

# CHAPTER 13

In the close of the foregoing chapter we left Jeroboam attending his altar at Beth-el, and there we find him in the beginning of this, when he received a testimony from God against his idolatry and apostasy. This was sent to him by a prophet, a man of God that lived in Judah, who is the principal subject of the story of this chapter, where we are told,

## I. What passed between him and the new king.

1. The prophet threatened Jeroboam's altar (v. 1, 2), and gave him a sign (v. 3), which immediately came to pass (v. 5).
2. The king threatened the prophet, and was himself made another sign, by the withering of his hand (v. 4), and the restoring of it upon his submission and the prophet's intercession (v. 6).
3. The prophet refused the kindness offered him thereupon (v. 7-10).

## II. What passed between him and the old prophet.

1. The old prophet fetched him back by a lie, and gave him entertainment (v. 11-19).
2. He, for accepting it, in disobedience to the divine command, is threatened with death (v. 20-22). And,
3. The threatening is executed, for he is slain by a lion (v. 23, 24), and buried at Beth-el (v. 25-32).
4. Jeroboam is hardened in his idolatry (v. 33, 34). "Thy judgments, Lord, are a great deep."

## <1113>1 KINGS 13:1-10

### THE WITHERING OF JEROBOAM'S HAND

Here is,

I. A messenger sent to Jeroboam, to signify to him God's displeasure against his idolatry, v. 1. The army of Judah that aimed to ruin him was countermanded, and might not draw a sword against him (<1124>1 Kings 12:24); but a prophet of Judah is, instead thereof, sent to reclaim him from

his evil way, and is sent in time, while he is but dedicating his altar, before his heart is hardened by the deceitfulness of his sin; for God delights not in the death of sinners, but would rather they would burn and live. How bold was the messenger that durst attack the king in his pride and interrupt the solemnity he was proud of! Those that go on God's errand must not fear the face of man; they know who will bear them out. How kind was he that sent him to warn Jeroboam of the wrath of God *revealed from heaven* against his *ungodliness* and *unrighteousness!*

**II.** The message delivered in God's name, not whispered, but cried with a loud voice, denoting both the prophet's courage, that he was neither afraid nor ashamed to own it, and his earnestness, that he desired to be heard and heeded by all that were present, who were not a few, on this great occasion. It was directed, not to Jeroboam nor to the people, but to the altar, the stones of which would sooner hear and yield than those who were mad upon their idols and deaf to divine calls. Yet, in threatening the altar, God threatened the founder and worshippers, to whom it was as dear as their own souls, and who might conclude, "If God's wrath fasten upon the lifeless guiltless altar, how shall we escape?" That which was foretold concerning the altar (v. 2) was that, in process of time, a prince of the house of David, Josiah by name, should pollute this altar by sacrificing the idolatrous priests themselves upon it, and burning the bones of dead men. Let Jeroboam know and be sure,

- 1.** That the altar he now consecrated should be desecrated. Idolatrous worship will not continue, but the word of the Lord will endure for ever.
- 2.** That the *priests of the high places* he now made should themselves be made sacrifices to the justice of God, and the first and only sacrifices upon this altar that would be pleasing to him. If the offering be such as is an abomination to God, it will follow, of course, that the offerers must themselves fall under his wrath, which will abide upon them, since it is not otherwise transmitted.
- 3.** That this should be done by a branch *of the house of David*. That family which he and his kingdom had despised and treacherously deserted should recover so much power as to demolish that altar which he thought to establish; so that right and truth should at length prevail, both in civil and sacred matters, notwithstanding the present triumphs of those that were given to change the fear both *of God and the king*. It was about 356 years

ere this prediction was fulfilled, yet it was spoken of as sure and nigh at hand, for a thousand years with God are but as one day. Nothing more contingent and arbitrary than the giving of names to persons, yet Josiah was here named above 300 years before he was born. Nothing future is hidden from God. There are *names in the book* of the divine prescience (<sup>304B</sup>Philippians 4:3), *names written in heaven*.

**III.** A sign is given for the confirming of the truth of this prediction, that the altar should be shaken to pieces by an invisible power and the ashes of the sacrifice scattered (v. 3), which came to pass immediately, v. 5. This was,

1. A proof that the prophet was sent of God, *who confirmed the word with this sign following*, <sup>416D</sup>Mark 16:20.
2. A present indication of God's displeasure against these idolatrous sacrifices. How could the gift be acceptable when the altar that should sanctify it was an abomination?
3. It was a reproach to the people, whose hearts were harder than these stones and rent not under the word of the Lord.
4. It was a specimen of what should be done to it in the accomplishment of this prophecy by Josiah; it was now rent, in token of its being then ruined.

**IV.** Jeroboam's hand withered, which he stretched out to seize or smite the man of God, v. 4. Instead of trembling at the message, as he might well have done, he assaulted him that brought it, in defiance of the wrath of which he was warned and contempt of that grace which sent him the warning. *Rebuke a sinner and he will hate thee*, and do thee a mischief if he can; yet God's prophets must rather expose themselves than betray their trust: he that employs them will protect them, and restrain the wrath of man, as he did Jeroboam's here by withering his hand, so that he could neither hurt the prophet nor draw it in to help himself. When his hand was stretched out to burn incense to his calves it was not withered; but, when it is stretched out against a prophet, he shall have no use of it till he humble himself. Of all the wickedness of the wicked there is none more provoking to God than their malicious attempts against his prophets, of whom he has said, *Touch them not, do them no harm*. As this was a punishment of Jeroboam, and answering to the sin, so it was the deliverance of the prophet. God has many ways of disabling the enemies of his church from

executing their mischievous purposes. Jeroboam's inability to pull in his hand made him a spectacle to all about him, that they might see and fear. If God, in justice, harden the hearts of sinners, so that the hand they have stretched out in sin they cannot pull in again by repentance, that is a spiritual judgment, represented by this, and much more dreadful.

**V.** The sudden healing of the hand that was suddenly dried up, upon his submission, v. 6. That word of God which should have touched his conscience humbled him not, but this which *touched his bone and his flesh* brings down his proud spirit. He looks for help now,

**1.** Not from his calves, but from God only, from his power and his favour. He wounded, and no hand but his can make whole.

**2.** Not by his own sacrifice or incense, but by the prayer and intercession of the prophet, whom he had just now threatened and aimed to destroy. The time may come when those that hate the preaching would be glad of the prayers of faithful ministers. "Pray to the Lord thy God," says Jeroboam; "thou hast an interest in him; improve it for me." But observe, He did not desire the prophet to pray that his sin might be pardoned, and his heart changed, only that *his hand might be restored*; thus Pharaoh would have Moses to pray that God would *take away this death* only (<sup><1707></sup>Exodus 10:17), not this *sin*. The prophet, as became a man of God, renders good for evil, upbraids not Jeroboam with his impotent malice, nor triumphs in his submission, but immediately addresses himself to God for him. Those only are entitled to the blessing Christ pronounced on the persecuted that learn of him to pray for their persecutors, <sup><1710></sup>Matthew 5:10, 44. When the prophet thus honoured God, by showing himself of a forgiving spirit, God put this further honour upon him, that at his word he recalled the judgment and by another miracle healed the withered hand, that by the goodness of God Jeroboam might be led to repentance, and, if he were not broken by the judgment, yet might be melted by the mercy. With both he seemed affected for the present, but the impressions wore off.

**VI.** The prophet's refusal of Jeroboam's kind invitation, in which observe,

**1.** That God forbade his messenger to eat or drink in Beth-el (v. 9), to show his detestation of their execrable idolatry and apostasy from God, and to teach us not to have fellowship with the works of darkness, lest we have infection from them or give encouragement to them. He must not *turn back the same way*, but deliver his message, as it were, *in transitu* — as he

*passes along*. He shall not seem to be sent on purpose (they were unworthy such a favour), but as if he only called by the way, his spirit being stirred, like Paul's at Athens, as he *passed and saw their devotions*. God would, by this command, try his prophet, as he did Ezekiel, whether he would not be *rebellious, like that rebellious house*, <sup><HB></sup>Ezekiel 2:8.

2. That Jeroboam was so affected with the cure of his hand that though we read not of his thanksgivings to God for the mercy, or of his sending an offering to the altar at Jerusalem in acknowledgment of it, yet he was willing to express his gratitude to the prophet and pay him for his prayers, v. 7. Favours to the body will make even graceless men seem grateful to good ministers.

3. That the prophet, though hungry and weary, and perhaps poor, in obedience to the divine command refused both the entertainment and the reward proffered him. He might have supposed his acceptance of it would give him an opportunity of discoursing further with the king, in order to his effectual reformation, now that he was convinced; yet he will not think himself wiser than God, but, like a faithful careful messenger, hastens home when he has done his errand. Those have little learned the lessons of self-denial that cannot forbear one forbidden meal.

## <HB>1 KINGS 13:11-22

### THE PROPHET DECEIVED

The man of God had honestly and resolutely refused the king's invitation, though he promised him a reward; yet he was over-persuaded by an old prophet to come back with him, and dine in Beth-el, contrary to the command given him. Here we find how dearly his dinner cost him. Observe with wonder,

I. The old prophet's wickedness. I cannot but call him a false prophet and a bad man, it being much easier to believe that from one of such a bad character should be extorted a confirmation of what the man of God said (as we find, v. 32) than that a true prophet, and a good man, should tell such a deliberate lie as he did, and father it upon God. *A good tree could never bring forth such corrupt fruit*. Perhaps he was trained up among the sons of the prophets, in one of Samuel's colleges not far off, whence he

retained the name of a prophet, but, growing worldly and profane, the spirit of prophecy had departed from him. If he had been a good prophet he would have reproved Jeroboam's idolatry, and not have suffered his sons to attend his altars, as, it should seem, they did. Now,

**1.** Whether he had any good design in fetching back the man of God is not certain. One may hope that he did it in compassion to him, concluding he wanted refreshment, and out of a desire to be better acquainted with him and more fully to understand his errand than he could from the report of his sons; yet his sons having told him all that passed, and particularly that the prophet was forbidden to eat or drink there, which he had openly told Jeroboam, I suppose it was done with a bad design, to draw him into a snare, and so to expose him; for false prophets have ever been the worst enemies to the true prophets, usually aiming to destroy them, but sometimes, as here, to debauch them and draw them from their duty. Thus they *gave the Nazarites wine to drink* (<sup><3122></sup>Amos 2:12), that they might glory in their fall. But,

**2.** It is certain that he took a very bad method to bring him back. When the man of God had told him, “I may not, and therefore I will not, return to eat bread with thee” (his resolutions concurring with the divine command, v. 16, 17), he wickedly pretended that he had an order from heaven to fetch him back. He imposed upon him by asserting his quondam character as a prophet: *I am a prophet also as thou art*; he pretended he had a vision of an angel that sent him on this errand. But it was all a lie; it was a banter upon prophecy, and profane in the highest degree. When this old prophet is spoken of (<sup><1238></sup>2 Kings 23:18) he is called *the prophet that came out of Samaria*, whereas there was no such place as Samaria till long after, <sup><1162></sup>1 Kings 16:24. Therefore I take it he is so called there, though he was of Beth-el, because he was like those who were afterwards *the prophets of Samaria*, who *caused God's people Israel to err*, <sup><2233></sup>Jeremiah 23:13.

**II.** The good prophet's weakness, in suffering himself to be thus imposed upon: *He went back with him*, v. 19. He that had resolution enough to refuse the invitation of the king, who promised him a reward, could not resist the insinuations of one that pretended to be a prophet. God's people are more in danger of being drawn from their duty by the plausible pretences of divinity and sanctity than by external inducements; we have therefore need to *beware of false prophets*, and not *believe every spirit*.

**III.** The proceedings of divine justice hereupon; and here we may well wonder that the wicked prophet, who told the lie and did the mischief, went unpunished, while the holy man of God, that was drawn by him into sin, was suddenly and severely punished for it. What shall we make of this! The judgments of God are unfathomable. *The deceived and the deceiver are his*, and he *giveth not account of any of his matters*. Certainly there must be a judgment to come, when these things will be called over again, and when those that sinned most and suffered least, in this world, will receive according to their works.

**1.** The message delivered to the man of God was strange. His crime is recited, v. 21, 22. It was, in one word, disobedience to an express command. Judgment is given upon it: *Thy carcase shall not come to the sepulchre of thy fathers*, that is, “Thou shalt never reach thy own house, but shalt be a carcase quickly, nor shall thy dead body be brought to *the place of thy fathers' sepulchres*, to be interred.”

**2.** Yet it was more strange that the old prophet himself should be the messenger. Of this we can give no account but that God would have it so, as he spoke to Balaam by his ass and read Saul his doom by the devil in Samuel's likeness. We may think God designed hereby,

**(1.)** To startle the lying prophet, and make him sensible of his sin. The message could not but affect him the more when he himself had the delivering of it, and had so strong an impression made upon his spirit by it that he cried out, as one in an agony, v. 21. He had reason to think, if he must die for his disobedience in a small matter who sinned by surprise, of how much sorer punishment he should be thought worthy who had belied an angel of God and cheated a man of God by a deliberate forgery. *If this were done to the green tree, what shall be done to the dry?* Perhaps it had a good effect upon him. Those who preach God's wrath to others have hard hearts indeed if they fear it not themselves.

**(2.)** To put the greater mortification upon the prophet that was deceived, and to show what those must expect who hearken to the great deceiver. Those that yield to him as a tempter will be terrified by him as a tormentor; whom he now fawns upon he will afterwards fly upon, and whom he now draws into sin he will do what he can to drive to despair.

## <1133> 1 KINGS 13:23-34

### THE DECEIVED PROPHET SLAIN

Here is,

**I.** The death of the deceived disobedient prophet. The old prophet that had deluded him, as if he would make him some amends for the wrong he had done him or help to prevent the mischief threatened him, furnished him with an ass to ride home on; but by the way a lion set upon him, and killed him, v. 23, 24. He did but return back to refresh himself when he was hungry, and behold he must die for it; see <0143> 1 Samuel 14:43. But we must consider,

**1.** That his offence was great, and it would by no means justify him that he was drawn into it by a lie; he could not be so certain of the countermand sent by another as he was of the command given to himself, nor had he any ground to think that the command would be recalled, when the reason of it remained in force, which was that he might testify his detestation of the wickedness of that place. He had great reason to suspect the honesty of this old prophet, who did not himself bear his testimony, nor did God think fit to make use of him as a witness against the idolatry of the city he lived in. However, he should have taken time to beg direction from God, and not have complied so soon. Did he think this old prophet's house safer to eat in than other houses at Beth-el, when God had forbidden him to eat in any? That was to refine upon the command, and make himself wiser than God. Did he think to excuse himself that he was hungry? Had he never read that *man lives not by bread alone?*

**2.** That his death was for the glory of God; for by this it appeared,

**(1.)** That nothing is more provoking to him than disobedience to an express command, though in a small matter, which makes his proceedings against our first parents, for eating the forbidden fruit, the easier to be accounted for.

**(2.)** That God is displeased at the sins of his own people, and no man shall be protected in disobedience by the sanctity of his profession, the dignity of his office, his nearness to God, or any good services he has done for him. Perhaps God by this intended, in a way of righteous judgment, to harden



Jeroboam's heart, since he was not reformed by the withering of his hand; for he would be apt to make a bad use of it, and to say that the prophet was well enough served for meddling with his altar, he had better have staid at home; any, he would say that Providence had punished him for his insolence, and the lion had done that which his withered hand might not do. However, by this God intended to warn all those whom he employs strictly to observe their orders, at their peril.

**II.** The wonderful preservation of his dead body, which was a token of God's mercy remembered in the midst of wrath. The lion that gently strangled him, or tore him, did not devour his dead body, nor so much as tear the ass, v. 24, 25, 26. Nay, what was more, he did not set upon the travellers that passed by and saw it, nor upon the old prophet (who had reason enough to fear it) when he came to take up the corpse. His commission was to kill the prophet; hitherto he should go, but no further. Thus God showed that, though he was angry with him, his anger was turned away, and the punishment went *no further than death*.

**III.** The care which the old prophet took of his burial. When he heard of this unusual accident, he concluded it was *the man of God, who was disobedient* to his Master (and whose fault was that?), *therefore the Lord has delivered him to the lion*, v. 26. It would well have become him to ask why the lion was not sent against him and his house, rather than against the good man whom he had cheated. He *took up the corpse*, v. 29. If there by any truth in the vulgar opinion, surely the corpse bled afresh when he touched it, for he was in effect the murderer, and it was but a poor reparation for the injury to inter the dead body. Perhaps when he cheated him into his ruin he intended to laugh at him; yet now his conscience so far relents that he weeps over him, and, like Joab at Abner's funeral, is compelled to be a mourner for him whom he had been the death of. They said, *Alas! my brother*, v. 30. The case was indeed very lamentable that so good a man, a prophet so faithful, and so bold in God's cause, should, for one offence, die as a criminal, while an old lying prophet lives at ease and an idolatrous prince in pomp and power. *Thy way, O God! is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters*. We cannot judge of men by their sufferings, nor of sins by their present punishments; with some the flesh is destroyed that the spirit may be saved, while with others the flesh is pampered that the soul may ripen for hell.

**IV.** The charge which the old prophet gave his sons concerning his own burial, that they should be sure to bury him in the same grave where the man of God was buried (v. 3): “*Lay my bones beside his bones, close by them, as near as may be, so that my dust may mingle with his.*” Though he was a lying prophet, yet he desired to *die the death of a true prophet*. “Gather not my soul with the sinners of Beth-el, but with the man of God.” The reason he gives is because *what he cried against the altar of Beth-el, that men's bones should be burnt upon it, shall surely come to pass, v. 32.* Thus,

- 1.** He ratifies the prediction, that *out of the mouth of two witnesses* (and one of them such a one as St. Paul quotes, <sup><3012></sup>Titus 1:12, *one of themselves, even a prophet of their own*) the *word might be established*, if possible to convince and reclaim Jeroboam.
- 2.** He does honour to the deceased prophet, as one whose *word* would not fall to the ground, though *he* did. Ministers die, die prematurely it may be; but the word of the Lord endures for ever, and does not die with them.
- 3.** He consults his own interest. It was foretold that men's bones should be burnt upon Jeroboam's altar: “Lay mine (says he) close to his, and then they will not be disturbed;” and it was, accordingly, their security, as we find, <sup><12318></sup>2 Kings 23:18. Sleeping and waking, living and dying, it is safe being in good company. No mention is made here of the inscription on the prophet's tomb; but it is spoken of <sup><12317></sup>2 Kings 23:17, where Josiah asks, *What title is that?* and is told, *It is the sepulchre of the man of God that came from Judah, who proclaimed these things which thou hast done;* so that the epitaph upon the prophet's grave preserved the remembrance of his prophecy, and was a standing testimony against the idolatries of Beth-el, which it would not have been so remarkably if he had died and been buried elsewhere. The cities of Israel are here called *cities of Samaria*, though that name was not yet known; for, however the old prophet spoke, the inspired historian wrote in the language of his own time.

**V.** The obstinacy of Jeroboam in his idolatry (v. 33): *He returned not from his evil way;* some hand was found that durst repair the altar God had rent, and then Jeroboam offered sacrifice on it again, and the more boldly because the prophet who disturbed him before was in his grave (<sup><6110></sup>Revelation 11:10) and because the prophecy was for a great while to come. Various methods had been used to reclaim him, but neither threats

nor signs, neither judgments nor mercies, wrought upon him, so strangely was he wedded to his calves. He did not reform, no, not his priesthood, but whoever would, he filled his hand, and made him priest, though ever so illiterate or immoral, and of what tribe soever; *and this became sin*, that is, a snare first, and then a ruin, to Jeroboam's house, to *cut it off*, v. 34. Note, The diminution, disquiet, and desolation of families, are the fruit of sin; he promised himself that the calves would secure the crown to his family, but it proved they lost it, and sunk his family. Those betray themselves that think by any sin to support themselves.