

1 Kings 13:1-34

The Strange Case of the Disobedient Man of God

1 Kings 13:1 - "And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense."

This man of God's name is not given.

1 Kings 13:2-3 - "And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out."

Josiah was born 300 years after this prophecy (see **2 Kings 23**), and as king he did eliminate idolatry in the land. The bones of the dead priests would defile the altar and prevent it from being repaired and used for offerings in the future.

Idolatry

Our inner false altars are the places we bring offerings to placate or influence our false gods. God promises to break these altars so we will return to true worship of Him. But to do so, we need to "rebuild" the true altar within ourselves so we can become living sacrifices to the one true God.

- **1 Kings 18:30** - "Then Elijah said to all the people, 'Come near to me.' So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down."

Fulfillment of the Sign

1 Kings 13:4-5 - "And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Bethel, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him. The altar also was rent, 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."

Jeroboam's dead hand was an indication of his spiritual condition. Jeroboam's arrogance made him feel he was in control of everything, but now he couldn't control his own hand.

A Temporary Change of Attitude

1 Kings 13:6 - "And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Intreat now the face of the LORD thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again."

And the man of God besought the LORD, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before."

"Thy God" - Jeroboam still did not acknowledge Him as his own God.

Refuses Reward

1 Kings 13:7-9 - "And the king said unto the man of God, Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward. And the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: For so was it charged me by the word of the LORD, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest."

Obedience is Better than Sacrifice

The old prophet who heard of this incident wants to meet the new rising Man of God. We know from the story that he is dishonest. He probably hadn't heard from God in a long time. Perhaps he hoped some of the new prophet's charisma might rub off on him. In fact many are drawn to be near celebrities or those we perceive as having power or influence. Maybe he wanted to be able to tell people, "that prophet stayed here in my home."

But the prophet refused.

1 Kings 13:16-17 - "And he said, I may not return with thee, nor go in with thee: neither will I eat bread nor drink water with thee in this place: For it was said to me by the word of the LORD, Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest."

A New Twist

1 Kings 13:18 - "He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him."

As they are eating, God gives the old prophet a message for the man of God.

1 Kings 13:21-22 - "And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the LORD, and hast not kept the commandment which the LORD thy God commanded thee, But camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place, of the which the LORD did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers."

Strangely, we don't hear his reaction to this disturbing prediction.

Sure enough, when the prophet set out on his ass, a lion met and killed him. Passerby

saw the lion standing by the dead man's carcass, but without harming the donkey, also nearby, or eating the body. This was to show it was not a natural development, but a fulfillment of the prophecy.

1 Kings 13:26 - "And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard thereof, he said, It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the LORD: therefore the LORD hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake unto him."

This is quite a pious pronouncement by someone who just lied to the prophet and got him killed. But he might have said this in a newfound fear of the Lord, we don't know.

So the old prophet gathers his body and buries it in his own grave.

1 Kings 13:31-32 - "And it came to pass, after he had buried him, that he spake to his sons, saying, When I am dead, then bury me in the sepulchre wherein the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones: For the saying which he cried by the word of the LORD against the altar in Bethel, and against all the houses of the high places which are in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass."

The rabbis explain that this old prophet was a false prophet, and not among those who had left the northern kingdom to go to Judah to escape the idolatries. He was sojourning in Bethel, where the false altar and golden calf was located. Why was he not punished along with the true prophet? It was maybe because of his initial respect toward the true prophet, his belief in the prophecy and finally, the blessings of offering refreshment to travelers.

Rashi - "Offering refreshment is a great thing, for it causes the Shechinah to rest on the prophets of the Baal." i.e. because God spoke to him even though he was a false prophet like Balaam.

Israel was warned against believing a sign or a wonder that conflicts with the truth of God's word.

- **Deuteronomy 13:1-3** - "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams...."

The New Testament agrees:

- **Galatians 1:8-9** - "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

Paul warns against "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of

light." - (**2 Corinthians 11:13-14**)

It's easy to understand that the younger prophet, when he was told about the angel's update to his instructions, would just say, "Oh, OK, good to know."

But he had seen proof of God's word to him, by its partly being fulfilled in that instant, with the altar splitting, the ashes poured out and Jeroboam's hand paralysed. In contrast, he didn't ask for more solid proof of the old prophet's story. Maybe he respected the old prophet's age. Maybe he was just hungry. Maybe he decided like Esau to trade his obedience for a mess of pottage. The reason is left unsaid so we can search our hearts and fill the space with reasons from our own disobedience.

- **Matthew 24:23-24** - "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

The beast in Revelation also deceives through miracles:

- **Revelation 13:13-14** - "And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live."

The rabbis explained that when a majority of elders rule on the meaning of a scripture, even a voice from heaven cannot overrule it. (Bava Metzia 59b)

But in this case there was no actual miracle or supernatural messenger, just the semblance of one, through deception.

For us, we must stick close to the scriptures. Every point of faith should have several supporting witnesses within the scriptures themselves.

- **Matthew 18:16** - "...in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established"

- **2 Corinthians 13:1** - "...In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established."

The Father and the Spirit appeared at the baptism of Jesus, confirming "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." (**Matthew 3:17**).

God has spoken to us now through His Son (**Hebrews 1:2**) who fulfilled the Law and went to the cross bearing the penalty for our sins. He rose on the third day and ascended to heaven, pouring out His Spirit on us and sharing eternal life with whoever believes. We are corporately His bride, whom He will receive at the end of time, when

all will be judged at the resurrection of the dead.

This is the unshakeable truth of the gospel. Even if someone you respect tells you something different, don't believe him. Don't acquiesce to another's age, authority or credentials if they deny or change the gospel of grace. We can't let anything, not even an appearance of an angel or miraculous fire from heaven, move us from this hope.

This story of the disobedient man of God is a warning for us. Jeroboam, the idolatrous and arrogant king, is spared. Despite the miraculous paralysis of his arm, he wouldn't acknowledge God. The man of God on the other hand, with only a mention of an angelic message, disobeys the Lord's instructions.

Even the lying old false prophet is spared. But the faithful man of God makes a decision to deviate from what God has told him, and he is punished for his disobedience with death.

“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22)

Satan is said to walk the earth, like the roaring lion in our story, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8-10). Disobedience will lead us right to him.

'Dem Bones

In the end, the old prophet seems to lean toward repentance. He tells his sons to bury him in the same sepulchre as the man of God and "lay my bones beside his bones." Why? If the bones of the dead priests and prophets of Jeroboam's idols were to defile the altar, then maybe the bones of the man of God might redeem and sanctify his own.

See a later incident:

- **2 Kings 13:21** - "So it was, as they were burying a man, that suddenly they spied a band of raiders; and they put the man in the tomb of Elisha; and when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet."

And even later:

- **Ezekiel 37:1-10** - "He asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' I said, 'Sovereign Lord, you alone know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones and say to them, "Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.'"

It seems there is some spiritual significance to bones.

And 300 years later, when Josiah destroyed the idols and false altars as was prophesied, his soldiers were gathering bones from the sepulchres of those nearby and burning them on the altars to defile them.

- **2 Kings 23:17-18** - "Then he [Josiah] said, What title is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Bethel. And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria."

So, being buried with the man of God did save the old prophet's bones from being burned, as he had hoped.

Summary

This strange story illustrates the saying of Samuel to King Saul, that "to obey is better than sacrifice" (**1 Samuel 15:22-31**)

We rely on the perfect obedience of Jesus, but that means we walk daily in repentance, experiencing our own brokenness.

1 Corinthians 10:12 – "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

There is no place for self-righteousness or even self-satisfaction in the kingdom of God.

'Buried With Him'

No parable is perfect. But there is a correlation between the old prophet's bones buried with the disobedient man of God and the first half of Paul's illustration of baptism - "buried with Him in baptism":

- **Romans 6:4** - "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

If there was some slight hope offered by being buried with the bones of the disobedient man of God, then being buried with the perfectly obedient Son of God offers the ultimate hope of His resurrection life.