

Kings and Prophets 13-10-25b

We pick up our study now, we're looking at the handoff, the baton transfer from Elijah to Elisha. It begins, the whole process begins at Gilgal, so we're slowing down to take a look at that highly significant location and what it symbolizes, what it stands for, and what it means to us. Most importantly, at the end of the day, we can think back and say, well, Gilgal, we did a study on that.

I remember what the name means. It means to roll or to roll away. God rolled away the reproach of Egypt from Israel at Gilgal when they were circumcised and dedicated to the Lord.

But what does it mean to us? And so we think about these Old Testament types, these Old Testament pictures, and how they can illustrate for us truths that are pertinent and meaningful and challenging for us to live by. It's one thing to hear it. It's one thing to see it.

It's one thing to remark upon it and perceive it in the Word of God. It's something else to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. But that's what this information should do.

We don't just accumulate it. We don't just observe it. It needs to make a difference.

How many times have you seen a report on TV about something and it makes a difference? I heard a report this last week that something like almost 500 cats and dogs have died nationwide from eating jerky treats. People got chicken jerky treats that were made in China and it killed their pets. And many hundreds of other pets were made ill by these treats.

And they hadn't yet figured out exactly what is in them. They found traces of antibiotics and bizarre chemicals and things. But there's been a huge incident of pet deaths from jerky treats made in China.

So when you hear a report like that, and you know that on top of your refrigerator is a tub of jerky treats, what do you do? I go look and find out, are these made in China? You know, it's just figures, commies, making stuff, sending it to us. They are. All those people in China are communists.

And I'm not a big fan of communism and I'm not a big fan of China for that reason. I think there's individual Chinese people that are wonderful, but their system of government and their political philosophy are murderous. And now they're murdering our pets with jerky treats.

So, but when you hear, when you get a piece of information like that, it makes you do something. I want to go check. Now the one, the kind we get at Costco are made from good old American venison.

They're deer treats. And you know, you can't mess up an American deer. You know, they're deer, you grind them up, you turn them into jerky strips and feed them to your dog.

And it's great. So our dogs are in the clear, but you get a piece of information and you do something about it. You find out that some shipment of spinach has got germs in it.

Remember, there's a bunch of people doubling over and getting all sick from vegetables that had a contamination. Well, you got anything that remotely resembles that in your fridge, you go in there and pick it up and throw it out, right? This is what we do. We respond and try to protect ourselves and try to improve our quality of life.

When we get a piece of information, we act on it. We act on it. This is information from the word of God that is vitally important to our spiritual life.

So we act on it, right? So I cannot help you with that. I can give you the information. I can do my best to suggest what it means and what its pertinence is for us, but you're going to have to get up and go look on top of the fridge and check the label on your jerky treats.

I can't do that for you. So having said that, we're looking at Gilgal. What is the significance of this place? Well, as goes the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, so goes the believer in the age of the church.

That's you and me. So we've got a Gilgal. We've got a place where hopefully we have gone beyond the drop in the wilderness mode.

We've gone beyond the barely subsisting on manna mode and failing at every turn. We're following Joshua. We're delivered through the ark of the covenant, the presence and power of God in our lives across the Jordan into the place of blessing, into the place of victory, into the place of challenge, into the place of service, into the place of inheritance.

That's where we want to be, right? If you don't want to be there, you've got to check your motivation because that's where we ought to be. That's where we are called to be. So Gilgal, it's important.

Separation. Waters of the Jordan, separated. Circumcision, separated.

Resting in the power and provision of God, separated. Doing battle by marching at God's command and never raising a sword. Separation, dedication, commitment, representing God on earth.

God doesn't need to swing swords. God can shake the walls down and deliver the city into their hand by other means. We're not limited to the tools and mechanisms of this world.

Sometimes they're used, other times they're not. But we've got a whole range of additional options in God's grace and by God's power. That's Gilgal.

Now, we're not through with Gilgal. That's just the initial exposure to that place and to those concepts. We're in Judges.

Turn over to chapter three. We saw in chapter two that the angel of the Lord is going to come up from Gilgal and rebuke Israel for failing to capitalize on this opportunity, failing to exploit God's grace and God's promise of blessing and deliverance. They fail the grace of God.

They do not enter into that rest, and they're going to have trouble, and they're going to have limited success, and they're going to be constantly in danger of being ensnared by the idols because they did not drive them out of the land. Now, you come to chapter three in Judges, and Gilgal is going to reappear. One of the most famous left-handed people in history is Ehud.

Remember Ehud and the fat king here beginning in verse 12? The children of Israel doing evil in the sight of the Lord strengthened Eglon, king of Moab. Pay close attention here. Eglon is not the king of just any old place.

He's the king of Moab. What was the prediction about Moab? They are going to be a constant source of challenge to Israel, Moab and Ammon both. Well, this is Moab.

Eglon is the king of Moab, and because they are disobedient, not only have they failed to do the positive tasks, but they are now just failing in their routine commitments to the Lord. And so God allows Eglon to gather to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek. The Amalekites are the first ones to get defeated when Israel is on the way out of Egypt.

Remember that? Aaron and Hur, arms of Moses, and the Amalekites are defeated. They're on their way in, I think, to take over and become the Hyksos kings of Egypt in the wake of the devastation of the plagues. But now here's Amalek back from the dead, as it were, back from defeat, no longer intimidated by Israel as they were 40-odd years earlier.

And Moab and Ammon, they're all coming in and taking a big chunk out of Israel. Now look at this in verse 13. This is Judges 3, verse 13.

Eglon gathered to himself Ammon, Amalek, went and defeated Israel and took possession of the city of Palms. This is not 29 Palms. This is not Palmdale.

You know what city this is? It starts with a J and ends with Ericho. The city of Palms is Jericho. This is the next town coming up in our itinerary after Bethel, right? The city of Palms is Jericho.

Eglon, with his Ammonite and Amalekite allies, takes this whole area. If you take Jericho, what have you already taken? You remember Moab is on the east side of the Jordan and the Dead Sea, right? So they've crossed the Jordan by whatever means. They built rafts and pulled their way across or they waded across or they swam across or they boated across.

They've gotten across the Jordan by human means. And if they've taken Jericho, what did they already take on their way? Gilgal. That's the reason the angel of the Lord left Gilgal.

It's full of Amalekites and Moabites and Ammonites. It's no longer a possession of the Israelites. Eglon's got it.

And Eglon goes on and takes Jericho. So, the children of Israel cried out to the Lord in verse 15. The Lord raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud, the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man.

Which, of course, as we've visited this concept many times, is quite the irony since Benjamin means son of the right hand. This is where all the left-handed warriors come from. And it's just part of God's sense of humor that Benjamin is going to be the place where all the lefties live.

Son of my right hand, you're left-handed. So, Ehud made himself a dagger, double-edged, and a cubit in length. What is the Word of God sharper than any double-edged sword? And the Mechira, the double-edged sword, was about a cubit in length.

Cubit is your elbow to the tip of your fingers. It's a nice short sword. It's not the long, broad sword where you try to cleave some guy's metal helmet in half or take off his arm or, you know, slice him diagonally and leave, you know, appendages on each side.

This is the short sword. This is the double-edged sword. And I like it because it is a reminder of the Word of God.

Ehud goes in there with this, what will become a symbol of the Word of God itself, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And he has it under his clothes, on his right thigh. Now, he's a left-handed man, and he's got it on his right thigh.

So how does that work? This is a cross-draw. This is like a cross-draw holster because he's going to reach inside and draw it across. He's not going to try to, you know, heist it out from the same side.

It's more effective this way. He can make a stroke even as he's drawing it. So he brings tribute.

Now, pay close attention here. Verse 17, he brings tribute. His pretext, his way through the security around the king is, I'm bringing the tribute money.

This is the booty and the spoils of defeating us. We're going to pay you to stay off our back now. So he's bringing this load of tribute money in.

And so the guards say, oh, money, well, come on in. And the king will want to see this. And so Ehud is ushered into the presence of the king because he's got this loot with him.

So when he brought it in, he sees that Eglon, and he knew this already, is an extremely obese man. He's very glorious. So when Ehud finishes presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute, but he himself turned back from what? It says stone images, but this basically says carved stones.

They might have been idols. They might have been engraved stones. They've been manipulated in some way.

But these are stones from where? Gilgal. The stone memorials, the carved stones of Gilgal. The only stones we know about at Gilgal are what stones? They're the memorial stones that were taken out of the center of the Jordan.

So one of two things has happened. Either they have sort of done what you see happen in Byzantine churches. You go to the Holy Land and any kind of a holy spot, you've got to build on it and gild it and ornate it and put a church on top of it and charge admission for it and have priests waving holy smoke and sprinkling water on it.

They've taken these stones and they've carved on them, trying to make them more significant. Or those stones are off somewhere, neglected, and these are new stones, perhaps idols, perhaps something else. But the stones of Gilgal should be those 12 man-sized stones that each individual carried out as a memorial to God's grace and God's provision when Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

Now there are carved stones in the presence of Eglon, king of Moab, probably celebrating his victory in coming across the Jordan and taking away everything that God has been giving his people. This is at Gilgal. And Ehud tries to make a turn in the other direction.

This is one of those times where there's an opportunity to do something different. And he turns back. He turns around.

They think they're leaving now, they've delivered the tribute, but he sees these stones, he is at the place where these stones are, and he turns around. Evidently, Eglon's got one of these open-air courts, like we'll see Saul and some other kings at later on. He's holding court in the open air at Gilgal, sort of celebrating his victory.

And Ehud, at those stones, turns around. They could have left this detail out. We wouldn't know the difference, would we? But it's there for a reason.

There are stones at Gilgal. There was provision from God at Gilgal. There was supposed to be separation unto God at Gilgal.

And Ehud turns around and with his left hand draws his sword out of his right thigh holster and plunges it into the middle of Eglon, never to be found again. And he buries it up to the hilt. He can't even get it back out.

So you remember that, verse 21. Thrust it into his belly. The hilt went in after the blade.

The fat closed over the blade, and he couldn't draw it back out. Instead, other things came back out. So then Ehud takes off.

But this is at Gilgal. It's at Gilgal. The stones of Gilgal.

Now, what kind of a king is Eglon? He's king of what? Moab, right? He drags the Ammonites and Amalekites along with him. Turn with me to Micah, chapter 6. It's after the book of Jonah.

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah.

I say that basically to kill time. I know you know where it is, but I've got to turn there myself. Chapter 6. Hear now what the Lord says.

Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the Lord's complaint, and you strong foundations of the earth. For the Lord has a complaint against His people, and He will contend with Israel.

Oh, My people, what have I done to you, and how have I wearied you? Testify against Me. I brought you up from the land of Egypt. I redeemed you from the house of bondage.

I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. Oh, My people, remember now what Balak, king of Moab, counseled, and what Balaam, the son of Baor, answered him. From the Acacia Grove to Gilgal." This is from Shittim.

Shittim. If you look on a map and figure out where Shittim is, it's on the east side of the Jordan. What happened at Shittim? This is where the Moabites sent their daughters to seduce and co-opt Israel.

Balak couldn't get Balaam to curse Israel, couldn't get supernatural blight to happen to them, and so instead they subverted them, co-opted them, tempted them away with these beautiful girls, sent them in, and Israel committed whoredom, it says in the King James, with the daughters of Moab at Shittim, what they call here the Acacia Grove. But this is Shittim. The place name, the place is important.

This is the valley of Shittim. This is where the Moabites fooled and made fools of Israel before they ever got into the land. This is in the days of Moses.

Now, verse 5, "...O my people, remember what Balak, king of Moab, counseled, what Balaam, the son of Baor, answered him, from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteousness of the Lord." This is Micah speaking in his day, and he says, why does he mention Gilgal? Balak and Balaam and all that, they never got across the Jordan. Gilgal is on the other side of the Jordan. He says, from Shittim to Gilgal.

That connecting endpoint at Gilgal is what we just read in Judges. This is Eglon, king of Moab, coming across the Jordan and taking away everything that they were due to inherit, that they were supposed to conquer and lay hold of and possess, and the service and the honor to God that they were supposed to accomplish in the land, Moab follows them into the land and takes it away, from Shittim, Balak, to Gilgal, Eglon. Why? Because of this complaint that the Lord lodges in these first verses in Micah.

It's the same complaint the angel of the Lord delivers in Judges chapter 2. Hear me now, it is the same complaint that God can deliver against you and against me when we make the same mistake. Gilgal is a hugely important place to think about and to avoid failure at. It can be a

place of wonderful blessing and accomplishment.

Circumcision is practiced there after many generations of failure in Egypt and in the wilderness. It is the place where the first Passover in the land is observed. It is Joshua's headquarters for the conquest of the land.

It's the place where the commander of the armies of the Lord appears and declares God's intention to deliver the land into their hand. It's enormously important, but it can also be the place of great failure, great sorrow, from Shittim to Gilgal, Micah says in chapter 6 verse 5. The near great dynasty of Saul is inaugurated. Saul is anointed king in what town in Israel? Where does Samuel anoint Saul king of Israel? Gilgal.

Not the right tribe, not the right time, not the right king, not the right dynasty. Gilgal. That's where Saul is anointed.

Where does David return and celebrate after the Absalom revolt? When Absalom is finally defeated and David is able to return to the land, he is met and celebrates at Gilgal. That's in 1 Samuel chapter 19 verses 15 and 40. This is where the kingdom is restored as it were.

The false king, the failed king, the rebellious son of David who seeks to usurp the throne is overthrown and David returns to the throne. Gilgal is specifically mentioned twice in that connection. Later on in the days of Hosea and Amos, when we get to those books in this study, we'll see that Gilgal is going to be mentioned again just the way Micah mentions it.

It will become a center of apostasy in the later days of Israel. So what is it going to be? Is it going to be a place of great victory, of great opportunity, of great initiative, a launching place for success and overcoming, or is it going to be an ignominious place of failure and loss where the Moabites come across and celebrate? That's the question. Well, that's Gilgal and this is the decision that faces northern Israel, isn't it? God is sending them a prophet.

He has sent them Elijah and he's going to redouble his efforts in Elisha to confront the people with their need for him, with their responsibility to him. In the same way that the law of Moses confronted the people and in a double portion, fulfilling the law and going beyond it, you have the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is Elisha where the law of Moses is Elijah where John the Baptist, summing up the entire Old Testament prophetic ministry, is the forerunner and he says there's one coming greater than I and that's the Lord Jesus.

John the Baptist is Elijah if you will accept him as such, Jesus says. And if he's Elijah, what does that make Jesus? The double portion, the double power, Elisha. It's the word and the deed.

It is the prophecy and the fulfillment. Well, it begins. This message, this confrontation, this plea from God to his people begins at Gilgal.

With Elijah and Elisha. So back in 2 Kings 2, Elijah says to Elisha, stay here for the Lord has sent me on to Bethel. And we always wonder why is it that Elijah tells him to stay and why is it Elisha

knows he can't stay? Well, if Elisha has been thinking about the significance of that place when it is time for Elijah to move to Bethel, then Elisha knows he can't stay in Gilgal.

You can't conquer the land sitting in Gilgal. That's the launching point. That's the starting place.

You get sanctified. You get rested. You get prepared.

That's your headquarters. But you go forth from there and move into the land and the place of opportunity. Now, I mentioned a couple of times that at Gilgal you have sanctification and separation.

You have the stones. You have the rest afterward and reliance upon God. Let's think a little bit about Bethel.

What's the origin of Bethel? Who named that town? Jacob. What was the occasion? He has just fooled his father into giving him the blessing that had been intended for Esau. And he's traveling north.

He's headed for the territory of Laban. And he's going to go up there and try to reestablish himself. He's leaving all the things that he was just granted by way of pronounced blessing.

But he stops. And what does he do? He takes a rock and makes a pillow out of it, a stone at Bethel. And he rests with his head on that stone.

And he sees in his dream at night the angels ascending and descending on this stairway. It's called a ladder, but it was probably a stepway, a stairway. But again, very significant because the angel of the Lord appears at Gilgal.

The commander of the Lord's armies appears to Joshua at Gilgal. The angels show up at Bethel. There is a stone at Gilgal, which the next morning, what does Jacob do with that stone? He sets it up and pours oil on it and makes it a memorial stone.

You've got memorial stones at Gilgal, memorializing God's deliverance across, out from the place of wandering, out from Egypt, finally entering the place of blessing and opportunity and inheritance. And there's a memorial there. Now Elijah goes to Bethel where Jacob himself, the namesake of the nation, Israel, rested, used a stone as a pillow.

And after seeing this dream from God, sets that stone up on its edge. It's got to be a man-sized stone because he's by himself. He's not taking an enormous stone.

This is something he can turn on and it's a small memorial, just like those that were carried out of the Jordan. Man-sized, a person can manipulate these stones. And that is significant.

This is not the Washington Monument. This is not the Herndon Monument. This is not some great obelisk.

This is not some massive piece of granite. This is something a person can set up himself. There's a reason why God said that.

He didn't say get 12 guys to lift one stone out of the bed of the Jordan. Each man takes a stone he can carry. Jacob takes a stone he can set up as a memorial.

He pours the oil on it. It's not too high for him to reach up and pour the oil on it. It's small.

This is why they don't know where these things are today because they've blended into the landscape. But he sets it up, rest, stone. What is he doing? He's separating from his family, from his father, from his brother, from his mother and going to make his own way.

He's going to build up those possessions that he will one day bring back to the land that he has been promised. But he is going to sojourn. The people under Joshua ended a sojourn and came into their inheritance.

At Bethel, Jacob began his sojourn. He was on his way out of the land and he will come back to Bethel later. But it's a place of communication.

What does that memorial that he set up at Bethel represent? Why did he set it up? He didn't say, wow, great pillow. I want to find this on my way back. It's because of what he saw.

And what did he see? The active communication between heaven and earth. And upon seeing that, he makes his vow to God that if God will be with him, God will be his God and he will be faithful and obedient because he sees that potential. God showed him that there is concourse, there is provision, there is active communication between heaven and earth on his behalf where he is at Bethel.

And he sets up that memorial stone as a recognition and a reminder that God is involved. God intervenes. God is actively taking care of his people here on earth.

And so there is a memorial. So the first memorial, God sanctifies and separates and prepares us for victory. Second memorial at Bethel, God continuously, these angels don't just all go up or all come down.

He didn't say, I saw a parade of angels and they came from heaven to earth and stood before me and said, holy, holy, holy, or, you know, Gloria in excelsis Deo or anything. They were actively going back and forth. This is a continuous process.

And Jacob realizes this is ongoing all the time. God is continuously involved on behalf of his people and sends support and encouragement and provision, protection from heaven to earth and gets reports back on how it's going, the angels ascending and descending. And Jacob wants to remember that.

So he sets up memorials, a different kind of memorial. This is where Elijah is going next. And Elisha says, I'm not staying at Gilgal.

I'm not just going to stay here and rest forever in the circumcision and in the promise. I'm going to go avail myself of that provision, that concourse that God displayed to Jacob. So Elijah goes there and you have a conversation with the prophets and so on.

Then Elijah says, stay here at Bethel. The Lord has sent me on to Jericho. Now this is reversing course.

He's been going. And by the way, what tribal area are all of these towns in? Gilgal, Jericho, Ai, it's not mentioned here, but they go back and forth by it. And Bethel.

What tribal allotment do all of these towns belong to? They're all in the same tribal allotment. And I'll give you a hint. It's not Judah.

And it's not any of the tribes in Northern Israel. It's Benjamin. All three of them are Benjamin.

They're right on the border. In fact, they constitute the border between the Southern Kingdom and the Northern Kingdom. They are on the line.

What are you going to choose? Are you going to choose what Jehoshaphat has encouraged and promoted and taught about in the South? Are you going to go the way of the Jeroboams and the Ahabs and the Jezebels up north? This is right on the line. He's traveling that border and it is confrontation. Here are God's promises.

Bethel is a place of great potential and great promise. It is also a place of great failure. As we will see next time, they're going to set up shrines of false worship in these same places because they start attaching mystical significance and they miss the point.

We can sometimes attach a sort of superstitious or mystical significance just to attending church or just to having our Bibles out or listening to somebody talk on the radio about the Bible or the things of God. And we think, well, I'm going to sort of get a glow just from association. And it's not true.

It isn't being in the location. It's not the location that is holy. It's God's presence and power that can make any place holy.

And we want that place to be our souls and our lives. So when you think about these cities, and we'll get the Lord willing next time, Jericho and then back to the Jordan. But this area of the Jordan is significant.

There are crossings that take place here, supernatural crossings, supernatural blessings. John the Baptist is going to be operating in this very same area many days hence, many years hence. But it is very significant.

This little travel log here is a huge pivot point in the story of God's wooing, God's calling of the Northern Kingdom back to Himself. He doesn't give up on them. He doesn't say, oh, you've all gone to Baal.

The heck with it. I'll just deal with Judah. God spends decades, decades, decades seeking and confronting His people with the opportunity to turn.

And this is the beginning of the prophetic ministry. Samuel had a major prophetic ministry out of Gilgal. If you look at 1 Samuel 10, verse 8, 1 Samuel 13, verses 4 through 18, 1 Samuel 15, verses 10 through 33, Samuel operates.

He's the first of the Israelite prophets, prophet proper. And he's operating in and around Gilgal. It's one of his three preaching sites, one of his three towns that he's on a circuit.

But his main base of operations is Gilgal. He's calling the people back to that initial sanctification. And that's what God calls us to.

Well, we'll continue our study next time. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the so intriguing pictures that you present to us in your word of timeless truths that were pertinent then and are pertinent now.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit will enliven these things and cause them to be real to us, to impress us, to return to us at times when we are able to think and to concentrate and to meditate on our opportunities as your children, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that as a result, we can maximize our opportunities and our potential, that we can live in a way that pleases you, that we'll stand up to the scrutiny of the judgment seat of Christ, that we will be overcomers, that we will be inheritors in that great land of promise that the Lord Jesus is even now preparing for our occupation. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.