

Kings and Prophets 15-02-13a

This is Friday the 13th of February, 2015. I think tomorrow being Valentine's Day, you have a Friday the 13th and a Valentine that probably meet like matter and anti-matter and create some kind of crazy weekend. But we continue tonight our study in kings and prophets.

We have a new prophet to take a look at tonight. We begin the third of the five prophets that we undertake to study in this particular period of time, this less than half a century period between about 750 and 721. Let's take a moment to dedicate our time and our concentration to the Lord and ask His blessing on our study.

Fathers, we come to the end of another busy week and look forward to probably equally busy weekend for most of us. We thank you for this opportunity to pause and refresh ourselves in the living water that we find in your word. We thank you for its preservation.

We thank you for the freedom we have to keep it with us, to study it. We're not under any duress. There is no threat.

And we enjoy these privileges and these blessings and appreciate the ministry of your Holy Spirit that takes these timeless truths and makes them live and breathe and have pertinence in our time and in our circumstance. We pray that as we examine this portion of your word tonight that your Holy Spirit will help us to see its meaningful and applicable truth, that it will make a difference in the way we think, in the way we decide, that it will illuminate our path so that we can walk in a way that pleases you and accomplishes your purpose. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. We have paused to take a look at the sudden influx of prophets into the Northern Kingdom. As we moved into 2 Kings and saw the end of the ministry of the two-fold dynamic duo of Elijah and Elisha and a succession of relatively heinous and evil kings, one set assassinating another and trying to get their son on the throne only to be assassinated by a general and a leader and another guy that reigns for a few weeks or a few months, it's become quite hectic.

And we've come now to the 740s BC, moving into the 730s and the 720s, knowing that in 721, the Assyrians are going to conquer and take captive the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom and their king who sits on his throne in Samaria. That has not yet happened. There is still the possibility of a delay or a suspension of judgment.

And so the word of the Lord comes, as it always does before judgment, by way of warning, by way of appeal, by way of calling the people of God back to himself, back to their covenant responsibilities. And we see the beginning of these writing prophets, Elijah and Elisha left no written records of their own. Their story is told in Kings and to a lesser extent in Chronicles.

But we have now seen the first two of the five writing prophets that pertain in this set of

decades. The earliest, we're pretty sure, based on the evidence, is Jonah. And what's the big idea in the book of Jonah? Jonah, Jonah, go down to Nineveh.

Whoa, Jonah. Our judgment from heaven will fall on you, as the old song goes. And we tend to think of Jonah and the fish.

We think of Jonah and the Ninevites. We think of the worm and the gourd. But what is the purpose of that episode and the record in the book of Jonah that has preserved it and enabled every generation of believers from his time down to the present to know the details of that story? What is its big idea? First and foremost, it was a message, a graphic message, another.

These were the, if you'll forgive the comparison, these were sort of the comic books, the graphic novels of ancient times. You couldn't post a video on YouTube. You couldn't get on the evening news.

So these episodes would be communicated by word of mouth and would spread like wildfire as campfire stories, caravan travelers, shepherds and herdsmen, and those who traveled the land, moving from place to place. Very quickly in that non-technological age, this information would spread. It was information in the pre-information age, the pre-information millennium.

And the details were memorable. The details are shocking. They are supernatural.

They are very telling. The details hark back to archetypal symbols and themes and recognizable subjects for people, uneducated people, run-of-the-mill people, just standard business people, standard agricultural and men who deal with flocks and herds and so on, had no difficulty parsing the symbolism. They had a rich verbal tradition.

They had a rich oral history. And they carried it in their heads because they didn't have a lot of external recording materials. This is one of the most interesting things.

I believe Carl Sagan is the guy that said this, and I've mentioned it a few times before. I'm pretty sure it was our dear departed Carl who said that human beings are the only animals capable of storing their memories externally. If you think about that for a minute, first of all, I don't consider us to be animals, but from his point of view, we're the only living things that store our memories outside of our heads.

And there's a reason for that. But in these days, that only took place in limited circles. You had your scribes, you had your court reporters, you had messengers who might carry short notes on broken shards of pottery.

But generally speaking, people heard what they heard, knew what they knew, had the grist for their mental mill by word of mouth. That's why you have these memorable episodes. They're memorable, they're easy to transmit.

It's not likely that you're going to mess up the story of Jonah and end up having him being

carried across the Mediterranean Sea by a giant pelican. Or he tried to make a long desert trek through Egypt to get to Tarshish. The story is so pungent and so rife with telling detail that it doesn't morph the way you're... That game they used to play that set everybody in a circle and the teacher would whisper something in one person's ear and say, now you whisper it all the way around and you see what it is by the time it gets to the other end of the people.

Well, it's usually something that's not very memorable. We did that experiment, I forget where, when I was younger. And the teacher made a point.

He said, now this sort of bland statement, watch how radically it changes by the time it gets to the other end. But he said, now let's try this one. And he said something very memorable and kind of shocking.

Well, it made the trip with very little change. And this is, God knows this. So this is the mode of communication that he's using.

We saw this with Elijah. We saw it with Elisha. We saw it with the men of God.

Remember the man of God that wasn't supposed to talk to anyone or stop and the other alleged man of God stopped him and got him to talk and slowed him down and he wound up coming to a bad end and the guy brings him back on a donkey and buries him in his tomb and there's just all kinds of symbolism that we looked at there. So, Book of Jonah. What is the big idea? It's not the man being swallowed by the fish per se.

It's not the Ninevites repenting per se. It's not the worm in the gourd per se. What is it? God is making a point to his people.

In the first instance, it is the people who existed in that generation. The Israelites specifically of the Northern Kingdom who have lost sight of who they are and why they're here. God's purpose.

God's prophetic pronouncement to Abraham is you and your descendants will be a light to the Gentiles. You have a responsibility to be the people of God for a number of reasons. One of which is you are the light that shines in the darkness.

You are the light to which those who are tired of the darkness and who are seeking God can come. This is where Uriah the Hittite will come. This is where Ruth the Moabitess will come.

This is where Naaman the Syrian will come. This is where those outsiders who recognize that there is a God in Israel will come. Well, how do they know there's a God in Israel except through his people? And in the first instance, the Northern Kingdom in particular has abdicated that responsibility completely.

They don't give two hoots in a rain barrel if they even had rain barrels for the surrounding Gentiles. All they do is adopt their culture and co-opt their worship and their gods and their

idols. They're not interested.

The flow of religion is all in the wrong direction. The Northern Kingdom looks just like the Canaanite nations. It looks just like the surrounding nations.

When it was supposed to be a light and an outflow of the grace of God toward the nations, it's all coming the wrong way. And you know what it's like when your plumbing flows the wrong way. It's bad news.

This is not helpful. So the story of Jonah is a reminder to the people of God that one of God's purposes in putting us here on this earth, Israel as a nation in the Old Testament, we as the body of Christ in the New Testament, is to represent the truth of God in the midst of a fallen and corrupt culture, a fallen and corrupt world. If not through us, how is God going to communicate? Is He going to have to go back to sending the angel of the Lord to make appearances? Is He going to have to sky-write the truth in the heavens? The only way the unbelieving, unregenerate, unrelated-to-God world can know the truth of God is through God's people.

And it is a major purpose of His that we let our light so shine before men that they see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. Right? That's the book of Jonah. And picturing the attitude that Israel has personified in Jonah, all he wants to do is have a ringside seat for the destruction bowl.

All he wants to do is... And he's disappointed when God recognizes that there is repentance and is merciful. I knew you were going to be merciful. There's no fireworks here.

I thought there'd be another Sodom and Gomorrah. And instead, I'm sitting out here baking in the hot sun because my gourd got eaten by a worm. And it is a powerful reminder.

So, first prophet, Jonah, what's the purpose? What is the focus? Where is the issue? Relationship of the people of God to the surrounding world. Make sense? That's numero uno, Jonah. The relationship of the people of God to the surrounding world.

There's a responsibility. There's a call. There's a commission.

There's a purpose. Secondly, we began to look at Hosea. What is the thrust and the focus and the issue overall? There's lots of sub-themes and sub-plots and many things said.

But what's the big idea? Which is all we have time to cover in this study. What's the big idea in Hosea? Yeshua. The book of Yeshua.

The book of Hosea. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, reconciled to God, entered into relationship with God, and then cultivating and maintaining and improving our relationship with God. That's why in the first three chapters, Hosea is, at the behest of God, married to an

unfaithful woman.

She's unfaithful before he enters into relationship with her. She is unfaithful during. She goes away.

He brings her back. And she's still unfaithful. She's unfaithful all the way through.

It's all about relationship. Hosea represents God. Gomer represents Israel and their faithlessness.

And in this graphic picture, why on earth would Hosea marry a woman of this type? Well, you're condemned out of your own mouth, O Israelite, because you are the woman. Right? Your nation is Gomer. Why would God waste his time with you? Why shouldn't he judge you? Wouldn't you, at the expression of his generosity and his mercy, want to turn and be grateful and be receptive and be obedient and recognize that you're receiving undeserved favor? So we saw those similes.

There were nine or ten of them in there. You are like this. You are like that.

And all of these are things that are unsatisfactory to God. If you're a baker and you're trying to bake bread, you don't want something that's burnt on one side and raw on the other. It's unfit.

It doesn't serve its purpose. Why do I have this bread? It's useless. I don't know about you, but I've made several things in my culinary career that were utterly inedible because unlike God, I was not a good assembler.

But that's the focus in Hosea. It is relationship. And interestingly, Hosea shares the root of the name of the Lord Jesus.

Why? John 14, 6. The only way to have relationship with God, whether in prospect or in retrospect, is through the work of the Lord Jesus. And here is Hosea, Yeshua, saying this relationship with God is important. It is covenantal.

It is beneficial. It has a purpose. And you are as bad as Hosea's wife, Gomer, in ignoring all of that and going your own way in what the old King James used to call concupiscence, lustful self-indulgence.

That's Hosea. And lots of different ways you could study that book, but those similes, this is what you are like. And it is a disappointment to God.

It is falling short of the glory of God and the grace of God and the willingness of God to lift them up and set them as a city on a hill. That's Hosea. Tonight, we are going to look at the third of the five prophets that pertain in this period of the history of the divided kingdom, and that is Amos.

The other two, just in case you're wondering, will be Micah and Isaiah. These five all minister in

this period. Jonah at the earliest, and Isaiah probably extends to and through the last part of this period.

Amos. If you turn to Amos chapter 1, we get an introduction to his presence and his identity. This prophecy is introduced as the words of Amos, who was among the sheep breeders of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

We know about the days of Jeroboam. This is Jeroboam II. We know about Uzziah.

We went to and through his reign down in Judah. We'll have to review that when we pick back up with the chronology, but it says the words of Amos. This is probably a short form of a full name, Amasiah, probably A-M-A-S-I-A-H, but it appears to be an abbreviated form.

It comes from a root. Almost universally in Hebrew, you find this to be true, that things come from a root verb. This verb means to bear or carry.

So it literally means, in this context, the bearer of a burden, burden bearer. It says he is among the sheep breeders of Tekoa. Thankfully, the things that we're seeing in the introduction, if I was going to go at this level of detail, Amos would take us several months, but there's a lot of information packed right here at the front, and we have to look at almost every word because it is so fraught with information that helps us interpret the book and understand its purpose.

So it says that these are the words of Amos, who is among the sheep breeders, the noqdim, N-O-Q-D-I-M. It's tricky to know exactly what this means. He's going to give us three different biographical details about himself.

This is the first one, that he is among the noqdim. There's only one other place in the Bible where you get this word. This, of course, is in the plural.

You recognize that I am ending, right? And it's used in the singular, and we actually saw it back in 2 Kings 3, verse 4, talking about King Misha. Remember Misha over there in Moab, and he was paying tribute. The Moabites have been paying tribute ever since the days of David, and then he decided he was going to stop, and warfare ensued.

But if you recall, in 2 Kings 3, verse 4, Misha, king of Moab, was a noqad, N-A-Q-A-D, or a noqade, if you use the participle form, and that's the singular of noqdim. He was a sheep breeder, it says there in the New King James, regularly paid the king of Israel 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams. We saw the eleph issue and so on there.

But think about this now. Many times they say, well, Amos is the shepherd prophet. He was out there kind of like David, with a stick and a little flock or whatever.

Ask yourself this question. Is the king of Moab, king Misha, is he a shepherd with a stick and a little flock? Is he a rural, rough-hewn man of the hills? No. This is someone who is in a large

business enterprise dealing with sheep.

This is a big operation, dealing with sheep. So there is the cultivation or the raising, the production of sheep and sheep products apparently. But this is a pretty big deal.

And it says he is among the noqdim of Tekoa. Tekoa. What do we know about Tekoa? Well, it is a town in Judah.

It is or was about 12 miles south of Jerusalem. Depending on who you read, it's either five, six or eight miles south of Bethlehem and almost in a line. If you go south and a little bit west from Jerusalem, you hit Bethlehem.

And then you go south and a little bit east and there is Tekoa. So Bethlehem is between, slightly closer to Jerusalem than it is to Tekoa. But the distances are small.

I think Bethlehem is said to be four to five miles south of Jerusalem, Tekoa. Six, seven, eight miles south of Bethlehem. All in the same general area.

In the days of the Old Testament, Tekoa was a place of pasturage, large fields. It's on the edge of the wilderness. It's the southern edge of the rich verdant hills of Judah.

If you go much past this, you start getting into the deserts that go around toward Moab and Edom. The name Tekoa, for the town, comes from the people who originally settled it at the conquest. And this is the area taken by Caleb.

And one of Caleb's grandsons is named Tekoa. Tekoa, grandson of Caleb. And you remember the whole story of his daughter Aksah with the springs and Othniel qualifying to be her husband and all of that.

Well, this is that area. But it was so close to Bethlehem that it was administered by the same local government. It was all in one district.

So it has very close ties to Bethlehem. And it is a strategic location. There are 15 towns mentioned in the days of Rehoboam, early days of the divided kingdom, 15 towns along the southern border that were fortified.

And Tekoa is one of those because this is the route that southern invaders such as Shishak of Egypt are going to traverse. So it's sort of a border town. And Jehoshaphat met them all by an Ammonite coalition down there.

We saw that in 2 Chronicles 20. So Amos is from there. And there is a group, it may be a small group, but it's not just him.

There are Nokdim in the region of Tekoa. They are in the sheep business. And it's a big business, evidently.

Well, why is this detail given to us in the very first line of the prophecy? The words of Amos, the words of the burden bearer, who is among the men in the sheep business in Tekoa, which he, Amos, saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash. Both of these kings come to a bad end. So when people are reminded of the days of Uzziah and the days of Jeroboam, remember Jeroboam is going to be assassinated and his son is only going to sit on his throne for a very short time.

Uzziah was the one that was made king when he was 16. He had a good long reign. But a lot of that was a co-regency with his father, Amaziah.

This is review. But in the latter days, when he was king on his own, he got proud and decided he was going to go into the temple and burn incense. Remember that? He thought he was good enough to supplant the priests.

Leprosy broke out in his forehead. And so he had to live apart with leprosy all the rest of his days. And he suffers with that leprosy until the day of his death.

And you'll remember that you have a relatively famous prophecy dated from the year that King Uzziah died. And that's one of the two remaining prophets we're going to look at. If you remember Isaiah 6, verse 1, it was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord sitting on His lofty throne.

That great vision of Isaiah 6. This is that time period. You kind of get the milieu, melee, the context, the goings on at this time. Well, we know that Jonah, the thrust and the theme and the issue in that prophetic situation was the relationship of Israel to the nations, to the outside world.

And their responsibility to represent God to their fellow man. In Hosea, it is the vertical that is in view. Where is your loyalty? Where is your appreciation? Where is your recognition of the grace of God pictured in the Hosea-Gomer relationship? And going forward, all of those disappointments in the similes, your half-baked bread, your broken pots, your dry sticks, your backslidden heifers, all of these different similes that we saw.

Grieving the heart of God, the disappointment in that covenant relationship with Him. In Amos, we're going to be watching to see what is the big idea? What is the big idea in the book of Amos? Well, we have a couple of clues here right at the beginning with the notion of a sheep breeder and the location of Tekoa. God could have had the prophet to deliver this prophecy come from anywhere.

But he's named Amos. He is a sheep breeder by profession and he comes from Tekoa. And these are going to help us triangulate what this prophecy is all about, the big idea.

But as we conclude our first session tonight, here's a question. If God, in confronting His people and in challenging them to repent and encouraging them to examine their relationship with Him and their purpose in existing, God breaks it down into these different areas, doesn't He?

He says, look at yourself relative to the people you are supposed to be shining before as a light. Look at yourself in the context of your ambassadorship.

Book of Jonah. You've been extraordinarily commissioned. You've been extraordinarily delivered.

You've been given a wonderful opportunity to be the means of deliverance for countless people. Remember the very last verse in the book of Jonah. It says, do you not care about this town in which there are so many people who don't know their right hand from their left and many cattle, potential for worship and offering and sacrifice, people overtly expressing their relationship with the God of creation so that that light can spread even further beyond their borders? Do you not care about that opportunity and that responsibility at all? When we examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith, this is a helpful paradigm, a helpful set of prophecies to remember.

We can say, well, because you can't just find one thing and say, well, I'm doing a great job of church attendance or I'm doing a great job in my personal relationships or I'm doing a great job being a prayer warrior. God is going to give five different vignettes, five different views, five different perspectives through these five prophets to the people of northern Israel and Judah indirectly and in at least one case directly. But there are these five prophets within this 40 to 50 year period and each of them tackles a different aspect, a different perspective.

And this is useful for us. When we go before the Lord in prayer and we say, Lord, show me my secret faults, try me, see if there be any wicked way in me, find those hard clods in the field where the seed of the word is being sown so that it doesn't fall among thorns, it doesn't sit on the surface and get picked up by the birds of the air. I want to be a hundred-fold field.

As long as you're praying, pray optimistically. Don't be a 30-fold or 60-fold. I want to be a hundred-fold field.

Show me how I can do better. Well, He has already given us part of the answer. Break it down into your horizontal relationship with outsiders to begin with, Book of Jonah, your vertical relationship with God, Book of Hosea.

Are you like some of these things? Are you gomer and not willing to look in the mirror? Well, we're going to have three more of those perspectives in these upcoming prophets. And when we come back from the break, we'll try to identify which of them is featured in the prophecy of Amos.