

~Other Speakers G-L: Aaron Hills:

"So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water" (1 Kings 13:19).

The Bible is the world's greatest textbook on morals. It often teaches by personal incidents and story illustrations. The most important truths are sometimes wrapped up in a narrative that would delight a child, or interest a sage.

We have here a long chapter detailing the experiences of God trying to reach the conscience of a king and a nation, and His failure to do it because of the religious short-coming of two preachers, who ought to have been better men. It is enough to move the clerical profession at least to serious self-examination.

I. WE ARE INTRODUCED TO AN UNNAMED "MAN OF GOD."

Is not that name enough to give personal distinction to any man? It is like the title God gave to Abraham, "And he was called the friend of God." "But thou, Israel art the seed of Abraham my friend." So God called the great lawgiver "my servant Moses;" and called "Daniel beloved of the Lord." God has splendid titles for His very own.

Who is "a man of God"?

1. He is one of the regenerated. A man who of choice and full purpose of heart is living in deliberate and persistent rebellion against God would not hold the glorious title, "a man of God."

2. This "man of God" at least was commissioned by the Almighty to perform an unpleasant and dangerous task. "And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of Jehovah unto Bethel: and Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar by the word of Jehovah, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith Jehovah; Behold, a son shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he sacrifice the priests of the high-places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall they burn upon thee. And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which Jehovah hath spoken: Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out.

"And it came to pass, when the king heard the saying of the man of God, Jeroboam put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not draw it back again to him. The altar also rent, and the ashes poured out, from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of Jehovah. And the king said to the man of God, Entreat now the favor of Jehovah thy God, and pray for me, that my hand be restored to me again. And the man of God entreated Jehovah, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before" (R. V.) .

After all this no one could make Jeroboam believe that this was not a real "man of God," for

3. God used him and heard his prayers, put a prophecy in his mouth, and brought it to pass, and punished the idolatrous king who thought to do him violence. Jehovah says, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm."

4. He is sixteen times in this chapter called "the man of God," and God used him as if he owned him, body and soul. St. Paul, said of God, "Whose I am, and whom I serve." There can be no doubt about such a character.

5. He proved himself to be "the man of God" because he was unbribable. The humbled king offered him a reward if he would come back and refresh himself in his palace. But he replied, "If thou wilt give me half thy house, I will not go with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: for so was it charged me by the word of Jehovah, saying, Thou shalt eat no bread, nor drink water, neither return by the way that thou camest. So he went another way" (R. V.). A true "man of God" is not to be bribed by high offices, nor big pulpits, or large salaries, or any royal honors that this old world can offer. He sets his face like a flint against all sin.

II. "Now THERE DWELT AN OLD PROPHET IN BETHEL."

This one is called "a man of God." He was probably backslidden, and had compromised under the influence of Jeroboam, and God would not use him. More than likely, also, he was jealous because God had sent clear to

Judah to find a man who would deal faithfully with the wicked king.

When he heard from his son what "the man of God" had said and done, he followed after him to meet him and entertain him. He found "the man of God" sitting under an oak, and invited him to his home; but he received the same answer that was given to the king. "I may not return with thee, for it was said to me by the word of Jehovah," etc. And the old backslidden prophet said unto him, "I also am a prophet as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of Jehovah, saying, Bring him back with thee into thy house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him. SO he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water." Verses 18-19 R. V.

III. HERE COMES THE TRAGEDY OF A NOBLE LIFE.

"The man of God" trusted and honored and used by Jehovah, who could not be bribed or coaxed to be untrue to God, is deceived by a miserable lie in the mouth of a backslidden preacher. Oh, the devices of Satan!

We have trained eight hundred students to preach holiness. Some of the brightest of them, with the richest experience, and a dear witness of the Holy Spirit to sanctification, and a success in preaching holiness that was more than human, have met some backslidden church official who told them there was nothing in the doctrine of sanctification, and invited them to .go back and eat and drink with the old crowd in the backslidden land. In absolute opposition to the clear testimony of God, they believed the devil's lie, and went.

That deceived, disobedient prophet was no more truly slain by the lion, than those precious young men have been slain as to their marked power and usefulness. They indeed have their reward in big pulpits and large salaries in backslidden Bethel; but the unction and glory of their work has departed and "Ichabod" is written across their lives.

To deny and go back on God's witness to a personal experience, is fearfully like the sin of blaspheming against the Holy Ghost which hath never forgiveness.

IV. NOTE THE FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES OF DISOBEDIENCE FROM TRUSTING TO A LIE AND A LIAR.

1. It was fatal to the noble man of God himself. It cost him his life, even if it did not cost him his eternal salvation.

2. It resulted in the final ruin of Jeroboam, and of his dynasty. We may well believe that the fearful warning of "the man of God," and the withering of his arm, and its restoration in answer to prayer, made a profound impressions on the king's wicked heart. It must have moved him mightily to repentance and reformation. But then "the man of God" himself was slain by the lion for disobedience, "after these things," says the holy record, "Jeroboam returned not from his evil way" (R. V.) but pushed on in wickedness until he and his house, and nation were destroyed from the face of the earth.

V. NOTE THE SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF LITTLE THINGS.

1. "The man of God" was overtaken by the lying prophet, "sitting under an oak." If he had not been acting so leisurely, but had hurried along to the completion of God's business, he would not have been overtaken, and all would have been changed.

2. It seems a "peccadillo" to sneering critics what a man eats, or when, or where, or what road he takes. But God thinks differently. It made a profound difference to Eve and Adam and "the man of God," what and where they ate and drank. With some, God tells us, "not even to eat."

3. It seems to many, a matter of indifference whether we receive the Holy Spirit or not. But we may well believe, if "the man of God had been filled with the Spirit he would not have believed the devil's lie in Opposition to the expressed command of God. And, doubtless, if the old prophet had been sanctified, he would not have been a backslidden liar, guilty of the death of "the man of God," Jeroboam and his nations might have been saved, and God more glorified.