

1 KINGS 13:1-34

GOD MEANS WHAT HE SAYS!

“An old prophet lived in Bethel. And his sons came and told him all that the man of God had done that day in Bethel. They also told to their father the words that he had spoken to the king. And their father said to them, ‘Which way did he go?’ And his sons showed him the way that the man of God who came from Judah had gone. And he said to his sons, ‘Saddle the donkey for me.’ So they saddled the donkey for him and he mounted it. And he went after the man of God and found him sitting under an oak. And 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 may not return with you, or go in with you, neither will I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place, for it was said to me by the word of the LORD, “You shall neither eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by the way that you came.”’ And he said to him, ‘I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, “Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water.”’ But he lied to him. So, he went back with him and ate bread in his house and drank water.

“And as they sat at the table, the word of the LORD came to the prophet who had brought him back. And he cried to the man of God who came from Judah, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Because you have disobeyed the word of the LORD and have not kept the command that the LORD your God commanded you, but have come back and have eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which he said to you, ‘Eat no bread and drink no water,’ your body shall not come to the tomb of your fathers.”’ And after he had eaten bread and drunk, he saddled the donkey for the prophet whom he had brought back. And as he went away a lion met him on the road and killed him. And his body was thrown in the road, and the donkey stood beside it; the lion also stood beside the body” [1 KINGS 13:11-24].¹

“**H**ow many men are you going to kill?” I was taken aback by the question. I could not imagine what my interlocutor meant; but when I asked for clarification she expressed a desire to know where I was heading with the series of messages I am currently bringing. This current series of messages has been entitled, “Men Whom God Killed.” Time constraints and the need to address other issues restrict me from speaking of all the individuals recorded in the Word whom God was said to have killed. While I know that God is love, and while I am prepared to insist that love characterises both God and those who are born from above and into His Kingdom, I am quick to caution people that this loving God is holy. We must never forget that God is holy.

After speaking of God’s sentence against Israel’s unbelief in the wilderness and the subsequent death of everyone over the age of twenty during the next forty years, the Apostle to the Gentiles wrote, “These things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.” He then drew warnings from examples of God’s judgements, concluding, “These things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come” [see 1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11]. Because these things—judgements, and even extreme judgements—were written down for our instruction, it is appropriate that we should study them so that we may be warned to avoid sinning against the Lord.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Thus far in these studies, we have witnessed God's warning against dishonouring the family,² His warning against presuming to lead when He has not appointed one to leadership,³ the divine warning against becoming complacent in worship⁴ and a stern warning against growing arrogant in our relationship with God and with others.⁵ These warnings need to be proclaimed in this day so that Christians will take heed and adjust their lives to reflect the transforming power of the Living God. Today, we will consider another individual who was persuaded to deviate just a little from what God commanded. His deviation cost him his life.

REBUKING THE KING — “Behold, a man of God came out of Judah by the word of the LORD to Bethel. Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make offerings. And the man cried against the altar by the word of the LORD and said, ‘O altar, altar, thus says the LORD: “Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who make offerings on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.”’ And he gave a sign the same day, saying, ‘This is the sign that the LORD has spoken: “Behold, the altar shall be torn down, and the ashes that are on it shall be poured out.”’ And when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar at Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, ‘Seize him.’ And his hand, which he stretched out against him, dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself. The altar also was torn down, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign that the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. And the king said to the man of God, ‘Entreat now the favor of the LORD your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me.’ And the man of God entreated the LORD, and the king’s hand was restored to him and became as it was before” [1 KINGS 13:1-6].

This chapter isn't actually about a young and an old prophet, though the account given in the text does deal with an older prophet who lied to a younger prophet. However, the chapter records an incident that is an integral part of the account of Jeroboam and his sins. If we fail to see that Jeroboam was the focus of the younger prophet's ministry, we will be handicapped in understanding what was going on. In the latter years of Solomon's reign, he compounded his sin against the LORD. One of the saddest passages in the Word of God informs us that “The LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded” [1 KINGS 11:9, 10].

This drift into dishonour began because Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, was terribly unwise concerning whom he loved. I say to any unmarried Christian that who you marry will have an impact on your relationship with God. His blessing cannot be given to any who will choose to follow the ways of this dying world. God repeatedly warns those who would follow Him not to be united to the world. What else can the warning mean that cautions, “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer have with an unbeliever” [2 CORINTHIANS 6:14, 15]?

² Michael Stark, “Dishonouring the Family,” Sermon, January 15, 2017, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Genesis-38.06-10-Dishonouring-the-Family.pdf>

³ Michael Stark, “Anyone Can Serve! Can't They?” Sermon, January 22, 2017, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Leviticus-10.01-03-Anyone-Can-Serve...-Cant-They.pdf>

⁴ Michael Stark, “Complacency Kills,” Sermon, January 29, 2017, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/2-Samuel-06.5-11-Complacency-Kills.pdf>

⁵ Michael Stark, “The High Cost of Arrogance,” Sermon, February 5, 2017, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/1-Samuel-25.36-38-The-High-Cost-of-Arrogance-Nabal.pdf>

Again, the Word of God informs us, “King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, ‘You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.’ Solomon clung to these in love. He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So, Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. 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” [1 KINGS 11:1-8].

After Solomon’s death, the kingdom was divided—Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, ruled over the southern portion of the kingdom and Jeroboam became ruler of the northern ten tribes. This fulfilled the prophecy Ahijah had pronounced before Solomon died [see 1 KINGS 11:30-39]. God had promised Jeroboam, “If you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in My ways, and do what is right in My eyes by keeping My statutes and My commandments, as David My servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you” [1 KINGS 11:38].

Fearing that worship of the Living God in the Temple at Jerusalem would lead to disloyalty in his subjects, Jeroboam built idols—golden calves—in Bethel and in Dan. He told the people that these were their gods. He set up altars and appointed priests from among the people—priests who were not Levites. He created feast days and led the people in worship. Everything that had brought God’s condemnation on Solomon, Jeroboam adopted. Like modern church leaders who exalt pragmatism over obedience to the Living God, he was more concerned about his tenure than he was concerned for God’s glory. Consequently, he jeopardised his dynasty and set in motion the disintegration of the kingdom over which God had appointed him.

The LORD God does not simply hold in His wrath until it suddenly explodes in uncontrollable rage. The Lord God warns mankind, informing them of the consequences of their sinful behaviour, until at last He must judge them. God warned Jeroboam of pending judgement; God warned him, as He so often does, by sending a prophet. We don’t know the name of the prophet, but we may be assured he was courageous. It takes courage to rebuke a king. Speaking without God’s power, a man will stammer and stutter, but he cannot speak truth to power. This prophet came with a message warning of pending judgement against the kingdom.

The prophet spoke against the altar the king had commanded to be built, as though God was saying it was fruitless to address the king. “O altar, altar, thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who make offerings on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.’ And he gave a sign the same day, saying, ‘This is the sign that the LORD has spoken: “Behold, the altar shall be torn down, and the ashes that are on it shall be poured out”’ [1 KINGS 13:2, 3].

Powerful people do not tolerate rebukes. They live in a bubble—a bubble that affirms them as witty, always correct, inerrant. Few people accept strangers slamming their religion, and this prophet was speaking against the religion of the day. As an aside that is significant—***religion is nothing less than worship of self***. Religion is what people do to make themselves acceptable to a god; worship is what Christians do when they meet the Living God.

Enraged that a nobody such as this prophet with no name would challenge the religion *he* established and fostered, the king stretched out his hand, commanding his acolytes, “Seize him!” But, something was wrong! The hand that was stretched out shriveled, the king could not draw it back. He had lifted his hand against the man of God and God had defended His man. In horror, the king saw the altar that he had built suddenly and mysteriously torn apart, the ashes from multiplied sacrifices were suddenly pouring out onto the ground as the refuse it actually was. Something powerful was taking place, something the king could not explain, something terrifying. What had been comfortingly familiar had drawn divine judgement; the place was now filled with terror. The guards were frozen, unable, perhaps even unwilling to move against the prophet; and the king was struck dumb, incapable of uttering a sound.

When at last the king regained his voice, he bleated out a plea to the man he had just tried to kill, “Help me! Pray to your GOD for the healing of my arm” [1 KINGS 13:6, THE MESSAGE]. Graciously, the man of God pleaded with the LORD God to show mercy to the king. God heard His man and healed the king’s arm. The biblical account is straightforward, it simply reads, “The king’s hand was restored to him and became as it was before” [1 KINGS 13:6b]. Our God is not vindictive, He is gracious and good. However, the Living God is holy; He expects obedience from His own people who call themselves by His Holy Name.

AN INVITATION HE CAN’T ACCEPT — “The king said to the man of God, ‘Come home with me, and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward.’ And the man of God said to the king, ‘If you give me half your house, I will not go in with you. And I will not eat bread or drink water in this place, for so was it commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, “You shall neither eat bread nor drink water nor return by the way that you came.”’ So he went another way and did not return by the way that he came to Bethel” [1 KINGS 13:7-10].

I suppose we have all seen movies featuring thugs who speak of making an offer that someone can’t refuse. Well, Jeroboam has made an offer that the prophet of God can’t accept. God had given specific directions to His man, telling him what must be said and directing him both in how he was to act when he came to Bethel and even what routes he must avoid. The LORD always guides His servant if that servant is prepared to listen. Indeed, we are taught,

“The steps of a man are established by the LORD,
when he delights in His way”

[PSALM 37:23]

Awed by what he had just experienced, Jeroboam invited the unnamed prophet to dine with him, promising to give him a gift. On the surface, this is an attractive offer; who wouldn’t enjoy being fêted by a king? Looking a little more closely at the account provided in the Word, I am led to believe that Jeroboam was attempting to make this prophet his employee. Why, with a prophet such as this, he could establish his kingdom and make his religion really resonate with the people. The prophet could have a secure position, he could accomplish great things as the king’s prophet. Surely, proximity to the throne had to be an attractive offer.

I am reminded of how Chuck Colson spoke of the ease with which religious leaders were co-opted, easily compromised when he worked with the Nixon White House. Ministers would oppose the policies of the administration. However, after dining at the White House and perhaps enjoying a cruise on the Potomac aboard the presidential yacht, their opposition melted. A brief exposure to power worked wonders to transform their opposition.

Watching ministers who have been dazzled by being entertained in the presence of powerful men, it is disconcerting to notice the transformation of their message after a single meeting with power brokers. It was a stain on his life and service when a world-renowned evangelist returned from the old Soviet Union and praised the freedom of worship he discovered there. Make no mistake, I recognise that I am just as susceptible to being co-opted by power!

“The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold,
and a man is tested by his praise.”

[PROVERBS 27:21]

Haven't I heard the siren call of ecclesiastical power brokers! “If you would just trim your message, I could place you in our best pulpits.” “If you would be nicer, not quite so blunt, you could pastor any of our largest churches.” Their plea was to lower my standard so that they would appear in a better light and so that the churches remained undisturbed. A former pastor sidled up to me on one occasion and smoothly whispered, “If you'll just do what ol' Frank tells you to do, you'll have a job for life.” “That is why I'm pastor and you are not!” I retorted. “You were looking for a job, and I am seeking to do God's will!” Our Judean prophet was endeavouring to do God's will. Prophecy is a calling, not a job!

It is distressingly easy for a Christian to be co-opted—praise, flattery, even dining with powerful individuals presents a grave danger for any Christian. We are susceptible to seeing our witness muted through accepting the accolades and plaudits of this dying world. Better to heed the Living God and avoid the praise of powerful individuals. Presidents and prime ministers, parliamentarians and politicians, are inclined to speak glowingly of their personal faith, until they attain power. The one who would follow the Living God must beware of imagining that mere words divorced from a godly life are meaningful,

I must step aside for a moment to make an observation concerning Jeroboam. He had witnessed three miracles in short order—his arm had been frozen so that he was unable to use it, the altar he had built was destroyed and the ashes poured out onto the ground and his arm was restored. If ever witnessing a miracle would bring an individual to faith, this should have been the time! However, witnessing a miracle has never brought a person to faith in the Son of God. Miracles do not bring belief, though they do draw attention to God's power.

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Many Jews were present and witnessed this stunning miracle. Yet, even among those who had witnessed this great miracle were individuals who hurried to the Pharisees to inform them of all that Jesus had done [see JOHN 11:1-46]. Though their report could be readily verified by the fact that Lazarus was now alive, we read that “the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death” [JOHN 12:10] as well as killing Jesus. Before their very eyes was living proof of Jesus' power, and it did not generate belief.

I am instructed and awed by the prophet's response to the generous offer from the king. “If you give me half your house, I will not go in with you. And I will not eat bread or drink water in this place, for so was it commanded me by the Word of the LORD, saying, ‘You shall neither eat bread nor drink water nor return by the way that you came’” [1 KINGS 13:8, 9]. I do not question the king's sincerity; however, not even the king understands that being awed by an experience is no qualification for judging the message. Herod had long desired to see Jesus because he had heard about Him; however, Herod wanted to be entertained. Luke reveals that “[Herod] was hoping to see some sign done by [Jesus]” [LUKE 23:8b]. The divine message was of no importance to Herod; being amused was his primary motive; the same was true for Jeroboam.

The account states of the unnamed prophet, “So, he went another way and did not return by the way he came to Bethel” [1 KINGS 13:10]. He remained true to the command he had received—he delivered the message that the LORD had given him, he refused the king’s invitation and as God had commanded, he was now returning home by another route. Let me caution the people of God—it is not enough to do right some of the time. God holds His people accountable to obey Him all the time. God cannot ignore just a little bit of sin any more than a surgeon can ignore just a little bit of necrotic tissue left behind in an incision.

Why would God give such strange instructions to His prophet? It is easy enough to say that God’s instructions need not make sense, they need but be obeyed. Why would God make a young preacher restless until he had moved his family thousands of miles away from all that was familiar to go to a foreign nation where he was to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Why could that young preacher not remain in his beloved Texas and enjoy the blessings of pastoring a large congregation and enjoying a measure of respect where he was. There is no answer to the question other than to confess that God had spoken and the sole response that would suffice was to say, “Here I am! Send me!”

Perhaps God directed the prophet from Judah as He did because He did not want His servant fraternising with the apostate northern kingdom. A preacher friend of mine used to say, “I don’t want to associate with those who are turning from God; I might like them.” He was correct. It is also possible that God knew the heart of that young prophet, realising that he was susceptible to succumbing to the siren allure of the king’s invitation to a life of relative ease and luxury. Whatever the reason for God’s command, the prophet did obey—to this point.

Over a hundred years ago, a Methodist preacher wrote, “It is not great talents nor great learning nor great preachers that God needs, but men great in holiness, great in faith, great in love, great in fidelity, great for God—men always preaching by holy sermons in the pulpit, by holy lives out of it. These can mold a generation for God.”⁶ These are wise words mostly unheard in this day. We do well to heed such admonitions and seek out men who strive in every way to honour God and to fulfil His will rather than saying what is pleasing to man’s ear.

I confess that I am terrified of presumptuous sin, rank disobedience against the revealed will of the Living God. God has warned us through the words of Ezekiel, “When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die” [EZEKIEL 18:24].

This warning mirrors that which is delivered earlier in the same prophetic book. “If a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul” [EZEKIEL 3:20, 21].

Indeed, “The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses” [EZEKIEL 33:12a], and “The righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins” [EZEKIEL 33:12b]. God continues speaking through the prophet to warn all who name His Name, “Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die” [EZEKIEL 33:13]. Let the wise be instructed by the warnings of the LORD.

⁶ Edward M. Bounds, **Power through Prayer** (Logos Research Systems, Inc., Oak Harbor, WA 1999)

God expects that His people will honour Him always, doing what He commands. This is especially true for anyone who would stand as a preacher of righteousness. To be a pastor, one appointed to serve as an elder of the congregation, an overseer of the Body of Christ, means that an individual must fulfil the will of God. One must not imagine that the will of God can be ignored, doing as the individual desires. One must never imagine that the will of God can be bent just a little to make things more comfortable. To do so is to invite His judgement.

DEATH BY DECEIT — “An old prophet lived in Bethel. And his sons came and told him all that the man of God had done that day in Bethel. They also told to their father the words that he had spoken to the king. And their father said to them, ‘Which way did he go?’ And his sons showed him the way that the man of God who came from Judah had gone. And he said to his sons, ‘Saddle the donkey for me.’ So they saddled the donkey for him and he mounted it. And he went after the man of God and found him sitting under an oak. And 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 may not return with you, or go in with you, neither will I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place, for it was said to me by the word of the LORD, “You shall neither eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by the way that you came.”’ And he said to him, ‘I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, “Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water.”’ But he lied to him. So, he went back with him and ate bread in his house and drank water” [1 KINGS 13:11-19].

Suddenly, the narrative introduces another prophet, an older prophet who lived in Bethel. His sons had been present when the prophet from Judah had rebuked the king before his altar. They told their father all that they had witnessed that day. This raises some questions in my mind. What were they doing at the altar ceremony that day? Why had not the older prophet spoken out forcefully before this? When they heard the prophecy delivered by the younger man and saw God working through him, why didn’t the boys immediately ally themselves with him? Silence indicates a lack of training in righteousness at best and an unfamiliarity with godliness at the worst. No matter how much we may admire courage in the face of ungodly administrations, silence reveals our lack of conviction. If self-preservation prevails to silence our lips, we have become partners with the ungodliness we claim to detest.

The report of his sons appears to have stirred in the old prophet a memory of having once walked with the LORD God. I don’t believe he was a false prophet, though he did speak falsely in order to persuade the younger prophet from Judah. God did speak through the older man; and though God is sovereign and can employ any of His creation to accomplish His will, He does not speak through unbelievers as a rule. The older man is identified as “an old prophet.” That indicates to me that he was at one time recognised for his relationship to the Living God.

Perhaps he had once served with the prophets during Solomon’s reign before the division of the kingdom. Then, when the kingdom was divided, he remained where he was. He does not appear to have allied himself with Jeroboam’s new religion. but neither does he appear to have openly opposed the new religion. The old prophet could be compared to many preachers who chose to remain silent as their denomination drifted into open rebellion against the Lord Christ. As denominations move away from declaring the Word of God, accepting unrighteous people identifying as pastors and priests, accommodating themselves to wickedness within the denomination, people who were once known as defenders of the Gospel and godly in their conduct, chose to be silent; their retirement was more important than was the truth.

The world has always attempted to silence the man of God. One early writer called upon Christians to look back to the experience of saints under the Old Covenant. His assessment was, “Time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth”

[HEBREWS 11:32-38].

In the first days of Christ’s churches, societies attempted to silence the voice of those proclaiming the Word of God through censure. If censure failed to quiet their voice, then beatings and even stoning was employed. The full weight of both civic and religious institutions combined to silence the prophetic voices.

Throughout Europe, prophetic voices were silenced by burning the prophets at the stake when they became vocal and exposed sin. At other times, those who refused to be silenced were drowned. They were beaten, imprisoned, tortured as even religious authorities inveighed against them. A similar experience awaited those believers who first proclaimed the Word of God in the Indian sub-continent and throughout Asia.

Modern society attempts to silence the voice of the prophet through threats. If threats fail to silence that voice, we employ calumny, accusing them of horrible sounding crimes for which there is no definition—sexism, racism, homophobia, islamophobia. Refusal to accept society’s evil as normal is labelled as hatred, though the man of God condemns violence and urges those who listen to always act in love. In the face of such intense and persistent opposition, many voices are silenced. Fear of censure or incarceration serves to smother the truth.

We need an infusion of courage into the churches in this day. We do not need to hear angry voices or words of raging bitterness; we do, however, need to hear the courageous voice that boldly declares, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” **[ACTS 4:19, 20]**.

Our generation is dying to hear men who avow, “We must obey God rather than men” **[ACTS 5:29]**. Oh, for courageous men who hold to the words of the Prophet:

“The lion has roared;
who will not fear?
The Lord GOD has spoken;
who can but prophesy?”

[AMOS 3:8]

When the older prophet heard of the boldness of this Judean man of God, he was stirred, remembering past thrills when he had once walked with the Living God. Inquiring which way the man of God had gone, he set off in pursuit. At last, he caught up to the man of God. Verifying that the man he overtook on the road was indeed the prophet from Judah, the older man invited him to come home with him. The younger prophet refused the invitation, repeating the LORD’S command that he had recited to Jeroboam.

At this point, the older man revealed the contamination that comes with tolerating evil. He deliberately lied to the younger prophet, “I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, ‘Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water’” [1 KINGS 13:18]. The text simply notes, “But he lied to him.” The younger prophet was incautious, he accepted the lie the older man told.

Let me make a most serious observation at this point. Whenever a child of God tolerates even a little bit of wickedness, that believer will find each new presentation of evil to be that much easier to tolerate. Especially for the Christian, there is no such thing as “a little bit of evil.” Wickedness is abhorrent to the Living God. Any toleration of sin reveals our distance from God. Had we spent time in the presence of the Master, we could not tolerate sin. The fact that professing Christians not only tolerate evil, but resist exposure of their secret sins, speaks volumes concerning the desperate state of the Faith in this evil day.

Do we not hear such false claims on a continuing basis among the churches in this day? “The Lord told me,” is commonly heard from people who want to appear spiritual or who seek to lend legitimacy to whatever particular claim they happen to be peddling. Standing in the midst of a congregation, women and men stand to claim some prophetic word that must be obeyed. The people of God are well advised to heed the warning given by the Prophet Isaiah, who wrote, “To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this Word, it is because they have no dawn” [ISAIAH 8:20].

I am not impressed by the individual who confidentially whispers, “God told me to tell you...” If you attempt such manipulation, you can anticipate that I will respond, “Well, He didn’t tell me.” God does speak through His Word and He does direct the steps of His saint by His Spirit, but it is not likely that an angel will suddenly contradict what God has clearly said. The Apostle Paul warns Christians, “Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed” [GALATIANS 1:8].

I assure you on the authority of God’s Holy Word that God does not contradict Himself. Whenever some individual contradicts what God has said, that individual must be rebuked. “[The man of God] must hold firm to the trustworthy Word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” [TITUS 1:9].

I find the judgement spoken through Jeremiah about his own people to be tragically true.

“They, the house of Israel and the house of Judah,
have dealt very treacherously with Me.
This is the LORD’s declaration.
They have contradicted the LORD
and insisted, ‘It won’t happen.
Harm won’t come to us;
we won’t see sword or famine.’
The prophets become only wind,
for the LORD’s word is not in them.
This will in fact happen to them.”

[JEREMIAH 5:11-13 HCSB]

Contradicting the Word of God means that an individual is calling down upon himself or upon herself divine judgement. To set oneself in opposition to the Living God must result in judgement.

Alas, the Judean prophet did not seek the face of the LORD; he did not inquire of God whether these words were true. Though God had spoken plainly to the young prophet, he yielded to the entreaties of the older man, returning to his home where he was treated to a meal. Was there no hesitation? Did he not have a single question concerning this supposed change of heart by the LORD God? Christian, we are warned by the Apostle of Love, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world” [1 JOHN 4:1]. Do not blindly accept as valid every religious pronouncement; hold each statement to the standard of the Word. This is the reason I encourage those who share in our services to bring a Bible with them. Check what I say to see whether it is accurate. No one should accept my word; but, you can accept the authority of the Word of God!

On multiple occasions, I have witnessed instability such as I am now discussing as churches formulated their plans, but I have never witnessed God change His will. Though a church board or ecclesiastical tyrants will attempt to dignify changing plans by claiming that God has spoken to them, we may be confident that God’s will is that anyone claiming to serve His people will be holy. God’s will is for His people to be obedient. There are no exceptions.

The Word of God continues the dreadful account, “As they sat at the table, the word of the LORD came to the prophet who had brought him back. And he cried to the man of God who came from Judah, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Because you have disobeyed the word of the LORD and have not kept the command that the LORD your God commanded you, but have come back and have eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which he said to you, ‘Eat no bread and drink no water,’ your body shall not come to the tomb of your fathers.”’” And after he had eaten bread and drunk, he saddled the donkey for the prophet whom he had brought back. And as he went away a lion met him on the road and killed him. And his body was thrown in the road, and the donkey stood beside it; the lion also stood beside the body” [1 KINGS 13:20-24].

God held his servant to account, speaking through the mouth of the older prophet who had lied in order to bask in the reflected glory of the younger prophet’s boldness. Likewise, God will hold to account anyone who willfully disobeys His command. The Judean prophet was killed by a lion, though he wasn’t eaten. That this was the LORD’s doing became evident when the lion acted in a most unlion-like manner. He didn’t eat the man he had killed; neither did he attack the donkey. Though there could not have been a large number of people travelling that particular route, people passing by witnessed the unusual scene, and word spread quickly throughout Bethel. The old prophet knew instantly what had happened. He gathered the body, brought it back to his home, and laid the prophet from Judah in his own grave.

“When the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard of it, he said, ‘It is the man of God who disobeyed the word of the LORD; therefore, the LORD has given him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him, according to the word that the LORD spoke to him.’ And he said to his sons, ‘Saddle the donkey for me.’ And they saddled it. And he went and found his body thrown in the road, and the donkey and the lion standing beside the body. The lion had not eaten the body or torn the donkey. And the prophet took up the body of the man of God and laid it on the donkey and brought it back to the city to mourn and to bury him. And he laid the body in his own grave. And they mourned over him, saying, ‘Alas, my brother!’ And after he had buried him, he said to his sons, ‘When I die, bury me in the grave in which the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones. For the saying that he called out by the word of the LORD against the altar in Bethel and against all the houses of the high places that are in the cities of Samaria shall surely come to pass’” [1 KINGS 13:26-32].

It was, no doubt, a sad funeral. Undoubtedly, tears were shed—tears of human sorrow at the loss of life and tears of family grief at the death of a brother in ministry. I must believe that the old prophet shed bitter tears of remorse; he knew that his deception had caused the death of a servant of God. The least he could do would be to dignify the life and the testimony of this man through providing a decent burial. He wouldn't know how to contact the man's family; if the Judean prophet was to be honoured, he must accept responsibility.

Three individuals figure large in this account—Jeroboam, the king; the old prophet who lived in Bethel and who lied; and the man of God from Judah. Ralph Dale Davis has suggested some lessons for us to take to heart by focusing on each of the principals. Considering Jeroboam, *the Word of God was his mercy—and he despised it.*⁷ Mercy? What mercy? The king was in the middle of his ceremony when suddenly there was this uninvited guest. He was loud, he was front and centre. He condemned the altar, ruining the liturgy that day.

The king responded by stretching out his hand only to realise that it was frozen, useless, unresponsive. Jeroboam instantly understood that he was dealing with the living God. Terrorised at the knowledge of his impertinence, he pleaded for mercy—and God, through His prophet, showed the wayward king mercy. His hand was restored, but Jeroboam did not change. The pericope concludes by noting, “After this thing Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but made priests for the high places again from among all the people. Any who would, he ordained to be priests of the high places” [1 KINGS 13: 33].

For the old prophet, *the Word of God was his calling—and he abused it.*⁸ The old man had worn the prophet's mantle, but he spoke the language of the old serpent. He once spoke the Word of God, and unexpectedly he against speaks the Word of God, but he destroyed a man of God. Anyone who presumes to be a man of God though yet speaking error must know that God cannot bless him. For this old prophet, the truth appears to have been a game rather than a life. He was not gripped and transformed by the knowledge of the Holy One. He asserted to the younger man, “I also am a prophet as you are.” He reduced the Word of God to a profession.

For the man of God from Judah, *the Word of God was his safety—and he abandoned it.*⁹ We grieve at the account because this man had been so bold before the king—he was not intimidated by the king's threats nor was he seduced by his offer. However, when challenged by the deceitful older man, he capitulated, perhaps showing deference to his advanced years, perhaps as an act of consideration to a brother prophet. Regardless of his rationale, he disobeyed the command of God, and it cost him his life. There is a warning for each of us in his actions. Often, we will muster courage in the face of immediate danger, and yet fail to show discernment when the lie is pronounced. As Davis states, “Ministry must be grounded in both the power of God and the wisdom of God.”¹⁰

My prayer is that you who name the Name of the Son of God will ensure that you adhere to this Word. My prayer is that all who are outside of this Holy Faith will turn in faith to the Risen Son of God and discover the mercy that He promises. My prayer is that He shall be glorified through holy lives committed to serving Him and obeying His command. Amen.

⁷ Dale Ralph Davis, **1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly, Focus on the Bible Commentary** (Christian Focus Publications, Great Britain 2002), 149

⁸ Op. cit. 154

⁹ Op. cit. 152

¹⁰ Ibid.