

#9 “One Good Prophet, One Bad Prophet, and One Ugly Result”

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A rather strange but powerfully important story is recorded in 1 Kings 13. A prophet, simply revealed as a “man of God” was told by God to approach wicked King Jeroboam about his idol worship. He did just that, crying out against Jeroboam’s altar a judgment of God, and the altar was miraculously split in two before the sight of the king. Jeroboam stood up to rebuke him and bring judgment upon him, and God dried up his hand in the very act of pointing to the man of God. Jeroboam obviously was moved by this event and asked the man of God to heal his hand, which he mercifully did. Jeroboam then asked the man of God to stay and share a meal with him, though it is unclear whether or not he repented at this moment. It is clear that his heart remained hard in the long term, however (v. 33-34). Whether or not Jeroboam’s intentions in this invitation were of a pure motivation we don’t know, but, regardless, the man of God refused his invitation because God had specifically directed him prior to his arrival that he must not stay but return to Judah. Perhaps God said this for his own protection, but the point is that He said it. The man of God did as God had told him, leaving Jeroboam’s presence.

Now the story takes an unexpected turn. We have seen how this man of God is bold and courageous, standing against an attack on his life, proclaiming the Word of God, and obeying God even though it may have been tempting to share a meal at the king’s table. This unnamed individual clearly had a heart that was devoted to God, discerning, and uncompromising. Yet, lo and behold, an old prophet meets this prophet on the road and invites him to stay at his home for a meal. Word had already been spreading about the events of the day, for the sons of the old prophet had told him all about this man of God and the event concerning the altar. The man of God recounted that God said that he must return home and not stay in the land. But the old prophet lied to him, saying that an “angel” gave him new revelation that contradicted and overruled God’s previous direction. Since this man of God was interested in God’s Word, it made sense that Satan used someone claiming to speak for God as the means of leading him astray. He had clearly demonstrated his desire to obey God’s will, but even the most zealous follower of God is still vulnerable to deception if he is not sober and alert. So, believing the old prophet that God had indeed changed His mind about His command, he chose to stay in the land and dine with him. Upon leaving, the man of God was met on the road by a lion and was brutally killed. As evidence that this event was ordered by God, the man of God’s donkey was sitting right there next to his body, not intimidated by the lion whatsoever. Evidently the donkey supernaturally knew that it had nothing to fear from the lion because this was a special supernatural act of God. Furthermore, the lion didn’t devour the body, but left it in the road and just stood by it, a behavior totally uncharacteristic of a lion. The old prophet took the body of the man of God, mourned over him, and declared that what the man of God had prophesied concerning Jeroboam would indeed come to pass. It is not clear that he repented, though he does say that he

wished to be buried in the same grave as the man of God. And that is all the information we are given about this unnamed man of God.

The story takes an abruptly ugly end. The bad prophet seems to get away with his lying, and the good man of God seems to be shown no mercy by God. This at first can be a real head-scratcher. First of all, we can rest in the fact that the old prophet will not get away with his lying ultimately as God holds us accountable for all that we do while in the body, whether good or bad and whether for Him or not for Him (2 Corinthians 5:10). God will hand out justice, just not necessarily in this life. Second, we ought also to note that just because someone has a ministerial robe, title, credential, or position does not mean that he is necessarily speaking the truth. Third, regarding the demise of the good man of God, he suffered a brutal, literally ravaging death, all because he disobeyed God. Was God unjust to let this happen? We must remember that those who become teachers will receive a stricter judgment (James 3:1). The same could be applied to this prophet of God. Why is this the case? A teacher, or in the case of the Old Testament, a prophet, had the capacity to turn a multitude toward the Lord or to lead them astray. This man obviously would have had an extremely high profile if he had just continued home. He had just stood up to the king of Israel and rebuked him. Word had already spread to the old prophet's sons. Certainly people were talking about this showdown with the king throughout all of Israel. Indeed, his words would have come true and affirmed his standing as a man of God. Perhaps then we would have known his name even today. But we do not know much about this passing figure because he disobeyed God and was disciplined by God. God dealt strictly with this good man of God because God takes His calling and Word seriously.

There is one overarching lesson that we can draw from this passage: the Word of God doesn't change. Man may alter it, lie about it, and add to it, but God's Word will endure forever. It is interesting that the old prophet claimed that an angel had given him some new revelation from God. Typically, God spoke directly to the prophets, though sometimes he did use angels as messengers of the oracles of God. So the old prophet could have been telling the truth. *Yet there was one way to know that he was not- he said that God reversed His revealed Word.* God may "change His mind" in the sense that He shows mercy, answers prayer, or relents in giving out punishment. But He never changes His Word, for He cannot lie (Titus 1:2). This is so important, which is why Paul says in Galatians 1:8, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!" Mormonism claims to have been started by angelic revelation as does Islam. These false prophets claim to have been given new revelation from God which in many ways reversed what God had previously said in the Scripture. Indeed many cults throughout history have claimed to have authority and to be true because of some revelation from an angel of God. This is a grave error which we can identify based upon the fact that they preach a gospel different than Jesus and Paul did. Satan masquerades as an angel of light and so do his followers. Thus, even if an angel appeared to us and delivered a message to us, we ought not to assume that the message is true and from God unless it is consistent with the Word of God as it has already been given. Even then, I would be wary as God has given us all that we need for life and godliness in Christ and in His Word (2 Peter 1:3). The lesson

for us is that God's Word doesn't change and cannot be altered, not even by a supernatural figure or an earthly figure that we respect. To believe that God has reversed His Word or given us permission to override it is always a deception from the enemy. Teachers and preachers who boast in their innovation, creativity, and reengineering of church practice ought to be wary that they do not subtly reverse God's commands in His Word. The safest and best policy is always to humble ourselves and align our theology, methodology, practice, and behavior with what God has already revealed in His Word.

If even this good prophet was vulnerable to listening to the wrong "word of God," so we can be deceived also if we do not trust completely in the Word of God. The man of God was a good man who was deceived into disobedience. God spoke to him during his meal, ironically through the evil old prophet, and convicted him of his disobedience, foretelling his imminent death. The man of God, seemingly undeterred and perhaps annoyed at the old man's schizophrenic prophesying, mounted his donkey and headed home. Not much time passed at all before God's Word, which had never changed, came true. How easy it can be for us to listen to other voices clamoring for our attention when God's voice has already spoken in His Word. How can we discern which voice is the voice of God? Actually it is quite simple. The Bible is the recorded voice of God through which the Holy Spirit within us will guide our minds, shape our desires, and lead us in the right direction. We don't need to look for external voices and supernatural encounters with audible voices. We just need to know God's Word. That is how Jesus rebuked and refuted the devil during His temptation in the wilderness. Without being anchored on the Word of God, we will easily be deceived.

That said, the offense by the prophet still likely doesn't strike us as being all that severe. All he did was disobey, and it doesn't even appear that he did it in blatant rebellion. Yet just because a person is deceived does not minimize the seriousness of an offense. In fact, being deceived can be more dangerous because we don't know until God convicts us that we have sinned. Such is the nature of deception- it occurs without our noticing. Just because we are deceived doesn't get us "off the hook" when it comes to disobedience. Sin is sin, whether or not we are fully aware of the evil that we are doing. Yet even disobedience doesn't sound all that bad to our ears. Sexual immorality, murder, adultery, stealing, and these kinds of sins seem much, much worse. Yet disobedience is a serious offense to God. As the Lord told Saul through the prophet Samuel in 1 Kings 15:22-23, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry." God takes disobedience to be just as evil as witchcraft, sorcery, divination, idol worship, and the grossest kinds of iniquity and immorality. Thus, it ought not to surprise us that He executed Achan in the book of Judges and Ananias and Sapphira in Acts because they disobeyed the command of God. Though one is an Old Testament event and the other a New Testament event, both stories serve to point out the same truth that 1 Kings 13 emphasizes. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His Word endures forever and does not change no matter who tampers with it, modifies it, and adds to it. Furthermore, anyone who doesn't listen to the Word of God and disobeys God is deserving of serious discipline from God. If even the good prophet was vulnerable to

deception, so too are we. We must know God's Word so that we can discern truth from error. Such is the lesson.

May we look to our own hearts to see if there are subtle rebellions brewing against the authority of Christ. Are we arguing with God about apologizing to someone? Are we fighting with the Spirit of God when He leads us to forgive someone? Have we gone in a direction that we know is not ordered by the Lord? Are we shrinking back in fear from a task to which God has called us? Are we making compromises, thinking that God will overlook such "minor offenses"? *We must remember that no matter what we have done for God in our lives, we are always vulnerable to deception, we always need the Word of God, and disobedience is never a trivial matter. Let us not wait a moment longer before we address any impulse in our hearts that is counter to the will of God before we incur the discipline of our Lord.*