

# 1 Kings 13 • Even Prophets Are Accountable

## Introduction

Is anyone exempt from obedience to God's Word? There would appear to be some people claiming to be a prophet who seem to think that they are exempt from keeping God's Word. What is particularly noteworthy in this lesson is the function of miraculous signs and how they are intended to convey a message greater than the signs themselves and the fact that the message is consistently dismissed personally. Prophets are just as accountable as everyone else when it comes to personal obedience to God's Word, and prophets must employ the same standards to detect and protect against false prophets as the rest of us as well.

<sup>1</sup>Now behold, there came a man of God from Judah to Bethel by the word of the LORD, while Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense. <sup>2</sup>He 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 on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.'" <sup>3</sup>Then he gave a sign the same day, saying, "This is the sign which the LORD has spoken, 'Behold, the altar shall be split apart and the ashes which are on it shall be poured out.'"

## [Read v.1-3]

**Q: Who is this prophet, here identified as "a man of God"?**

A: Scripture never reveals his name.

**Q: Why do you suppose he remains anonymous?**

A: It is probably an example that we are never to make a name or bring glory to our self, but to be satisfied in our role communicating God's Word and glory. It emphasizes the fact that the more important lesson in this story is God's Word, not man's.

**Q: What do we know about Jeroboam to this point?**

A: God chose Jeroboam to be king over the ten tribes of the northern kingdom now referred to as "Israel" because of Solomon's sins. (1 Ki. 11)

**Q: What were the sins of Solomon specifically detailed to Jeroboam? Why is this significant?**

A: Even though the Lord has personally appeared to Solomon twice, "his heart was turned away from the LORD" and he followed "after other gods". (1 Ki. 11:9-10) Jeroboam not only repeats Solomon's sins, but repeats Aaron's sin (Ex. 32:1-6) by making calves of gold and placing one in Dan and one in Bethel, consecrating these as places of worship and instituting his own priesthood. He completely counterfeits Old Testament Judaism in order to keep the people of the northern kingdom of Israel from worshiping and serving in the true Temple at the hand of the true priesthood in Jerusalem, now located in the southern kingdom of Judah.

**Q: What is the biblical term describing the actions of God's people when they choose to worship and serve Him according to their own word and ways instead of His?**

A: "Apostasy", which means "falling away". They use the same terms and rituals, use the same Scriptures, employ the name of God—they make what they do look, feel and sound authentic, but in reality it is a counterfeit designed to satiate their own desires.

**Observation:** Jeroboam teaches something about the final Antichrist to come, and the apostasy which ensues teaches something about the final apostasy of the Last Days.

**Q: What altar is this?**

A: This is the false one set up in Bethel, which literally means "house of the Lord".

**Q: So what is the purpose of God's message and its accompanying sign through this prophet?**

A: The message is that this counterfeit is not merely unacceptable to God, but will inevitably result in God's judgment for destruction.

**Application:** *The role of a true prophet of God is to call God's people back to the Word and ways they have left. A prophet is like an evangelist to God's people, calling them back to what they should have never left in the first place.*

<sup>4</sup>Now when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar in Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, "Seize him." But his hand which he stretched out against him dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself. <sup>5</sup>The altar also was split apart and the ashes were poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. <sup>6</sup>The king said to the man of God, "Please entreat 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 it became as it was before. <sup>7</sup>Then the king said to the man of God, "Come home with me and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward."

<sup>8</sup>But the man of God said to the king, "If you were to give me half your house I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water in this place. <sup>9</sup>For so it was commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'You shall eat no bread, nor drink water, nor return by the way which you came.'" <sup>10</sup>So he went another way and did not return by the way which he came to Bethel.

**[Read v.4-10]**

**Q: What is Jeroboam's initial reaction to God's Word through the prophet?**

A: To kill both the messenger and the message.

**Q: Why do you suppose God struck Jeroboam as he did?**

A: To publicly verify His messenger and the message.

**Q: What does it mean when it says, "his hand which he stretched out against him dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself". (v.5)**

A: It became frozen, in a state of paralysis, so that not only could it not be used, but became a visible sign which he would not be able to hide and would have to explain.

**Q: How can we tell that Jeroboam does not accept the message God is trying to get through to him?**

A: Jeroboam never repents, never understands that the paralysis of his hand is an earthly representation of what God's hand will do spiritually for continuing the false religion established in Dan and Bethel. He asks for the prophet to pray for the restoration of his limb, but never repents and accepts the greater message behind the sign of the splitting of the altar. Notice how he says, "Please entreat the LORD **your** God" and not "**my** God." (v.6)

**Q: How does Jeroboam's reaction to the healing speak of the true spiritual condition of his heart?**

A: He wants to reward the man without acknowledging it as the greater work of God.

**Application:** *An unrepentant heart is never saved by even the most miraculous of signs because the accompanying message is never recognized nor acted upon.*

**Q: What might be the practical reason for God's instruction to the prophet in v.8-10?**

A: Knowing that Jeroboam and Israel would not repent, God did not want a true follower entering into fellowship with false believers. (Note: The New Testament way of stating this is that we are not to join in communion with backsliders or unbelievers.)

**Q: What is one of the chief characteristics of someone in apostasy?**

A: They keep going back spiritually to the place they came from but trying to retain something of what they experienced.

**Application:** *If God's Word is not received and acted upon, the true follower of God never enters into a relationship with those who continue to fall away.*

<sup>11</sup>Now an old prophet was living in Bethel; and his sons came and told him all the deeds which the man of God had done that day in Bethel; the words which he had spoken to the king, these also they related to their father. <sup>12</sup>Their father said to them, "Which way did he go?" Now his sons had seen the way which the man of God who came from Judah had gone. <sup>13</sup>Then he said to his sons, "Saddle the donkey for me." So they saddled the donkey for him and he rode away on it.

<sup>14</sup>So 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."

<sup>15</sup>Then he said to him, "Come home with me and eat bread."

<sup>16</sup>He said, "I cannot return with you, nor go with you, nor will I eat bread or drink water with you in this place. <sup>17</sup>For a command came to me by the word of the LORD, 'You shall eat no bread, nor drink water there; do not return by going the way which you came.'"

<sup>18</sup>He said to him, "I also am a prophet like you, 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.'" But he lied to him. <sup>19</sup>So he went back with him, and ate bread in his house and drank water.

<sup>20</sup>Now it came about, as they were sitting down at the table, that the word of the LORD came to the prophet who had brought him back; <sup>21</sup>and he cried to the man of God who came from Judah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because you have disobeyed the command of the LORD, and have not observed the commandment which the LORD your God commanded you, <sup>22</sup>but have returned and eaten bread and drunk water in the place

### [Read v.11-19]

#### **Q: Who is this "old prophet"?**

A: Like the "man of God" (v.1), his name is never revealed to us.

#### **Q: What might lead us to believe that he is a false prophet, or someone who was once a true prophet but has since fallen away?**

A: When the kingdom split, all those in the northern kingdom of Israel who desired to continue serving and worshiping God according to His Word, migrated to Judah. (In reality, representatives from **all** the tribes were living in the southern kingdom of Judah.) A false prophet would have no problem living and operating within the false religion established in Israel, much less encouraging his sons to do the same.

**Point:** *False prophets are often attracted to true prophets, first because they are so personally interested in being a prophet themselves, and secondly because it gives them an air of legitimacy to be associated with the true. It is the same with false teachers.*

#### **Q: Is there a greater spiritual significance to the "man of God" being found "under an oak"?**

A: Oak trees in Scripture always represent someone operating from a position of spiritual strength. The "man of God", having fulfilled God's will to this point, is at his spiritually strongest.

#### **Q: How should the "man of God" have immediately known that the "old prophet" was trying to deceive him?**

A: Because the "old prophet" contradicted the Word of God. All false prophets are not only betrayed by making predictions which do not come to pass, but by preaching a "new" word which they claim supersedes God's already established Word.

#### **Q: What is the second accompanying mistake the "man of God" appears to have made?**

A: He does not inquire of the Lord.

#### **Q: How has the "old prophet" succeeded whereas Jeroboam failed?**

A: The "old prophet" persuaded the "man of God" to enter into fellowship with someone who, if not an outright non-believer, was certainly a backslidden one in apostasy.

**Application:** *Even a true prophet of God can be deceived in the exact same manner by which any true follower is deceived: by failing to test all things by prayer and God's Word.*

### [Read v.20-25]

**Note:** *Even some of the most learned and respected scholars have difficulty understanding why God would speak to the "true" prophet through the "false" one, and attempt to dissect the underlying Hebrew text to say that either God actually spoke directly to the "true" prophet, or spoke out loud from heaven to both of them. Have the courage to accept the text as it is.*

of which He said to you, “Eat no bread and drink no water”; your body shall not come to the grave of your fathers.”

<sup>23</sup>It came about after he had eaten bread and after he had drunk, that he saddled the donkey for him, for the prophet whom he had brought back. <sup>24</sup>Now when he had gone, a lion met him on the way and killed him, and his body was thrown on the road, with the donkey standing beside it; the lion also was standing beside the body. <sup>25</sup>And behold, men passed by and saw the body thrown on the road, and the lion standing beside the body; so they came and told it in the city where the old prophet lived.

<sup>26</sup>Now when the prophet who brought him back from the way heard it, he said, “It is the man of God, who disobeyed the command of the LORD; therefore the Lord has given him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke to him.”

<sup>27</sup>Then he spoke to his sons, saying, “Saddle the donkey for me.” And they saddled it. <sup>28</sup>He went and found his body thrown on the road with the donkey and the lion standing beside the body; the lion had not eaten the body nor torn the donkey. <sup>29</sup>So the prophet took up the body of the man of God and laid it on the donkey and brought it back, and he came to the city of the old prophet to mourn and to bury him.

<sup>30</sup>He laid his body in his own grave, and they mourned over him, saying, “Alas, my brother!”

<sup>31</sup>After he had buried him, he spoke to his sons, saying, “When I die, bury me in the grave in which the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones. <sup>32</sup>For the thing shall surely come to pass 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.”

<sup>33</sup>After this event Jeroboam did not return from his evil way, but again he

***Q: Is there any logic as to why God would choose to speak through the “old prophet”, whom we know to have acted in deceit?***

A: It makes sense if the “old prophet” was once a true prophet of God who is now in apostasy, having fallen away from the true faith and is now living and serving the false religions of the northern kingdom of Israel. Just as the sign of the altar was a message to Jeroboam and Israel of what would ultimately happen to them for pursuing their false religion, so the pronouncement coming through the “old prophet” would have a dual meaning for him as well, that disobedience to God’s Word and ways would result in judgment on him, too.

***Q: How might the surprising behavior of the lion be an indictment against just about everyone spoken of in this story to this point?***

A: The lion is the only one who obeyed God precisely and did not exceed God’s Word directing him.

***Point:*** Like the sign of the altar, the public display of the prophet’s corpse was a public testimony to the truth and power of God’s Word.

***Application:*** Those who fail to heed the greater message accompanying God’s signs become a sign themselves and an unwitting testimony to that message.

***[Read v.26-30]***

***Q: How do we know the true condition of the heart of the “old prophet” and that, like Jeroboam, he has neither repented nor learned the right lesson?***

A: He makes mention only of the true prophet’s sin and never utters a syllable about his own. (v.26)

***Q: How are the actions of the “old prophet” an antithesis to the instructions given to the “man of God”?***

A: The “man of God” was told not to return back the way he came, a spiritual representation of those engaging in apostasy who return to the old life but with some outward appearances of following God. The body is taken back to backslidden Bethel and treated as one of their own. No one actually repents and changes their ways.

***Q: How is the reaction of the “old prophet” really not very different from that of Jeroboam at the splitting of the altar?***

A: Because he does not accept the greater message accompanying the sign, the sign has no real effect on him.

***Application:*** Not even a prophet is exempt from obedience to God’s Word. Recognition of God working is never a substitute for putting the message into practice.

***[Read v.31-34]***

***Q: What would be the real-world benefit to “lay my bones beside his bones”?***

A: When Josiah comes and literally fulfills all God spoke, both prophets’ bones would lie undisturbed in spite of everything around them being completely and utterly destroyed.

made priests of the high places from among all the people; any who would, he ordained, to be priests of the high places.  
<sup>34</sup>This event became sin to the house of Jeroboam, even to blot it out and destroy it from off the face of the earth.

*Then he said, "What is this monument that I see?" And the men of the city told him, "It is the grave of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel." He said, "Let him alone; let no one disturb his bones." So they left his bones undisturbed with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria. (2 Kings 23:17-18)*

**Q: Did everything come to pass?**

A: In approximately 350+ years, Josiah—the name prophesied by the “man of God” (v.2) would be born and fulfill every detail.

**Q: Scripture will repeatedly refer back to the “sin of the house of Jeroboam”. What does that describe?**

A: Not merely the individual sins of each thing listed in v.33, but how they combined to supplant true biblical faith with a counterfeit religion retaining a lot of the outward appearances of the authentic.

**Q: Why did Jeroboam have to ordain his own priesthood?**

A: The Levites refused to participate in his false religion, were expelled from their cities, and migrated to the southern kingdom of Judah.

*For the Levites left their pasture lands and their property and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons had excluded them from serving as priests to the LORD. (2 Chronicles 11:14)*

**Q: What is the ultimate fate of all cults, religions and movements which attempt to counterfeit the authentic?**

A: Like the house of Jeroboam, they will be blotted out and destroyed from the face of the earth. (v.34)

**Application:** Refusal to return to God's Word and ways ultimately leads from temporary separation to permanent separation.

**Overall Application**

- *How does this speak to your own accountability to live according to God's Word alone?*
- *What does this teach about false prophets and discerning whether someone claiming to come in the name of the Lord is authentic?*
- *Can you see the difference between what is happening here from what takes place in the Parable of the Prodigal Son? What is the key factor missing from this account versus the parable?*