Kings and Prophets 15-01-23a

Good evening and welcome to the Friday night Bible class at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 23rd of January 2015 and we're continuing our study of Kings and Prophets. We departed from the narrative in 2 Kings and its parallel in Chronicles to take a look at the book of Jonah two weeks ago and we'll pick up and finish that excursion and then move forward this evening.

Let's take a moment as we begin to go to the Lord in prayer and ask his blessing on our fellowship and on our study. Father, thank you for this day. Thank you for sustaining us through the week, the many manifestations of your grace, both those we're aware of and those that have been in the counsels of your own will, invisible to us, but protecting us and supporting us in ways that we will not be able to appreciate until we find ourselves in the future realms of glory.

We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, his work on our behalf, the standing that we have in him, the opportunities and the potentials that bless us on a day-to-day basis and give us such a bright hope for the future. We thank you for this portion of scripture that is before us this evening and we ask that as we look at it together that your Holy Spirit will teach us and illuminate it for us so that each one individually and we as a group will come to a more perfect understanding and a better appreciation of your grace, your faithfulness, your plan and purpose in history and for us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray it in his name, amen.

You'll remember that Jonah is one of the first prophets, one of the first writing prophets that we encounter as we move through the history of the divided kingdom and we come to the days of Jeroboam the second and it is no accident that his ministry and the parallel or simultaneous ministries of a couple of other writing prophets occur at this time. Why? It's not, one of the most memorable things I ever heard was someone disparaging a lack of literary knowledge on the part of somebody and they said well he thinks Moby Dick is just a story about a whale and you know that raises eyebrows because a lot of people say well isn't it? And of course it's not, if you have read that Herman Melville novel with any sensitivity at all you realize that Captain Ahab and the struggle to harpoon this great denizen of the deep is metaphorical, it is allegorical in many ways of human struggle and what can happen when your ego gets the better of you obsession, there's a lot of themes going on in that story, it's not just a story about a whale. Well, you can say the same thing about the book of Jonah, it's not just a story about a recalcitrant prophet and a great fish, it's here for a reason and it was delivered in its day and in its historical season for a reason, season for a reason.

And what is that? Well, let's return just for a moment to our narrative back in Second Kings, you'll remember that in the days of the leper king Uzziah down in Judah who rules for a long time we have in the northern kingdom the appearance of Jeroboam the second, this is Second Kings 14.23. In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel became king in Samaria, he reigns forty-one years. And we're looking at the fact that he does evil in the sight of the Lord, he's like his namesake Jeroboam and yet in

verse 25 he restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the sea of the Arabah, this is the sea of the southern plain and what sea would that be? If you think about the historical environs of the nation, what sea would there be down near the Arabah? Sea of Galilee, Jordan river flowing into what? The Dead Sea, the Dead Sea, he has basically expanded the kingdom largely back to what it was in the pre-division days. It goes all the way down to the Dead Sea, you'd have to turn the corner around there into Edom and Moab and it's all the way to the entrance of Hamath and if you look at that on a map he's greatly expanded, he's all the way down to past Judah really, it's just hugely expanded.

So, what does this imply? Well, I thought about and I've given a lot of thought to how much of the history should we delve into and I decided not too much and here's why, it's not in the Bible. If the history was important it would be in the Bible, it's not in there but we can cover just enough to help put the writing prophets in their context and understand what would have been very obvious to the people of this day because they knew current events and we just need a little bit. But here's the situation in a nutshell and this is really as much as we need to know to put these Bible books in their context.

What has happened? You remember Ben-Hadad, who's he the king of? He's the king of Syria up there, right? He's right up to the north of the Northern Kingdom, putting pressure on the Northern Kingdom with its capital at Samaria, right? These guys have been a power and a threat for decades and decades and decades. They've been the big problem. Well, here's what has happened right here at this time circa 750-755 BC.

Think about that, 750-755 BC. When does the Northern Kingdom go out? What's the year for the demise of the Northern Kingdom? There's really only about three dates you need as navigational aids for the Old Testament. Just remember that David comes to the throne right around 1000 BC.

A thousand years before the Lord Jesus, David comes to the throne. The 900s BC, this is the reign of Solomon. He builds the temple in the nine-somethings BC.

We don't know exactly when, but it's pretty close, nine-something. The Northern Kingdom goes out under the Assyrians. The Assyrians come and wipe them out in 721 BC.

Big signpost in the Old Testament. Northern Kingdom wiped out, carried off into captivity, 721 BC. Big signpost.

The next big one is the third incursion of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian Empire, about 140 years later, 586. 586, some will say 587, I don't really care. I use 586, that's the way I learned it, so that's the way you're going to learn it.

586, that's the Southern Kingdom of Judah going out. The third invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, he comes in 605, carries off a lot of the princes, Daniel and his three friends, comes back in 597 and takes a second group, which includes Ezekiel. And then 586, he raises Jerusalem to the

ground and burns the temple down and does horrible devastation and destruction.

And they all go into captivity for 70 years, so that the land can have its Sabbath rests. So, what are our three signposts? Just say 900 to 1,000, remember David has a 40-year reign, Solomon has a 40-year reign. You've got that whole century, basically, between 900 and 1,000 BC.

That's David and Solomon, United Kingdom. It's glory days. And then all the way down to 721, this is when the Northern Kingdom is going to go out.

And then roughly 140 years later, give or take, the Southern Kingdom goes out. Northern Kingdom goes out 721, Southern Kingdom 586. Okay, got that? We are right now with Jeroboam II at about 755 BC.

So, think about it. What was our second big signpost? What year is it? So, how much time is left on the clock for the Northern Kingdom? Less than a generation, right? Less than 40 years. They're just on the verge.

But you read this and look at verse 25 of 2 Kings 14. Even though he does evil, worse than Jeroboam, the son of Nebat and all that, didn't depart from it. Jeroboam II restores the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath, this is all the way up north, down to the Sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he had spoken through his servant Jonah.

Jonah says, it's going to be prosperous. It's going to be great. You'll have victory.

Go, attack, you'll win. And so he does this. The Lord saw the affliction of Israel was very bitter, and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel.

So the Lord did not say that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven. He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, and the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, etc. So they have this period of prosperity.

And it is predicted, it is prophesied by our guy, Jonah, the son of Amittai from Gathhefer, up there in the mountains of Zebulun. Now, we have looked at the story of Jonah. We reviewed, in summary, his whole career of being told to go to Nineveh.

Where is Nineveh? In Syria. The hated Syrians, boo on Syria. We're sick of them.

They keep coming down, raiding, taking our stuff. Why would I want to go preach salvation to the Syrians? I don't. I'll go the other way.

I've had enough. It's too much. I'm not going to do it.

Well, you want to talk about not going to do it? Wait until we get to our next writing prophet. So we saw the whole thing. With the whale, he is delivered, and he still doesn't go.

So the word of the Lord comes a second time and says, Look, go do what I told you to do the first time. So he goes, and he walks in. He says, Hey, 40 days.

You guys are gone. And then he leaves. And he goes and sits on the hill and waits for the destruction.

Well, let's turn back to the book of Jonah, and let's just quickly finish our survey here, so that we can understand why this book exists, why its thematic message is what it is, at this time in the days of Jeroboam II. So let's just pick up partway through chapter 3 here. Verse 4. Jonah began to enter the city the first day's walk, cried and said, 40 days, Nineveh shall be overthrown.

It's a three-day journey. He only goes in one day's walk. Well, he doesn't even have to go the rest of the way.

Everybody picks up the message. It travels like wildfire. The people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, put on sackcloth, the greatest of the least.

King of Nineveh hears about it. He throws off his robe, covers himself with sackcloth, sits in ashes. He has it proclaimed and published throughout the land.

Jonah doesn't have to do anything. The king of Nineveh and the people of Nineveh just take over. Jonah doesn't even have a job.

Neither man nor beast, herd nor flock. And pay attention here in verse 7, because I've wondered about this, and one other verse in this chapter forever, and it finally dawned on me this week. I think maybe I know why this is in here.

It's not just the people. Neither man nor beast, herd nor flock. Taste anything.

Do not let them eat or drink water. Why the flocks and herds? Do they need salvation? Do they have volition? Are they going to repent on their own? But they deny their flocks and herds water also. I just was clueless on this point, and I haven't ever seen anybody comment on it that gave me any sort of peace about the answer.

But I'll make a suggestion here in a bit. Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, cry mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

Who can tell if God will turn and relent? Turn away from his fierce anger so that we may not perish. God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. God relented from the disaster that he had said he would bring upon them, that he did not do it.

Chapter 4, It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. This is the man who's been delivered from the belly of the great fish. Looking at somebody else's deliverance, do you remember a story Jesus told? It had sort of a similar theme about a servant working for a master and was hugely in debt, and the master forgave his debt.

But then he had an underling servant working for him that owed him a paltry amount, and he wouldn't forgive him. And when the master heard about it, he said, the title of a Clint Eastwood movie, You are unforgiven. I unforgive you.

The forgiveness I forgave you with, I withdraw. I retract. You are now on the hook for what I formerly forgave.

That's a scary thought. The Lord Jesus illustrates a situation where you can lose your forgiveness. And he says it in more than one place.

Model prayer given to the disciples. Forgive us as to the extent that in accord with, parallel to, the way we forgive each other. If we cannot and do not forgive one another, I don't care how many 1 John 1-9 loops you've been through, the Bible says, God can and will unforgive.

That is a very sobering thought. Well, it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. He's angry at the expression of the grace of God.

Now, let's stop for a moment. Think about somebody that you love and admire. Somebody close to you, and you really love and admire them.

I can easily think of people that fit my upcoming illustration. And you see them in action, and one of those things that you love and admire about them is expressed. Maybe they're very selfless and generous, and you see a fresh example that maybe even trumps all the previous examples, and you say, you know, I've always loved that about them, and look at this.

That's just fantastic. I don't know anybody that is so uniquely possessed of that particular character attribute as this person. I just love that about them.

This is not Jonah looking at the Lord God. If you look at God, and you love Him for His grace, His patience, His long-suffering, slow to anger, reserving mercy to a thousand generations, but willing to judge if three successive generations of them that hate Him come up, He'll cut them off. But mercy, He doesn't cut that off after three generations.

He's so gracious, so patient, so merciful. And if you love God, and you see a fresh expression of this wonderful aspect of His character, what would it normally produce? A fresh appreciation, a recognition, just as you have done for me, I see that you do it for others. This is lacking in Jonah.

The man who has been delivered from the belly of the great fish, and given another chance, is angry that God would be merciful. Why? He is subjective. These are Ninevites.

These are Syrians. These are the enemies of His people. And the fact that they have repented, and are sorrowful, and are ready to abandon their violent and despicable ways, doesn't impress Him at all.

He can't step back and see the big picture. He's just angry. So he prays to the Lord.

He says, Ah Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Now we find out why He got on the ship and tried to go the other way. He says, This is what I thought when I left for Tarshish. I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, one who relents from doing harm.

I know this about You. I'm a prophet in the Northern Kingdom. And we're still here.

I know this about You. But I don't want to see that going any direction but me. But us.

But, you know, the chosen few. Therefore now, O Lord, please just kill me. You're merciful to others.

So don't be merciful to me anymore. Just kill me. I don't want to see Your grace going to others.

It's better for me to die than to live. If I've got to live and see You dispensing grace and mercy to the Syrians, kill me and kill me now. But, obviously, He doesn't mean it.

Because, the Lord says, is it right for you to be angry? And, as is so often the case, the Lord poses a question. How many times did the Lord Jesus confront the disciples with a question? Think. This is just God's way of saying, Think, man.

Think, woman. Think, believer. Is this right? And if it's wrong, where's the source of the wrong? And that's all God says.

Right for you to be angry? And this is a message from God to Jonah. God is talking to Jonah, even his anger. Which, by the way, is a sideways affirmation that when we sin, God the Holy Spirit doesn't close up shop and hide until we confess.

We used to have that light switch on, light switch off. You're filled, you're not filled. The Holy Spirit's here.

You sin, He's gone. You confess, He comes back. That's not the case.

The convicting ministry, the teaching ministry, persists even when we are in sin. This is the grace of God. Jonah is manifestly committing a sin of anger here.

He's petty. He's self-centered. He's subjective.

And God speaks to him. Now, if God does it in the Old Testament, do you think He doesn't do it for us? His method of communicating with us is the Word through the Holy Spirit. And when we sin, how do you think we come to a knowledge and a conviction of sin? It's a work of the Holy Spirit.

He convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He doesn't suspend business and hang an out-to-lunch sign in the shop window until we get around to confessing. He is there and He speaks.

He never leaves us. He doesn't forsake us. And the active ministry of God's Spirit is evident even when we are in a state of sinfulness.

He is there convicting. That's His job. Which, by the way, saves us from having to do it for each other.

Well, you know you're in a state of sin, don't you? I mean, wouldn't that be fun if it was our job to walk around to each other and, excuse me, Sam, it's pretty obvious to me that you're in a complete state of sin here. You really do need to... Here, I've got a list of the things you need to... Isn't it great that the Holy Spirit does that so we don't have to do it for each other? Praise God for that. So Jonah went out of the city.

He doesn't answer the question. Did you notice? He doesn't say yea or nay. God asks the question and Jonah just turns on his sandal heel and walks out of the city.

Notice he's in the city when he says, kill me and kill me. He's looking around, seeing the repentance, seeing recognition of the grace of God and people responding and claiming it. He's in the city when he sees this.

He's still one day's journey in. He says, look at this. This is terrible.

I wanted God to wipe these people out and make us all feel good. He's sparing them. And by the way, the 40 days has not elapsed yet.

Right? Why is Jonah so angry? All he sees is the repentance. God hasn't said, I'm going to spare the city. Jonah knows God's going to spare the city because Jonah knows God.

And as soon as he sees the repentance, he says, God doesn't have to tell him he knows this already, that God is going to relent. So he's still in the city. And he says, I know you're gracious and merciful, so take my life from me.

So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city, made himself a shelter, and sat under it in the shade till he might see what would become of the city. Now, if he doesn't know what's going to happen to the city, why did he get angry and leave and stop proclaiming the message? He already knows. That's why he's angry.

But he thinks, well, maybe God will see how angry I am when God will see it my way and go ahead and destroy them. I don't know what he's thinking. He's irrational as we all are when we're in a state of sin.

We can't think clearly when we are not sharing God's viewpoint. We're not responding to what we know of God. It's irrational.

If he knows God's going to spare the city, why is he sitting out there waiting to see what's going to happen to it? It just doesn't make any sense. But he's not making sense. The Lord prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah.

Now it says he made himself a shelter, but his shelter is obviously inadequate. It must have been a... How much stuff does he have with him when he goes? Maybe a cloak? And so he's trying to, I don't know, just hold it up over his head or something. He makes himself a little shelter, but it's completely inadequate because when this tree with its large shady leaves springs up, he's grateful.

Now, point of contact with Jeroboam II. Let's step back right at this point. Jonah, it's not a great leap of the imagination, represents Israel, God's chosen people.

We're not talking about a united, divided kingdom. We're talking about the people of God. The people, Israel.

Why did God raise them up? What did God tell Abraham? Your descendants will be innumerable and they will be a light to the Gentiles. Remember that? Light to the Gentiles. Their deliverance, you could loosely equate his experience in the belly of the great fish, perhaps to the bondage in Egypt, where you think, well, that's hopeless.

And yet they are delivered. And sent into a land that allegedly belongs to them, but is occupied by others. And remember, Syria, the broadest extent of the land of Israel actually includes Syria.

It includes Damascus. It includes Nineveh. The broadest extent, and this is the way it'll be in the millennial kingdom, goes way up north.

And so he could be looking at these Syrians like squatters in the same way that when they came to the land of Canaan that had been promised to Abraham, it's full of people who don't belong there. But what's the first thing that Joshua does when they go up north? You remember the whited cliffs and the writing of the law, proclamation of what is available. And this is how you have Rahab.

This is how you have some of the others, the Gibeonites, who recognize that God is God and they come under the shelter. Well, so this is what their example is supposed to do. And looking at it in broad brush strokes, what happens? When the Ninevites look at Jonah and listen to Jonah, it is Jonah's visible and verbal witness to which they respond.

It's not an angel. It's not a comet. It's not a heavenly apparition.

It is Jonah's presence that is the occasion for their repentance and response. They look at Jonah. The very minimal little message that he manages to deliver is enough to galvanize this entire population into repentance.

Right? Well, he's not happy with that mission. He doesn't feel fulfilled. He doesn't glorify God.

He walks out. And now what is the situation? When he goes on the hill, who's looking at whom? He is no longer visible to the Gentile population of Nineveh. He is outside looking at them, waiting for their destruction.

Right? Instead of them looking at him with opportunity for salvation and response, he is looking at them, waiting for judgment and obliteration. And God says, Jonah, I've already disciplined you with the fish. Let me manifest my grace to you and see if a positive example of grace will bring you back to your senses.

So God prepares a plant and made it come up over Jonah that I might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. Shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. What did we just read over in 2 Kings 14? God looked down and saw what? In the days of Jeroboam II? That the people were afflicted? The Lord saw, verse 26, the affliction of Israel was very bitter and whether bond or free, there was no helper.

And so God let Jeroboam. Jeroboam is kind of like the plant. He comes up and provides shade.

The northern kingdom has gone far astray. They're way outside the will of God. They're doing what Jeroboam, the son of Nebat did under Jeroboam II's leadership.

But even though he's a bad guy, kind of like Jonah is a bad guy, God blesses him, makes him an agent of deliverance and restores their borders. This is shade. This is relief.

Now, historically, what has actually happened is the Assyrians are rising to power and Syria is sinking. And one of the things that prepared the ground in Nineveh is the knowledge that their empire is about to go out. They see the looming shadow of Assyria to their north and east.

And the historical circumstance has prepared them to think, you know, maybe we need to change our ways because we are about to be destroyed. That's not a detail in the book of Jonah, but it is a historical fact that Assyria is already on the rise and has already conquered many surrounding kingdoms. And Assyria is the next one on their list.

Syria is. And they're going to come through Syria and eventually to the northern kingdom. This is only 30 years off, remember? 30 years.

We know the situation in Assyria at this time. But from Jonah's perspective, his witness turns them. Well, he's unhappy about that and so God doesn't chastise him, doesn't scourge him with boils, doesn't do something negative.

He gives him relief. And he says, look, I am a God of grace and mercy. That's what he does to the northern kingdom in the same time.

Now, what's going to happen when Jonah does not respond? Jonah appreciates the shade, just like the northern kingdom appreciates the expansion of borders. They've done archeology and traced a lot of their finds back to the days of Jeroboam II. And they have found marked evidence of prosperity.

They have ivory artifacts with gold inlay. They have imports that they got from Egypt with decorations of powdered glass and all kinds of evidence of expanded agriculture and building

and great prosperity traced back to the 8th century B.C. in the days of Jeroboam II. And God gave them this shade, gave them a period to take a deep breath and say, look at the grace of God.

Maybe I should respond, just like Jonah under the... And they appreciated the prosperity just like Jonah appreciates the shade. But just like Jonah, they did not recognize the source. And so, what happened? In the same way that God prepared the plant, God prepares a worm.

And the plant goes away. The Lord God, as morning dawned the next day, God prepared a worm and it so damaged the plant that it withered. And it happened when the sun arose, God prepared a vehement east wind.

Three different things God prepares. He prepares the plant, He prepares the worm, and He prepares the east wind, which is universally this dry, hot, withering, drying, blasting wind. The sun beat on Jonah's head so that he grew faint and he wished death for himself and said, it is better for me to die than to live, which is what he said earlier when God was being gracious to others.

God said to Jonah, is it right for you to be angry about the plant? First of all, was it right for you to be angry about the repentance and about the deliverance of others? Is it right for you to be angry about the plant? He said, it is right for me to be angry, even unto death. The Lord said, you had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. By the way, that's about how long that prosperity under Jeroboam II lasted.

It was on very unstable foundations and it did not survive Jeroboam's reign in the north. And 30 years later, they are destroyed and taken captive. Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city? What God is doing in this prophecy from Jonah is reminding Israel of the reason they exist.

Why is Jonah a prophet? To proclaim the word of the Lord, to proclaim the day of deliverance. And why does Israel exist? To be a light, to appreciate themselves the grace of God and to be a light to the Gentiles, just like Jonah. And so in this last effort, God blesses the northern kingdom and tries to remind them through Jonah, who prophesies the prosperity in the same way that he prophesies salvation to actually destruction to Nineveh and he refuses to prophesy prosperity.

But do you see the parallel? God is reminding the northern kingdom, this is why you exist. Have you forgotten? Which, of course, they have. And because they have forgotten and because they say, well, I'd rather die than recognize the grace of God, that's exactly what's going to happen.

And they are going to go out just a few decades later. God says at the close, should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than 120,000 persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left. This is sort of the knowledge of good and evil.

They have no knowledge like you Israelites have. And much livestock. This is the second of the

two verses I've always wondered about.

It's the last phrase in the book of Jonah, much livestock. And earlier, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything, nor let them eat or drink water. Why include the animals? It's not just any old animals, it's not dogs, it's not parakeets in cages, it's not peacocks and any of the rest of it.

What is it? It's flocks and herds, in both cases, much cattle. What can you do with those? Worship. In the Old Testament economy, this is the way you worship.

These people not only have an attitude of repentance, but they have the wherewithal to worship. They've got, and by repenting and putting their animals in sackcloth and fasting, it is in a way sanctifying those animals. And when God says, it's not just the people, but there's much livestock, these are people who have the potential for worship.

It's not just, wow, look at how I dodged that bullet. They have the wherewithal, it's a suggestion, I think, of their potential to worship God in the same way that Israel does. They turn, and it's just a suggestion, this is very metaphorical, obviously the Ninevites, they're going to be soon wiped out and gone, but it's the parable, it's the picture that God paints, and these animals are presented because these are animals qualified for sacrifice, I think.

And it is a reminder that not only can you be a light to the Gentiles, but they can glorify God, they can appreciate God, they can worship God in the way that you do. And it is a look forward. What part of the Bible do we not have because of Israel? Every word of it.

Genesis to Revelation, we have the word of truth because of the witness of Israel. That's why we've got Bible Old and New Testament. And it is up to us to look at their example, recognize that God is gracious to us just as he was to them, and we do not want to make the mistake that Israel made and that Jonah personifies of being so occupied with ourselves and our immediate circumstance that we cannot celebrate and rejoice when God's grace extends to others, when God's mercy and his character are made manifest and we're blind to it because we are preoccupied with ourselves.

I think you can see why the message of Jonah comes to the Northern Kingdom at the time that it does. Jeroboam's successes and restoration of prosperity is the plant. And God is going to prepare the worm and that plant is going to go away because like Jonah, they're happy for the prosperity, but they do not turn.

You can think of the carrot and the stick. God has used the stick on them. He says, I'm tired of beating you purple.

Let me try blessing you. Let me remind you of my grace and my faithfulness and my willingness to overlook enormous amounts of wrong. Well, we're going to pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to look at another of the writing prophets at this time. We're

going to see this same message, but from a completely different perspective. Let's pause here and take our break.