

An Unusual Tale of Two Prophets

1 Kings 13

1 Kings 13 - *“And behold, a man of God went from Judah to Bethel by the word of the LORD, and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. Then he cried out against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, “O altar, altar! Thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men’s bones shall be burned on you.’” And he gave a sign the same day, saying, “This is the sign which the LORD has spoken: Surely the altar shall split apart, and the ashes on it shall be poured out.”*

So it came to pass when King Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, who cried out against the altar in Bethel, that he stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, “Arrest him!” Then his hand, which he stretched out toward him, withered, so that he could not pull it back to himself. The altar also was split apart, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. Then the king answered and said to the man of God, “Please entreat the favor of the LORD your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me.” So the man of God entreated the LORD, and the king’s hand was restored to him, and became as before. Then the king said to the man of God, “Come home with me and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward.”

But the man of God said to the king, “If you were to give me half your house, I would not go in with you; nor would I eat bread nor drink water in this place. For so it was commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, ‘You shall not eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the same way you came.’” So he went another way and did not return by the way he came to Bethel.

Now an old prophet dwelt in Bethel, and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel; they also told their father the words which he had spoken to the king. And their father said to them, “Which way did he go?” For his sons had seen which way the man of God went who came from Judah. Then he said to his sons, “Saddle the donkey for me.” So they saddled the donkey for him; and he rode on it, and went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak. Then he said to him, “Are you the man of God who came from Judah?” And he said, “I am.” Then he said to him, “Come home with me and eat bread.” And he said, “I cannot return with you nor go in with you; neither can I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place. For I have been told by the word of the LORD, ‘You shall not eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by going the way you came.’”

He said to him, “I too am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, ‘Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.’” (He was lying to him.) So he went back with him, and ate bread in his house, and drank water. Now it happened, as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came to the prophet who had brought him back; and he cried out to the man of God who came from Judah, saying, “Thus

says the LORD: *'Because you have disobeyed the word of the LORD, and have not kept the commandment which the LORD your God commanded you, but you came back, ate bread, and drank water in the place of which the LORD said to you, "Eat no bread and drink no water," your corpse shall not come to the tomb of your fathers.'*"

So it was, after he had eaten bread and after he had drunk, that he saddled the donkey for him, the prophet whom he had brought back. When he was gone, a lion met him on the road and killed him. And his corpse was thrown on the road, and the donkey stood by it. The lion also stood by the corpse. And there, men passed by and saw the corpse thrown on the road, and the lion standing by the corpse. Then they went and told it in the city where the old prophet dwelt.

Now when the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard it, he said, "It is the man of God who was disobedient to the word of the LORD. Therefore the LORD has delivered him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke to him." And he spoke to his sons, saying, "Saddle the donkey for me." So they saddled it. Then he went and found his corpse thrown on the road, and the donkey and the lion standing by the corpse. The lion had not eaten the corpse nor torn the donkey. And the prophet took up the corpse of the man of God, laid it on the donkey, and brought it back. So the old prophet came to the city to mourn, and to bury him. Then he laid the corpse in his own tomb; and they mourned over him, saying, "Alas, my brother!" So it was, after he had buried him, that he spoke to his sons, saying, "When I am dead, then bury me in the tomb where the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones. For the saying which he cried out by the word of the LORD against the altar in Bethel, and against all the shrines on the high places which are in the cities of Samaria, will surely come to pass."

After this event Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but again he made priests from every class of people for the high places; whoever wished, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. And this thing was the sin of the house of Jeroboam, so as to exterminate and destroy it from the face of the earth."

Background Notes

In 1 King 12 we learned that King Jeroboam I, the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel, sinned greatly by making two golden calf idols. He set one up in the far north at Dan, and the other at Bethel, near the border with the southern kingdom of Judah.

In 1 Kings 13, God sent a prophet from Judah to pronounce judgment at the golden calf shrine at Bethel. It just so happened that, when the prophet arrived, King Jeroboam was at the Bethel shrine, burning incense on the idolatrous altar. The prophet boldly denounced this false worship! Then he prophesied that a future king from Judah named Josiah would actually burn the bones of the false priests on this idolatrous altar.

What an amazing prophecy - even predicting King Josiah of Judah by name! This remarkable prophecy was fulfilled about 300 years later. 2 Kings 23:15-16; *"Moreover he broke down the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, both that altar and the high place; and he burned the high*

place and crushed it to powder, and burned the wooden image. As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs that were there on the mountain. And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar, and defiled it according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words.”

The prophet from Judah also said that, as a sign from the Lord, the altar at Bethel would split apart. At this point, Jeroboam tried to capture the prophet, but his outstretched arm became paralyzed - and the idolatrous altar split apart before his very eyes! Even though God graciously healed Jeroboam's arm, the king did not turn back to the Lord. He asked the prophet, "Please entreat the favor of the Lord **your** God," (not "Please entreat the favor of the Lord **our** God.") And King Jeroboam continued in his evil ways (v33-34).

Doctrinal Points

1. A servant of the Lord must speak the word of the Lord.

After King Jeroboam's arm was healed, he invited the prophet to come to his house to receive a reward. King Jeroboam may have had a royal residence at Bethel for his frequent visits to the shrine. But the prophet refused to receive any reward from this ungodly king. *"But the man of God said to the king, "If you were to give me half your house, I would not go in with you; nor would I eat bread nor drink water in this place. For so it was commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'You shall not eat bread, nor drink water'" (v8-9).*

The prophet reminds us of Abraham, when he resisted the offer of the king of Sodom in Genesis 14. The prophet's mission was to go to the shrine and pronounce the word of the Lord, and then return home. He was not to be sidetracked by offers of reward, even from the king himself. And sharing a meal with this ungodly king would have indirectly condoned the king's evil actions. The prophet's mission was to speak the word of the Lord - not to socialize with those who were involved in evil practices.

And it's still true today: a servant of the Lord must speak the word of the Lord. If you're a servant of the Lord, be sure to speak the word of the Lord! In 2 Timothy 4:2, servants of the Lord are commanded to preach the word *"in season and out of season."* That means we should always be ready to share the word. That's our mission! The Lord Jesus said that even though we're **in** this world, we are not **of** this world. We are to be salt and light in this world. We are to separate from the evil of this world, but not from the needs of this world. And we help meet the needs of the people of this world - not to make them more comfortable on the road to hell, but so that we can share God's love and truth with them. A servant of the Lord must speak the word of the Lord.

2. A servant of the Lord must do the will of the Lord.

Do you think God's judgment on His servant, the prophet from Judah was too severe? Killed by a lion - just for stopping to have a meal with an old prophet on the way home?! After all, at this point he would have been tired and hungry. Not only that, but the old prophet lied to him. Why didn't God allow the lion to kill the lying prophet?

The point is: **direct disobedience to the command of the Lord is a serious sin** (v17). The prophet from Judah directly disobeyed a specific command from the Lord, and God must judge disobedience. Remember Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5)? We need to remember that we're not immune. *"Judgment begins with the household of God" (1 Peter 4:17)*. Disobedience is a serious sin. Are you disobeying the Lord in some area of your life? If you want to be a servant of the Lord, you must obey the will of the Lord.

Practical Application

Beware of a believer who says, "The Lord told me"!

Notice that the older prophet lied to the prophet from Judah, when he said he had a word from the Lord. *"I too am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water'" (v18)*.

Possibly the old prophet was jealous of the younger prophet. God was at work through the young prophet, and the older prophet had been passed over and set aside. In churches today, there's always a danger of the older generation becoming jealous of the younger generation - especially when God begins to work through the younger generation to accomplish His purposes. As a result, some older Christians may become jealous and bitter, and may even try to manipulate or deceive younger believers (as we see here). Older generation: watch out for this pitfall! You're never too old to sin!

Believers of all ages should beware of other believers who say, *"The Lord told me"* or *"The Lord showed me that you should do this or that"* or "I have the word of the Lord in this matter." Fellow believers may have all kinds of agendas, and they may use this trick to accomplish their selfish purposes.

Some time ago a female student came to me for counsel, because a male student had told her that the Lord told him that she was to marry him! What was my reply? I said, "Has the Lord told **you** that?" She said, "No!" So I said, "Then forget it. If it's a word from the Lord, the Lord will show **you** what His will is for you. "

The Lord can use the advice and counsel of other **godly** believers to help guide us. Notice - the counsel of the **godly** believers (**plural**) to help guide us. But beware of the believer who says, "The Lord told me!"