

### Lesson 13—Poetry, Prophecy, Gospels

Last time, we wrapped up our discussion regarding the relationship of the first two volumes of the sayings of God in Scripture: Promise and Law. We saw that these two sayings of God comprise the basic revelation of God throughout the Bible: God says He will act on our behalf to bless us—save us from our sin—and in response, we are to trust God obey Him. In addition to this, we also learned that the Promise and Law of God do not contradict one another, but rather they both serve two different purposes while working towards the same goal of God glorifying himself by redeeming His fallen creation. The Law of God shows us our need to be redeemed while the Promise of God provides for our redemption in the coming of Jesus to earth and his death and resurrection for our sins. Then, the Law shows us what it looks like to live as those who have been redeemed by the Promise of God, and that is by obeying the spirit of the law which can be summed up into loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and loving your neighbor as yourself.

So, tonight, we are finally going to jump into the third volume of the sayings of God in the Scriptures—Poetry, which includes the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon—and the first question we ask of each of these volumes is: 1) Why? What is the need being met by God speaking through the poetic books of the Bible? Well, at this point, the people of God have the Promise of God and the Law of God, so what do you think they would need next? In **Deuteronomy 11:18**, God says, “<sup>18</sup> ‘You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul,’” and when I read that, my first question is: what does that look like? You have just been given the foundational promise of God, guaranteeing your redemption if you respond to him in faith, and you have been commanded to obey his commands as a part of this promised redemptive relationship with God. Therefore, it makes sense to me

that our top priority would be understanding what it looks like when we do what God said in Deuteronomy 11, when we lay up his words in our hearts and minds. In light of this, I am suggesting to you that one of the main purposes of the poetic books in the plan of God is to show us what is looked like to have the Promise and Law of God worked out in and through his people.

Now, question 2) what is the content of these poetic books? Let's see a few examples:

**Job 23:1-4, 10** says, "Then Job answered and said:

<sup>2</sup> "Today also my complaint is bitter;

my hand is heavy on account of my groaning.

<sup>3</sup> Oh, that I knew where I might find him,

that I might come even to his seat!

<sup>4</sup> I would lay my case before him

and fill my mouth with arguments...

<sup>10</sup> But he knows the way that I take;

when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold;"

**Psalm 3:1-3** says, "O Lord, how many are my foes!

Many are rising against me;

<sup>2</sup> many are saying of my soul,

"There is no salvation for him in God."

<sup>3</sup> But you, O Lord, are a shield about me,

my glory, and the lifter of my head;"

**Proverbs 1:1-3; 2:1-5** say, "The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

<sup>2</sup>To know wisdom and instruction,

to understand words of insight,

<sup>3</sup>to receive instruction in wise dealing,

in righteousness, justice, and equity...

*Chapter 2:1-5: My son, if you receive my words*

and treasure up my commandments with you,

<sup>2</sup>making your ear attentive to wisdom

and inclining your heart to understanding;

<sup>3</sup>yes, if you call out for insight

and raise your voice for understanding,

<sup>4</sup>if you seek it like silver

and search for it as for hidden treasures,

<sup>5</sup>then you will understand the fear of the Lord

and find the knowledge of God..."

And **Ecclesiastes 1:12-14** says, "<sup>12</sup>I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>And

I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an

unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. <sup>14</sup>I have seen

everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind." The

main subject present throughout the poetic books is "I," and the general content is the inner

personal experiences of human beings that are living under the Promise and Law of God.

The next question to address is 3) do we see any progress in this saying of God? It does

not appear that God has spoken progressively in the poetic books, but there is a logical

development that seems to be present. Each of the poetic books, except for Job, are found

historically during the time of Kings David and Solomon when Israel was at its peak; Job occurs during the time of the early patriarchs back in early Genesis (i.e. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). This makes sense given the purpose that the poetic books serve: to show us what it looks like to have the promise and law of God worked out in us and through us. Each of these books was written during a primetime in Israel's history when we are given some of the greatest examples of faithful commitment and obedience to God through the lives of men like Job and David, and 2 of the poetic books written by Solomon, especially Ecclesiastes, also help show us the consequences of faithlessness and disobedience to God as well, something that we unfortunately see in the later years of Solomon's life.

Next question: 4) What method did God use to speak to us through these poetic books? It seems clear that God is revealing himself through these books by way of personal experience, or testimony, and given the content, this is an appropriate method. We can see this in **Psalm 27:1**, for instance, when David says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation;

whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;

of whom shall I be afraid?"

Here, in this Psalm, we see David experiencing God as his light and salvation, the stronghold of his life. Therefore, David's conclusion is: whom shall I fear? God is revealing something true about his character and what it means to live under his promise and law: God can always be trusted, he will save those who turn to him, and there is no reason to be afraid with God on your side. The Apostle Paul seemed to have picked up and adopted this truth as well from, I believe in large part, reading passages like Psalm 27:1: in **Romans 8:31**, he writes, "<sup>31</sup>...If God is for us, who can be against us?"

And this brings us to our final question: 5) what is to be our response to this saying of God? What is the appropriate response to the poetic books of the Bible? God has given us these many, many testimonies of his people as they experienced the grace of his promise and walked in obedience, or disobedience in some cases, to his law, and He intends for us to read them, to learn truth about God through another's experience, and then to adopt that truth ourselves. This does not mean that people's experiences dictate what is true and what is false, but by giving us these books of the Bible, God is affirming the testimonies of these people to be accurate in reflecting truths about who He is and what it is like living under his promise and law. Therefore, God wants us to read verses and passages like Psalm 27:1 and come to not only agree with David mentally or theologically, but to share that experience with David as we come to personally know God as our salvation and see all fear fade away. We are to read through these books, these collections of testimonies from the people of God of old, and to long for a similar experience of God so much so that we seek God until it happens. Don't just rest being comfortable saying that God is your light and salvation; instead, God wants you to seek Him until you have known what it feels like to be so secure in the promises of God that nothing scares you.

Now, let's discuss the fourth volume of God's saying in the Scriptures, which also happens to be the largest volume so far: Prophets, covering from Isaiah through Malachi (the rest of the OT after Song of Solomon). So, let's address our first question: 1) why? What need is being met by God speaking through the Prophets? Well, **Isaiah 1:2-3** says, "2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;

for the Lord has spoken:

"Children have I reared and brought up,

but they have rebelled against me.

<sup>3</sup> The ox knows its owner,  
 and the donkey its master's crib,  
 but Israel does not know,  
 my people do not understand,"

and **Jeremiah 13:11** says, "<sup>11</sup> For as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the Lord, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they would not listen." So, God has entered into a vital covenantal relationship with His people, Israel, but they have rebelled and become unfaithful to God. Therefore, we can say that the Prophets were given to us so that the rebel might hear the Word of God.

Now, 2) What is the content of the Prophets? What did they say to these rebels? As you read through the Prophets, you will quickly gather that they are pretty heavily focused on two main topics: 1) what happened? What went wrong in Israel's relationship with God? 2) Is there any hope for this relationship? Is there any chance of reconciliation? At least half of the prophets address this first issue of what went wrong in Israel's relationship with God, and they are insistent on one thing, shown here as we read in a string of references from the prophets:

**Micah 6:3** says, "<sup>3</sup> "O my people, what have I done to you?

How have I wearied you? Answer me;"

**Isaiah 40:9, 12-13** says, "<sup>9</sup> Go on up to a high mountain,

O Zion, herald of good news;

lift up your voice with strength,

O Jerusalem, herald of good news;

lift it up, fear not;

say to the cities of Judah,

“Behold your God...

<sup>12</sup> Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand

and marked off the heavens with a span,

enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure

and weighed the mountains in scales

and the hills in a balance?

<sup>13</sup> Who has measured the Spirit of the Lord,

or what man shows him his counsel;”

**Hosea 3:1** says, “And the Lord said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins;” and **Micah 7:18** says, “<sup>18</sup> Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity

and passing over transgression

for the remnant of his inheritance?

He does not retain his anger forever,

because he delights in steadfast love.”

The point is clear: the prophets were declaring to rebel Israel, ‘Behold you God! It is not his fault that your relationship is broken; He is good, great, and always faithful.’ In fact, they also make it plain that Israel’s broken relationship with God was indeed their fault, and their fault alone: **Isaiah 1:4** says, “<sup>4</sup> Ah, sinful nation,

a people laden with iniquity,

offspring of evildoers,

children who deal corruptly!

They have forsaken the Lord,

they have despised the Holy One of Israel,

they are utterly estranged.”

The other half of the Prophets, then, addresses the second issue of reconciliation, assuring rebel Israel that there is indeed hope for reconciliation: **Ezekiel 37:15-17, 21-23** says, “<sup>15</sup> The word of the Lord came to me: <sup>16</sup>“Son of man, take a stick and write on it, ‘For Judah, and the people of Israel associated with him’; then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with him.’ <sup>17</sup> And join them one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. ...<sup>21</sup> then say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land. <sup>22</sup> And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms. <sup>23</sup> They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.” God promises here to do an amazing work of redemption and reconciliation with His people, Israel. It is also important to note that the Church is never mentioned throughout the Prophets because Israel, historically speaking, has been set aside while God works through the Church to bring about redemption for the Gentiles (those who are not ethnically Jewish). The promised redemption of Israel, then, must be referencing Act III when Jesus returns to earth to rule and reign from Jerusalem.



Then, we come to question 3) Is there any progress in the Prophets regarding what God has said? Again, just like the Poetic books, it does not appear that God has spoken progressively here. And again, just like in the Poetic books, it does appear, though, that there is a logical sequence still present: historically speaking, Volume 1 considers Abraham and the birth of the Israel, Volume 2 considers the official formation of the people of Israel as a nation, and Volume 3 considers the climax of Israel under Kings David and Solomon, thereby reaching the end of Scene I of Act I; Volume 4 considers the dark period of Scene II of Act I while Israel is in rebellion against God and therefore cast into exile in Babylon.

So, question 4) How does God speak to rebels? **Deuteronomy 18:15-18** says, “<sup>15</sup>“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—<sup>16</sup> just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’<sup>17</sup> And the Lord said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken.<sup>18</sup> I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” The Prophet stands alongside his people, and God puts His word in the prophet’s mouth, which explains why you regularly read the phrase, ‘Thus says the LORD,’ as you read through the Prophets. Consequently, the authoritative Word of God become incarnate to the people of God through the words of a man like Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, a method highly appropriate for speaking to rebels; we all know how we tend to respond to shows of power and authority when we are already feeling defensive or rebellious: we become hardened in our rebellion. So, rather than repeat the method God used when speaking the Law—flashing lightning, booming thunder, dark

smoke, etc.—God comes alongside His rebellious people by speaking through the mouths of some of their own.

And this brings us to question 5) what is the appropriate response to the Prophets? As we answer this, we must remember that the Prophets primarily show us 2 things: 1) any broken relationship with God is not God's fault; it is ours. 2) There is hope for reconciliation with God, and He makes that very clear to us not only in what He says, but also in how He said it: while his people were in rebellion against Him, God did not simply rage against them and begin shouting that they 'better straighten up, Mister.' Rather, He came alongside of them through His prophets to show in efforts to breach any walls of hostility; not to mention the fact that the Prophets, as the largest saying of God so far, also find themselves historically in Israel's darkest period—God spoke most to His people when they needed Him most, even though they didn't want to hear it, and that is mercy. So, it is plain that our expected response to the Prophets is a return to the LORD; God desires that we would repent from our sin and trust Him for forgiveness. **Hosea 14:1-2** says, "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God,

for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

<sup>2</sup>Take with you words

and return to the Lord;

say to him,

"Take away all iniquity;

accept what is good,

and we will pay with bulls

the vows of our lips;"

And **Joel 2:12-13** says, “<sup>12</sup>“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,

“return to me with all your heart,

with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

<sup>13</sup> and rend your hearts and not your garments.”

Return to the Lord your God,

for he is gracious and merciful,

slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;

and he relents over disaster.”

So, again, we see the Prophets repeating those two basic principles spelled out for us from the beginning through the Promise and the Law: because of your sin, you are in a broken relationship with God that will result in eternal punishment and suffering; however, you do not have to stay that way—God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, encouraging you to return to Him with all your heart that you might find forgiveness and be restored to a right relationship with Him, resulting in eternal life and everlasting joy.

Now, then, we will discuss the 5<sup>th</sup> volume of the sayings of God: the Gospels, and our first question is 1) what is the need being met as God speaks through the Gospels? **Hebrews 1:1** tells us that “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,” referencing the first 4 volumes of the sayings of God, while **Hebrews 1:2** reads, “<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” Then, **John 1:1, 14** reads, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” So, God is communicating something so important that speaking

through prophets or other messengers would no longer do, but God himself had to come to earth in the person of Jesus to communicate to us. This shows us 3 things: 1) whatever truth was to be communicated through Jesus was intimately personal, not abstract; 2) whatever truth was to be communicated through Jesus was of utmost importance—God himself came to tell us, not one of his messengers; and 3) Jesus, then must perfectly personify the truth of God, meaning that when we look at Jesus, we get the clearest picture possible of what is true about God; this is why **Colossians 1:15** tells us that “<sup>15</sup> [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God....”

This, then, brings us to question 2) What was the content, then, of this important truth about God? When you look at Jesus’ teachings, you see a summation of what John 1:14 says when we are told that Jesus came, full of ‘grace and truth.’ In several instances, you read things like that in **Matthew 6:21-22**, which says, “<sup>21</sup> “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire,” and **Matthew 7:1-2**, which reads, “ “Judge not, that you be not judged. <sup>2</sup> For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.” Jesus’ teachings here sound a lot like that of Volume 2—the Law—when God told His people, ‘you do this, or you don’t do that,’ showing us that physical, outward obedience is a significant reality of a healthy relationship with God.

Then, you see teachings like that in **John 14:1-3** where Jesus says, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

These types of teachings of Jesus sound a lot like Volume 1—the Promise—in which God said to Abraham, ‘I will,’ signifying again that the grace of God—His underserved and free goodwill towards us due to His unconditional love for us—is foundational to a good relationship with Him and, therefore, belief on our parts is necessary since grace cannot be earned but must simply be received through faith. And all of this shows us that all of the teachings of God, past and future, are unified in the person of Jesus Christ, again emphasizing our need to pay special attention to Him.

Question 3) Do we see any progress in the Gospels? Well, in Jesus’ teachings, we see the seed of all that is taught throughout the New Testament. For example, **Luke 21:10-13** says, “<sup>10</sup> Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. <sup>11</sup> There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. <sup>12</sup> But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.<sup>13</sup> This will be your opportunity to bear witness.” Then, in **Philippians 1:12**, while Paul was imprisoned for sharing the Gospel, he says, “<sup>12</sup> I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.” We see another example in **John 15:7-8**, when Jesus says, “<sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” Then, **Romans 6:5-13** says, “<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup> For one who has died has been set free from sin. <sup>8</sup> Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will

also live with him. <sup>9</sup> We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. <sup>10</sup> For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. <sup>11</sup> So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup> Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup> Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.”

Question 4) What method does God use to speak to us in the Gospels? In **John 13:2-5, 12-15**, we read, “<sup>2</sup> During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, <sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, <sup>4</sup> rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. <sup>5</sup> Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him...<sup>12</sup> When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. <sup>14</sup> If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.” Jesus, perfectly personifying the grace and truth of God, was a living example to His disciples of that grace and truth. Therefore, we see that God’s method of speaking through the Gospels is very personal and very intimate because He is communicating the deepest and fullest truth about who He is through His Son, Jesus.

This, then, leads us to question 5) what is the appropriate response to the Gospels? Jesus says in **Matthew 11:28-30**, “<sup>28</sup> Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give

you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” This can be a very hard passage to grasp at first because Jesus doesn’t sound like He is making any sense: a yoke is placed upon a beast of burden (i.e. an ox or donkey) in order to do some work; therefore, offering a burden of work upon someone who is already heavy laden with burden doesn’t sound like a recipe for rest like Jesus is promising, but rather it sounds like a recipe for burnout and collapse, and then following up by saying ‘my yoke is easy, and my burden is light,’ sounds like an oxymoron and an outright contradiction in terms. And I think that’s the point, because it makes you ask the question: what on earth could he possibly be talking about? What yoke is easy and what burden could possibly be light? **John 6:29** says, “<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent,” and **John 15:4** says, “<sup>4</sup> Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.” So there you have it, the work that Jesus is giving us is believe and abide in Him as the perfect personification of the grace and truth of God.