

Kings and Prophets 14-05-30b

We pick up our study now, we're in 2 Kings chapter 8, and we've seen a series of episodes now that can be looked at in a number of different ways. We've looked at just the narrative and the details of that narrative and some of the foreshadowing that is involved in it, some of the numerical significance that you find, prophetic significance. It is also a reminder that God is intimately involved in human events, both at the large scale of nations and at the individual scale.

One moment you're looking at the king and armies and national destinies, and the next, here's one lady with a son. And God's attention is equally devoted in each, and I think that's one reason you have these two scenes juxtaposed. On the one hand, this woman who there was nobody considered to be more helpless than a widow, and yet her case is made and her provision is secured.

And then in the next you have something that is going to affect the destiny of both Syria and Israel for many years to come. And God is equally involved and equally attentive. And it's a reminder that when we go before the Lord in prayer and bring our seemingly individual and not momentous needs and concerns before Him, He is the same God that cared for the widow and her son, and He's the same God that orders the destiny of nations.

But I want to digress for just a moment and cover something that's related but not directly. I had mentioned last week on Sunday the book by Douglas Gruthy is called Truth Decay. And I think it is a good time as we look at current events and the trend in our culture and culture around the world to pay attention to some of the things that are pointed out in this book.

The whole book is really good, but there's a nice summary in one of the early chapters. I'm starting on page 26, and the title of the chapter is Truth in Jeopardy. Now the reason I'm bringing this up is, what is the issue? Both in this study and in our Ephesian study, what do you do with the truth? God has demonstrated the truth through Elisha to the Northern Kingdom.

He has manipulated a raider band from the Syrian army, and Elisha, one dusty little old prophet, was able to lead them right into Syria, feed them a meal, and send them home. It's a combination of hospitality and humiliation. They are so insignificant in God's mind that He can bring them in, treat them like guests, and send them home.

It's the very opposite of a threat. But this is done before King Jehoram to remind him that there is a God in Israel who can do these things and will do them on behalf of the kingdom. It's truth.

It's demonstrated. It's just like the withered arm being extended and healed. In Ephesians chapter 4, He gave some apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastor-teachers to present the truth.

You and I are confronted as individuals right now with a variety of presentations of what is

truth. If you watch CNN, you get one truth. If you watch Fox, you get another truth.

If you read blogs, you get a different truth. If you try to go look at Bible teaching on YouTube, you get a different truth, or a whole panoply, cornucopia of varying truths. God the Holy Spirit has been sent into your soul and into my soul to give us a truth detector.

There is no way. If you try to find a formula or a litmus test, who is teaching the Bible accurately, who is telling the truth in history, who is telling the truth in current events, who is telling the truth about any given situation, there is no detector that is going to click like a Geiger counter and tell you, well, this is the truth and this is not, except the gift of God's Holy Spirit. He is the one.

What did Jesus say? I will send you another comforter. What will He do? He will lead you into Bible truth, theological truth, church age truth, age of Israel truth, all truth, all truth. God the Holy Spirit, when we are sensitive to His ministry and when we provide Him that with which He can speak, which is the Word of God, which is why we are assembled here and why we do so every week, that is how He communicates.

But the issue is truth. Truth is that which reflects reality. And there is just one reality, or there should be.

You know, people say, well, my truth is different than your truth, and my spirituality is different than your spirituality, and the world in which I live is different than the world in which you live. There is an objective set of facts that constitute reality. Some of it is seen, much of it is unseen.

Science can only deal with what is seen. And they try to act omniscient when they are dealing with only a tiny fraction. It reminds me of the fact that our planet is a tiny micro-speck in the vast cosmos, and we can only sample and do experiments in our little planet-based laboratory, and yet science is quick to extrapolate and say, these things hold true everywhere.

The speed of light that we measure is 186,000 miles per second. It is that way everywhere. Well, says you, prove it.

Prove to me that on the backside of the crab nebula, the speed of light, well, we don't have any reason to think otherwise. Well, you don't have any reason to think it is either. You know, who knows? Is the density of whatever forms the universe constant? Does light, in fact, slow down after it gets beyond what we can measure? You know, for all we know, the universe is just a little snow globe on God's desk, and light that appears to have been traveling for millions and billions of years across the fabric of time and space, it might have left day before yesterday, but it is artificially, you know, the objects in your mirror are closer than they appear.

You don't know. We extrapolate. We assume.

We make all these assumptions. Science only deals with the known universe, and that is not reality. That's a little portion, a tiny portion of reality, and we have to be careful about

extrapolating that to everything.

Well, this book deals with what is truth and what is happening to truth in our postmodern culture, and if you're using technical terms, there was the modern age. We are past that. Everybody says, well, I want to be modern because we think it's a synonym for up-to-date.

No, modern was an age that has come and gone. The modern age is gone. We are postmodern.

So I just want to give you a little bit of it. This is a summary from the Truth in Jeopardy chapter in this book. It's the first chapter, and this is in a section called The Acids of Truth Decay.

We're in a dental setting anyway, so I thought what could be more fitting? The Acids of Truth Decay. What factors motivate truth decay? Why do people embrace a postmodernist viewpoint that radically redefines truth? People do not decide to jettison an ancient and venerable tradition for no reason. The following are some of the salient beliefs leading to truth decay.

I've already explained what this decay is. We did that last Sunday, and I don't have time to review it. So just remember that the notion that you can take fact one and fact two and make a declarative propositional statement, there is a prothesis based on this, and then you can use logic and deductive and inductive reasoning to form conclusions.

When I have two apples in this basket, and I have two apples in this basket, and I take this basket and dump it into this basket, how many apples will I have? I will have four. Not five, not three, four. Two plus two is four.

That's what used to pertain. And we would say, well, if I want four apples, I'm going to have to take this two and get two more and add to them. And there's a whole series of deductions and reasonable conclusions that you can draw based on these facts that represent reality.

The problem in the postmodern age, as you will recall from last week, is people no longer feel the need to have a truth that reflects reality. They have a relational truth. They have a subjective truth.

Well, I don't like there being that many apples in the basket, and I don't care how many you dump in, I've still got two. Two apples is my truth. Well, I just dump two more in your basket.

Well, I see that, but I still have two apples. But I just put two more in the basket. Well, I know, but I've got two apples.

Believe me, if you look around and listen and watch, this disconnect of thought and conclusion and operating principles no longer reflects logic. We used to be able to use inescapable logic. You remember Mr. Spock and Mr. Data and these other logical guys in science fiction? Well, logic dictates a thing.

Well, if it's logical, I've told you before at least once, you used to watch these old detective shows like Mannix and Canon. But Mannix especially. Mannix, I would love to see an X-ray of

that guy's skull, because every single episode he got knocked out at least once, sometimes twice.

They were forever knocking the guy out. When you can't have Mannix around doing stuff, they'd just club him in the head. I would conservatively estimate that in the episodes of Mannix that I saw, he was knocked unconscious at least 65 or 70 times.

I don't think he could be healthy after that. But here's another thing in Mannix, and I don't know how much they do this now, because I don't really watch that much series television, but in the old days they would capture Mannix and they would tie him up and they would say, I'm going to shoot you, and Mannix would say, well, but if you shoot me, you'll never find out where the papers are, because I had them and I hid them, and if you shoot me, you'll never find out. Do you remember this kind of thing? The captive would use logic on his captors, and he would say, well, but if you shoot me, you'll never get the answers you need, or you'll never find your long-lost daughter or whatever it is.

And the guy, the criminal, would be compelled by the logic to say, oh, I can't shoot him because otherwise I'll never find out the thing. What happens in the postmodern world? I'll worry about that later. I'm mad at you and I'm going to plug you.

And you notice that I haven't seen them build that into an episode lately where it used to be it's stock and trade. The guy, your hero, would cleverly use logic to stymie the enemy. Oh, my hands are tied.

You've got a point I can't escape. Your logic is irrefutable. I can't proceed.

You've confounded me with your genius of your plan. I've got papers that are going to be released to all of the press. If you kill me, this thing is going to come out.

Oh, well, darn, I can't kill you. Now they don't care. They'll shoot you and worry about that later.

This is the postmodern world. Logic does not compel. Reason does not define people's operations.

So listen to this now. The acids of truth decay. These are what he's going to talk about throughout the rest of this book.

Number one, the Enlightenment vision. You remember the Enlightenment, right? Age of Reason. This is where science had its birth through Christian men who drew a conclusion that since God is orderly and God is reasonable, that there would be a reflection of that in nature and that the laws of nature would be consistent because of God.

Science is founded, the bedrock foundation of science that laws of physics and laws of chemistry hold was first arrived at by men who made that conclusion without knowing it yet based on what they knew of God. God is not a God of confusion. God is a God of order.

So when God sets a thing up, it's always going to act the same way, that Christians founded modern science. Why didn't science take off? They always talk about, oh, the Arabs had science back in AD 800 and there was African scientists and this. They never did anything with it.

Why? Because they didn't start from the assumption that nature is under the orders and the dictates of the decrees of God. So the Enlightenment vision of unleashing reason's powers in pursuit of universal knowledge. Isn't this the scientific assumption? Through reason, through observation and experimentation and the scientific method, we can pursue and ultimately attain universal knowledge.

Isn't that what they tell you? You say, well, you can't explain abiogenesis, you can't explain the Big Bang. Well, we will. Just give us time.

The powers of reason and observation, we will eventually explain everything. The Enlightenment vision of unleashing the power of reason in pursuit of universal knowledge and technical mastery of the world has failed. This is one of the reasons for truth decay, because this whole enterprise that started off with such promise has failed.

The ideology of progress did not make good on its promises. Modernism has been eclipsed by postmodernism. This is the disaffection and the disappointment and disillusionment of Generation X and Generation Y and whatever they're calling whatever the generations are now.

But you know how you've got all these goths and people sitting around being glum and not interested in anything. They never speak up. They walk around in kind of a cranky mood all the time.

This is why. Because in their view, this whole enterprise has failed. They don't see the fruits of it as they look at their iPods.

Modernism has eclipsed postmodernism, which according to Jean-Francois Lyotard. Oh, gosh. If I had that name, I would change it.

Anyway, it's characterized by incredulity toward metanarratives. This is why I didn't recommend this book. I mean, all of this is kind of written at this level and above.

But postmodernism is characterized by incredulity toward metanarratives, which means people don't accept your pat explanations. They don't accept your logic. They don't accept your demonstrations that, look, this is what works.

When we used to raise kids strictly, we didn't have social problems. Now we let them run amok, and we don't want to crush their psyche or warp their id or damage their self-esteem. And now we've got high suicide rates, high drug dependency, school shootings, and pregnancy rates, and all kinds of instability, and the only way we can keep society from falling apart is to drug everybody.

Well, see, they have incredulity toward the metanarrative, and so they think they've got a better way. Of course, that hasn't worked. So the metanarratives are disappointing, whether they are Marxist, democratic, religious, or scientific attempts to definitively explain and master reality.

They don't think religion works. They don't think government works. They don't think, in many cases, science works.

I mean, they like the science that they've got, but they don't see it meeting their personal needs, their personal angst, which, of course, it can't and won't. The metanarrative must give way to the local narrative, the situational perspective and contingencies of encultured existence. Cosmic pretense should be shunned, as should the naive hope in progress through technology or ideal forms of government.

So this is one of the things. The death of modern architecture and its ideology of progress, which offered technical solutions to social problems, is seen by everybody. It has failed.

Technology isn't solving our social problems. Social problems are getting worse. I mean, anybody with an eye to see can see that.

Number two. That was the first one. The notion that progress is going to make a utopian world, people are seeing how hollow that is.

Number two. The social situation of people in a cosmopolitan, media-saturated environment makes a unified worldview untenable. The notion of finding objective truth in the midst of the information-slash-Internet age is a utopian illusion and should be dropped.

In other words, there's no consensus about what is truth. This gets back to my point about Bible teaching on the Internet, on websites, on YouTube. You can find, used to be, you know, you had to be prominent to get published and for people to read and hear your opinion.

Now, any guy with a webcam and a couple of minutes can be right up there with the most well-known long-standing figures. And so everybody's got a different idea and you go in there and you're just overwhelmed with the diversity of it and this universal access to information forces people to the conclusion there is no absolute truth. I'm just going to have to carve out a little truth right here where I am.

Nobody can agree on a universal truth. So there must not be a universal truth. You see the point? That's number two.

In such close conditions of information density, how can anyone hope to sort the true from the false, the trivial from the pivotal? Is that not the problem on the Internet? What's trivial? What's extremely important? You can't tell. It's all turned up to 11. And construct a justifiable metanarrative, you know, a real metanarrative.

Number three. The diversity of religious and philosophical perspectives available to people

today makes the notion of one absolutely true religion or philosophy unacceptable. Kind of related to number two.

There are many ways of knowing and many perspectives to be embraced. Traditional religions should therefore loosen their dogmatic grip and give way to a plethora of spiritualities, some of which are pastiches of several religious traditions. This is like the incursion of New Age into Christianity.

Let's meditate. Let's imagine that Jesus is walking through a field of daisies with a child in each hand and, you know, then cross your legs and do yoga while you're thinking about Buddha. And, you know, it's just all glum together.

A cover story in Utne Reader entitled God with a Million Faces surveyed the postmodern religious landscape in America and concluded that synthesizing one's own religion may be the best way to handle religious diversity and one's individual needs. Instead of trying to pick one, just make your own. You know, be the god of your own universe.

The author cited Christian pollster George Barna's assessment that there is a, quote, new perception of religion, a personalized, customized form of faith views which meets personal needs, minimizes rules and absolutes, and bears little resemblance to the pure form of any of the world's major religions. People are just, well, I'm spiritual. I'm a spiritual person.

Have you heard that? In a tolerant age, one is free to create a faith of one's own because, quote, a personal quest is a creative act and thus just as authentic in what it says about innate human yearnings and desires as are established religions. Spirituality becomes more of a consumer item than a matter of facts, argument, and truth. It's a product.

It's a consumer item. It's a do-it-yourself. Postmodern pluralism also sparks religious challenges for the increasing number of interreligious marriages occurring in the United States.

On an airplane flight, I spoke, this is Douglas Gruthius, I spoke at some length with a man who told me that he and his Hindu wife from East India had participated in two wedding ceremonies, a Hindu ceremony for her and a Methodist ceremony for him. The matter of how to train their two young children in religion had not yet been settled, although the husband hoped that some combination of the two faiths could be achieved. I'm a Metha-Indoo.

I'm a Meth-Indoo. Number four. Our cosmopolitan and pluralistic environments do not allow for a fixed sense of personal identity.

Or one best way of life. Identity should be fluid and flexible in order to adjust to the kaleidoscope features of postmodern culture. There is no final truth of how humans ought to be.

We must simply experiment, adapt, and adjust. Consider the pop icon Madonna, who has made image makeovers a way of life and a very lucrative life for 15 years. As theologian David Wells

notes, she is in many ways a perfect personification of the postmodern reality, a self-created persona undergoing perpetual change for its own sake.

In her world, everything is fluid and open. All boundaries and taboos are gone. Because for her, there are no structures of meaning that transcend personal preferences.

Or we could add that transcend marketing strategies. So do what you want to do. Be what you want to be.

Worship however you feel like it. We're kind of in this if it feels good, do it mode as a postmodern approach. Number five.

Language is ultimately a contingent creation of human beings. It cannot represent any objectively knowable reality. In other words, a term or a word will mean whatever I say it means.

It's not going to mean anything that you can put in a dictionary and everybody can refer to. This word means what I tell you it means. Our signifiers cannot be known to connect with the signified reality outside of them.

Besides, language creates our sense of reality. It cannot describe a reality independent of itself. Truth is absorbed into various irreconcilable language games.

This is Ludwig Wittgenstein's terminology. No higher authority available. We may take language to have the potential to deliver reality at least some of the time, but postmodernists want to disabuse us of pretensions.

Nietzsche, who predates postmodernity, was nevertheless a kind of early postmodernist with respect to his views on truth and power. In an essay, Nietzsche said, What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms. In short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished, poetically and rhetorically, and which, after long use, seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people, truths or illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are, metaphors which are worn out without sensuous power, or coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.

So, in other words, even when you say a thing, it's going to mean something different to you than it means to the person you're talking to, because everybody's going to define their terms their own way. So, when you say something like, Jesus is God, well, somebody's definition of God is going to be different. It's not the biblical God.

He is a God. In other words, the disconnection from reality that is reflected in post-modernity has affected language. You can't say a thing and have it mean what it ought to mean anymore.

Number six. Written texts do not have a determinate, singular, knowable meaning or truth

value. And you see this in Bible interpretation.

What the Bible says isn't subject to just one interpretation. There's no one valid way to understand the Bible. Any way you want to understand it is okay, because it's your worship, it's your truth, it's your religion.

Human documents resist definitive interpretation and must be freed from the prison of objectivity. Freed from the prison of objectivity. As founding deconstructionist Jacques Derrida famously said, there is nothing outside of the text, and any text may be deconstructed to reveal its ultimately ambiguous nature.

An author's intended meaning does not limit the meanings of any given text. There are as many meanings as there are readers, and no reader is more justified in his or her interpretation than any other. Whether the deconstructionists themselves want to be read in this way is another matter.

If they say you can read it any way you want, well, I'm going to read what you just said any way I want, which is that it's bunk. But they want you to take what they say as verbatim fact, but they want to say that what everybody else says can be interpreted. And then number seven.

Following up on themes in Nietzsche's work, Michael Foucault and his followers argue that what is defined as, quote, truth is a function not of verifiable evidence or sound logic, but of power relationships that masquerade as a neutral means of enforcing order. Have you heard the atheist argument over and over again that religion and Christianity is just a way to control and manipulate and that the church wants to control and dominate and they get nervous if they start to lose control? Well, this is that. Impartiality and objectivity are impossible in science, politics, or any other endeavor.

All claims to knowledge are just masking a subtle symptom of omnipresent power relationship and transaction. Foucault said in an interview, I think that instead of trying to find out what truth as opposed to error is, it might be more interesting to take up the program posed by Nietzsche. How is it that in our societies the truth has been given this value, thus placing us absolutely under its thrall? In other words, we're going to ignore the idea that there might be any truth because as soon as you say something is true, well, that empowers that truth or anybody who holds to that truth and we don't want anybody to have power over anybody else.

So get rid of the truth and you get rid of power and power plays. Modernist philosopher Francis Bacon claimed that knowledge is power. By this he meant that one's awareness of the truths of nature will lead to a mastery of nature.

Foucault, by contrast, takes knowledge to be essentially a function of power and inseparable from it. Bacon believed that knowledge leads to power. Foucault reverses the order.

Power creates forms of knowledge. And power ultimately explains the nature of supposed knowledge. And if you followed that, and I know that's a little deep, but when you say power

creates knowledge, if you think about people who reject God, if you reject God and you reject God's authority and God's power, what is the last thing you want to hear? The truth of God, the knowledge of God.

And the truth of God, the Bible, revealed truth, is rejected because to acknowledge it is to acknowledge God's power, God's sovereignty, God's authority, His right to judge sin, righteousness and judgment. Well, I'll burn that candle up from both ends. I'll deny that there's any such thing as knowledge and I'll deny that there's any such thing as that sort of power.

Then I'm free, free, free, free. I can do what I want, believe what I want, invent what I want. Don't bother me with the facts my mind has made up, literally.

So, all of the seven claims given above contain some truthful insights. For instance, social and personal power relationships do tend to define what people take to be true and false. They do not, however, determine what is true or false with respect to objective reality.

Nevertheless, the conclusions that postmodernists draw from these claims are not only hostile to the Christian notion of truth, but are seriously intellectually flawed. And the rest of this book goes on to show how these foundational pillars of postmodernism are fundamentally wrong. But out of all of that, what do we need to know? It is important, as you listen to the fruits of the information age all around us, you can't escape it.

It's on your phone, it gets tweeted, it gets reported, it gets on the radio, it's on television, it's on the internet, it's everywhere you turn, everywhere you look, all of this stuff is floating at us. And there is a natural reaction to fall into the postmodernist trap of saying, I reject all of it, I don't think anybody knows anything, and I don't think anybody has any right to tell me anything, I'm going to cover my head and cover my ears and I'll just do what I think is right in my own eyes. Remember in Judges? Every man did what was right in his own eyes.

This is postmodernism in a nutshell. This is why you have people citing the Bible in defense of homosexual marriage, and in defense of homosexual churches, and in defense of shacking up before marriage, and in defense of getting rid of unwanted pregnancies. People quote the Bible selectively and subjectively to support anything, and if you say, well, that's not what the Bible says, they don't hear that and they don't care.

Because for them, their truth is the only truth that counts. There is only one sword that will cut through all of this noise. There is only one power that can penetrate this kind of self-created armor, and that is the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit of God.

This is why you come to Bible class, because there is a truth that reflects reality, and this is it. Whether it's in the Old Testament, whether it's in the New Testament, whether it is a verse that you memorize, this is the truth that is objective. This is the transcendent truth that is more real than the molecules and the energy fields that constitute this universe.

It is more real. There is an absolute reality, and it's here. There is an absolute truth, and it's

here.

We would not be able to parse it or to discern it from all of the rest of the options. How do you know Christianity is right? Why is Jesus the only way? Because God's Holy Spirit has come from the heavenly supernal realms that vastly out-distance, overshadow, and surround this little bubble. God's Holy Spirit has come and is present inside you and inside me.

His ministry of truth-telling and truth-identification is available to anyone willing to listen. That's the difference. There is no Holy Spirit in Hinduism.

There is no Holy Spirit in Buddhism. There is no Holy Spirit in any other ism you want to name. There is only one place where God, because of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, is able to connect directly to the soul of an individual human being.

That objective reality is our heritage and our privilege. Do not undervalue, do not undersell this truth and the power of God's Holy Spirit within you to activate it, to lay hold of it, to invoke its transformational power. The reason our souls and our lives can be transformed is because of this connection to heaven.

There's nothing else like it. Don't let anybody hornswoggle you out of the truth. Paul talks about this all the way through the book of Galatians.

O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you that you would depart from the true teaching that you were initially given? Who has bewitched you? Well, there is nothing but bewitchment going on all around us. Don't fall for the messages in entertainment. Don't fall for the cataclysmic swamp of information glut that purports to be truth.

There's one truth and there's one means of understanding the truth and you and I have it. It is the Spirit of God and the Word of God. That's how God's power comes into our lives.

You've got to lash yourself to that mast, especially in this post-modernist day and age where all of those assumptions are under direct attack. This is another reason I think the return of the Lord Jesus is very near because it is getting increasingly difficult to filter the noise. There's going to come a time where God is going to say, enough, there's less than ten in Sodom.

I'm taking you out and I'm destroying the five cities of the plain. That will be the tribulation and I think it's close. I think it's likely to be within the lifetime of a lot of us sitting here.

The time is ripe as it has never been in history. There's always been depravity, there's always been evil, there's always been heinous things going on, but there has never been this level of erosion of truth itself. These seven acids that he named have never prevailed globally like they are today.

It's unprecedented and I think it is a harbinger of the time of the end. Our studies are important. Your attention and diligence and consistency in listening to them and thinking about

them and trying to live in their light is very, very important.

This is the full armor of God that protects us from these very advanced weapons of darkness that are being launched against Christianity as never before. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you that you have given us the means of identifying it, of claiming it, of understanding it, of having it reside within us and have an active power to guide us and to transform us, to renew our minds and to equip us to do those things that reflect your glory in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will continue his ministry of making these things real to us and helping us to see their pertinence and their applicability in the moment-by-moment challenges that face us as we live out what remains to us of this life. We pray that in all things we can live in a way that brings glory to our Savior and is pleasing in your sight.

We pray to Jesus' name. Amen.