

## Sermon 17, The Power of God's Word, 1 Kings 13

### **“Buried in that man’s tomb”--buried with Christ**

- I. The Word of God Fulfilled (vv. 1-24)**
  - A. God’s Word Judges Jeroboam’s Idolatry (vv. 1-10)**
  - B. God’s Word Judges the Judean Man of God (vv. 11-24)**
- II. The Word of God Confirmed (vv. 25-32)**
  - A. The Burial of the Man of God (vv. 25-30)**
  - B. The Burial of the Old Prophet (vv. 31-32)**
- III. The Word of God Ignored (vv. 33-34)**

This is undoubtedly one of the strangest stories in the Bible. Certainly we have to ask why this northern prophet, if he was a true prophet, was willing to lie to the southern man of God. We also have to wonder why a liar spoke the true word of God, and why God punished the disobedient man of God but not the lying prophet. And indeed, the passage produces more questions than these in our minds. But it is important to see that this chapter was not written to simply tell us a good story and gratify our curiosity, leaving us with a minimum of questions. The focus is relentlessly elsewhere--that is, on the word of the Lord. That’s why I’ve arranged the text under three points: we see the word of God fulfilled, confirmed, and ignored in this chapter. The phrase “the word of Yahweh” occurs nine times in this passage. Indeed, this passage demonstrates to us one major thing: God will always keep His word! It doesn’t matter whether that word is given to prophets or to kings; God always fulfills what He promised.

#### **I. The Word of God Fulfilled (vv. 1-24)**

So we pick up the first major section of the story, where we see the word of God fulfilled in the life of Jeroboam and in the life of the man of God from Judah.

##### **A. God’s Word Judges Jeroboam’s Idolatry (vv. 1-10)**

This chapter picks up where the previous one leaves off. Jeroboam is standing by the altar, ready to offer incense to this golden calf. This is an occasion at least as solemn as one of our ordinary morning worship services here. Can you imagine--a southerner bursting in the door, coming up front, and proceeding to denounce this pulpit while Allen was standing here preaching? Yet that, in effect, was what took place here. An unnamed man of God--that’s an alternative title for a prophet, and it will be used a great deal throughout the rest of this book and the next--stands up and denounces the altar. The address is to the altar, not because in their prescientific understanding they thought rocks could hear, but because direct address is a dramatic and effective way of getting the point across. Sometimes an overhead conversation is much more effective than one directly spoken to you.

Now we have a prophecy of King Josiah by name. Josiah ruled more than 300 years after the time of Jeroboam, but that did not stop God from knowing his name in advance. Here’s the

key part of the prophecy: Jeroboam's line will end. David's line will once again have dominion in Bethel. The false worship at Bethel will be terminated by this descendant of David. The wicked priests will be killed and the altar will be defiled by human bones.

That's a dramatic prophecy. That's intense. But is this guy just making it up? Not according to his miraculous powers. Then and there (I think that's what "that same day" means; there are no references in the OT to hours or minutes), the man of God declared a sign. Sure enough, the sign happened. The altar burst open. As Matthew Henry comments, surely the bystanders should have been convicted by the fact that the senseless stone broke under the word of God, but their hearts were impenetrable.

Indeed, Jeroboam was not impressed by this prophecy. He called for his guards to come and put a stop to this--but the Lord struck him with paralysis. The Hebrew literally says that his hand dried up. Now, as one commentator mentioned, even a king can be a fast learner. Jeroboam quickly changed his tune. Whereas he had just defied the word of God, he now saw the reality that the word of God is always fulfilled.

Notice how much mercy God extended to this king. Jeroboam didn't claim to be a servant of the true God. He tells this man of God, "Pray to *your* God." God literally intervened in Jeroboam's act of sin to let him know that there was mercy, and that he could turn at any time from his wicked way. God confirmed this by healing his hand.

Growing up, I was always disappointed by these rapid striking healings. When Miriam was struck with leprosy and when Jeroboam's hand withered, my ten-year-old self always thought it would be far more just if God had just left it that way. "That'll teach you, Jeroboam. Quit picking on my prophets!" But God is more merciful than I was, and than I am. He was willing to forgive Jeroboam, and He is willing to forgive you, and me.

God's other judgment on Jeroboam's idolatry is represented in the rest of this section. The refusal to have anything to do with the Northern Kingdom, except for a reproof, was an acted excommunication. By refusing to go to Jeroboam's house, accept his food, and take his presents, this man of God was making it very clear: God has cut off Northern Israel. They are not to be accorded the right hand of fellowship any longer. That is what the command not to eat and drink in Bethel meant.

### **B. God's Word Judges the Judean Man of God (vv. 11-24)**

Well, the narrative shifts. God's word to Jeroboam has been confirmed abundantly, both by the withered hand and crashing altar and by the man of God's acted excommunication. But God's word was not finished.

The scene switches to an old prophet in Bethel. Questions multiply. If this is a true prophet, why did his sons attend Jeroboam's bull session? If he wasn't, why didn't he go himself? In any case, this old prophet listened to his sons' "you'll-never-believe-what-happened-in-church-today" story, and he hurried after the southern man of God. The man was sitting under a tree not far away. Now, remember, it's ten miles from Bethel to Jerusalem. It's six miles to the border of Judah. This guy could have gotten home in three hours at a moderate walk. Yet he's

resting. When invited (again) to lunch in Bethel, he responds by quoting God's word once more. That's pretty good! Can you do that when enticed to sin? Can you open up with an excellent quote from God's word? Well, this man of God could. But it didn't save him. Knowing it doesn't help if you won't obey it. He listened to the lies of the old prophet and followed him home.

Now, why did the old prophet invite him? Theories differ. Some say he wanted to regain his self-respect, dwelling as he did in a territory that God had excommunicated. Others say that he was afraid of the desecration of his bones, and he wanted to keep his bones safe. In the end, that's what happened, of course. But he must have been a prophet indeed if he knew that his lie would set in motion a highly contingent train of events that would result in his bones being preserved. Regardless, the story doesn't answer that question. It presents the actions of these men so that we can see the utter reliability of the word of the Lord. If God promises it, it will happen. Period. That's the point of this story. God never lies.

But human beings do lie. The man of God goes, and halfway through lunch, the old prophet receives a true word of God--proving that God is capable of speaking, and speaking truly, through fallen men. This word simply says that the man of God will never reach the tomb of his fathers. That is exactly what happens. A lion comes and kills him. To show that it's not just one of those things, the lion clearly acts like a lion that's acting on instructions from God. The implications are clear: just because you're a prophet doesn't mean you're exempt from the word of the Lord. If you break that word, you will experience consequences, whether you're a king, a prophet, or a private citizen.

## **II. The Word of God Confirmed (vv. 25-32)**

So we have seen two ways in which the word of God came to pass. The next section shows how God confirms His word.

### **A. The Burial of the Man of God (vv. 25-30)**

The first way is simply by letting the man be buried. The graveside speech is simple: God has done this, and He has done it to show that His word always comes to pass. Lest you doubt it--well, here: it has come to pass. Now, why did the old prophet mourn when it was his lie that cause the death in the first place? Well, it goes to show that even a prophet, even a servant of God, can sin in a pretty terrible way. That doesn't mean that his grief and repentance is not real, even if it takes time to rebuild trust. Further, the fact that the prophet was willing to contribute his own tomb is significant.

### **B. The Burial of the Old Prophet (vv. 31-32)**

The significance lies in his desire to be buried with the old prophet. If you skip ahead to 2 Kings 23:17-18, you see that he was buried and his bones rested in peace with the bones of his victim.

What are we to make of this? Well, first of all, the two prophets seem to represent the destinies of their two nations. Israel seeks to corrupt Judah, often by deliberate lying. Only the word Judah brings can save Israel, yet Israel will ignore it. "Judah will be buried in an alien land, and Israel will be saved only insofar as it is joined to Judah."

The other thing we need to see is this: burial in the prophet's tomb means something. Romans 6:4 tells us what it means. We too must be buried with a prophet if we want to be saved. We too must place our faith in the word of God, knowing that it is our safety and our mercy. Those of us whose profession is to preach the word of God must remember that we must both preach it and keep it--rather than doing what these men did here.

The old prophet wanted to be buried with the man of God because he knew that the word of God was true, even in reference to the distant future.

### **III. The Word of God Ignored (vv. 33-34)**

But despite the faith of a once-lying prophet, and the manifest confirmation of the Word of the Lord, Jeroboam didn't get it. He didn't want to get it. He continued to ordain the unqualified. Just as God promised, it was this sin for which he would be punished.

So the choice is before you, family of God. Will you heed the word of the Lord? Or will you do your own thing? You have God's word. You have abundant evidence that it's completely true. So . . . will you repent, or will you press on in wickedness, believing that you can beat the power of God's word? The first step to heeding the word of God is to know it. Do you read the Bible? Do you ask God to help you remember it? Do you come to church and listen to what is proclaimed from the Bible here?

The second step is to ask God to help you keep His word. Without this, you will never obey His commandments. Sanctification is a work of God's free grace.

The third step is effort. Put forth the effort required to keep the law of God.

But in all three steps, remember that unless you are buried with Christ and risen again, none of it will matter. Take a page out of the old prophet's book. Be buried with Christ. Amen.