

LIVING THE LIVING WORD
Bible-Based Bible Study and Application

Grace Chapel
Orange, CA

Mr. Timothy R. Nichols
Spring 2008

SOLOMON

1. INTRODUCTION

Last week, we considered David's reflection on the Lord and His Word. For the most part, we concerned ourselves with the implications for worship. In a nutshell, when you look at God's Word, or his acts in history, or the creation, if you are not drawn into worship, then you are not looking hard enough. More than that, you are missing the most obvious, foundational point about God's Word and His world: that we should glorify Him and be thankful.

This week, we will continue our study of reflection on God's Word and His world with the works of Solomon. Where David's work tends to focus on our individual and corporate relationship to God, Solomon emphasizes how we should relate to each other. In order to consider Solomon's works in context, we will begin by looking at the historical and legal background of Solomon's life, and then move into a consideration of Solomon's works.

2. SOLOMON'S PERSONAL HISTORY AND WORKS

Solomon's Background

The Israelite Kings and the Torah (Deuteronomy 17:14-20)

Back when the Law was first established under Moses, God gave certain laws to govern Israel's future kings. If you look at those laws, you'll notice that the Israelite kings didn't do a very good job of keeping them. The important law for our purposes today, though, is in vv. 18-20. If you recall from two weeks ago, the nation as a whole was supposed to hear the Law read every seven years, and they put the Law on standing stones on Mount Ebal so it would be accessible to everyone. For the king, it was even more important that he know the Law, so God instructed him to hand-copy it for himself, and read it continually.

There is no direct record that Solomon obeyed this command, but it is a good surmise that he did, at least in his early years. David would have known about the command, and probably obeyed it himself. As 1 Kings 1:13, 17 show, David had already chosen Solomon to reign in his place, so David would have been preparing him for the role. Furthermore, Solomon was placed on the throne while David was still alive (1 Kings 2:1-4), so even after he took the throne, David would have been able to encourage him in the right direction. Finally, there is Solomon's own

character to consider, and as we'll see below, he pleased God greatly as a young man.

Solomon's Character (2 Chronicles 1:1-13)

Very early in Solomon's reign, after a day of worship, God came to Solomon in a dream and asked him what he wanted. Notice that it was a very open-ended question; God didn't offer any suggestions. The thing Solomon wanted most was the wisdom to govern the people wisely. God agreed to give him wisdom and knowledge, but God was so pleased with the request that He also promised Solomon riches, wealth, and honor.

Solomon didn't remain true to the wisdom that God gave him. He multiplied horses, wives, and gold to himself in defiance of the commands in the Law, and ultimately he turned away from the Lord to worship the idols of his foreign wives. (1 Kings 11:1-10). At the last, he was not the man he could have, and should have, been. But God was pleased to give us three books of Scripture through this fallen king, and as we'll see, in spite of his failings, he was a great man.

Solomon's Accomplishments (1 Kings 4:21-34)

Of course, God knew what Solomon would become. Nonetheless, He performed all that He had promised to Solomon, and the results were spectacular. Solomon's kingdom had tremendous power and political influence, and the people were wealthy and prosperous. Solomon himself was a prodigy, so renowned for his literary, musical, and scientific genius that from wherever news about him spread, people would come to hear him. He was the man that Leonardo da Vinci dreamt of becoming—and Solomon did it all in his spare time, while running an empire.

Can you imagine what a treasure trove we might have if we were to dig up a palace somewhere and find inside the complete works of Solomon? We only have one of his songs—and it's amazing—but he wrote 1005. Ever wonder what the other 1004 sound like? Can you imagine having Solomon's complete scientific works? The rest of his proverbs? Wouldn't that be amazing?

Solomon's Reflections

Well, we don't have all of Solomon's works. But we do have three books, and the way they reflect on the Law of God is a lesson for us all. We don't have time to do any sort of justice to the works as a whole, but I want to take particular notice of the way they clothe the basic commands of the Torah in flesh and blood, making them memorable and motivational.

Work vs. Laziness (Proverbs 12:24,27, 15:19, 21:25-26, 24:30-34, 26:13-16, 27:23-27)

God worked six days in the creation, and rested on the seventh day. God made man in His image, and He made man to work also. Even before the Fall, Adam was working, continuing God's work of naming the creation and tending the Garden God had planted. After the Fall, the only thing that changed is it all got harder to do; the basic commands remain the same.

When we think of the ten commandments, we don't usually think of work; "Thou shalt work" is not one of the ten. However, the ten commandments forcefully reflect the command to work. In the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), God

commands them not to work on the seventh day, and in the process explains that's what the other six days are for. In the eighth commandment, God forbids stealing. If we have to eat, wear clothes, and receive shelter from the elements, and we can't steal, well, what does that leave us?

Solomon gives us some very explicit word pictures about work. As we read through the passages listed above, note the mental pictures and the predictions of consequences. In terms of knowing what to do, there's nothing here that isn't already present in the Torah. But here, Solomon makes the instruction as vivid as he can, so that his readers will remember.

Faithfulness in Marriage (Proverbs 5)

As with laziness, notice the vividness of the imagery. Solomon knows that when his son meets sexual temptation, it will be vivid, immediate, and, well, *tempting*. "Do not commit adultery" is pretty abstract by comparison, so Solomon makes his treatment as vivid as he can. I want to draw your attention to some of the features of his instructions:

- He involves the senses of taste and touch (vv. 3-4).
- He warns that the dangers are unpredictable (v. 6)
- He gives a vision of the future, if they give in to temptation (vv. 8-14)
- He gives a positive command: what to do instead (vv. 15-19)

There are other treatments of this subject in Solomon's works as well. Proverbs 7 treats the same subject similarly, with another series of vivid images. Song of Solomon gives considerable instructions for maintaining healthy sexual relations in marriage. Ecclesiastes teaches us how to enjoy the pleasures of this life (including sex) without worshipping them.

3. THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGES

Your Daily Walk

Is there a particular command that you struggle with, something you know you should (or should not) do, but you continue to find yourself drawn away by the temptation? Why not take a lesson from Solomon and begin to build a well-rounded view of that sin? Describe the consequences of the sin in painstaking detail (be sure to involve the senses). Consider what your future will look like, if you continue to yield to this sin. Think through what God wants you to do instead, and develop a detailed mental picture of what obedience looks like. It will help to write all this up and go over it a few times a day for a while.

Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

This week, your job is to give a preliminary interpretation of Psalm 139. You have already begun interpreting; you can't help it. Of course the big question in interpretation is always "What does it mean?" but we need to discuss what constitutes an acceptable answer to this question.

There is a tendency to treat each individual verse or statement as a free-standing unit and find the appropriate doctrinal pigeonhole for it, e.g., coming to vv. 7-10 and saying “This is talking about the doctrine of omnipresence.”¹ Then, confident that we know what it’s talking about, we move on to the next one. The end product is an “interpretation” that is nothing but a list of doctrinal terms.² This is totally unacceptable; Psalm 139 is not a “doctrine smoothie” David made by dumping a systematic theology book into a blender and pushing “frappé.”

The psalm is a *unity*, a continuous flow of thought from beginning to end. It is true, of course, that David states or alludes to certain key ideas about God and the world in the course of the psalm, and there is nothing wrong with noticing that. However, what makes the psalm more than just a list is the way in which all these ideas are tied together into an organic whole.

This may be easier to understand if we look at a few verses, so let’s look at verses 19-22, which trouble many readers. The common complaint is that we know we’re supposed to love our enemies, and yet this seems to directly contradict that. The usual response to that complaint is to marshal a vast array of evidence from other passages and come up with a systematic teaching on handling enemies. I have nothing bad to say about doing a systematic study on how to handle your enemies; I think it’s a great idea, and often people do resolve their difficulties with this passage in the course of such a study.

However, they usually walk straight into the teeth of the exegetical problem, because as we interpret the psalm, it’s not enough to be able to say “oh, yeah, this is part x of doctrine y.” It’s not enough to know how these verses fit into the doctrine of enemies; *we need to know how these verses fit into the psalm*. The doctrinal problem is “What are these verses doing in *the Bible*?”; the exegetical problem is “What are these verses doing *here*?” Our goal is not just to be able to rip these verses out of their context and explain how they fit into the systematic theology books. Our goal is to *understand Psalm 139*.

So as you formulate an interpretation of the psalm this week, go ahead and notice the key concepts David discusses, but keep in mind that your goal is to understand how it all fits together in the psalm.

¹ Which, by the way, it is not. Take another look at the verses: does it actually *say* that God is everywhere?

² Just for the record, I need to add a disclaimer here. Those of you who hail from the doctrinal movement may feel that I’m picking on you here, and you’re right, I am. But hear me out, because there’s more to it than that. While it is certainly true that doctrinal pastors have elevated this deplorable practice to an art form, the practice itself is much, much older than the doctrinal movement. You can find many examples of it in the works of Lewis Sperry Chafer, C. I. Scofield, John Calvin, Martin Luther, and even further back in church history. (The devil does it with Psalm 91:11-12 when he’s tempting Jesus in Matthew 4:6. We’ll look at that passage in more detail when we get to Jesus in a few weeks.)

Reading (1-2 hrs.)

Read Hendricks chapters 27-34.

Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

Most of what we have from Solomon is written up in poetic form, and there's a tendency to dismiss some of what's in the poetry as overblown—just poetic license. In order to get a sense for how poetry and prose map onto each other, read Exodus 14:1-15:21. Compare the historical account of the events to the poetic reflection on them afterward. How are the two alike? How are they different? If all you had was the song in chapter 15, how well could you reconstruct the historical account in chapter 14?

For Further Study

Read through Exodus 20, and take careful note of the ten commandments. Then begin reading the works of Solomon (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon). As you read, notice how much of what Solomon has to say is actually a more vivid repetition of the ten commandments.

4. LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGES

Your Daily Walk

Last week, I challenged you to carry your reflection on God's Word, His acts in history, and His world all the way to its logical conclusion in worshipping the Lord. How has that worked out this week? Did something happen in your life this week that you praised the Lord for? (Did you praise Him because you could see His hand in the events, or just because you liked what happened?)

Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

Okay, so you've worked on memorizing Psalm 139. Not word-for-word or anything so drastic, but remembering the contours of the psalm, the shape of it, the flow of thought. Can you talk your way through the whole psalm without looking? I hope so, but if not, keep at it. You'll get there.

How have your efforts at memorizing the psalm affected your reflection on the psalm this week? Do you find yourself thinking of it more often than in past weeks? Have you seen new things that you missed before?

Reading (1-2 hrs.)

You've finished the section on observation. Congratulations! How has it helped your work in Psalm 139? Think back to the first time you read the psalm for this class, three weeks ago, and compare to how you read it now. What about your other Bible reading? Has your study of observation changed the way you read the Bible?

Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

Last week I asked you to consider some basic questions about meditation, and suggested that perhaps our culture's concept of meditation is not the same thing as the Bible's concept. Let's take another look at those questions:

- What is meditation?
- Who should meditate?
- On what?
- When?
- Where?
- For what purpose?

Now that you know what the Bible says about meditation, let's come back to our culture's concept of meditation. What are the differences? What are the implications of those differences?