

Background Characters in the Old Testament

The Man of God: Obedience Is Not Optional

Lesson #10 for December 4, 2010

Scriptures: Exodus 32; 1 Kings 11; 13:1-34; Daniel 5:13-17; Luke 16:31; John 15:24; 2 Timothy 4:3.

1. This lesson is about two unnamed prophets: the older from the northern kingdom of Israel and the younger from the southern kingdom of Judah.
2. Before going into the details of this story, we need to understand why Israel and Judah had separated into two nations. King David had managed to pull all the tribes of Israel together into a more or less unified nation. Israel was near the peak of its strength when he handed it over to his son, Solomon. In the first few years of Solomon's reign, he served as a very wise king. In fact, he was known as the wisest man who ever lived. (1 Kings 4:31) During that time, he was building what came to be known as Solomon's Temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. He was also building a magnificent palace for himself. But, Solomon's wisdom and power led to some very serious pitfalls in the nation. He became very rich, and those riches led to other people in the kingdom demanding higher and higher wages. His riches, wisdom, and power also led to many treaties with other nations which in many cases involved marriages to princesses until Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. (1 Kings 11:3) It is hard to imagine how he had time even to marry all those women!
3. But, we know that those women and the wealth that he had accumulated eventually went to his head; and he began serving pagan gods until, finally, he was so degraded that he even offered his children as sacrifices to Molech. (1 Kings 11:5-8) As Solomon grew older, he grew more and more foolish. God sent a prophet to reveal to one of his leading builders—a man by the name of Jeroboam—that ten of the tribes would be split off from the Davidic kingdom and would be given to him to rule. (1 Kings 11:26-40)
4. When Solomon died the people went to his son, Rehoboam, and asked if his rule was going to be as taxing and burdensome as his father's was. Rehoboam foolishly listened to the young men giving him advice who hoped to benefit from his wealth and told the people that his little finger was thicker than his father's waist! (1 Kings 12:10-11) They were going to make taxes even worse! As a result, the 10 northern tribes rebelled against the house of David.
5. At that point, Jeroboam returned from Egypt where he had been hiding and rallied the 10 northern tribes against Rehoboam. When Rehoboam rose and wanted to attack Jeroboam and the northern tribes, he was warned by God not to do so.
6. As might be expected, Jeroboam sought ways to consolidate his new kingdom. He feared that if people continued traveling to Jerusalem to worship, they might be attracted either by the worship services in Jerusalem or perhaps by the magnificence of the temple to return their loyalty to David's house. So, he took it upon himself to establish two new temples, one in the far north in the area of Dan and one in the south in the city of Bethel.
7. When the new temples had been built, each one housed a golden bull calf that Jeroboam claimed was a symbol of the true God, *Yahweh*. (1 Kings 12:28) Do we sometimes worship the golden "bulls" that run on Wall Street?
8. Read 1 Kings 13:1-3. Jeroboam could not get Levites to lead out in the services at his new "temples"; so, he did so himself. How many times had God spoken to the younger prophet from Judah? In what way did He reveal His will to the younger prophet—instructing Him to travel to Bethel and condemn the worship in that temple? What were the very specific instructions that God gave to the younger prophet about his journey to Bethel?
9. Before we take up a discussion of what actually happened in the story, we need to remember

that there were many prophets of God mentioned in the Old Testament. There were also many prophets of false gods such as Ashtoreth and Baal, etc. Elijah killed 850 of them on Mount Carmel! (1 Kings 18:19,40) But, there were at least two prophets—Balaam (Numbers 22-24; 31:8,16; Balaam caused Israel to sin and 24,000 died!) and the older prophet in this story—who for various reasons were true prophets of God at one time or another and then either turned against God's people or lied! How should we deal with the case of a deceptive prophet? How can you distinguish between a true prophet and a false one? (Isaiah 8:20?)

10. This lesson quotes 2 Peter 1:20,21 to suggest that all prophecy comes not from men but from God as they are instructed by the Holy Spirit. But, what was the cause of Balaam's greed? And, why did the older prophet in this story lie? If a prophet of God tells you that the Lord has instructed him thus and so, should you immediately accept that as the truth?
11. Unfortunately, this was not the first time the children of Israel had been invited to worship a golden bull calf! See Exodus 32 and compare 1 Kings 12:25-33.
12. Although Jeroboam had managed to construct two new temples, he had the additional problem that he could not get the Levites to serve as priests in those pagan temples. Thus, he had to offer the job of priest to anyone who was willing to do it. Of course, that inevitably led to all sorts of corruption in the priesthood.
13. This story of Jeroboam and his religious-political mess should have served as a warning to the Christian church in its early years. When Constantine declared Christianity to be the national religion of the Roman Empire, many pagan influences worked their way into the Christian church. The day of worship was changed from Saturday to Sunday, and so-called "saints" were venerated. Eventually, that led to the corruption that resulted in the Protestant Reformation in Martin Luther's day. What kind of political pressures are leading to compromise today? What about cultural pressures? Are we compromising our stand on such things as movies, the drinking of alcohol, our dress code, etc.? The world can seem to be so attractive! The pioneers of our church would be aghast to see what is going on in many of our churches today!
14. The younger prophet was told to travel from somewhere in the southern kingdom of Judah to Bethel and to declare judgment against the king, the altar, and the golden bull calf they were worshiping. He was instructed not to eat in the northern kingdom under any circumstance and to return home by a different route. The instructions were very clear. And the prophet understood them very well.
15. Apparently, the young man arrived in Bethel just in time for the ceremonies to get under way. At the height of the ceremony, the "man of God" (compare Moses [Deuteronomy 33:1] and Elijah [1 Kings 17:18]) stood up and declared his condemnation of the altar, the sacrifice, the behavior of the king, and the golden bull calf. Did the young man provide any verification that he had been sent by *Yahweh*? He prophesied that [300 years later] a descendant of David by the name of Josiah would tear down the altar and burn human bones on it. (1 Kings 13:2)
16. This part of the story should raise a number of questions in your mind. First of all, if a true prophet of God was living in Bethel, why didn't God use him to condemn the king's practices instead of calling a younger prophet from Judah? Compare Luke 4:24; John 4:44.
17. As soon as the young prophet had finished his speech, the altar broke apart, and the contents were spilled on the ground. No doubt, everyone watching was petrified. At that point, the king pointed at the younger prophet and shouted for people to arrest him. But, as he pointed at the younger prophet, he suddenly realized that he could no longer pull his arm back. Suddenly, he was changed from being in a position of authority and power to being in a position of begging for healing! The younger prophet prayed for the king, and his arm was restored to normal. Then the king offered him a meal if he would come home with him. But the younger

prophet, remembering the instructions from God, refused the king's offer. It is not easy to refuse an oriental king. What are we supposed to learn from this younger prophet's example of civil disobedience? It is hard to imagine exactly what the response of the so-called worshipers was at that point. They had just seen several miracles taking place. No doubt, they wondered what was coming next. What should everyone have done at that point? They should all have abandoned that type of worship permanently!

18. What is the role of miracles in producing faith? What did Jesus say about that? (Luke 16:31; John 10:25-28; 15:24) It has been demonstrated repeatedly and throughout Scripture that miracles never produce any long-term change in men's behavior. But, they do get attention. In this case, Jeroboam just changed his approach. (1 Kings 13:7-10)
19. The man of God did not have too far to walk, because the inauguration of the shrine at Bethel took place about 2 kilometers (1.4 miles) from the border with Judah. The next town in Judah's territory was Mizpah, a 10-kilometer (7-mile) walk from Bethel. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, November 30)
20. But, that short distance provided the opportunity for the younger prophet to make a fatal mistake. On the way home following a different route, he stopped briefly to rest under an oak.
21. Read 1 Kings 13:11-18. Meanwhile, back in Bethel, two young men who had apparently attended the ceremonies returned home to their father who also had been a prophet of God. How many true prophets of God were living at that time in Judah and Israel? Why hadn't the older prophet at least gone to the ceremony? His sons related to him what had happened. The older prophet asked, "Which way did the younger prophet go? I must go to him." His sons pointed out the way, and the older prophet mounted his donkey and took off. He found the younger prophet resting under the tree. What happened next is one of the most surprising passages in Scripture. The older prophet who apparently was—or had been—a true man of God (Did he show his credentials?) told the younger man that he was supposed to come home and eat with him because God had given new instructions through him. But, the older prophet was lying! What possible motive could have led the older prophet to do that?
22. Here the younger prophet was faced with a real dilemma. He had been given clear instructions by God telling him he should return to Judah without eating anything. But the older prophet had just assured him that God had instructed him that the younger prophet should return to eat with him. Does this sound like the story of Eve back in the Garden of Eden? (Gen. 3:1-5) What about Paul on his way to Jerusalem the last time? (Acts 21:10-21)
23. How should we respond if we are faced with apparently conflicting information? Both the older prophet and the younger prophet should have stopped immediately and discussed this contradiction! The younger prophet should have said, "The instructions I was given by God are different from what you are telling me now. Before I move ahead, let me consult with God again to see if He has really changed His mind!" Would the older man have admitted his lie?
24. The younger prophet in this story received two very powerful invitations. He refused the king's invitation, but he succumbed to the invitation from the older prophet. Why do you suppose he did that? What should we learn from his "example"? (2 Timothy 4:3; 2 Peter 2:1; Jude 4-16)
25. In defense of the younger prophet's actions, we must remember that it was/is customary in eastern cultures to show great respect to the elderly. We do not know whether the younger prophet had any previous knowledge about this older prophet. We do not know what evidence the older prophet may have provided to show that he also was a true prophet of God.
26. If the story had ended just before the older prophet found the younger prophet, how would you have judged the story? What lessons would you have said the story teaches?

27. Unfortunately, without any significant further questioning that we know of, the younger prophet got up and followed the older prophet back to Bethel to eat with him. While they were eating at the older prophet's home, the older prophet received a true message from God telling the younger prophet that he would not be buried in the tombs of his fathers.
28. How should we respond if prophets lie to us? Is there any way to tell if they are lying? How should we respond to TV evangelists who preach all kinds of crazy notions and then perform "miracles" to convince us to believe them?
29. Then, the older prophet offered the younger prophet a donkey so he could hurry home. Not long thereafter, he heard a rumor that there was a very strange sight on the road between Bethel and Jerusalem. A lion had killed a man, but the lion had not eaten the man nor had he attacked and eaten the donkey who was standing nearby. That was very strange behavior! The older prophet immediately surmised that it was the younger prophet, and he was correct. He saddled a second donkey and hurried out to the place. We do not know exactly how he dealt with the lion, but the older prophet put the body of the younger prophet on his first donkey, brought him home, and buried the young man in his own tomb! He instructed his sons that when he died, they were to bury his body beside that young man. (1 Kings 13:20-34)
30. The rest of the young man's prophecy came true some three centuries later. (2 Kings 23:15,16) The bones of the younger prophet and the older prophet who was buried with him were not burned on the alter during the reform under King Josiah. (2 Kings 23:17,18) Will either of these prophets be saved in heaven?
31. In our day, how often do we face people who want to introduce us to "progressive revelation"? Early adventists were famous for what they called "present truth." In order for truth to be "present," it needs to be new and in some way departing from previous beliefs and practices?
32. Churches have taken two very distinct approaches to new truth. Some churches teach that God will continue to lead His people, which seems like a good thing, and that "new truth" should supplant and take the place of "older truth" if there is a conflict. The Roman Catholic Church and the Mormon Church take that approach. Other churches like the Seventh-day Adventist Church teach that any new revelation must be compatible with all previous revelations. We accept the Canon of Scripture as the rule for faith and action. If a new teaching comes along that clearly disagrees with what we have been taught in the past, we reject the new teaching rather than rejecting the previous instructions from God.
33. In light of what happened in this story, should we conclude that conscience is always a safe guide? Most of the time? Only some of the time? (Deuteronomy 13:1-3; Revelation 13)
34. Jesus has informed us that false messiahs and false prophets will come. (Matthew 24:5,11,23) Even Satan himself—pretending to be Jesus—will appear before the end of this earth's history. How are we to tell truth from falsehood at that time? It could be a mistake to believe that all truth has been revealed and that no new truth will be coming our way. But, we must find a way to clearly distinguish between falsehood and truth in the future. How are we to do that? Is there some way to know for sure if we are on the right track?
35. Those of us who believe in the great-controversy, trust-healing model of the plan of salvation are convinced that God does not ask us to believe anything without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. (*Steps to Christ*, p. 105) What would the younger prophet have done if he had followed that advice? What should we do in our day?

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