

## **Facing Change: A Lesson From I Kings 13**

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The man's heart was filled with dread. Reflecting on the past few days, the prophet from Judah admitted to himself that he had made a fatal mistake. And now he rode his donkey toward the certain punishment of God.

"If only I had stopped to consider God's instruction!" he thought. "If only I had questioned the false prophet's lies!"

A few days earlier, God had called him to a special mission, sending him through the hostile country of Israel to denounce their king Jeroboam. Keenly remembering his fear as he had walked through the worshipping throng at Bethel, he had confronted the king, who, acting as priest, was preparing to offer incense on the altar (I Kings 13:1).

In a clear and strong voice, he had delivered God's message: "O altar, altar! Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men's bones shall be burned on you'" (verse 2).

Then, turning to the king, he had said, "This is the sign which the LORD has spoken: Surely the altar shall split apart, and the ashes on it shall be poured out" (verse 3). God wanted Jeroboam and all Israel to know how displeased He was with their idolatry.

Furious, Jeroboam had raised his arm, shouting, "Arrest him!" But God had suddenly intervened, and the king's arm had withered and frozen in place. At the same instant a huge crack had rent the altar and its ashes had poured out, just as the prophet had spoken. Abruptly, the king's attitude had changed, and with as much dignity as he could muster, he had begged for the prophet to intercede on his behalf. After the prophet had prayed, the king's arm was restored to normal (verses 4-6).

Jeroboam had been so grateful that he invited the prophet to dine with him, but remembering God's special instructions, he had refused, saying, "If you were to give me half your house, I would not go in with you; nor would I eat bread nor drink water in this place. For so it was commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'You shall not eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the same way you came'" (verses 8-9). With that, he had turned and rode for home.

The problem had developed not long thereafter. While the prophet had stopped to rest under an oak tree, an old man had ridden up, and after a few pleasantries, invited the prophet to his house to eat. At first the prophet had declined, but he was persuaded after the old man had explained to him that he was also a prophet and that an angel had revealed to him that it was now all right for him to eat and drink (verses 11-18).

They had returned to Bethel and sat down to a meal. As they sat at the table, the old man had suddenly said, "Thus says the LORD: 'Because you have disobeyed the word of the LORD, and have not kept the commandment which the LORD your God commanded you, but you came back, ate bread, and drank water in the place of which the LORD said to you, "Eat no bread and drink no

water," your corpse shall not come to the tomb of your fathers'" (verses 21-22). Stunned, the prophet had saddled his donkey and continued on.

A short time later, they found his untouched body by the road, a lion and the man's donkey standing still and silent by his body (verses 24-25).

### **Lessons to Be Learned**

What personal lessons can we learn? The most obvious lesson is that God means exactly what He says. When God says He wants us to do something in a specific way, we should neither add nor subtract from it.

A less obvious lesson is found in what caused the prophet not to obey God's commands.

What made him let down? He had been under great pressure to stand up for God. Walking through thousands to confront the king, he had overcome great obstacles. After he delivered God's message with boldness, however, he felt the pressure was off. He may have assumed God would not mind if he relaxed after all he had been through. But when he relaxed, let down and believed a lie, it cost him his life!

What should he have done when faced with conflicting information?

*He should have examined the man bringing the message* . He would have quickly determined the man's beliefs and identity as a prophet of Bethel, not of God. Having just warned Jeroboam how displeased God was with Israel's false religious practices, he would have easily avoided the trap.

*He should have reviewed God's original commission more deeply, remembering that God does not change (Malachi 3:6)*. The prophet did review what God had said, but his response to the false prophet's offer showed his willingness to compromise. Instead of holding fast, he responded emotionally rather than thoughtfully.

*He should have asked God for guidance*. Having given the original instructions, and backing him throughout his mission, God would have been more than willing to answer the prophet's prayer requesting the truth had he taken the time to ask.

Concerning these latter days Christ says, "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5). The apostle John echoes this warning and gives us advice: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (I John 4:1).

As time progresses toward Christ's return, we will face many changes. But we need not be too concerned, if we take time to examine the source of the change, to consider the truth we have learned and most importantly to go to God in serious, earnest prayer for understanding. If we use the time profitably, we will not react like the prophet from Judah and fail our calling and commission. We will have learned the lessons of I Kings 13.