

## Kings and Prophets 16-03-24

This is Thursday, the 24th of March, 2016. We move forward in our study of Kings and Prophets. We're currently looking at the final days of the Southern Kingdom, the last full generation there, beginning with the reign of King Josiah.

And we have come to the book classified among the Minor Prophets, minor only in size, not in importance, the book of Zephaniah. We'll continue that study tonight, but we'll begin as we customarily do by taking a moment to dedicate our time and our fellowship, our study of God's Word, to God and to His plan and purpose in us and among us. Shall we pray?

Father, it is such a wonderful privilege to come before You as Your children, as those who are qualified to stand in Your presence because of our Savior, the Lord Jesus.

We thank You for Him. We thank You for all of the tremendous potentials, the great door that He has opened for us, not only into Your presence but into the future: opportunities for service, for reflecting Your glory and seeing the further unfolding of Your works in the present and in the future. We thank You for the record of Your works in the past and how much it teaches us about our own situation now and about the decisions that face us and the options that are before us.

We pray that as we look at this portion of Your Word tonight, that Your Holy Spirit will teach us and motivate us and encourage us through these inspired examples and powerful prophetic messages. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, I attempted with debatable degree of success last week to review where we have come, particularly with regard to the prophetic side of our Kings and Prophets study. We have, in a workmanlike fashion, begun in the days of Solomon, in 1 Kings, and worked our way through the divided kingdom, seeing the demise of the Northern Kingdom, and we are in the sunset days of the Southern Kingdom at this point. And as we have encountered the setting for the prophets, we have tried to take a look at them and the message that God delivered to His people through them in that context, in those situations, in those cultural and historical and international circumstances.

If you remember last week, the big idea—and even if you don't remember, don't feel bad, because I don't think it was especially clear on my part. I was in a bit of a fugue. But let me just quickly rehash the big idea last week as we took a step back to survey our study of these prophets in particular, was to see why God even has prophets.

What are they for? It seems like there's vast swaths of history where there are no prophets. How many prophets were there between Adam and Noah? That's multiple hundreds of years. Remember, it was the lifetime of Methuselah coming to a close where the flood happened, and he lived to be 969 years old.

So you've got practically a whole millennium. And unless you're willing to accept the book of Enoch, Enoch, seventh from Adam, apparently prophesied. Jude records a little bit of that.

But that's an awful long time without any word from the Lord. Then you have Noah, and you come on down from Noah through Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and on down the line to Abraham. And that's another pretty big chunk of time where there's, talk about no frequent vision, no frequent word.

If there was any, it hasn't come down to us. And honestly, I suspect that there was. But what we looked at last time, and what we, I think, at least touched the hem of the garment of, is that beginning in the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and extending down to the time of the Exodus under Moses, you begin to have God working in a more frequent and immediate and present fashion.

He has conversations with Abraham. He has conversations with Jacob. And He reveals things to Joseph in dreams, and in the dreams of others.

And then you have another period of silence until the cry of God's people comes to Him out of bondage in Egypt. And then you have the mighty man Moses, who is the first named prophet in the Bible. How do I know he's named a prophet? Because toward the end he says, God's going to raise up another prophet like unto me.

Right? Well, if it's another prophet, then Moses had to be the first. So Moses really has a great communication ministry, doesn't he? Gets the people all the way to the edge of the land, stands up on Nebo, looks over. Sorry, you can't go in.

Dispute over the body of Moses, we know about that. And Joshua takes them in. And there is revelation from God during that time.

You remember what happened at Ai with Achan, and you remember the further exploits under Joshua, the settlement of the land, the casting of the lots. God is heavily involved in the distribution of the land. Then you get into the days of the judges, and you have that up-and-down cycle.

So, in a nutshell—and I'm not going to burn up my time this week like I did last week, so pay close attention—there is, in the days of Eli and Hophni and Phinehas, a great time of spiritual decline and a time when there is the potential for the people of God to be wiped out by the Philistines. There is a prophetic ministry.

God sends the prophet Samuel. And there hasn't been a man like Samuel really since the days of Moses and Joshua in the land. There's been a judge here and a judge there, and there's Gideon here, and there's Ehud there, and there's Samson here, and there's Deborah and Barak there.

But it's piecemeal, it's momentary, it's sort of a Band-Aid on the problem. It isn't any sort of a national movement until the days of Samuel. Samuel prophesies.

Samuel leads the people. Samuel gets something of a revival going, and it lasts for a while, and they put up the stone Ebenezer. But people say, "We want a king."

And Samuel anoints Saul, and then later Samuel anoints David. And he really launches the period of the monarchy, which we are now in the midst of examining. So it was a time of great crisis in Egypt when Moses arose as the prophet who delivered them and led them for 40 years in the wilderness.

There's a time of great crisis in the land in the closing days of the judges when God raises up Samuel. Remember Hannah and the boy, and she dedicates him, and God uses him in a mighty way. Then you have the monarchy, which really fails under Saul and succeeds under David and then Solomon.

And then you have the divided kingdom. But during the days of David and Solomon, you have Nathan as sort of a national prophet. He talks primarily to the king, leads the king, but he doesn't appeal to the nation, does he? He appeals to the nation through the king, if at all.

But there are messages delivered to David primarily. Then Solomon has his period, and then you have Rehoboam in the south, Jeroboam in the north. And then for many generations, the monarchy is seemingly left to fend for itself.

And you don't have another great prophet until the days of Elijah. Well, why does God suddenly restart and rejuvenate the prophetic ministry in those days? You have the occasional man of God who will appear and disappear or get eaten by lions or whatever. But you don't really have a national presence and a profound prophetic ministry until Elijah.

Well, what's going on? You think back: bondage in Egypt, and there's Moses. You have the threat of destruction under the Philistines, and you have Samuel. You have the potential for the running amok of the early monarchy, and you have Nathan.

But then you have Ahab and Jezebel. And Jezebel has brought the Baal cult down. She's the daughter of the high priest of Baal.

And Ahab marries her and imports her and starts this Baal cult up, which is just wildly popular. Everybody loves the depraved, erotic nature of it and all of the fun activities that go with Baal worship. By that time, the worship of God has disappeared from the north.

The very first king in the north was Jeroboam. And what was his great contribution? Why does all subsequent monarchic rule get compared to the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat? Why? What's his great contribution? No sooner does he become king up there than he does what? Aaron makes one golden calf. He makes two.

And brackets the nation with them. He's got them from Dan to Bethel. Remember that? Golden calf worship.

Well, this is just heinous. And if you think about this, what happens in the days of Elijah? What happens with Jehu? God commissions Jehu as sort of an avenging angel. And he destroys the house of Ahab.

He runs his chariot wheels over Jezebel and so on. And you think, okay, well, we're kind of getting back on track. But Jehu is no prophet.

And Jehu, when he gets this zeal for bloodshed, doesn't know when to quit. And he winds up also not only wiping out the house of Ahab and that whole dynasty, but who else does he kill? He kills Joram. And he kills Ahaziah.

And he finds 42 relatives of Ahaziah and kills all of them. And you remember the rows of heads at the village and all the rest of it? He doesn't know when to quit. So these are the days in which our first prophets begin to prophesy at a national level.

And we talked last time about this: it seems to be when God, in times of great crisis, when there's a threat to existence, God sends His Word into that situation through messengers. And that's the big idea from last week. In times of crisis, God sends His message through messengers.

Great crisis, the baby boys are being slaughtered in Egypt. Here comes Moses with a word from the Lord. And Moses ends up setting down the Pentateuch, which is going to guide the nation for the next 400 years.

Then in the days of David and Samuel, you begin to have that record. And you have Samuel. You have the oracles of Nathan.

He's not a writing prophet, but he keeps the Davidic monarchy from going completely off the rails. Then in the days of Ahab, you have Elijah followed by Elisha and those things that are set down. We saw those in the book of 1 Kings and early 2 Kings.

But now in this time where you have Jehu, and then you end up having Uzziah and Jotham and Ahaz and Hezekiah in the south, and you've got a really great threat to the monarchy there. And in the north, of course, you have Jeroboam II. This begins a fresh incursion of God's Word.

So the first big thought to hold on to, when you think of the Old Testament, when there is a time of great crisis, whether it's Abraham starting to run amok in deciding that he can't wait for God to fulfill His promise of a son and taking up with Hagar and here's Ishmael—well, would that my servant Eliezer might be my heir, and so on—God sends His Word into that, doesn't He? God appears.

Remember the theophanic appearance there? God and the two other visitors by the oaks at Mamre, and you've got Sarah laughing in the tent. "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" It's a time of great judgment. Sodom and Gomorrah and the other three cities are about to be destroyed.

Time of great crisis. God sends His Word into the time of crisis. The principle here, the big idea, whether you're thinking about Abraham, whether you're thinking about Jacob, whether you're thinking about the days of Moses, whether you're thinking about the time of Samuel, whether you're thinking about the time of the later days of David, whether you think about when the monarchy, north and south, starts to really come apart at the seams.

God sends His Word into that situation. So whether it is personal for us, this is what I've been leading up to now, and I'm going to say it in plain terms. Whether it is in our personal life, we hit a time of crisis, it's a time of threat, there's a possibility that things may come unglued or unraveled.

It is a time for God's Word to be infused into that situation. God's Word conveys God's power. It expresses God's purpose and God's will in and around and through that situation.

So whether it is in our personal lives or as we see around us today in our national life, there is a threat to the very existence of Christianity all around the world. It is downplayed, it is ignored in our press because our press is wholly corrupt. It is secular.

If you think things were distorted in the past, it is hugely distorted, it is filtered, it is spun. It is lies, lies, and more lies in our press today. People make news where there is no news, and where there is actual news, like the slaughter of Christians in Africa, Northern Africa, the slaughter of Christians in the Middle East, the slaughter of Christians, the suppression of Christianity in Europe by the incursion of Islam who is actively replacing the remnants of decadent Christianity all through Europe, all over the place.

Where there used to be hundreds of churches, now there are hundreds of mosques. Is it reported in our news? No. Is it a fact? Yes.

Visit Europe, talk to somebody who has been to Europe, talk to people who live in Europe online, as some of us do, and it has happened. It is not going to happen. It isn't happening.

It has happened. The replacement throughout much of Europe is complete. Why do you think they are having so much trouble now with terrorism in places that you hear in the news like Paris and Brussels and elsewhere? And a lot of that doesn't make the news either because it is of a less spectacular nature.

It is not necessarily bombs. It is the quiet oppression. It is the buying up of land.

It is the replacement of populations so that when it comes time to have local representative government, that government becomes Islamic and becomes Sharia, and that's taking place in swaths of Europe. Do we hear about it in our news? No. It is taking place in the United States of America.

It is taking place in North Texas. It is taking place here in the Metroplex. Any of you that have lived here longer than, say, 20, 25 years, remember when you couldn't swing a cat without hitting a church.

Look around the skyline now. Look around the landscape now. Less than two blocks from here, what used to be a Methodist church is now a mosque.

Throughout Richardson, count the mosques. Right across the street from the Hope Center, where we have an office, is an ILC, an Islamic Learning Center. It would have been shocking to the point of jaw-dropping if you could have just flashed this landscape back 20, 30 years ago to people and they would have said, "I refuse to believe it."

"That's a fantasy. That will never happen." It is happening. It has happened now.

My point being, again, when there is a time of crisis, when there is a threat to the existence of the people of God—and don't kid yourself, there is a threat to your existence. There is a threat to biblical Christianity.

Now, eviscerated, anemic, limp-wristed Christianity can thrive and flourish. It will be left alone because it has no power. Biblical Christianity, the Christianity that you believe and that you practice, is under attack.

It is threatened both in your individual and personal life and your immediate surroundings and at the state and national level. Look at what's happening in the courts. Look at what is happening around the world when people try to live their faith, try to operate their business based on their faith, try to speak and act in accordance with their faith, expressions, symbolic expressions.

Ten Commandments, not allowed to see it. Cross, not allowed to see it. T-shirt that has the word Jesus on it, not allowed to see it.

Bible, openly, not allowed to see it. This has been pushed onto our military. Well, but we have an ally and they are Islamic.

Well, the ally doesn't have to get used to us. It is the opposite of maritime law. From the time this nation was born, when we were still in our infancy, we required, from the time we were separate from England, we required that any ship on the high seas dip its flag to us.

They snap the first salute. Then we salute back by dipping our colors very briefly, and then they can raise their colors back up. Their colors go down, ours bob down and back up, then their colors go back up.

That's respect. That's acknowledgement. That is a salute.

It's just like a junior person in the military. You salute your senior, your senior pops their salute, then you can drop yours. That's how it has always been.

Well, it's just the opposite now. Anytime we are allied with anyone, anytime we are associated with anyone, we have to find out their customs, and we force our military to hide their Bibles and not wear any T-shirts that have any sort of religious message whatsoever because we don't want to give offense. They're here, so we're dropping our flag first and we're keeping our flag folded up and out of sight, and our Judeo-Christian values that defined that flag for 200 years.

Now we're the first to give in and to cave and to tuck away the last vestiges and remnants of our heritage. So my point is, we are in the kind of days that Israel faced when they were in bondage in Egypt. We are in the kind of days that Israel faced when they were about to be run out of the land by the Philistines.

We are in the kind of decline that occurred in the days of Ahab and Jezebel. And how does that happen? Are the people of God doing what they're supposed to do, being loyal and faithful and diligent and worshipful and respectful and cultivating their relationship and their witness and their testimony, reflecting the glory of God as the light shining in a dark place? Is that when they're enslaved and abused and oppressed and sent into hiding? No.

It is when the people of God disregard and fritter away their heritage for a mess of pottage. Well, this is what was happening in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, and this is when our Minor Prophets began. What I want to impress on you, what we need to remember six months from now, a year from now, two years from now, after I've blown away and gone, and you think back, you know, there was a time when we did Kings and Prophets.

What was the big idea there when we got to the prophets? It's hard to remember what Habakkuk is about. It's hard to remember exactly what Amos was about. You might remember that Amos was a fig piercer and a shepherd.

But what was the book about? Why did God send him into that milieu with a message? What about Hosea? And you say, "Well, it seemed like there was Gomer and a couple of kids with funny names. I forget the rest of it. It's a big, long book."

What I'm hoping is that we won't forget at least the big idea. And the big idea sets the stage so that when you go back and review these books and read through them in your Bible reading, it will come back. Oh, yes, this is what God was saying.

So, what was God saying? Why did He send this rash of prophets, this grouping of prophets at this time in the later history of the divided kingdom and into the time of just the Southern Kingdom? Why did God suddenly send messages into these circumstances for His people? Same as always: threat to existence, and it is a call to return to the values that preserve and nurture and prosper God's people.

The reason these dire circumstances happen is that the greater proportion of God's people lose their way and forget who they are and why they're here. And so now you have an increasingly leavened lump that should be holy, but it isn't. And it becomes increasingly defined by what the majority are choosing, which is evil.

But there is a faithful remnant. So there's always a two-pronged message. There is a message of judgment on those who go the way of Egypt.

Are you going to put the blood on the doorpost or not? Because if you don't, your household will be judged by the loss of the firstborn. People had a choice, and there were Israelites that did not put the Passover blood on the doorpost, and they lost their firstborn. And did it draw them to God? No, it made them angry.

And many of them probably stayed behind in Egypt. It doesn't say that they all came out. It doesn't say that they all were preserved.

Remember when God started making a distinction in those judgments between those who were obedient and those who weren't? Well, it is ever that way. And that's what these messages entail. So let's think back now.

We have been covering these prophets sort of chronologically. The earliest was Jonah. Jonah went to Nineveh and said, "You're about to be destroyed."

And those people fell all over themselves, covering themselves in ashes and dust and sackcloth, and put their animals in sackcloth. And there was a great wave of repentance and remorse. And God said, "Well, I'm not going to judge them after all."

Well, Jonah got angry. He wasn't angry that God had spared His people and had spared him on multiple occasions, delivered him from the storm and delivered him out of the belly of the fish and spared him when he still didn't go to Nineveh after both of those experiences. Remember, God has to call him again and say, "Jonah, get thee to Nineveh."

"Do your job." So that was our first, our earliest prophet. And Jonah gives a prophecy that we saw in Kings that says God is going to re-expand the borders that have been eaten away and nibbled away and flaked away because the people have been disobedient.

God says, "I'm going to give it back to you. What are you going to do with it?" But then we saw that in those days we also had Hosea. These are in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah in Judah, and Jeroboam II up in Israel.

It is a prophecy to Israel. It's sort of launched from the south, but it is a message for the north. So what we want to do now is, what you should come away with tonight is a big idea from each of these little prophets.

A big idea for the little prophet. Hosea, think about his name. Hosea, it's from the same root as Yeshua.

Yeshav, which means salvation. Hosea, this is a message of deliverance, a message of salvation. What was the problem? Well, Jeroboam II is like Jeroboam I.

He's amplified all of those sins. He's got his own agenda, and anything related to God is subordinate to it. Same thing down in the south.

You have Uzziah and these guys down in the south in Judah. And so the big idea here is God's love. Just remember Hosea and Gomer.

God tells the prophet, "Go marry this faithless prostitutionary gal." And he does it. And they have those children. You remember Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi and Mahershalah El-Hashbaz, that whole thing.

What is the big idea there? God's love is constant. God's love is reliable. God's love is unfailing.

But it will not prevent judgment on those who do not respond to His love. God so loved the world—you remember John 3:16—God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that everyone would be saved. Is that what it says? God loved the world and sent His only begotten Son as a sacrifice so that what? Whosoever believes, whosoever expresses faith, will not perish.

But when God so loves the world and sends His Son, if you don't express faith, what is the fate? He that hath the Son hath life. He that hath not the Son of God hath not life. But what? The wrath of God abideth, remains on him.

The wrath is not removed. So in a time of crisis, this separates those who are going to turn, those who are going to recognize and heed the message of the prophet, the message of God's Word which is constant. "Turn you at my reproof."

"Why will you die, O house of Israel?" Turn at my reproof. That's the message. That's the Word.

If we're having tribulation in our life, we need to take stock. If we're having tribulation in our nation, in our world, we need to take stock. Is there a place where I myself personally need to turn? Am I being reproofed? Is there something that I have been apathetic or indifferent or insensible to? Have I been weak? Have I been lazy? Have I been slack in my dedication to the God who saved me and the Savior who delivered me? It's time to turn.

When the Word of God comes into that situation, it calls me to turn. It calls me to trust. Turn and trust.

But God leads with love. The message of Hosea is: marry the unfaithful woman. And when she goes off and is enslaved, go redeem her and rescue her and bring her back.

Not because she's a great prize, but as an expression and as a symbol of God's unfailing love for His people. God's love never fails. We can fail the love of God, but the love of God for us never fails.

We can turn at any point if we just will. Our nation could turn and be healed. Ahab even gets a reprieve.

Ahab, the one who imported Jezebel and the whole Baal cult and was one of the worst kings the Northern Kingdom ever had. You remember the whole Omride dynasty beginning with Omri all the way down to Ahab? They were just the depths of depravity. But God was merciful to Ahab when he had a flash of repentance.

And it's a reminder from God. But that's the message of Hosea. The big idea is God's unfailing love, Hosea and Gomer.

Even in times of unfaithfulness, God remains faithful. He cannot deny Himself. You have Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi.

There's no compassion, and you're not My people. You don't have compassion on one another, I will not have compassion on you. You are forgiven as you forgive.

New Testament expression of that same idea. But the big idea in Hosea is in chapter 4, verses 1 and 6. There is no knowledge of God in the land, and My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

Look around today in the Christian community. Look at the average church. Look at the average Christian, so-called, Christian self-identified.

How much knowledge of God is there? I'm not just talking about Bible knowledge, although that is atrocious. But how much knowledge of God—who God is, what He's like, what His objective is, what His purposes are? Knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, His person and His work and His future return.

There is practically none. There is no knowledge of God in this land. So we turn our laser-beam vision on ourselves.

Is there knowledge of God in my life? Do I live in the light of knowledge of who God is and what His purpose is and what He expects from me or not? Because if we don't, we will go the way of this nation, and this nation is going to be destroyed. There is a reason we don't show up in prophecy, or if we do, it's all negative. We are not the wings of an eagle that have come to deliver Israel in their time of crisis.

This nation doesn't appear in that end-time scenario. Why? For the same reason other nations have disappeared from the stage of history. No knowledge of God in the land.

My people are destroyed. My people, God's own people. The unbelievers are destroyed because they won't accept God or won't accept Jesus as Savior.

God's people are destroyed. God's people are wiped out. That's us.

That's you and me. And we should heed the warning. Take note.

Be warned. I was editing a sermon transcript where Dr. Griswold was talking about about a hundred-odd years ago, a hundred and change now. In the early days of weather forecasting and weather predicting, they realized that there was a great hurricane off the coast of Texas, and it was going to hit in the Galveston area.

And so they went, and the rather infant National Weather Service sent bulletins and warnings to the people of Galveston, and they said, "It's going to be bad. Leave. Get to the coast."

"It's almost an island there. It is an island. It didn't even have a causeway back then."

“It just had an iron bridge, big long iron bridge, going to Galveston. And they said, ‘Flee the island. Get to the mainland and get to higher ground. It’s going to be awful.’”

Well, people walked out and looked around. The sky was blue. The sea was calm.

They said, “What are you talking about? We’ve lived here for decades and everything’s fine.” Well, nobody was leaving. And so they sent more bulletins and more warnings.

They sent law enforcement out trying to cajole people and browbeat people to leave and to get out of there, and hardly anybody left. They just didn’t believe it. Well, after the sun went down in the middle of the night, all of a sudden the thing hit, and tidal waves washed over the island and wind and hail and every imaginable manifestation of hurricane went through there, and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people were killed, and the island was pretty much wiped out.

And the only people that escaped it were the ones that heeded the warning. But the ones who looked around and said, “Well, I don’t see any signs of—the horizon is clear, there’s not so much as a cloud the size of a man’s hand, so I don’t see anything coming,” died. Died in masses.

Died in droves. And it’s a reminder in the present day. That’s the message of Hosea.

We skipped Joel for the most part and moved to Amos. Still in the days of Jeroboam II in Israel and Uzziah down in Judah. Remember, he was the tender of sheep, those sheep that were being prepared for sacrifice, and he was a piercer of figs, some sort of a fig tender, a fig grafter perhaps.

You remember he gave the judgment against all those other nations: Syria and Philistia and Phoenicia and Edom and Ammon and Moab. And as it got closer to home, everybody’s cheering more and more and saying, “Yes, those Edomites, they’ve given us a hard time. Those Moabites, they’ve been coming over and stealing our stuff.”

“Those Ammonites, they’re our cousins, and they’ve been worse to us than enemies.” And then he comes down and he says, “Well, judgment’s coming on Judah, and judgment is coming on Israel.” And it was addressed to both of them, and this was in the days of great prosperity because God had lifted the rod and Syria was otherwise occupied with the nascent Assyrian power development up in the north.

And so Jeroboam extends the borders of Israel as far as the days of Solomon, and everybody says, “Well, look, the sky is blue. I don’t see a cloud on the horizon. Things are looking up.”

“We’re prospering. We finally come out from under, and we’re strong enough now that we’re able to fend off the Moabites and the Ammonites and the Edomites and the other -ites that have been taking our stuff.” It’s a time of prosperity unrivaled since the days of Solomon, so what are you crying and decrying and talking about judgment and impending action of God? We don’t see any of that happening. It’s a wonderful day.

The economy is on the rebound. Unemployment is down. Look, the price of oil, it may soon come back up, and things are looking good, kind of like now.

Impending judgment for disobedience, and people didn’t believe it, especially in the north, because things seemed to be going so well under Jeroboam II. But this is just shortly before—the reason there is that vacuum, it’s kind of like when the tide goes out unexpectedly and there’s all kinds of wonderful things you can pick up on the beach. The reason the water has receded in an unusual fashion is it’s underneath a giant tidal wave that you can’t see.

There’s this mysterious leaving of the water, and you say, “Wow, wonderful. Look, crabs, starfish, seaweed. Look at this.”

“Look, beachcombing. We’re finding all this stuff that’s been buried for a long time. Let’s all go down to the beach and look at this strange phenomenon.” The reason you have that room, that vacuum, is the power has all been concentrated just beyond the horizon.

That’s what happened in the days of Jeroboam II with Assyria rising. Syria had to turn around, and everybody else had to turn around and say, “What are we going to do about these guys?” All the Israelites thought was, “Hey, freedom. Nobody’s pestering us.”

“Growth. Opportunity. Economic boom.” Right before the Assyrian crisis. And if you remember Micah prophesied in those days, remember Micah of Moresheth, and Moresheth is one of the cities that is obliterated by Sennacherib of the Assyrians, who has rolled up the Northern Kingdom and is now marching toward Judah.

What is God's consistent message with these prophets as we worked our way forward? And I don't have time to review, by the way, some of them. The reason we haven't done them yet is I think their biblical order is not their chronological order, so Nahum and Obadiah we haven't done yet because that's a little further down.

But when you get down to Habakkuk that we recently covered, remember Habakkuk is a wonderful point of light. He says, for those of you that do get it, that are turning to God and asking questions, God will give you answers. When you respond positively to God's Word, God's Word is more than just an assurance that you're not going to be judged, that you will be preserved, that God has His eye on you, that the marking angel has come through and you're not going to be subject to these terrible judgments.

There's more than that. Like Habakkuk, you move up into the tower and you see the glory of God reflected in these judgments. You see the righteousness and the justice of God vindicated.

And more than being a spectator, you become a participant and you become someone who actively reflects the glory of God the way the great prophet Habakkuk did in his three-chapter book. You remember that? His perplexity, his uncertainty.

He had questions that he asked God. God answers him. And he says, “Ah, well, if that's the case, then what about this?”

I see that patience is required. I see that I need to take the long view. I need to get up in the tower and watch the— And it's just like Galveston.

And Habakkuk has gotten up in a strong tower, and while judgment washes underneath him, he's preserved and he sees the strength and the power and the glory and the righteous judgment of God doing what needs to be done. And there's a time when you do need to see artillery shells coming in on your own position so that the enemy can be destroyed and God's righteousness can be vindicated.

And then his prayer in chapter 3, when he talks to God about remembering His mercy, and when he sees the awesome majesty of God's judgment, and he's faithfully and prayerfully holding on to his assurance that God is going to be merciful and God isn't going to forget that He has those people marked by the marking angel and that He is going to deliver and prosper and ultimately bring in the kingdom.

And you begin to see this hope being expressed throughout these prophets that even in the day of judgment there is the bright hope of vindication and of restoration, and for that remnant there will be glorification and entering into the fullness of the promises that have never really fully been expressed even in the heyday of David and Solomon.

The coming kingdom with the coming King, capital K, is a bright hope held out, and implicit in this is the hope of resurrection. The hope of resurrection. It is implicit; it is going to become explicit in your latter prophets.

Ezekiel with the Valley of Dry Bones, Daniel in chapter 12: there is a day coming when those who are in the grave will hear the voice of God, and as many who hear will live, live again. After two days He will raise us; on the third day we will stand up again. That idea.

We're going to see Joel also, as we're taking him a little bit out of order because they don't know where to place Joel because there are so few clues, and they put him content-wise with Amos and Hosea, but he's actually right before the outgoing of the Southern Kingdom. And interestingly, one of the things we'll see—and I'll tell you this now just because I think it's cool—but the beginning of this great crisis, who's the prophet in the days of Ahab that really starts up the prophetic ministry that embraces all of these writing prophets thus far? Who pronounces the drought in the days of Ahab? Who is there when the top is taken off Mount Carmel? It's Elijah.

What is his name in Hebrew? El-e-Yah. It's got both the divine godness, Elohim, El-e-Yah. My God is the Lord.

Yahweh, God's covenant name. El-e-Yah. You know what Joel's name is? And he's going to be just right before the Southern Kingdom goes out in 586-587.

You know what Joel's name means? It's Yah-el. Yo-el. It's the Lord is God.

It's the reverse of Elijah. And that's how I know, one of several ways I know, that Joel is one of the last of the prophets right before, because here's Elijah at the beginning, and in a mirror image you have Yah-el at the end of that final kingdom period. Southern Kingdom survives the Assyrian incursion, but it does not survive the Babylonian incursion.

They get a chance. And in the days of Hezekiah they are spared. Kazach Yah.

Remember what Hezekiah's name means. There's the faithfulness of God. There is the Kessel of God.

There is the remembrance of God. There is the preservation of God. And Hezekiah himself, turning his face to the wall, and then is given an extension.

The kingdom is on the ropes but is given an extension. And as goes the king, so goes the kingdom. And by the way, as goes Israel in the Old Testament, so goes the believer in this age.

What is our response? We can look around and wring our hands at world events and national events and the latest terrorist incursions, or we can take a leaf out of the book of Habakkuk and of Zephaniah and wake up to the spiritual reality that these are just reflections and echoes of on earth.

Bottom line: when you think about the Minor Prophets, think about each of them in their historic context. This is the Word of God coming in at a time of crisis and forcing either a reaction or a response. It is either received or it is rejected.

What are you doing? What am I doing with the Word of God at this time? Is it faith? Is it obedience? Is it response to the love of God? Or is it distraction? Indifference? I'm busy with other things.

I just really, I'm not processing that. I'm not digesting that. It's not—it doesn't have any traction in my daily thinking because I've got all this other stuff going on.

That is the sin of Jeroboam. That is the two golden calves. That is the sin of Hezekiah walking around deciding that the glory and the riches are his own doing.

And the emissaries come and say, "Wow, you were sick unto death and you've been healed. Your kingdom was on the ropes and somehow the Assyrians returned to their own lands." And Hezekiah says, "Yep, I'm a pretty great king, aren't I? Let me show you my stuff."

Do we take credit because there's been a vacuum and the sea has receded? Are we strutting through our unfettered kingdom? Are we enjoying the blessings and not looking to the source? Not humbly bowing and prostrating ourselves before the source of those things?

These messages, whatever else they do and however well they fit into the context of Kings and Chronicles, need to have their impact in our lives and our thinking. Each of them is slightly different. Hosea, there's an emphasis on the love of God despite the unfaithfulness of His people.

In Amos, there is the certainty of impending judgment, but there is escape for those who will ensure that they are right with God. Same thing in Habakkuk. Same thing in Zephaniah.

We're going to see it's going to be the same thing in Joel, and there are going to be some eerie similarities to the message of Joel and the message of Elijah. They're brackets. It wraps this entire prophetic ministry, not to mention Ezekiel and Isaiah, which we have covered verse by verse as books.

And if you remember the message of those books in their context, Ezekiel looking back from the captivity, Isaiah looking forward from the days of Hezekiah, those two great Major Prophets, what is the consistent message? God's disappointment with the Esau-like attitude of people who ought to know better, who fritter

away their heritage and their covenant inheritance for the momentary stimulation of the present. And there's never been a day when the devil could throw more at us by way of distraction than right now.

You can be immersed in the world that is supported by this technology, immersed, carried away, stimulated, so that you don't have to have an original thought. Or you can, from time to time, shut it off, set it aside, go into a quiet place and commune. Think back on what we have learned from these prophets.

It's the Word of God in a time of crisis. What do we do with it? It's not a choice of socks. It's not, "What color shirt am I going to wear today?"

This is, "Which side of the righteousness and justice of God are you going to be on?" When the marking angel comes through, what's he going to do when he looks at our face? When he looks at our life? When he looks at our priorities and our goals and our values?

And for many of us, I think we're there. We're in that remnant, and we want to focus on Habakkuk. We want to focus on being in the right place at the right time, learning the right lessons so that we can be useful to God and be available to be the one who is the watchman on the wall, the one who proclaims, the one who is a light shining in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

In the latter days perilous times will come. That wasn't written on believers. Paul wrote that to believers, and mature believers at that.

In the latter days perilous times will come. Why? Men will be Jeroboam. Men will be Uzziah.

Men will be Amaziah. Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of pleasure, enamored with all of the emoluments of this world, and distracted and deflected and insensible in the day of decision. Remember, there is a valley of decision.

We're in it. The valley of decision is the valley of Armageddon. You're either going to be on a white horse riding with the Lord Jesus, or you're going to be grist and cannon fodder, part of that contributes to the blood as high as the horse's bridles.

That's in effect what we face. It's serious. It's real.

That's why God has preserved these prophets. That's why it's so important for us to remember their message as we go through this wonderful historical study and see how the message was received or rejected by people in that day. It's even more important to think about how it is either received or rejected by us today.

Well, we'll see what happened to the Southern Kingdom in the days of King Josiah because there is a tepid, superficial revival, and that's going to be our next test when we look at the days of Josiah and they find the scroll and there's sort of a revival. Is that going to be us? It's a sort of a hand-flapping, half-hearted revival. It didn't work, did it?

They still went out. Everybody talks about the wonderful things that happened in the days of Josiah. The nation was judged just a few years after because it was shallow, half-hearted, superficial, wrongly motivated, and God wasn't fooled.

The days of Josiah are tragic days. They're the days of Zephaniah. They're the days of Obadiah.

They're the days of Joel. And we'll see that in upcoming weeks. But we'll close here for tonight, having been somewhat sobered by this view, in a word of prayer.

Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You that it does instruct, rebuke, and correct us in righteousness. We pray that Your Holy Spirit will fan the flames of Your Word and swing the hammer of Your Word in our souls to break up the rocks, to ignite our motivation and our living, breathing dedication to fulfill Your purpose in our lives.

We've been given so much. We have so much information. We have such a great presence of Your Holy Spirit, such a wonderful example in the Lord Jesus and in the apostles as we find them recorded in the New Testament.

We pray that these things will not fall to the ground of our souls, but that, like Habakkuk, we can be up in the strong fortress of Your Word and be ready to proclaim and to serve and to shine as lights in our generation and to be prepared for inheritance, for service in the ages to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.