

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

A man of God prophesies against Jeroboam's altar, and foretells the destruction of that altar, and of its idolatrous priests by Josiah; and gives Jeroboam a sign that the prophecy should be accomplished, 1 Kings 13:1-3. Jeroboam is enraged, and orders the man of God to be seized; and stretching out his hand for this purpose, his arm dries up, 1 Kings 13:4. The altar is rent, and the ashes poured out, according to the sign given by the man of God; and at his intercession Jeroboam's arm is restored, 1 Kings 13:5, 1 Kings 13:6. Jeroboam wishes to engage him in his service, but he refuses, and tells him that he was ordered by God not even to eat or drink in that place; and he accordingly departs, 1 Kings 13:7-10. An old prophet that dwelt at Beth-el, hearing of this, rides after the man of God; deceives him; brings him back to his house, and persuades him to eat and drink, 1 Kings 13:11-19. While he is eating, the word of the Lord comes to the old prophet, and he foretells the death of the man of God; who departing is met by a lion, and slain, 1 Kings 13:20-25. On hearing this, the old prophet goes to the place, finds the carcass, brings it home, burns it, and mourns over it, charging his sons to bury him, when dead, in the same grave, 1 Kings 13:26-32. Notwithstanding these warnings, Jeroboam continues in his idolatry, 1 Kings 13:33, 1 Kings 13:34.

Verse 1

There came a man of God - Who this was we know not. The Chaldee, Syriac, and Arabic call him a prophet. The Vulgate and Septuagint follow the Hebrew, **ישׁ עֲלֹהִים** (ish elohim) means a Divine person, one wholly devoted to God's service. Some have thought it was Shemaiah, others Joel, and others Iddo. It could not have been the latter, for he wrote the acts of Jeroboam, 2 Chronicles 9:29, and the prophet was killed before he returned home; but conjecture is idle on such a subject.

Jeroboam stood by the altar - Like gods, like priest; he made himself high priest, and he took of the lowest of the people, and made them priests of the high places; they proved themselves to be fools by worshipping calves.

Verse 2

He cried against the altar - He denounced the destruction of this idolatrous system.

A child shall be born - Josiah by name - This is one of the most remarkable and most singular prophecies in the Old Testament. It here most circumstantially foretells a fact which took place three hundred and forty years after the prediction; a fact which was attested by the two nations. The Jews, in whose behalf this prophecy was delivered, would guard it most sacredly; and it was the interest of the Israelites, against whom it was levelled, to impugn its authenticity and expose its falsehood, had this been possible. This prediction not only showed the knowledge of God, but his power. He gave, as it were, this warning to idolatry, that it might be on its guard, and defend itself against this Josiah whenever a person of that name should be found sitting on the throne of David; and no doubt it was on the alert, and took all prudent measures for its own defense; but all in vain, for Josiah, in the eighteenth year of his reign, literally accomplished this prophecy, as we may read, 2 Kings 23:15-20. And from this latter place we find that the prophecy had three permanent testimonials of its truth.

1.The house of Israel;

2.The house of Judah; and,

3.The tomb of the prophet who delivered this prophecy, who, being slain by a lion, was brought back and buried at Beth-el, the superscription on whose tomb remained till the day on which Josiah destroyed that altar, and burnt dead men's bones upon it. See above, 2 Kings 23:16-18.

Verse 3

And he gave a sign - A miracle to prove that the prophecy should be fulfilled in its season.

Verse 4

Lay hold on him - No doubt, stretching out his own hand at the same time, through rage, pride, and haste, to execute his own orders.

And his hand dried up - The whole arm became suddenly rigid; the nerves no longer communicated their influence, and the muscles ceased to obey the dictates of the will.

Verse 5

The altar was also rent - It split or clave of its own accord; and, as the split parts would decline at the top from the line of their perpendicular, so the ashes and coals would fall off, or be poured out.

Verse 6

Entreat - the face of the Lord thy God - The face of God is his favor, as we see in many parts of the sacred writings. He says, thy God; for Jeroboam knew that he was not his God, for he was now in the very act of acknowledging other gods, and had no portion in the God of Jacob.

And the king's hand was restored - Both miracles were wrought to show the truth of the Jewish religion, and to convince this bold innovator of his wickedness, and to reclaim him from the folly and ruinous tendency of his idolatry.

Verse 7

Come home with me - and I will give thee a reward - Come and be one of my priests, and I will give thee a proper salary.

Verse 9

For so it was charged me - Eat no bread, etc. - That is, Have no kind of communication with those idolaters. He was charged also not to return by the way that he came; probably lest the account of what was done should have reached the ears of any of the people through whom he had passed, and he suffer inconveniences on the account, either by persecution from the idolaters, or from curious people delaying him, in order to cause him to give an account of the transactions which took place at Beth-el. This is a reason why he should not return by the same way; but what the reason of this part of the charge was, if not the above, is not easy to see.

Verse 11

An old prophet - Probably once a prophet of the Lord, who had fallen from his steadfastness, and yet not so deeply as to lose the knowledge of the true God, and join with Jeroboam in his idolatries. We find he was not at the king's sacrifice, though his sons were there; and perhaps even they were there, not as idolaters, but as spectators of what was done.

Verse 14

And went after the man of God - I can hardly think that this was with any evil design. His sons had given him such an account of the prediction, the power, and influence of this prophet, that he wished to have a particular acquaintance with him, in order that he might get farther information relative to the solemn import of the prophecy which he had denounced against the idolatry at Beth-el. This good man could not have been an object of the old prophet's malevolence.

Verse 18

An angel spake unto me - That he lied unto him is here expressly asserted, and is amply proved by the event. But why should he deceive him? The simple principle of curiosity to know all about this prediction, and the strange facts which had taken place, of which he had heard at second hand by means of his sons, was sufficient to induce such a person to get the intelligence he wished by any means. We may add to this, that, as he found the man of God sitting under an oak, probably faint with fatigue and fasting, for he had had no refreshment, his humanity might have led him to practice this deception, in order to persuade him to take some refreshment. Having fallen from God, as I have supposed, 1 Kings 13:11, his own tenderness of conscience was gone; and he would not scruple to do a moral evil, if even a temporal good could come of it. Again, is it not possible that the old prophet was himself deceived? for, though he lied unto him, it is possible that he was not conscious of his lie, for Satan, as an angel of light, might have deceived him in order to lead him to deceive the other. He does not say, as the man of God did, It was said to me by the word of the Lord; no: but, An angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord. And I think it very likely that an angel did appear to him on the occasion; an angel of darkness and idolatry, in the garb of an angel of light, who wished to use him as an instrument to bring discredit on the awful transactions which had lately taken place, and to destroy him who had foretold the destruction of his power and influence.

Verse 19

So he went back with him - He permitted himself to be imposed on; he might have thought, as he had accomplished every purpose for which God sent him, and had actually begun to return by another way, God, who had given him the charge, had authority to say, "As thy purpose was to obey every injunction, even to the letter, I now permit thee to go with this old prophet, and take some refreshment." Now God might as well have dispensed with this part of the injunction, as he did in the case of Abraham: Take thy son Isaac, thy only

son, whom thou lovest - and offer him for a burnt-offering; but, when he saw his perfect readiness, he dispensed with the actual offering, and accepted a ram in his stead. Thus much may be said in vindication of the man of God: but if this be so, why should he be punished with death, for doing what he had reason and precedent to believe might be the will of God? I answer: He should not have taken a step back, till he had remission of the clause from the same authority which gave him the general message. He should have had it from the word of the Lord to himself, in both cases, as Abraham had; and not taken an apparent contradiction of what was before delivered unto him, from the mouth of a stranger, who only professed to have it from an angel, who pretended to speak unto him by the word of the Lord. In this, and in this alone, lay the sinfulness of the act of the man of God, who came out of Judah.

Verse 20

The word of the Lord came unto the prophet that brought him back - *“A great clamor,”* says Dr. Kennicott, *“has been raised against this part of the history, on account of God’s denouncing sentence on the true prophet by the mouth of the false prophet: but if we examine with attention the original words here, they will be found to signify either he who brought him back; or, whom he had brought back; for the very same words, אֲשֶׁר הֵשִׁיבוּ (asher heshibo), occur again in 1 Kings 13:23, where they are now translated, whom he had brought back; and where they cannot be translated otherwise. This being the case, we are at liberty to consider the word of the Lord as delivered to the true prophet thus brought back; and then the sentence is pronounced by God himself, calling to him out of heaven, as in Genesis 22:11. And that this doom was thus pronounced by God, not by the false prophet, we are assured in 1 Kings 13:26: ‘The Lord hath delivered him unto the lion, according to the word of the Lord which He spake unto him.’ Josephus expressly asserts that the sentence was declared by God to the true prophet. The Arabic asserts the same.*

Verse 21

And he - That is, according to the above interpretation, the voice of God from heaven addressing the man of God, the old prophet having nothing to do in this business.

Verse 22

Thy carcass shall not come - This intimated to him that he was to die an untimely death, but probably did not specify by what means.

Verse 24

A lion met him - and slew him - By permitting himself to be seduced by the old prophet, when he should have acted only on the expressly declared counsel of God, he committed the sin unto death; that is, such a sin as God will punish with the death of the body, while he extends mercy to the soul. See my notes on 1 John 5:16 (note), 1 John 5:17 (note).

From the instance here related, we see, as in various other cases, that often judgment begins at the house of God. The true prophet, for receiving that as a revelation from God which was opposed to the revelation which himself had received, and which was confirmed by so many miracles, is slain by a lion, and his body deprived of the burial of his fathers; while the wicked king, and the old fallen prophet, are both permitted to live! If this was severity to the man of God, it was mercy to the others, neither of whom was prepared to meet his judge. Here we may well say, *“Self the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”*

Verse 28

The lion had not eaten the carcass, nor torn the ass - All here was preternatural. The lion, though he had killed the man, does not devour him; the ass stands quietly by, not fearing the lion; and the lion does not attempt to tear the ass: both stand as guardians of the fallen prophet. How evident is the hand of God in all!

Verse 30

Alas, my brothers - This lamentation is very simple, very short, and very pathetic. Perhaps the old prophet said it as much in reference to himself, who had been the cause of his untimely death, as in reference to the man of God, whose corpse he now committed to the tomb. But the words may be no more than the burden of each line of the lamentation which was used on this occasion. See instances of this among the Asiatics in the note on Jeremiah 22:18 (note).

Verse 31

Lay my bones beside his bones - This argues a strong conviction in the mind of the old prophet, that the deceased was a good and holy man of God; and he is willing to have place with him in the general resurrection.

Verse 32

In the cities of Samaria - It is most certain that Samaria, or as it is called in Hebrew Shomeron, was not built at this time. We are expressly told that Omri, king of Israel, founded this city on the hill which he bought for two talents of silver, from a person of the name of Shemer, after whom he called the city Samaria or Shomeron; (see 1 Kings 16:24); and this was fifty years after the death of Jeroboam. How then could the old prophet speak of Samaria, not then in existence, unless he did it by the spirit of prophecy, calling things that are not as though they were; as the man of God called Josiah by name three hundred years before he was born? Some suppose that the historian adds these words because Samaria existed in his time, and he well knew that it did not exist in the time of the old prophet; for himself, in the sixteenth chapter, gives us the account of its foundation by Omri. After all, it is possible that God might have given this revelation to the old prophet; and thus by anticipation which is the language of prophecy, spoke of Samaria as then existing. This is the solution of Houbigant, and is thought sound by many good critics.

Verse 33

Jeroboam returned not from his evil way - There is something exceedingly obstinate and perverse, as well as blinding and infatuating, in idolatry. The prediction lately delivered at Beth-el, and the miracles wrought in confirmation of it, were surely sufficient to have affected and alarmed any heart, not wholly and incorrigibly hardened; and yet they had no effect on Jeroboam!

Made - the lowest of the people priests - So hardy was this bad man in his idolatry that he did not even attempt to form any thing according to the model of God's true worship: he would have nothing like God and truth. In his calves, or rather oxen, he copied the manner of Egypt; and in the formation of his priesthood, he seems to have gone aside from all models. Amongst the worst of heathens, the priesthood was filled with respectable men; but Jeroboam took of the lowest of the people, and put them in that office.

Whosoever would, he consecrated him - He made no discrimination: any vagabond that offered was accepted even of those who had no character, who were too idle to work, and too stupid to learn.

Verse 34

And this thing became sin - These abominations were too glaring, and too insulting to the Divine Majesty, to be permitted to last; therefore his house was cut off, and destroyed from the face of the earth.

A Holy priesthood, a righteous ministry, is a blessing to any state, because it has a most powerful effect on the morals of the community; inducing order, sobriety, and habits of industry, among the people: on the contrary, the profligacy of the clergy, and false principles of religion, are the most likely to unsettle a kingdom, and to bring about destructive revolutions in the state. This is the principle on which all national establishments of religion were originally formed. The state thought proper to secure a permanency of religion, that religion might secure the safety of the state; because it was supposed from the general aversion of men from good, that, if left to themselves, they would have no religion at all. Where the religion of the country is pure, founded solely on the oracles of God, it deserves the utmost sanction of the state, as well as the attention of every individual. A Christian state has surely authority to enact, The Christian religion is and shall be the religion of this land; and, prejudice apart, should not the laws provide for the permanence of this system? Is the form of Christianity likely to be preserved in times of general profligacy, if the laws do not secure its permanence? What would our nation have been if we had not had a version of the sacred writings established by the authority of the laws: and a form of sound words for general devotion established by the same authority? Whatever the reader may do the writer thanks God for the religious establishment of his country. For abuses in church or state, he is the last to contend.