey, in the Iliad and stuff like that.

Hesiod, read some of these guys. It's deep. And this is the time and the generation.

People have no trouble recognizing the genius and the timeless qualities of these other great authors, nor does anybody with two brain cells to rub together have any trouble recognizing the greatness of biblical literature just as literature, leaving aside its spiritual value and its divine inspiration. It is spectacularly great literature. If anybody tries to tell you that it's primitive, crude, unlettered, unlearned, waste-of-time verbiage, you tell them the fact that you don't understand a thing doesn't mean that it's not great.

In fact, that's probably evidence that it's great, that you don't understand it. Well, I get very impatient with this kind of nonsense. People want to dismiss with a wave of the hand the truth of the Word of God and the quality with which the Lord God in heaven communicated it.

And this is brute ignorance. Anybody who says the Bible is primitive is ignorant with a capital G. Well, Solomon was not ignorant. Solomon was a wise man.

When you read the Proverbs, this is the distillation of a lot of wisdom. Now, let me ask you this. Why the Proverbs? Why the Book of Proverbs? We looked at it some last week.

We saw its structure. We saw that the beginning part is written by Solomon. Why the Proverbs? Think about it.

Did you need Proverbs in the days of Abraham? Did Isaac need a handy reference of Proverbs to get through his life and raise his twin sons? Did Jacob, as he carried on in the land of promise and went down to Egypt and so on, need the Proverbs to inform him of how to be the great patriarch that he was? These guys had a personal relationship with God, in some cases met God, had visions of God, had angelic visitors from God, had the person of God Himself wrestle with them or appear to them or speak to them. Did they need the Proverbs to be reminded or to be informed about the wisdom of God? Did Moses? Where did Moses get his information? Excuse me, Lord, if you could stop talking for a minute, I need to consult my pocket edition of the book of Proverbs. Moses didn't need it, did he? Joshua out there fighting battles, does he need the Proverbs? When do you need this kind of wisdom? Give us a king.

Now you have a king. Now you've got a kingdom. The kingdom prospers.

It expands. It extends. Now you've got urban life.

You've got city dwellers who are no longer mobile and transient and nomadic. Now your country, because of its prosperity and its trade and the wisdom of your king, David and Solomon, you are on the trade routes. There are caravans coming and the idolatry and false

God worship and paganism that was driven out of the land by Joshua and by King Saul and culminating in the battles of King David.

The land is purged and cleansed and the Israelite nation is set up on the foundation of the word of God and all of these native dwellers have been purged and expunged as a picture, especially for us when we think about what needs to happen in our own soul. But then what happens? We've got treaties and we've got agreements and we've got a trade agreement. We've got IFTA.

Instead of NAFTA, it's IFTA. It's the Israelite foreign trade agreement. IFTA.

And they make it with all the surrounding countries. And so what happens? Caravans and foreigners are coming in and they're setting up trading posts and places of business. And they're dwelling in the land bringing with them all of the same religions, all of the same idolatry, the same immoralities, the same ignorance of God and fascination with the occult and with demonically inspired things.

They've all come back, but they've come in peace and now it's business and it's trade. So what does God do? How much of the word of God is available in the days of David? What's been written down? What can you go consult? Five books of Moses, right? Do the books of Samuel exist in any sort of distributable form? No, it's still being written. David lives and dies in 2 Samuel.

That book is underway, right? They're not issuing it like a serial in a Saturday evening post where each edition has another chapter. That's not out. What have they got? They've got the five books of Moses.

They don't have Kings. They don't have Chronicles. They don't have Samuel.

They don't have Esther. They don't have Ezra and Nehemiah. That stuff hasn't happened yet.

They don't have Job, at least not to our knowledge. What have they got? They've got the books of Moses. How available is that? Where are those books? Where's the stuff that Joshua and Moses... These things you can go to the tabernacle and have them read.

You can hear them quoted and portions of the law from Sinai written on the stones up there at Ebal and Gerizim. Remember that? But it's pretty sparse, pretty scarce. And now when people need the word of God at an individual level because they're no longer a consolidated nation traveling under a leader such as Moses, such as Joshua, such as Samuel, such as those that arose in the days of the judges to remind people of the presence and the power of God, now they're cosmopolitan.

Now they're international. Now they're coming into the modern day. And where are the great prophets like Moses or Samuel? Not until later when you get to the days of Elijah and so on are you going to have any sort of preaching ministry.

So what do people need? They need some practical wisdom and they need something to counter and to refute and an alternative to the wisdom of the surrounding nations that is being imported on a daily basis on the backs of camels that are carrying spices and goods and services and trade with all of these places. Solomon recognizes this. God puts it in his heart and he codifies, he writes down, he enshrines, he communicates these truths in little bite-sized nuggets that are memorable.

He sets a bunch of it to music so that people can remember it that way in the same way that we can remember. You know, you try to memorize stuff in a college class and it's very difficult to stick in your head, but stuff that's set to music? I used to kick myself because I couldn't remember stuff I needed to know for my electrical engineering exam, but I could give you all of the lyrics to all of the verses of all of the songs of the Eagles or Paul Simon or somebody else that was on the radio. It just sticks in your head because the tune puts it there.

I very seldom have to open a hymnal because I've heard these things all my life and the music reminds you of the lyric. And you just remember it. And you can remember verse 2 and verse 3 and you think, wow, if I had to sit down with a piece of paper and pencil, I could probably give pretty close to the full versions of probably 60, 70, 80.

I don't even know how many hymns I know, but they're stuck in my mind because of the music. So Solomon wrote songs. A thousand and five, it says.

By the way, I haven't really had a chance to delve into it, but there's something odd about the way that thousand and five is phrased in Hebrew. I can't quite... Something strikes me as odd, but I haven't been able to pursue it. I'm not sure if it's a thousand and five or if it's a thousand times five, but it's a lot.

And he not only generated these himself, I think he had a staff. I think he had a press corps who worked on these things and distributed them, took them over once the temple was built, took them over to the sons of Korah and the others who did the music. And they would trot out new songs and people would come to worship and they would hear the singers and the instrumentalists and they would say, wow, that's a catchy tune and listen to those great words.

And it was in Hebrew and people would remember it and sing it on the way home from the assembly feasts and so on. Well, that's why we have the book of Proverbs. So, in our canon of 66 books, we've got all different kinds of Bible.

We've got didactic epistles and exhortatory prophets. We've got narrative histories and gospels. We have prophetic eschatological revelations and we've got wisdom literature.

Why was wisdom literature initially innovated, invented, brought into being? What is its specific purpose? Why would you want to be familiar with the Proverbs today? For the same reason that God gave it to Israel back then. These are quick references for daily living immersed in a secular world. That's what they're for.

That's why they came into being. When Israel was iconoclastic and among themselves, what's the content of the law of Moses? Love your neighbor. And who's your neighbor? The guy in the next tent.

The guy in the next house in the village. The guy, your fellow Israelite. It doesn't have a lot to say.

And the foreigner who is in your midst. If you're a foreigner in the midst of Israel, you're a tiny minority. If you're a Hittite or a Moabite or an Edomite or something else, and so the law says, this is how Israelites deal with one another and with those occasional foreigners that are in the midst, the mixed multitude.

But if you look at the injunctions that Moses gives, Numbers and Deuteronomy and latter parts of Exodus and so on, it's all about life inside the nation. What are the Proverbs? Much more general. Dealing with people at large.

Dealing with things that are more modern problems in their day. So we reviewed the structure last time of the book of Proverbs. And you recall that I personally, there's a lot of different ways you can divide it.

You can divide it into nine separate pieces. You can divide it into five pieces. I use five.

Because it sort of reminds me of the five books of Moses. This is the next edition of God's word. It's another sort of five section missive or communication.

And if you remember, the first section are the Proverbs of Solomon that starts with the title of the book and statement of the theme of the book in chapter one. And then that's chapter one, verse seven. And then goes through the rest of chapter one all the way through chapter nine.

And this is these Mashal poems. They're teaching poems. They're longer personification wisdom.

My son, if you will receive my words. These exhortations and illustrations about the importance of living life in the light of the word of God, in the light of relationship with God, in the light of recognizing that you are a peculiar people, a unique called out people. And then the second section was the two line Proverbs of Solomon.

The little two line Mashals, the dis-stitches. And we'll see more about those here shortly. And this is the ones that Kings tells us Solomon composed or organized or collected about 3,000 of these.

What a convenient thing. This is the ancient world's little hallmark card. Little quick sentiment.

Quick, easy to remember aphorism. A stitch in time saves nine. One in the hand is worth two in the bush.

Kind of a thing. Memorable, easy, quick. People don't have, you know, iPhones and tablet PCs or pieces of paper or notebooks or things they can carry around with them.

How are they going to hide the word of God in their heart so that they might not sin as David encouraged them? Well, these little memorable bits. Scripture memorization is the key here. So these two line Proverbs and those of course run from chapter 10 through chapter 22.

And these are almost all, virtually all of these are dis-stiches and are a particular kind of two line mashal, two line instruction. And we'll, again, we'll see more about that right after the break. Then you had the appendix to that, which was the words of the wise.

And the words of the wise were collected and these might have been guys on Solomon's staff, maybe a generation or two after Solomon. They, as more of these were deemed worthy, as more of them were recognized as inspired, we would say, they were added to the collection. And so you have that in 22, 23, and 24, last half of 22, 23, and 24.

You've got these words of the wise. And that sort of completes the truly Solomonic portion of the book. We would consider this to probably be the oldest.

This thing sort of adds sections or adds volumes as it goes on, much as the Bible itself. You start with Moses, you add the rest of the Old Testament, then you go to the Gospels and the New Testament. And you end up with a sort of chronological collection that gets added with the Revelation being the latest and the final book.

Then the fourth section was the second collection of Proverbs. And those were the men of Hezekiah that had collected those, remember? That was chapter 25 through 29. And then the final section was the two appendices or appendixes of Agur and Lemuel, those Ishmaelite, apparently Ishmaelite authors.

And this rounds it out. And you almost get the idea that there's a foreshadowing that the final revelation in Proverbs comes from a non-Israelite source, what they would consider to be a Gentile source, just as in the entirety of the Word of God that we have, the latter portions are encompassing the Gentiles and broadening out to include people that are not strictly Israelite. Luke and the book of Acts and Paul's letters to Gentiles throughout the ancient Greek world.

So there's perhaps a hint or a foreshadowing of that in those last couple of chapters. And by the way, where do you find one of the other common carps about the Bible in general and the Old Testament in particular is that it denigrates women. But look at the final chapter in Proverbs.

This is where you find the worthy woman extolled and lifted up. And the Bible, if you recall, was the first of the ancient works of literature. The Jews were the first culture to elevate and lift up and value and extol women.

There's none of this in the Code of Hammurabi. There's none of this in the Sibylline Oracles or the ancient Babylonian epics. Women were chattel.

They were common. They were discardable commodities in the cultures of the ancient world. It was the people of God under the direction of God and at the instruction and teaching of God who recognized that this is an equal partnership.

The two shall become one flesh. That's Genesis. If the two are one flesh, as Scripture says later on, there's never yet a man that hated his own flesh.

So are you going to oppress yourself? Doesn't make any sense. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. That's an ancient word from the Bible, from these alleged goat herds.

And yet the rest of the world takes centuries and eons to catch up and recognize that women are not to be denigrated and cast off and treated as second, third, or fourth class citizens. So this is in the Proverbs. And who writes that? That would be Lemuel.

Gets the privilege of adding that to this canon. But it is consistent with the law of Moses that values women and gives them protections. The narrative portions where you have the daughters of... I had a brain cell die there.

Remember the daughters that Joshua gave in inheritance because their father had no sons? His name momentarily escapes me. The daughters of Zelophehad, I believe. Am I right? Daughters of Zelophehad.

Takes a minute, but the old machine will still eventually crank. Where do you have an analog to that in the ancient world? You don't. And it goes all the way back to the garden.

It goes all the way back. Look at the genealogies of the Lord Jesus where women are included, unheard of, in the lineages recorded on stone of Babylonian kings and Assyrian kings and Canaanite kings and Egyptian pharaohs. It's a rare thing.

Not until the latter days of Egypt do you find someone like Hatshepsut. So, a sell of that to say this. This wisdom is timely.

God puts it in Solomon's heart and distributes it in and through the kingdom of Solomon for a reason. And when we understand that reason, it tells us the place of these portions of God's Word in our lives. We find ourselves living in the world.

We are in it, but not of it. We are incursions on every side. There are tire tracks all through our lives from outsiders who don't know God and don't care anything of the faith or the truth or morality or wisdom or righteousness or truth.

How do we cope? Where is the source of our guidance? This is one of the primary places. And we're going to take a look after the break at the ways in which the book of Proverbs enriches the communication from God to His people with these particular kinds of truth. How does it do it? How do we know how to take these Proverbs that seem to make a promise that, well, if you

do this and so, it'll happen.

And you say, well, I did this and so and it didn't happen. Well, what about that? The proverb is not true. We'll pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to see that this wisdom began in the days of Solomon in terms of its distillation and codification, but it has pertinence and applicability for every generation of believers since. Old Testament and new. Let's pause here and take our break.