

## Kings and Prophets 13-03-15b

We pick up our study now of kings and prophets. We're in the days of Solomon. We're looking at the Proverbs of Solomon, and specifically the Book of Proverbs.

It may be a while before we get to study this book in detail and this is a good occasion to see its place in God's revelation, the reason why it came into being in the days of Solomon. And as a corollary to that, the responsibility that creates because of its existence for the later kings of Judah and Israel. From those to whom much is given, much is required.

And with the communication and codification of these truths, this creates responsibility for the kings, the princes, the nobles, the rulers in Israel, because they can't say they haven't been told what God's requirements and expectations are. And one of the keys to this is to look at the word *mashal* itself. This Hebrew verb means to represent or to be like.

And so the *mashals* are what you might call in general similes. And there's quite a number of them, especially in the latter sections that actually begin with those words. So God is going to reveal truths by analogy or by comparison or by illustration.

And this is a really vivid and practical way to teach. You try to talk about something as an abstract and it's an abstraction. If you can bring it down to a concrete, especially a memorable illustration, it enhances our memory of it, our understanding of it, our ability to think of it later and apply it.

So the basic form, as I said, is the *dis-stitch*, the two-line parable. And the most usual kind is the synonymous *dis-stitch*. There's gonna be basically five different kinds of two-line *mashal*.

And the first, I wouldn't necessarily say it's the most common. I think probably antithetical is the most common, but synonymous is the first kind we'll talk about. And this is where the first line makes a statement and the second line says something, oddly enough, synonymous.

But there will always be a little bit maybe of a complimentary nature. It will fill it in. It's not an exact duplication.

You remember Proverbs 16, 18, pride goeth before a fall. Remember that? What's the second line? And a haughty spirit before destruction. So pride goeth before a fall and a haughty spirit goeth before destruction.

They're synonymous, but slightly different. It's one thing, you know, pride and a fall are sort of inside brackets. If you think of this as a chiasm, well, pride goes before a fall.

A haughty spirit is worse than pride, right? Haughty is really egregious pride. And instead of a fall, what's the consequence of that? Destruction. Would you rather be proud and fall or would you rather be haughty and be destroyed? So, but they're synonymous ideas and they're linked together in this two-line statement in 16, 18 of Proverbs.

Second kind is perhaps the most common and that's the antithetical distich. As you might imagine, something is gonna be stated in the first line and something opposite will be in the second line. Proverbs 11, 17.

In fact, you can pick almost any proverb in that section and it's going to be antithetical. It says, the merciful man does good to his own soul, but he that is cruel troubles his own flesh. Proverbs 10, 23.

To do evil is like sport to a fool. Boy, isn't that the truth? To do evil is like sport to a fool, but a man of understanding has wisdom. And antithesis.

What does a foolish man do? What does a wise man do? What does a wise man do? The third kind is the synthetic. If you synthesize something, what do you do? You bring together different parts and make them a single entity. Different but related truths are presented.

Proverbs 10, 18 is an example. He who conceals hatred has lying lips. Think about that.

He who conceals hatred. I've got some hatred, but I'm going to hide it. So what I say isn't going to be true.

I say one thing and I'm thinking another. There's hatred, but I'm, you know, this is, they smile in your face all the time. They want to take your place, backstabbers.

That would be the idea here. So he who conceals hatred has lying lips and whoever spreads slander is a fool. So these two statements are different.

This isn't synonymous and it isn't antithetical. It's taking two things that are sort of linked. This is talking about how you speak, the fruit of the lips.

Someone who's concealing hate is going to be deceitful, is going to have lying lips, and a fool is going to spread slander. Whoever spreads slander is a fool. So this might be the person to whom the hateful person talks.

The hateful person tells a lie and the fool who listens to him spreads it. Synthetic distich. Fourth kind is the integral distich.

This one's not quite so common. The first line isn't really sufficient to communicate the thought. It's not a thought in and of itself as we've seen in these others.

So whatever the truth is that you're talking about, you really need the second line or you don't get the whole picture. Proverbs 11:31, behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth. How much more the wicked and the sinner? If the righteous are recompensed in the earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner? So your idea is that God is going to recompense or as it says later, will render to every man according to his deeds.

Remember that? The righteous shall be recompensed in the earth. How much more the wicked

and the sinner? You don't get the full idea without both lines. The fifth kind is the parabolic distich.

And you think, well, why don't I just call that the redundant distich because a distich is a parable. Now I'm saying it's a parabolic distich. Well, parabolic means that there is a statement of truth, some practical or moral truth is stated and then it's illustrated.

So you get, you remember looking at the parables of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament, he tells a story, the parable of the sower, the parable of the mustard seed or something. And then later on, he'll explain it to the disciples and this is what it means. So you have a statement of truth and then an illustration perhaps.

So an example is Proverbs 25, 25. Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land. Like cold water to a weary soul.

This would be, you think of the prodigal son, if his father doesn't know what happened to his son, his son has gone to a distant land, but if the son had actually woken up and done well in the distant land and the father heard back, that would have been a great comfort and a great encouragement to his father. Didn't turn out that way, he doesn't, it turns out the comfort goes the other way. But news from a distant land is like cold water to a weary soul.

Now that's the basic parable, the dis-stitch. Sometimes you can't get it all into two lines or it's an expanded thought that occupies more than two lines. And so you will have tri-stitches or tetra-stitches, even pent-a-stitches, sept-a-stitches, sext-a-stitches and all the way up to oct-a-stitches.

What do you think an oct-a-stitch would be? How many lines? Yeah, just like the tentacles. However, we don't typically go beyond eight lines. If it's beyond eight lines, we don't really call it a mashal anymore.

Eight lines is about the maximum. And that becomes the song mode. We figured this has become sort of a piece of poetry unto itself.

And that's what you have in two through nine of Proverbs are these extended proverbial statements or odes or songs. And so we kind of take them out of the pithy, short saying mode and put them in a more of a, this is almost an Aesop's Fable type of length. Now, we've talked about the composition of the book.

And once you get past the introduction and the title and the statement of the theme and so on, you have in that first collection of Psalms, Solomon's Proverbs after the songs in chapters two through nine, then you've got Proverbs proper, mashal dis-stitches almost exclusively in 10 through 22, middle of 22. Well, these are almost all antithetical dis-stitches. There's a few others in there for variety, but the vast majority of them are antithetical.

You can open up Proverbs anywhere in 10 through 22. I opened my Bible to chapter 14 and I go

to verse five, a faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness will utter lies. Antithetical, one side and the other.

Go to 1321, evil pursues sinners, but to the righteous, good shall be repaid. If you're righteous, good will come along. Evil, that'd be another verse I could add to my discussion this past week, talking about, you know, is God the author of evil and good? But that's the nature of those.

When you get to the second collection, the Wisdom of the Wise in 25 through 29, there's a much greater variety of dis-stitch material. This is where you're gonna find a lot of your parabolic and your synthetic and your integral type dis-stitches, other flavors and types. And if you think about it, there's sort of a progression there.

An antithetical dis-stitch is gonna be real easy to remember, because as soon as you remember the first line, just think of something opposite, that's gonna help you remember the second. These others are a bit more advanced. And if you think about it, this is God's provision to the people of Israel as they enter into a sedentary, urban, national life surrounded by friendly nations that are going to conquer them by means of peace instead of by means of war, by means of commerce and in ideas rather than the warfare of swords and spears.

And so they need this fortification of the soul rather than fortification of the walls of the city. And that's what these proverbial truths are designed to do, to equip them for daily life with people in their midst. How do you deal with situations that go beyond, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's ox, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, his wife or any of the other thing that he has.

Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not murder. Those are the 10 commandments, very simple, very distinct, very general. And you get more and more various, more and more specific, more and more applicable to daily life as revelation unfolds.

Think about the meat and the breadth and the scope of the epistles of Paul and of John and of Peter that we have in the New Testament. It is an expanding and more detailed and more unfolding revelation as time goes on. One of the other ways that we see this progression is to look at Solomon's Proverbs.

These are primarily aimed at youth. If you say this is practical wisdom for life, I'm about to send my kids off to college or out into the world at large, they're gonna get married, they're gonna have their first job, buy their first house, get their first car, do their first stuff. They're in their late teens, early 20s, mid 20s, late 20s, whatever it might be.

Maybe I don't wanna throw all 34 chapters of Proverbs at them. What would be the section that might be most helpful? Well, the initial section is aimed at the young. This is why Solomon says, my son.

And perhaps he's recording what David imparted to him when he was a youth before he became king. But the first section is really a book dedicated to youth. And it states this, if you

look at those songs in chapter two through nine, they are an appeal to the young man to not waste his life, to not be distracted, to not be seduced, to not be waylaid and deflected from a life that pleases God.

It's aimed at the young man. If you can get a young person who's got a mild spark of interest interested in anything in the Bible, this is a good section. And think about the civilization, the nation of Israel.

It's in its youth. It's in its early days of independent life. If God as the theocratic king has moved to a distance and now you've got a human king and the nation is trying to be a nation among nations, but they're a young nation.

And so the things that are aimed at the individual also apply nationally. Then you have that section after those songs where the words of the wise are given in 22 through 24, compiled by the men of Hezekiah. And it starts out saying, these also are the words of the wise.

Well, if you look at the content in those next three chapters, the words of the wise, this doesn't go back and talk to the youth or the young man. It talks to an older person, somebody who's out in the world of business or the more wise to the ways of the world. So there's a progression even here in the content.

There are exceptions of course, but this is the trend. This is the sort of the wider pattern. You also notice as you get into the subsequent collections that sometimes there are repeated Proverbs.

What do we know about repetition in the Bible? Why would God repeat himself? Well, emphasis for one thing, if something's repeated, what is the most important event in human history? It's the appearance and the incarnation and the life and the death and the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, right? What gets repeated more than anything else in scripture? You've got four gospels giving that account. So there is that principle. Also, you think about aphorisms or pieces of wisdom that you get and you apply when you're young.

And then with the progress of time and experience, some of those same pieces of wisdom take on a deeper significance. And when you revisit something that you knew as a youth and applied in a certain way as a youth, when you come back to it, you're told don't make foolish mistakes when you're young. Don't make irreparable, irreversible, bad decisions by thoughtlessness or just being rebellious or whatever.

Well, later on, you come back to that same truth as a parent or as an elder, as a senior figure. And it takes on new significance because you have a lot of experience, whether it's personal or observational, of people that have or have not done those things. And it resonates in a fresh and new way.

It's the same truth, but it is informed by observation and experience that you did not have when you first learned it. And there are a number of proverbs that are repeated in the wisdom

of the wise section that first appeared in the to the youth section, but in that context and with very slight wording changes, they take on a whole fresh significance. And so we watch, we do a comparison contrast and we look at them in context as we do all the scripture and it lives anew.

It has a fresh offer of insight and application that maybe we didn't see the first time around. So I can give you some examples. Interestingly, we don't find this sort of repetition within a collection.

If you look at Solomon's initial set, 10 through 22, you don't find repeated proverbs in there. If you find a repeated proverb, it's because it's in the wisdom of the wise section or it's in a subsequent section. And why is that? Did the subsequent compilers not know about the earlier version? They did know, they had the book in front of them.

These things are added to it, but they put it in anyway. So they knew something. They knew that by repeating this or adding it or modifying it slightly and including it, it was making a fresh contribution.

So it's really interesting to look once you understand the structure of the book, when you find a repeated proverb, you say, oh, well, that's some wasted space. They could have shortened the Bible by a couple of pages. They just got rid of these useless duplications.

Not at all. There's a lot of intrigue and treasure to be dug for by saying, well, why is it here and now it's here? What comes before and after it over here? What comes before and after it over here? What are the slight wording changes? Was this just scribal corruption or is there intentional modification over here? It's a fascinating study. One of these days when we do Proverbs, if we don't do the whole book, we will certainly do some of these repeated Proverbs just to elucidate these very interesting, the word of God.

You begin to think that the millennium is not gonna be long enough to even begin to, this life, we're lucky to just get the gist. Then in the millennium, we'll have a thousand years, 10 centuries, 100 decades to try to get a better grip just on this part of God's word. And in the meantime, God's gonna be adding more to his word because all the experience of this age and of the millennium is probably gonna be enshrined in God's word, just as past ages have been.

And what do you think we're gonna be doing in eternity? If you love God and if you love his word, all you can think is, I can't wait. It's, I was reminding Patty the other day, my high school graduation, we had three dozen kids in my graduating class, but you know how they do, they sell you the caps and gowns and the little cards and the rings and the pictures and the, you just keep getting all this paraphernalia. They just rob you blind just when you need your money the most.

You're leaving home and they, oh no, you gotta spend it all on this stuff. But then they have the big graduation ceremony. You have to learn a song and sing it for the torture of the grades below you that have to sit there and go to this assembly and you're in your cap and gown and

you got to have a big motto so that it will be up there while you walk across the stage and get your rolled up piece of blank paper that isn't really your diploma because you haven't technically graduated yet.

And well, our class motto, the song that we had to sing was The Carpenters' We've Only Just Begun. Struggled through that, but the class motto that was over the stage up there in the gymnasium as we had folding chairs on the basketball court, we have crossed the bay, the ocean lies before us. And I thought, well, I'm going to the Naval Academy, kind of makes sense.

But there is a sense in which we're in just a small little inlet of water here. And if we learn to float and learn to swim and not drown and learn the properties and the nature of the water of God's word, now, while we're in this relative calm estuary and this sort of seeing through a glass darkly, limited access, limited memory, we're just learning. It's the things we hand to children.

We give them plastic flatware. We don't give them steak knives and electric forks. And we give them something easy.

We give them a sip cup. We don't hand them an eight ounce crystal tumbler. We give them things that they can cope with.

And when they master those and learn the use, we give them a tricycle or training wheels before we give them a bicycle, before we give them a car. Well, this is what God is doing with us, with this portion of his word. But it truly is the case.

When you think of that concept, as we finish this life and move into eternity, we have crossed this very small bay and there is an ocean that will lie before us in eternity. And it's the seven seas of God's truth and God's person and God's plan. And galaxies unexplored of truth and opportunity for us.

But you don't get to go there if you don't master the basics now. You're not going to get to drive the car if you never bother to learn to ride your tricycle without falling over. Half-inch scar, right eyebrow.

I couldn't drive a tricycle when I started. But I eventually learned. And then I got a bicycle and then I got a car and a motorcycle and all kinds of stuff.

But you start small. That's what the Proverbs are. When you think about the revelation, you've got the history of where the world came from, where the people of God came from.

You get the law at Sinai. This is how to dwell with each other. Just neighbor to neighbor, love your God, love your neighbor.

Now the Proverbs expand out. We're starting to have an international view, a worldview. And the progress, the unfolding of God's revelation is equally true for you and for me.

God gives us those essential truths. We're secure. Our sins are forgiven.

We have a relationship with God. We can go to him in prayer. He will never turn us away.

He will never reject us. If we come to him with a heart of repentance and of acknowledgement that we need him, that we are insufficient in and of ourselves. Jesus said, the one who comes to me, I will in no wise cast out.

But we come to God on God's terms. I am infernally, eternally sick of hearing people saying, well, God can't be God, or he would do what I want him to do. If God was really there, he would speak.

If God was really there, he wouldn't let babies get burned with cigarettes or starved to death in Afghanistan. If God were really God, there wouldn't be affliction and disease. You know, they want a God on their terms.

And of course we understand, and the unfolding revelation of God teaches and illustrates and emphasizes that he that comes to God must come to God on God's terms. And that requires humility and recognition of our insufficiency and our utter helplessness when it comes to solving our own problems. So the Proverbs are going to expand on this.

What is the nature of righteousness? It's not just laws, it's application. And the Proverbs largely take moral truths that are embedded in the commandments and the law of Israel and sets them in practical settings, puts them in practical situations. Be holy for I am holy, thou shalt not commit sins.

Well, if you're a righteous man, how does that work itself out? That's what these aphorisms and these illustrations and these different kinds of distich do. So people say, well, I'm a new believer. Where should I start in the word of God? And you say, well, read the gospel of John or something New Testament.

Somebody starts in the New Testament and hits Romans or Hebrews or name your Pauline epistle. Or you say, well, I'll give you something simple. Go to first John or second John or third John.

Well, that's deceptively simple. You say, well, the one who was born of God does not sin. What? I must not be born of God.

I just committed a sin five minutes ago. Well, not so easy. Where did God start his people out? In practical truth.

There are moral standards of righteousness. You need those. Some things are right and some things are wrong.

That's what the law does. What is the very next revelation? It's how do you live out the righteousness, the moral truths of God? That's what the Proverbs do. They're not just

aphorisms.

They're not just pithy sayings. This is crawl before you can walk. Here are some pre-done applications.

Many times we'd get a new piece of software and it says, okay, create your own this or your own that. And if you look, they give you some samples that are already done. You ever seen that? You get a piece of software that look, here's some that are already done.

Greeting cards. You buy some greeting card software. You used to have it all the time.

American greetings, different ones, greeting cards. Do you want a tall one? Do you want a wide one? Do you want two pages, three pages, tri-fold, bi-fold? What do you want? Here are some examples already done. You want to start a website? Come online.

We've got a template. We've got an engine that'll help you make a website. Here are some themes already done.

The font and the color and the design is already picked out for you. That's what Proverbs is. Proverbs is a get you started exemplar collection of applications.

When you understand that, and did you hear what I just said? They're examples. They are not prophecies. They are not ironclad predictions.

They're examples. This is a typicality. This is the way application works.

Doesn't mean the Proverbs is going to hold in every case. The wicked will suffer calamity and the righteous will prosper. Hey, I know righteous people that are suffering calamity.

What's up with this? The Proverbs aren't true. Look, these are example applications. This is baby steps.

This is training wheels. This is teaching people who have had nothing but the law of Moses, how to get into the realm of application. You learn and grow through that and expand beyond it.

You begin to have nuance. You begin to have context. You begin to recognize that general rules don't always apply in specific exceptional cases.

But these are a great starting place for people that have never had anything but the law. So as a part of the canon of Scripture, the place of the Proverbs, the construction of the book of Proverbs, the purpose of the Proverbs, the nature of the Proverbs is something all of us should know. And so as we move through the Kings and the Prophets, we know now this is the kind of wisdom that God has given His people under Solomon and in this period of time down through Hezekiah.

Judah is still a kingdom in the days of Hezekiah, right? 721 BC, the Syrian invasion, Northern Kingdom, Pekah and Rezzin and the whole bit. Should these people be able to believe and apply the word of God? And well, yes, they have been given this very specific, very helpful, very elementary level communication of truth and God will hold them accountable for it. Point of application for you and me, we have also been given clear, specific, timely, applicable truth from the word of God.

Now that we have it, now that we understand it, now that it has been reviewed and reinforced and illustrated and reiterated in study after study after study, do you think that God will hold you and me accountable for putting it into practice, making it a part of our thinking, having it imbue and color and influence our decisions? Our actions, our activities, the way we spend our time. Do you have no responsibility for how you spend your time knowing what you know about how short this life is and how long eternity is and what the necessary steps of preparation are that we have been given this? It's like chatting with the neighbor behind you in a really important physics class, knowing that next week is the final and the teacher is giving a review and you're chatting with somebody behind you, paying no attention. The teacher is handing out a review sheet, practice questions, and you don't bother to pick one up.

What do you think is gonna happen on the day of examination, the day of judgment? What excuse do we have? We have none. The people of Israel, why is God gonna hold them accountable as a nation for their moral degeneracy and their lack of commitment and their lack of obedience? It's not just the law of Moses. They have had a man of incalculable wisdom teach them for 40 years, collect and imbue and put in song form and in proverb form and in poetic form and minstrels are walking up and down the highways and byways teaching these truths, and they will be held accountable.

You and I are accountable for what we know, which isn't a bad thing. Don't look at it as a sort of Damocles. It's an opportunity because when we do it right, clink, clink, clink, gold coins, rubies, diamonds, falling into the chest of our inheritance in the eternal future.

Opportunity, access badge. God's got a galaxy where he's got a whole new thing going on. You're a faithful believer, access badge.

You get to go there. You get to be a part of it. Those who are faithful, those who are overcomers, Jesus says, will sit with me on my throne.

What happens when you sit on the throne, when you sit in the realms of government? Think about up in Washington, DC, where there are intelligence reports coming in from all around the world, and drones are taking camera shots behind the scenes, and this is what's really going on, and the news is reporting one thing, but look at all the intelligence we have, and there are shakers and movers and players, and those who hopefully are acting in our national interest who are privy to much more information, and have much more opportunity to influence and shape things for the benefit of the nation because of their place, because of their access, because of their clearance, because they have been brought up and made a part of. That's our

opportunity. So being accountable and responsible for this information is not a bad thing, it's a great thing.

We have things that angels longed for, would crave, angels longed to look into, have been handed to us, and we wander off, and I thought I heard a noise, you know, squirreled, and off we go, and we miss the opportunity. Don't let it happen. Think of these proverbs.

God is bending out of heaven, reaching down, pleading with us to pay attention, to learn, to grow, to be prepared, to be ready, so that we can serve, so that we can reflect his glory, so that we can be a part of these great, unimaginably, spectacularly wonderful future things. All it takes is a little bit of concentration, a little bit of dedication, a little bit of shifting of priorities, and altering of focus, and remembering who we are and why we are really here. And that's what these proverbs are gonna do.

We'll take a quick look at some of these next time, and then we're gonna return to our trip through the book of Kings, but you just can't pass by these gems of wisdom. It's like saying, Solomon had a gigantic coffer of gold, and silver, and precious stones, but we're not gonna look at it. We're gonna walk on by that.

Well, I wanna just crack the lid and look at just a few of these gems before we leave the throne room of Solomon and move forward into the dismal, dark, damp, dripping, moss-covered walls of the later history of Israel. But let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the incredible privilege. We can hardly comprehend the magnitude of the gift that you have given us through the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of him and because of your love for him and the things that you have given to him, we share in those, we are a part of those, we enter into those things because we are in him and he is in us.

We pray that as we go forward that God the Holy Spirit will not let us rest, will not let us be complacent, not let us sink into apathy or drift into indifference, but that we will be constantly aware of the rare and precious privileges that we have and the opportunities that your word afford us to grow in grace and knowledge, to bear fruit that reflects your glory, to be prepared for things to come. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.