

What's the Message – Lesson 58

Today we look back and see how the “big picture” fits together.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Our prayer today is that the Lord would help us to see that the road of life-experiences our spiritual forefathers walked down, is very parallel to the life-road we walk today, and that the lessons they had to learn are still applicable to our life and time. Amen.

Teacher, it seems to me that since we are at the beginning of a major change in the lives of the Children of Israel with the divided kingdom . . . and since the announced objective of this course is to show how the major themes of the Bible tie together . . . that it would be appropriate to look back and remind our listeners of how all these years and experiences do fit together.

Yes, Dale, it is easy to lose sight of an objective if one is caught up in the details. So let's review. We began with the idea – a radical concept in the ancient world – that there is only One True God, the Creator of the entire universe, who has the ultimate power and authority to begin life and to set its rules. All things that inhabited this world were created exceedingly good, everything that was necessary to sustain life on this planet was provided, and man was given the highest privilege of walking with God daily, communicating with Him on a first-person basis.

But mankind was not content with merely being close to God, Adam and Eve wanted to be like God, and to be in control of their own lives. So they rebelled, rejecting God's authority over them. And with this act, sin was brought into the world and into the lives of every person that ever lived. It multiplied and spread throughout all generations to the point where God saw nothing but evil continually, and God determined that He would destroy all mankind except Noah, and would start over with him as a “second Adam.”

And just five generations after the flood, the people gathered together in the plain of Shinar, and set out to build a tower that would reach to the heavens to bring fame to themselves.

But God made that construction come to an end by confusing their language, so that people could not readily communicate with each other. And they scattered to the many corners of the globe.

Then comes an event that I did not fully understand at the time. It was God's covenant with Abraham, and you made a statement about this covenant being the central theme of the Old Testament, with the lengthy rest of the book being only a commentary on Israel's failure to keep this covenant. I didn't quite catch the full implications of that statement then, but over time as we have watched the development of the Israelites, I am now seeing your claim become fulfilled.

Yes, Dale, this is the central theme that ties together everything that follows. God's promise to Abraham of material blessings, such as land and becoming a great nation, were given for a purpose, to help them become the blessing to the world that they were called to be. God was acting in His mercy to provide for His children. God only asked one thing, that they respond by showing their love to Him through obeying His commandments. Unfortunately, they – and we – have never been able to respond in love to God consistently, and they – like we – suffer the consequences.

Isaac and Jacob, then Joseph and his brothers all had to learn this lesson. Moses was a great leader and teacher, but he struggled with generations of Israelites after the freedom from slavery in Egypt to get them to understand and accept the fact that God was good to them because He loved them, and that they should trust Him fully and obey Him. Yahweh is not only the God of love and mercy, He is at the same time the God of justice . . . or maybe you recognize these two great themes as Law and Gospel. Whatever term you use, these are the two great themes that appear repeatedly throughout the entire Bible.

And God gave His children a way to relieve themselves from the consequences of sin through the provision of atonement, as laid out in the Book of Leviticus. But a whole generation had to return to the desert and wander for 40 years until they had died off and were replaced by a generation that recognized the necessity of obedience. In spite of God

providing them everything they needed to fulfill their purpose in life, they still found it difficult to obey God . . . completely.

And so we had example after example of what to do or not to do with our lives in the book of Joshua, then the book of Judges where we had lessons mostly from the failures of the Israelites, and on into the books of Samuel. Here we saw Israel demand that they be like all the other nations around them and have a king. In doing so, they rejected God as their king and opted for an earthly one. There were some early successes especially under the leadership of David, but he had his human flaws as well, and there were problems that came to painful fruition under the reign of his son, Solomon.

And that brings us to the historical moment where our study finds us about to delve into the subject of the divided kingdom. It is a period which lasts about 300 years, and covers the reigns of 19 kings of the ten northern tribes, as well as 20 kings of the two southern tribes. Since our objective in this series is not to be primarily a history class, we shall approach our study of this section somewhat differently than we have done in the previous ones.

What we hope you see is the principle that with God we are able to accomplish everything He intends for us, but without Him we can do nothing of substance and lasting consequence. The illustrations of ancient Israel may be different from our lifetime settings, but the parallels definitely are present, and the stories most certainly are pertinent and applicable to our lives today.

Next time we will begin our study of the divided kingdom.