

**Message:**

Our verses direct our attention to two main characters. The man of God from Judah, whom we saw the last week confront Jeroboam, the king of the Northern kingdom of Israel. The man of God, who interrupted Jeroboam's worship, prophesied that a Judean king by the name of Josiah would one day destroy the false altar that Jeroboam had built. Jeroboam attempted to seize the man of God for making such claims, but God intervened protecting the man of God and freezing Jeroboam in his tracks. Jeroboam pleaded with the man of God to intercede to his God on his behalf and when he does, God restores Jeroboam's hand. Then Jeroboam invites the man of God over for something to eat, but the man of God informs Jeroboam that the Lord had explicitly told him not to eat or drink anything until he got back to Judah.

Our second main character is introduced to us in verse 11: *"Now an old prophet lived in Bethel. And his sons came and told him all that the man of God had done that day in Bethel. They also told to their father the words that he had spoken to the king."* I suppose this includes the man of God's words to Jeroboam concerning the Lord's instructions that he should not eat or drink until he returned to Judah. The old prophet from Bethel gets his donkey ready and takes off after the man of God from Judah. When he finds him sitting under an oak tree, verses 15-17 records a troublesome conversation: *"Come home with me and eat bread." And he said, "I may not return with you, or go in with you, neither will I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place, for it was said to me by the word of the LORD, 'You shall neither eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by the way that you came.'"*

The offer is made and the offer is refused. Much like we saw last week. But what is different these verses is that the old prophet doesn't take no for an answer. Verses 18-19 tells us that the old prophet from Bethel is about to successfully deceive the man of God, *"I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water.'" But he lied to him. So he went back with him and ate bread in his house and drank water."*

Then, if this episode is not odd enough already, the lying old prophet, after having deceived the man of God and successfully lured him to eat and drink, gets a real Word from the Lord: *"And as they sat at the table, the word of the LORD came to the prophet who had*

*brought him back. And he cried to the man of God who came from Judah, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because you have disobeyed the word of the LORD and have not kept the command that the LORD your God commanded you, but have come back and have eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which he said to you, "Eat no bread and drink no water," your body shall not come to the tomb of your fathers.'" (1 Kings 13:20-22).*

The man of God, knowing what he had done, simply gets on his donkey and proceeds on his way. However, along the way, a lion attacks the man of God killing him and then standing guard over him. All of this gets reported back to the old prophet from Bethel, who scurries back to his donkey to see for himself. He finds the man of God from Judah just as it was reported, *"And he went and found his body thrown in the road, and the donkey and the lion standing beside the body. The lion had not eaten the body or torn the donkey" (1 Kings 13:28).* Upon finding the man of God from Judah, the old prophet from Bethel has him buried in his own personal tomb, with instructions that when he eventually dies he should be buried right next to the man of God. Then, the old man from Bethel concludes with a confirmation of the man of God's prophecy (back in verse 2), *"For the saying that he called out by the word of the LORD against the altar in Bethel and against all the houses of the high places that are in the cities of Samaria shall surely come to pass" (1 Kings 13:32).*

One of the strange components of this entire episode is the namelessness of the main characters. What is the name of the man of God from Judah? We aren't told his name. What is the name of the old prophet from Bethel? We aren't told his name either. I would suggest that their names have been withheld, not to protect them, but to make a bigger point. This episode historically reveals the real account of these two men, but this narrative also was intended to instruct the entire kingdom of Judah something very vital about them as a people. It was common for the Old Testament prophet's lives to serve as object lessons. What the object lesson of these two men certainly did come to fruition in Israel and Judah.

Our two main characters are representative of the two distinct kingdoms where they are from. The man of God from Judah represents the Southern kingdom of Judah, while the old man from Bethel represents the Northern kingdom of Israel. Like the man of God, Judah has God's truth to act on and live by and like the old prophet from Bethel, Israel is completely given over to a live, living and worshipping falsely.

With that said, the tragedy that is played out between these two men will be the tragedy that gets played out between these two kingdoms. Judah will turn from the truth that they have received from God only to slowly and increasingly become like Israel. As time progresses in their two histories as kingdoms, Israel will seduce Judah with its lies. Judah will flirt with and then go all in for Israel's lies and false worship.

As we find ourselves perplexed over how a the man of God from Judah would turn from what he knows God wanted him to do, we must face the reality that there is something internally flawed with the man of God. Simply knowing what he should do, does not translate into the ability to do it. What the Southern kingdom of Judah must see about themselves is that they have the condition that the man of God from Judah suffered from: he knew the command of God, but he was powerless to refuse believing a lie. The man of God as well as the hearts of the people of Judah possesses hearts with a penchant for believing lies. Judah will exchange the truth of God for a lie. Furthermore, when mercifully shown this, they, like Jeroboam, don't run to the Lord's mercy, but further away from it in idolatry and disobedience.

As our passage started off last week, God will raise up a king named Josiah who will tear down the false altar at Bethel. Josiah comes (about 300 years later) and as 2 Kings 23 records, Josiah tears down the false altar at Bethel as well as, with the rediscovery of the Word of God, enacts great reforms for the Judah's life and worship. Josiah re-centers Judah back to God's truth, but even his reforms would be short lived, for his reforms could not do what most needed done: curing the heart's posture of turning from truth and embracing lies. It will take One greater than Josiah to cure hearts. The good news is that He has come: Jesus Christ, having lived, died, and been raised, has enacted a new covenant with the greatest of all provisions—new hearts to serve, and follow, and worship God.

**Implications:**

Word of God does not contradict itself. The issue in our passage is not simply that the man of God was told one thing by God and the old prophet from Bethel told him something completely different from God. The crisis here is not that the Word of God cannot be depended upon due to the fickleness of the Word's God. The Word of God is perfect; God does not talk out of both sides of His mouth. His Word is true and our lives can

be anchored to God's Words with the utmost of confidence. Our passage repeatedly impresses upon us the perfections of God's Word: it predicts an event that will occur 300 year later, it gives an immediate sign that what it promises will come true, it arrests Jeroboam and then heals Jeroboam, it moves a lying prophet to declare its truth, it dispatches a lion to kill the man of God but then restrains the lion from devouring him.

We must ever be on guard concerning temptation, not only in the big moments, but also the small, mundane moments. The man of God passed the temptation with the might king of Israel, but faltered and failed the temptation with the old man from Bethel.

We will not mature spiritually simply by knowing the commands of God. Our thoughts can and must be informed by the commands of God's Word. We sin against God and disobey Him, not because we do not know His commands, but in spite of knowing them. Most of our sins are completed with full knowledge of what God has said. And yet, we find ourselves engaging in the very things we know that we ought not to do as well as failing to do the things that we know that we should do. Neither our sins of commission nor omission are done in genuine ignorance.

We feel the cold chill of reality blowing over our souls when we discover that the man of God easily exchanges the truth of God for a lie. We are perplexed by this passage, perhaps in part, because the implications to us are startling. We can know and even recite the Word of God, but that does not insure that we can obey the Word of God. Maybe we see that what's wrong with him is what's wrong with us: we know what God says, and we turn from it. Maybe we see that the man of God from Judah has a fundamental heart flaw and that we share that flaw with him. Maybe we are seeing that we need more than knowledge of what God commands; we need the desire to do what we know.

The information that our hearts and minds possess is not the sole factor in determining what we do. We know the truth, but we find that knowing the truth alone is insufficient to overcome sin and disobedience. Why? Because we have powerful passions within us at work-passions that have a penchant for lies. Take the matters of greed and worry and lust. Why do we find ourselves so easier swayed toward these sins? Is it because we are not previously informed that these choices displease God? We succumb to these sins

because we perceive that they make a better offer to us. Sin typically does an end run around rationality and goes right for our desires, that is our affections, expectations, cravings, loves, or aspirations. Sin comes easy for us when temptation allures us with what we perceive as better promises. Sin comes easy for us when temptation suggests that God is not good, that His promises are small.

Our passage itself supports the call to live by God's promises and not merely His commands. Our passage began last week with a declaration of what God promises to do: destroy Jeroboam's altar. This promise should have driven both Jeroboam's and Judah's lives. We are privy to see in 2 Kings 23 that God's promise comes true.

Therefore, we must battle sin and temptation, not simply with a rehearsal of God's commands, but with a renewal of God's promises. We address the inordinate affections of our hearts, by redirecting them to a better offer. God's promises are that better offer. God's promises are designed to appeal to our desires. The battle is fought in our hearts, not simply by knowing what God commands, but by an awareness of what God promises.

Two qualifiers: first, God's promises are only for those who are in Christ Jesus; second, we will not stand a chance of embracing God's promises unless we are in Christ Jesus. Christian obedience is not driven by commands but by promises. Christ offers Greater promises than sin offers, Christ gives us new hearts to embrace His promises. We are driven by God's promises and empowered by Jesus to live by those promises. Therefore, the fight is to direct our gaze to Jesus and the His promises.

Our children cannot be raised to be Christians merely by giving them commands. It is certainly good to teach and reteach our children the commands of God. However, we will never see our children's hearts captured for the cause of true godliness if all we give them is the commands of God. We can use the disobedience as an opportunity that merely knowing God's commands is insufficient to give us the heart that God requires. We can use disobedience as an opportunity to help them see that their hearts and what their hearts desire is the problem: the problem that only God can fix. Therefore, we should use the occasion of their disobedience to direct them, not only to what God calls them to do, but also to His mercy for only His mercy in Christ Jesus can give them a new heart.