



Possessions and the Old Testament People of God

Starting in the Old Testament, then Jesus, then we're going to go to the New Testament, and here's our process. What we're going to do...and I've got most of them listed in here...we're going to look at individual Scriptures...just explanations, implications from different verses or passages...and then come to those conclusions and those applications. So, this is going to be the bulk of the rest of our time together.

The reality is we're going to dive into the prosperity gospel really, really late, and we're not going to spend extravagant, exorbitant amounts of time talking about this or that, because the reality is, after you look through Scripture, it's pretty clear what this means for the prosperity gospel. So, the Bible will do the work for us on that one. So, we're going to look at these Scriptures starting with the Old Testament people of God.

Reminders when Interpreting the Old Testament

Now, we've got to be careful when we come to the Old Testament to remember some things about interpreting the Old Testament that are important. So, I want to walk through these really quick. These are actually some things we've talked about if you've been to different Secret Churches or listened to them; things in the *Old Testament Secret Church* as well as *How to Study the Bible* that are really important for us to keep in the back of our minds.

Interpreting Old Testament narratives. On a whole, Old Testament narratives are not allegories filled with special meanings. Like, Abraham getting a wife for Isaac is not about Christ getting a bride through the Holy Spirit. They're not intended primarily to teach moral lessons. We can learn things from that, but this person is not set up to be a moral example for us. Unless Scripture explicitly says that, we need to be really, really careful. Intended primarily to teach doctrine...they illustrate doctrine, but they don't teach systematically about doctrine.

On a whole, Old Testament narratives are stories with a specific purpose. Real, true history of God's people told for a reason. They are accounts of what happened, not what should have happened or ought to happen every time. So, it includes a lot of stuff where we see imperfections in biblical characters, and they're selective and incomplete. They don't include every single detail. They're written for a reason.

So, when we're reading Old Testament narratives, identify theological principles that are underlying that, and then filter those theological principles through the New Testament. Think about the story we read in the Old Testament through the lens of Christ and what happens in the New Testament. Does the New Testament add to that principle? Does the New Testament modify that principle? So, we want to think about looking at the Old Testament through a New Testament lens. It doesn't really stand just all by itself. We're looking at it from the back through the cross from the New Testament.

Interpreting Old Testament Law – you know we're going to look at some of the laws. We wonder about some laws. "If a man's hair falls out from his head, he is bald; he is clean."

(Leviticus 13:40) "A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God." (Deuteronomy 22:5) So, cross-dressing needed to be addressed in the law. We wonder about some laws. We violate some laws. "The pig, because it parts the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch." (Deuteronomy 14:8) Next, if you have a tattoo, then you've violated that law. We obey these laws: you shall not murder; love your neighbor as yourself.

So, how do we know when to wonder, when to violate, and when to obey the Old Testament law? Remember, the Old Testament law is not our testament law. Testament is another word for covenant, and the Old Testament represents God's covenant with the people of Israel, which is no longer what you and I are under obligation to keep. So, here's the general rule: unless an Old Testament law is somehow restated or reinforced in the New Testament, it is no longer directly binding on God's people.

Laws that are not reinforced in the New Testament: Israelite civil laws, some of the specific penalties for various crimes...major crimes, minor crimes. The Israelite ritual laws...a lot of the laws like how to worship, what sorts of animals to be sacrificed when. Those are not reinforced in the New Testament. Laws that are reinforced: laws that are renewed or restated in the context of the new covenant...when we see it repeated. Matthew 22:37-40 is repeating what has been expressed already in the Shema - Deuteronomy 6 - so, when we see them repeated we know, "OK, this needs to be obeyed"...if they're repeated in the context of the new covenant. Realize this: all of the Old Testament law is still the Word of God for us even though it is not still the command of God to us. Just because it's not for us, we're not under it, does not mean that it's not valuable. It's incredibly valuable. It's revealing the character of God and the sinfulness of man, and all the things by which we understand the gospel.

Interpreting Old Testament prophets...Old Testament prophets were enforcing and mediating the old covenant. So, they're speaking about the old covenant and Israel's obedience or disobedience to the old covenant. The prophet's message is unoriginal; in other words, it's not a new concept. They're talking about that which has been already said before in the law. The message is confrontational. It's identifying Israel's sin. The prophet's message is completed. Only a small percentage of Old Testament prophecy deals with events that are future to us; less than one percent of the Old Testament prophets where what they're saying applies to something that's still to come. Less than two percent of it's Messianic, applying to Jesus. Less than five percent even applies to the new covenant age, so we need to see it in the context of covenant.

Old Testament prophets were God's direct representatives, and they spoke in oracles. They spoke in oracles. They said the three main points in an oracle: you've broken the covenant, you need to repent. Things like idolatry and social justice in Micah 6, and religious ritualism. You've broken the covenant; you need to repent. If you don't repent, you will experience judgment, but you have hope beyond judgment for future restoration. That's what we see in the prophets.

Interpreting Old Testament wisdom literature. Oftentimes, Old Testament wisdom literature is difficult to follow the line of thinking. Like Job's friends, what in the world are they saying? Difficult to understand literary styles, and that can lead to abusing the text. We've got to understand the genre in which Old Testament wisdom literature was written. Difficult to determine meaning - remember the goal of wisdom literature is to apply the Word to practical living. Wisdom is applying God's Word to making wise choices in life, and realize that the wisdom books contain insights and guidelines for developing godly character. Listen

to this: they are not a collection of universal promises. Now look at Proverbs 22:11, "*He who loves purity of heart and whose speech is gracious, will have the king as his friend.*" Is that a promise? "*If a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked.*" (Proverbs 29:12) These are guidelines and insights, but they're not to be taken as literal universal promises. It's the way the genre is written.

Interpreting Old Testament poetry. Old Testament poetry is emotional. We don't read poetry like we read Paul's letters. Poetry is different. It's metaphorical, uses all kinds of images; and Old Testament poetry is variable; we see different kinds. Psalms, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, even some of the prophetic books.

Interpreting the Old Testament. This is the key. Look at specific contexts, especially the context of the old covenant, then historical context, maybe even the geographical context. We've got to see everything in the Old Testament in the context in which it was written and realize we are not in the same context. So, we've got to look at specific context, and in that context, identify eternal content. So, you're looking for what in here is eternal truth that applies to all people of all time, and how does that come over into the New Testament? When New Testament authors and speakers quote or affirm Old Testament teachings we need to pay close attention. When something is being reiterated in the New Testament, pay close attention. When they don't mention Old Testament teachings, give cautious consideration, because if it was important for the new covenant, then it's being communicated in the new covenant. What that means is our understanding of possessions is not based on the prayer of Jabez. It's not our basis of understanding possessions. That's dangerous. Our understanding of possessions is based on the prayer of Jesus. Now, that is a good basis for understanding possessions, but "*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me...not my will, but yours, be done,*" (Luke 22:41-42) just doesn't sell books.

Creation

Creation, Genesis 1:26-31. Creation is a reflection of God's goodness. God is not called good in Genesis 1; all the things He created are called good, and they're a reflection of His goodness. Material things are created good. Man is created good. Genesis 1:31, man is very good. Creation a reflection of God's goodness...creation is submissive to God's authority, God's authority. God owns everything, without exception. Everything belongs to God. Everything. Man owns nothing, not even his own life. Now, God entrusts man; man has reign under God over the material world. That's what Psalm 8 says, "*You have given man dominion over the works of your hands.*" However, it belongs to God; man owns nothing.

He has reign under God over the material world, and he has responsibility before God for the material world. God put him in the garden and said, "Keep it." This is huge. God owns everything; He entrusts things to us. Nothing belongs to you, not even your own life. That's what Genesis 1 is teaching us that everything in creation belongs to God. Creation, a reflection of God's goodness, submissive to God's authority, creation is a recipient of God's generosity. From the very beginning, we see God giving. God gives His image for His people to bear. He gives good things for His people to enjoy. This is the beauty of Genesis 1 and 2; it's God, man and woman, and creation, all in harmony.

Fall

Man and woman enjoying creation, everything good until Genesis 3 where man questions God's goodness. At the fall of man, he spurns God's authority, and man rejects God's generosity, and as sin enters into the world, God's image is marred in man. Good things are misused by man. This is key. It's not that the apple or the fruit was bad in and of itself. It's that there was a sinful desire in the one who was approaching the fruit, questioning God's goodness, spurning God's authority, and what happens is good things that God has created

are misused by sinful man, and now man needs God's redemption. Man needs grace to be reconciled to God, and man needs grace to properly relate to things. You're seeing how Genesis 3 affects our understanding of things, possessions, stuff. It's the sinful use of stuff that we see in Genesis 3, and we need grace to know how to properly relate to things. We had this promise in Genesis 3:15 of redemption; a redeemer who will come and take Satan down. That's creation and the fall.

Patriarchs

That sets the stage for the patriarchs. So, now we've got a world where people don't know how to relate to things. Patriarchs...God blesses His people in Genesis 12 to accomplish His purpose. Now, see the context here: God in Genesis 12 is forming a people. This is one of the first promises, basically, of prosperity. God is saying, "I am going to bless you, Abraham." What is He doing? He is forming a people. Genesis 15, "Look in the sky, see all the stars. That's what your descendants are going to be like." A people in a land...God is going to bring them into a land to possess. So, God's blessing of prosperity on Abraham, "I'm going to bless you, forming a people in a land with possessions. I'm going to give you all these possessions," and we see Abraham beginning to acquire possessions. Sheep and oxen, male servants and female servants, given to Abraham, a people in a land with possessions for a purpose, what's the purpose?

From the very beginning, Genesis 12, "I'm going to bless you and all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you. So, I'm going to give you all these things for a purpose, that you might be a blessing to the ends of the earth." That's what God is doing. This whole promise of prosperity in Genesis 12, God's forming a people in a land with possessions for a purpose. God uses wealth and prosperity to accomplish His purpose. Look at all these verses that talk about the riches God gave to the patriarchs. In Genesis 26, all that Isaac had. From Genesis 30, and then Genesis 47, to the end of the book, when Israel settled in the land of Egypt, and they gained possessions and were fruitful and multiplied greatly.

However, notice the material blessings were not intended to be an end in and of themselves. God is doing something here. He's forming a people with possessions in a land for a purpose: to bring spiritual and material blessing to all the world, that's what Genesis 12 sets up. This leads to the truth that we see in the last part of Genesis here, and this is really interesting. Yes, God uses wealth and prosperity to accomplish that purpose, but God also uses famine and pain to accomplish His purpose. Joseph is sold into slavery and sentenced unjustly to prison; suffers for years, and then he's brought to Potiphar's house, brought before Pharaoh. This is the picture. Genesis 50:19-20 sums it up: even in the middle of pain and evil, God was accomplishing His purpose. So, God is accomplishing His purpose through wealth and prosperity and through famine and pain. It's all being used to accomplish His purpose.

The Exodus

That leads us to the Exodus, as God delivers His people out of slavery in Egypt. God is faithful to save. He hears His people in their suffering. When they are suffering, when they are materially suffering, when they are physically suffering, He hears them, and He delivers His people from their slavery. He brings them out of Egypt.

God is faithful to save His people. He's faithful to save; He's faithful to bless. Now, this is where I want us to think about the purpose of possessions, the role of possessions in Exodus. What we see is wealth is intended by God to be used for worship. God made clear over and over again, "You go tell Pharaoh to deliver you out of there so that you may worship me," and listen to what it says, Exodus 10.

Pharaoh called Moses and said, "Go, serve the Lord; your little ones also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind." But Moses said, "You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must take of them to serve the Lord our God, and we do not know with what we must serve the Lord until we arrive there."

In other words, they needed possessions to worship. Wealth intended for worship. So, when God brings them out of Egypt, what do they take with them? Possessions. They plunder the Egyptians as Exodus 12 says. They take all their stuff, and so you've got possessions intended for worship.

Next, wealth is twisted by man to be used for idolatry. What we find is God gives them these possessions as they leave Egypt, so that they can build a Tabernacle, and they use them to build that Tabernacle, but not before they use those possessions in Exodus 32. While Moses is meeting on the mountain with God to find out about the Tabernacle, what it should look like, the people are using their possessions to construct a golden calf. Wealth intended to be used for worship twisted to be used for idolatry. God is faithful to save and faithful to bless. He gives blessings for the purpose of worship.

God's faithful to provide. God gives His people exactly what they need. As they wander towards the Promised Land, Exodus 16, what does God provide? Food from heaven, manna from heaven. You try to keep it over till the next day, what happens? It's totally rotten. He gives His people exactly what they need, and He forbids His people to store excess beyond their need. Don't store it up. "Trust me every day to provide you the food, the material things that you need." He forbids His people to store excess beyond their need. He wants them to be dependent on Him every day...remember that. He wants them to depend on Him for their possessions; not to take it into their own hands.

The Law

That sets the stage for the law. Deuteronomy 6 sums up the essence of the law, and we begin to see some very specific details in the law about how possessions are to be used. First, God entrusts property and possessions to all His people. When you read Numbers 26, what you see is every tribe shall be given its inheritance. The land shall be divided by lot. Everybody is supposed to be given property and possessions in that property. All the families, all the clans, receive an allotment of property. That was God's plan for His people; He was giving them property. We kind of see from the very beginning here this notion of private property...though it's not really private property, it belongs to God...but He wants everybody among His people to have this land and possessions.

Then, God gives laws to govern His people's use of that property and possessions. Laws like don't steal; don't covet what other people have; don't accept bribes. These are all things that He's giving in the law. Basically, four different types of laws that He gives them – number one, laws against interest. There were some specific passages where Israelites were forbidden to loan money to one another on interest. That was because it was the common thing in cultures around them to loan money and take advantage of people, and He wanted His people to be distinct. Laws against interest, then second, laws regulating rest; laws regulating rest. The Lord prioritizes rest among His people. Sabbath rest every seventh day. We're familiar with that, rest every seventh day.

Sabbatical year was the second law regulating rest, and that was you're supposed to rest every seventh year. Every seven years, Exodus 23 says, you're supposed to leave the land to lie fallow. This helps the good of the land and, listen to this, "*For six years you shall sow*

your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat." So, this is for the good of the land and for the good of the poor. You see it mentioned again in Leviticus 25, sabbatical year.

Now, during that sabbatical year, a couple of important things happened: number one, debts were canceled. "*At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release,*" (Deuteronomy 15:1-3) and release debts. Every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. Not only were debts canceled, but servants were freed. "*If your brother...is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you.*" (Deuteronomy 15:12-15) Not only free, but you shall not let him go empty-handed. You send him away with stuff. So, year number seven was good if you were in deep debt or you were a slave. You looked forward to the sabbatical year.

All of that pointed to this third regulation law regarding rest, the Year of Jubilee. The Year of Jubilee where you would rejoice after 49 years. Now, talk about radical. Leviticus 25, one of the most radical texts in all of Scripture. Listen to this,

You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. For it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you. You may eat the produce of the field.

So, basically, every 50 years God said, "All the land is returned to its original owners. You come back to your clans." Now, during a 50 year span, who knows what could have happened in that 49 years? Injury, illness in your family, death in your family, and struggles financially, and maybe lost land. Maybe you became a slave, and you're in all this debt. Then, imagine this thing: maybe for 30-plus years, you've been living in slavery with no land, working another person's field. Then, on this day, this trumpet is sounded, and it is freedom for you, and you go back, and the land is yours. The land that belonged to you is given to you. That's good news for the poor, and...don't miss it...it's sobering news for the wealthy. If you're going about, and you're this entrepreneur and gathering all this land, the reality is you know that when you get all this land, there's coming a day where it's all going to be given back anyway. So, we see extreme poverty and extreme wealth avoided in the Day of Jubilee.

What was the purpose here? It was designed to acknowledge the holiness of God, number one. "You'll remember the land is mine," Leviticus 25 says. This is a reminder to every wealthy person and impoverished person that the land ultimately belongs to whom? It belongs to God. Second, it was designed to support healthy families, strengthen families, bring families back together. Third, it was designed to avoid hopeless poverty. No matter how bad it got, every person who lived a long life had, at least a once in a lifetime chance to start over fresh, no matter how irresponsible you had been. No matter how difficult the circumstances you had faced had been, you get a start-over, a do-over, one time, and you avoid this hopeless poverty that cycles and gets worse and worse and worse and worse. The Year of Jubilee...a fresh start for poor and rich alike.

Then, designed to promote holistic worship. "For it is to me that the people of Israel are servants. They are servants who I brought out of the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God." (Leviticus 25:55) It was a reminder that God had brought them out of Egypt, and why God had brought them out of Egypt. Maybe most important: it was designed to foreshadow hope in Christ. It's not a coincidence that the trumpet blast was announced for the Day of Jubilee on the day of what? The Day of Atonement. The day when man is reconciled to God for his sins, man is also reconciled to one another...to the material world around him. Reconciliation with God bringing restoration with others, which sets the stage...you remember in Luke 4, when Jesus is about to start His ministry, and He's in the synagogue, and the scroll is given to Him.

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

That's a reference to the Year of Jubilee.

And He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

That's cool. Freedom has come. No matter how difficult it has been, no matter how oppressed you've been in sin and struggle, freedom has come. Those are laws regarding rest.

Third, laws regarding tithes and offerings. There's a whole subset under here, too. Talking about tithe, which literally means a tenth part, a tenth, but reality is there were three different types of offerings that are mentioned here, and the Israelites ended up giving more than just ten percent. The picture was tithes and taxes. Now, with the people of God, Israel, some of the money they were giving would be more equivalent to what you and I give when it comes to taxes today. They're for civil use, for government-type use. Tithe and taxes, given to, first of all, support the priests and the Levites. Give a tenth to support the priests and the Levites. That's Numbers 18. So, the first and most important offering is to give your first and your best for religious purposes.

Second, tithes and taxes were given to provide for community celebration. You see that in Deuteronomy 14. Then, third, to help the poor and the needy. Every third year this tithe would be given to a local storehouse to be distributed to the Levites, and then those who are poor and marginalized. That's Deuteronomy 14. So, when you add it up, you have two tithes every year, then one tithe that's done every three years. So, the total tithe was about 23 percent per year, when you total it up. Total tithe, two and a third, basically. Then, the tithe was only the beginning of their giving.

That's not all. That's not the whole story on Old Testament giving. In addition to the tithe, the Israelites would also give firstfruit offerings to offer the best to the Lord. This is something that was taken off the top. The first production of the vineyard, Leviticus 19. Exodus 23: grain, wine, olive oil, wool, the top. The firstfruits of the harvest you would give as an offering. Then, in addition to the firstfruits, there were freewill offerings that were given to offer excess to the Lord. Voluntary contributions that went beyond the tithes and went beyond the firstfruits. They were given, freewill offerings. It says "*whose heart was moved to give,*" Exodus 35:29.

So, then all these gifts, tithes and offerings...follow this...were reminders of God's absolute ownership of all things. God was training His people to remember that He owned it all, and it belonged to Him. So, they set aside their first and best, because it was a reminder. It's not that God didn't own the other 90 percent or the other 77 percent...God owns it all. This was a reminder to them that God owns it all. It was a reflection of God's faithful provision for all of His people. This is how God provided for the priests and how God provided for the poor in some circumstance, and it was a reason, tithes and offerings were reasons to celebrate God's gracious blessing toward all of His people.

You know oftentimes I hear people talk about Old Testament giving, and they say, "Well, that was duty; that was law." This was joy. Now, it could turn into the other, but listen to Exodus 36:

They received from Moses all the contribution that the people of Israel brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him free will offerings every morning, so that all the craftsman who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, and said to Moses, "The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do." So Moses gave a command and the word was proclaimed throughout the camp, "Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary." So the people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more.

That's not dutiful law, that's joyful obedience to the law and freewill giving.

Laws regarding social justice, next type of law. We have tithes and offerings; social justice. They were general laws that were concerned with providing for the needy. There were laws that were set up for the harvest to help the poor. It's how Ruth and Naomi were able to set up romance with Boaz. Then, you had laws regarding sacrifices for worship, that if you were more wealthy, you were expected to give these kind of sacrifices. If you were poor, then there were less expensive sacrifices that you would give, Leviticus 14. So, in His law, God was providing for the needy.

He was protecting the needy. God set up laws so that aliens or foreigners, orphans, widows, would not be mistreated. God set up laws to avoid partiality, avoid favoritism. "*You shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great.*" (Leviticus 19:15) Don't spread a false report. Then, God set up laws aimed to eliminate poverty. Listen to what He says in Deuteronomy 15:4-5, "*But there will be no poor among you; for the Lord will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess— if only you will strictly obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all this commandment that I command you today.*" Then, in Deuteronomy 15:11, a few verses later, He says, "*For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'*" The goal was no poor among you, and they were supposed to work toward that at all times with open-handedness.

Now, in the law, God also told His people to work. He told them to do spiritual work, Deuteronomy 6, and physical work. "*Your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.*"

You have to work here. God told His people to work, and God gave His people wealth. Now, this is key. This is where we often go when it comes to Old Testament possessions. God

promised material blessing to His people as they obeyed Him. The key is, though, and you read Deuteronomy 8...we don't have time to read the whole thing...but you read it there, and you see that it's not that they were earning it. It was still God's generosity, but God was blessing His people as they obeyed Him. So, God is giving material possessions as they obey Him according to His grace. *"Know, therefore, the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people."* (Deuteronomy 9:6) According to His grace, He's giving it to advance His glory. You look at Deuteronomy 11, and you look at Deuteronomy 4, and you see that God is giving His people possessions, so that they would be a demonstration to other nations around them of the goodness of God. It's not intended to be an end in and of itself. Possessions are given for a purpose. That's the picture of the law.

Kings in Israel's History

OK, now kings in Israel's history. The purpose of wealth. We look at the kings. We see that God is giving wealth in part, and I would even say in large part, but in part to build a place, and that place is the what? It's the Temple. You look in 1 Kings 8, and you see that's an ornate description of the Temple, and you see all this in the beginning of 1 Kings 8:62-64. *"Then the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the Lord. Solomon offered as peace offerings to the Lord 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep."* That's a lot of animals in one day.

The purpose of wealth, to build a place and to prosper a people...build a Temple, a place for worship and sacrifice, and prosper a people. You read 1 Kings 10, and this is a very important passage. Queen Sheba, a pagan queen, comes to visit Solomon, and basically, her conclusion is...she says right in the middle of this passage...*"Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that he may execute justice and righteousness."* The picture is a pagan queen giving glory to God as she sees the goodness and the greatness of God on display here. A pagan queen giving glory to God.

At the same time, we see the danger of wealth in the kings. Wealth leads to idolatry. This is most evident in Solomon's life. I mean the next chapter after 1 Kings 10, *"Now King Solomon loved many foreign women,"* (1 Kings 11:1) and it goes on. His wives turned away his heart...700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines...and this whole picture of idolatry that wealth brought. This is right after this picture we see in 1 Kings 10. 1 Kings 11:7-8 says, *"Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods."* You know, we talk about Solomon and God's blessing on Solomon and his wealth, but wealth has a very, very dark side here in Solomon's life. It leads to idolatry.

It results in immorality. We see this in kings like Ahab in 1 Kings 21 there, and we see when Nehemiah is rebuilding the walls around the Temple, he is very concerned to make sure to avoid immorality and to use money for that for which God has intended it to be used, Nehemiah 5:6-10. So, there's a danger in wealth.

The responsibility of wealth we see in the kings. The wealthy should live wisely, and one of the bright moments in Solomon's life, instead of asking God for wealth, he asked God for wisdom. We see the primacy of wisdom over wealth. The wealthy should live wisely. The wealthy should give generously. There's a powerful moment under David's leadership, listen to these freewill offerings. 1 Chronicles 29:7, *"They gave for the service of the house of God 5,000 talents and 10,000 darics of gold, 10,000 talents of silver, 18,000 talents of bronze and 100,000 talents of iron. And whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasury of*

the house of the Lord." They were giving, giving, and that's the whole picture we see in Nehemiah 5 is Nehemiah's modeling generosity.

Then, finally the nature of wealth. In the kings, we see the nature of wealth. To kind of sum this whole picture up: wealth is not always a reward for obedience. This is important. There are times when Israel's kings are wealthy, but it's not because their hearts are close to God. Their hearts are far away from God, and sometimes they're wealthy. So, we can't equate wealth with obedience in the Old Testament, particularly in the kings or anywhere else. The patriarchs as well.

Wealth is not always a reward for obedience, and second, poverty is not always a punishment for disobedience. There are times when we see the people of God suffering, and it's not a result of disobedience. We see that in the prophets, during the times of the kings, very difficult times, but it's not because of their disobedience that they are suffering and impoverished. In the end, this is the lesson of the kings: wealth can be used for both good and evil. David and Solomon both used wealth wisely at times and unwisely at other times. They'd bring glory to God, sometimes, with wealth, and bring dishonor to God other times. Wealth used for both good and evil.

Psalms and Wisdom Literature in Israel's History

Psalms and Wisdom literature in Israel's history. Truth from Job. You know the overview in Job...which, remember, happened in the time of the patriarchs. Job suffers as a result of obeying God, so we can't look to the patriarchal times and say, "Well, during that period God was blessing obedience with possessions." Job's life shows us faithfulness to God does not guarantee prosperity in this world. Job was righteous. He was even giving to the poor, and he experienced suffering. Faithfulness to God does not guarantee prosperity in this world. That's Job.

Next, truth from Song of Solomon, "*Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.*" (Song of Solomon 8:7) This is good, as it relates to possessions: the beauty of marital love reflects the goodness of the material world. The whole book of Song of Solomon is showing us the beauty of marital love, but the images are a reflection of the goodness of the material world. "*I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots. Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels.*" (Song of Solomon 1:9-10) That's apparently a good thing, and it's things that are used to depict that. Song of Solomon 4:

Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one of them has lost its young. Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. Your neck is like the tower of David, built in rows of stone; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors.

So all right, moving on. Truth from the Psalms...other wisdom literature and Psalms. Truth from the Psalms. In the Psalms, obviously, Psalms is worship to God, so you've got the revelation of God in the Psalms, and we see God's character. Amidst economic injustice, God is just. He's praised for His justice, for upholding the righteous. Amidst desperate need, God is compassionate. Thirty-three different Psalms the poor are prominent in - the poor, the weak, the oppressed, those in low position. God is compassionate toward them. "*The*

needy shall not always be forgotten." They're not forgotten by God, Psalm 9. Reminders for man in the Psalms: wealth is fleeting. "*Make me know my end and what is the measure of my days.*" (Psalm 39:4-7) This is a picture. "*Man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather.*" This is a picture, wealth is fleeting. Debt is dangerous, that's the picture in Psalm 37.

So, there's just a kind of browsing over the Psalms there, and that leads us to truth from Proverbs. Now Proverbs, probably no section of the Old Testament that contains more explicit material about wealth, and probably no section of the Old Testament that is more abused in discussion of possessions in our day. Remember, Proverbs are always situation-specific. These are not these universal truths or these lucky charms that if you do this, this always happens. Miscellaneous truths...wisdom is more important than wealth. We've seen that before. It's how Proverbs opens up to remind us of that. Proverbs teaches us that righteousness is more important than wealth. "*Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.*" (Proverbs 11:4) "*Whoever trusts in riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.*" (Proverbs 11:28) Humility is more important than wealth. "*The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life.*" (Proverbs 22:4) Humility. Now again, that's one of those examples; just because we humble ourselves doesn't mean we're going to be rich. That's not a universal promise there. The point of the insight is humility is more important than any riches or wealth.

Get into some cautions concerning wealth in Proverbs. Wealth is fleeting. "*Do not toil to acquire wealth...When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.*" (Proverbs 23:4-5) Man, that's a strong word. "*Know well the condition of your flocks and give attention to your herds, for riches do not last forever.*" (Proverbs 27:23-24) Wealth is fleeting and debt is dangerous. Various proverbs sound the alarm against debt. Proverbs 6 talks about this. Proverbs 22 probably even a bit stronger. "*Be not one of those who gives pledges, who put up security for debts. If you have nothing with which to pay, why should your bed be taken from under you?*" Debt is dangerous.

Proverbs teach that wealth is fleeting, debt is dangerous, hard work is valuable. "*How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?*" (Proverbs 6:9-11) "*Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.*" (Proverbs 12:11) "*In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty.*" (Proverbs 14:23) So, stop talking and do something. "Work," Proverbs says.

Hard work is valuable, and helping the needy is vital. These are strong statements. "*Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker.*" (Proverbs 17:5) You mock the poor, you insult God. "*Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.*" (Proverbs 21:13) "*Do not rob the poor.*" (Proverbs 22:22-23) "*A righteous man knows the rights of the poor; a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.*" (Proverbs 29:7) Those are strong statements.

All those leading to these concluding thoughts in Proverbs, don't miss this. Wealth is attributed to both the righteous and the wicked. Look at Proverbs 3:9-10, "*Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.*" "*A faithful man will abound with blessings, but whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.*" (Proverbs 28:20) So, you have wealth here associated with the righteous and with the wicked. Then, in Proverbs 28:6, "*Better is a poor man who walks in integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways.*" So, you've got wealth in those first two associated with the righteous, and in the last one, wealth is associated with the wicked.

In the same way, poverty is attributed to both the righteous and the wicked. Sometimes we see the righteous described as having little. "*Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice.*" (Proverbs 16:8) So, it's good to have a little with righteousness. Then, we see after that, the foolish man being impoverished: "*Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.*" (Proverbs 28:19) So, on a whole wealth and poverty are not good, accurate gauges of righteousness or unrighteousness. The only thing we really see that's pretty clear, and we've seen this at other points already, is extreme wealth and extreme poverty both appear undesirable in Proverbs. "*Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.*" (Proverbs 30:7-9) Extreme wealth, extreme poverty both appear undesirable.

Then, you've got Ecclesiastes, probably the most powerful expose of materialism ever written. The whole message of Ecclesiastes is summed up in these two verses, Ecclesiastes 2:10-11:

Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done, and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Ecclesiastes, fairly depressing. Truth from Ecclesiastes. We learn that God's gifts are good. We see in Ecclesiastes 3 and 5, that possessions are good in the context of closeness and intimacy with God; they're good. God's gifts are good, second, the world is temporary. The world is temporary, passing away like a shadow. Ultimately, particularly in an eternal perspective, Ecclesiastes teaches that riches do not satisfy. Ecclesiastes 5:10-15, listen to this:

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep. There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand.

These are some truths that Alcorn brings out in Ecclesiastes 5. I think they're so poignant. The more you have, the more you want. If you love money, you'll never be satisfied with money. The more you have, the less you're satisfied. He says whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. The more you have, the more people, including the government, come after it. The more you have, the more you realize it doesn't meet your real needs. You see people taking it from you. The more you have, the more you have to worry about. You can't sleep because wealth brings worry. The more you have, the more you can hurt yourself by holding onto it. There's grievous evil that I've seen; riches kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches lost. The more you have, the more you have to lose. And finally, the more you have, the more you will leave behind. You're going to leave this world with nothing, so let not the rich man be fooled. The end of the matter...all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for that is the whole duty of man. That's the point

of Ecclesiastes: fear God, follow His commandments, and see material possessions in a proper light.

Prophets in Israel's History

Finally, the prophets in Israel's history. What Israel had done with their possessions, the priests were immoral. You look at Malachi 1:6-10 there, and the priests were offering cheap offerings. They did not measure up to the laws that God had set out, but it was an easy way for them to gain a buck.

So, the priests were immoral, the people were idolatrous. Their possessions became their gods, literally. *"Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made."* (Isaiah 2:7-8) *"In that day everyone shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you."* (Isaiah 31:7) The people were idolatrous.

They were oppressive of the poor; this is all throughout, even when you get to Ezekiel 16. In Ezekiel, when the prophet talks about how even the sin of Sodom, looking back...and yes, there was homosexuality, there was perversion...but there was also oppression of the poor that brings about the judgment of God. They were oppressive of the poor. They boasted in their wealth. They boasted in their wealth. You know there is so much in the prophets, evil and sinfulness associated with wealth. It's not impossible to be righteous with wealthy in the prophets, but it is rare. It is extremely rare. Most all of the pictures we see with wealth are associated with sinfulness; these kind of things.

Pride, boasting in what you have, and they missed the point of worship. Some of the fiercest words from God toward His people come in the context of talking about worship. In Jeremiah 7, Isaiah 1, they miss the whole point, and God says, "Stop bringing your meaningless offerings. Your incense is detestable to me."

So, what it is you'll need to do is you'll need to lament over their sin; lament over sin. They've got a whole book called Lamentations, and then you've got Jeremiah 7, Joel 1, Amos 5. Lament over your sin before God. Seek justice for the needy. I love this passage in Isaiah 58.

Is this not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, "Here I am." If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out...

Listen to this verse...

If you pour yourself out for the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom shall be as the noonday. And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in

scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

Oh, that is beautiful! Care for the poor, give to the poor, and you will be like a watered garden, and your satisfaction, your springs will never fail. Micah 6, poignant words that we're familiar with. *"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"*

Lament over sin, seek justice for the needy. Third, practice humble generosity. Humble yourself before God, and then give to God. Malachi 3, *"Bring the full tithe into the storehouse. Bring it in. Thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."* They were literally robbing God, and God says, "I give to you. Just see; I will give you more than you - just open the windows of heaven."

Lament, seek justice for the needy, practice humble generosity, and trust the restorative promises of God. He will restore you; just trust Him, Ezekiel 34. Trust the restorative promises of God, and then...this is going to bring us full circle for where we started in the Old Testament...fulfill the redemptive purpose of God. Fulfill the redemptive purpose of God. Look at Isaiah 66. You remember when God blessed Abraham, He said, "I'm going to bless you, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through you," right? So, look at where this comes around in Isaiah 66.

"For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the Lord, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the Lord, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the Lord. And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites," says the Lord. "For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me," declares the Lord.

God gives blessing for what purpose? For the purpose of His glory in all the nations. That's why we've got to see material blessings in that context. God gives us blessing for His people for His glory among all the nations. That's where the Old Testament leads us with the prophets.

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