



LESSONS FROM A LYING PROPHET

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Greetings and welcome to Let the Bible Speak. Did you know that preachers can sometimes get you into trouble? Yes, preachers are not always what they should be and who you may think they are. That's not a modern problem. It was an ancient problem as well. Our lesson today comes from a story recounted in the Old Testament and it deals with two preachers, one younger and one older. And you might suppose the younger, more inexperienced preacher would have been the source of the problem but in this case, it was the other way around. A young preacher learned some hard lessons from the older one – in fact, they cost him his life. I'm talking about the story told in 1 Kings 13 during the days of King Jeroboam.

We read now from 1 Kings 13, verses 1 thru 10. It says: ***"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."

If the story ended there, it would be an inspiring story of courage and fidelity to God. But it doesn't end there. An older preacher in Bethel enters the picture and things quickly go downhill. There are some important lessons we should learn in our desire to obey and please God. This young prophet learned them – but too late.

This happened after the division of Israel into the northern and southern kingdoms. The glory days of a united Israel as it was in the days of David were over. Solomon had continued his father's dynasty but later in his life had allowed his pagan wives to turn his heart away from God and when he died, the kingdom fell into the hands of his haughty son, Rehoboam. Rehoboam foolishly refused to listen to the older and wiser heads and instead relied on the advice of the younger men. This resulted in the division of the nation into the Northern and Southern tribes. Despite Rehoboam's pride and foolish conduct, God did use Rehoboam and for a time, Judah and the southern kingdom were considered faithful to God.

Jeroboam, on the other hand, became king in the north and quickly led HIS people into idolatry. The temple that Solomon built and where the presence of God had been manifest was in Jerusalem – in the south. This was to be the place of worship and sacrifice. But that presented a problem for Jeroboam because he feared that if his people continued to travel to Jerusalem to worship, they would get down there and they would be influenced to defect and turn back to Rehoboam, the southern leader. Jeroboam couldn't have that and so, he came up with a compromise. He had two golden calves made and set in the northern cities of Dan and Bethel and told the people to go there and worship instead. Well, that was wrong. Just like it's wrong and sinful anytime men propose a substitute for the worship God has prescribed and introduce an innovation that is an addition and contrary to what we read in God's word. That's still wrong today. It was wrong for ancient Israel because, number one, the temple was in Jerusalem, and Jeroboam didn't have God's authority to set up another place of worship. And it was also wrong because it was a sin to worship a golden calf instead of the living God. Any unscriptural innovation is sinful and constitutes man's will-worship (Colossians 2:23) instead of worshipping God in the way He has prescribed (John 4:24).

Well, God would not let Jeroboam's false worship go unchallenged and unrebuked because He sent a young prophet from Judah up to Bethel to preach against Jeroboam's compromising arrangement. The bible doesn't name this young preacher, but it does picture him (at least as he sets out on his mission) as being faithful and courageous. It would take a brave man to go before a king and flatly condemn his religion but that's what this young preacher was ready to do. He wasn't going to Bethel to have peace talks with Jeroboam. He wasn't planning to win Jeroboam by his charm and by smooth and flattering words. He went to Bethel to tell the king in no uncertain terms that the worship he had established was wrong and condemned by God.

The bible says that this young man went to Bethel and happened to find Jeroboam himself burning incense at his false altar. Without hesitation, the fiery young prophet spoke up and said that God would destroy Jeroboam's altars. Speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he prophesied that some 300-years later, Josiah would be born, and that God would use him to execute God's judgment upon Bethel and its altar. To show that God was speaking through him, the prophet announced a miracle would take place. God would split the altar there before their eyes and the ashes of its offerings would be poured out. Well, that brought Jeroboam's "church service" to a halt and the angry king raised his hand toward the young prophet and told his guards to seize him. But as he did, his arm was frozen into place and just like

the prophet had predicted, the altar was broken in two. There was no denying that God had expressed his disapproval and the king had a sudden change of heart. He asked the prophet to pray to God to reverse his paralysis and the prophet did.

When Jeroboam's arm was made whole again, he was grateful and asked the prophet to go home with him and eat and drink. Still courageously determined to obey God, the prophet refused. God had told him that he was not to eat and drink while there and was to quickly come home taking another route than the one by which he went there. To have eaten with the king would have compromised his message and showed that he approved of what was going on there. God did not want this prophet to compromise by extending fellowship to Jeroboam and his false worship. So, the prophet bravely turned away to go back home a different way than he came.

Well, that's all well and good except there was an old preacher who had stayed up there in Bethel after the division of the kingdom and his sons went home and told their father what they had just seen. This old prophet was in a compromised position himself. He couldn't go along with Jeroboam's false worship but for whatever reason, he hadn't taken a very firm stand against the king. He too was like some in our own time who might prefer that things be done in the right way, but they don't have enough courage and conviction to do anything about it. The old man's curiosity is aroused by what his sons tell him, and he wants to talk to this young prophet. His motive is somewhat a mystery. It may be that he simply wanted to have some collegial association with a fellow prophet. After all, he would have been isolated and probably lonely having remained up north when all the other prophets had migrated to the south. Someone suggested that perhaps he was a bit jealous of the young man. Maybe he was feeling sort of washed up and put out to pasture and when he heard of the young man's zeal and determination, it stirred up feelings of envy and so forth. Unfortunately, things like that have happened among preachers. But it may have been the other way around! Maybe he was feeling a little dejected and discouraged up there by himself and dismayed by the rotten religious culture of where he was living, and maybe he was inspired by what the prophet had said and done. Nonetheless, he wanted to see and talk to the younger preacher.

Listen now, continuing in verse 12: "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."

Uh oh! What has happened to our young preacher who set out from Judah on such a noble mission and with such courage and determination to please God? For all the fidelity he showed when the idolatrous king tried to get him to compromise, it is now different when another preacher comes and offers the same compromise. Regardless of what the older man's motive was, the fact remains that he lied to the younger prophet. He told the young man something claiming it was the word of God, but it wasn't! He was misrepresenting the word of God.

Friend, this is where we all must be the most careful. The world is full of voices and influences that try to lead us astray – no doubt. Satan appears in many forms, and he speaks through many messengers. Yes, he certainly tries to appeal to the believer through the outside world – but I would suggest that the means the Devil uses to the greatest effect in leading souls astray and condemning them is through the compromising voice of false teachers and preachers. Here was a prophet who was claiming that God had told him something that God never did say. He got the younger and more inexperienced and naive prophet to believe a lie because it was coming from someone who claimed to be a man of God.

It's easy for a person who is trying to do the will of God to recognize the lies of the outside world. It's more challenging to discern truth from error though when the source of error is someone who claims to be speaking on behalf of God. Paul warned of this very thing when he wrote his second letter to Corinth. There were those claiming revelations that God didn't give them, and they were working to turn the church away from Paul, who was a divinely inspired and chosen apostle of Jesus Christ to listen instead to them and their false ideas. Paul warned the church that Satan insidiously works to deceive people by means of those who claim to be representatives of light and truth, but they speak things that are false and that will lead people astray and to condemnation. He spoke of them in 2 Corinthians 11:12-15 saying that they "...desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."

Paul, likewise, warned the elders of the church in Ephesus "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." (Acts 20:29) And Jesus, Himself, warned in Matthew 7:15 ""Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." You see, Paul and the other apostles DID speak on behalf of Christ. The Holy Spirit inspired their teachings and their writings giving them authority that no other can possess, then or now. That means that their words are the standard by which any religious claim must be measured. The Apostle John said, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1) How do we test the spirits? How do we judge the words of preachers who claim to speak on behalf of Christ? We turn to the words of the apostles – the New Testament scriptures! In 1 Corinthians 4:6 Paul said, "...that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written..." (1 Corinthians 4:6)

The problem this young prophet (who WAS living in the age of revelations – when God was still speaking through living prophets) the problem he had was that he knew God HAD spoken to him and yet, he was willing to listen to what someone else claimed God had said which contradicted what he knew God HAD already said. Now, we're not living in the age of living prophets and new revelations and the giving of new truth – but our world is nonetheless filled with those who claim to receive such revelations. Our religious world is filled with preachers, organizations, and movements that claim to be supernaturally led by the Holy Spirit, apart from the already revealed word of God. But my friend, the bible teaches that the revelation of Christ and His will is complete! Jude said that "faith was once and for all delivered to the saints..." and that we are to "earnestly contend" for THAT faith. That means we reject any and every claim, any and every doctrine, any and every practice that is not given in the word of God. This young man was led astray though because he listened to the lying prophet. Maybe the age and gravitas of the older prophet compelled him. Apparently, the older prophet was convincing when he told him God has revealed this contradictory truth to him. It didn't matter. When the young prophet listened to him and heeded him, he sinned and ultimately lost his life.

If you read on in 1 Kings 13, you'll learn that after the old preacher lied, God really did speak to him and told him he had done a terrible thing to this young man. That young man who started out so well would be killed on his way home. And that's exactly what happened. The old preacher was then filled with regret and remorse and went and gathered up the remains of the young man and gave them a proper burial and mourned his demise.

That's all a strange story but it's a poignant and powerful story that out to teach us all some important lessons. God doesn't contradict Himself. He doesn't tell one person one thing and tell someone else something different. God doesn't reveal one thing in His word and then send the Holy Spirit to reveal something else to man today. It should also teach us that believing the wrong thing is a mistake that has eternal consequences. Truth matters. Where we get that truth matters. I don't care how many universities a man has attended, how many books he has written, how many letters he has after him name, or how fluently he reads Greek, he might can be a tremendous help and resource in our study of the word of God – but he's not inspired. And listen, if what he says or what he advocates or what he practices is different than what you can plainly read in the word of God – you need to ignore him. Eternity is too long, the truth is too precious, and your soul is too valuable to just believe what others say in religion. There is one lesson you and I need to learn from this lying prophet – judge everything you see and hear by the word of God. Judge the truth claims that you don't know by the truth you know and not the other way around. And at the end of the day, be determined and stay determined to obey what God has said in His word – nothing more and nothing less.

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