

DEVoured BY A LION

Lions are referred to in scripture from Genesis to Revelation. There are two interesting accounts in 1 Kings about two prophets who were killed by lions for disobeying the commandments of the Lord. The first story is found in 1 Kings 13:1-25. Upon the division of the kingdom, the northern division (Israel) was ruled by king Jeroboam, who was a very wicked king, and promoter of idolatry. God sent a young prophet to rebuke and denounce Jeroboam. The unnamed young prophet stood by the idolatrous altar in Bethel and foretold the birth of one Josiah who would sacrifice the priests of the high places ON that altar. Jeroboam stretched out his hand to give orders for him to be arrested. His hand withered and he could not draw it back. Jeroboam asked the prophet to pray for his hand to be restored. He did so, and the Lord responded. The king asked the prophet to come to his house and be rewarded. The prophet refused, and told the king that he was “commanded” by the Lord not to eat bread or even drink water while in Bethel, and to return to Judah a different way than he came to Bethel. A man heard this conversation, and told his father (an older prophet) what happened. This prophet went to see the young prophet (who was lingering under an oak tree), and gave a similar invitation, and received the same reason for his refusal. The older prophet told him that he too was a prophet of God, and that God told HIM to inform the young man of God that an angel told him it would be all right, but he was “lying to him” (v. 18). He did return and ate and drank. THEN, the “word of the Lord” came TO the older prophet, and he told the young prophet that because he “disobeyed” the word of God, that his corpse would not come to the tomb of his fathers. He saddled the donkey for the young prophet who departed, only to be greeted by a lion, who killed him, but did not eat his body. The older prophet took his body and put it in his own tomb, and it was not returned to Judah to be buried with his fathers.

The second story of a lion devouring a prophet of God is in 1 Kings 20:35-43. Here another man of the sons of the prophets asked his neighbor (obviously another of the sons of the prophets) to “strike” him. He refused to strike his fellow prophet, thus disobeying the “word of the Lord” that came to him. He was then told that as soon as he left, a lion would kill him. It happened! Then, the prophet went to another man and asked him to “strike” him. THIS man obeyed the command, inflicting a wound upon the prophet. He then disguised himself and went to AHAB (another very wicked king of Israel), and following a procedure that Nathan used in rebuking David, and told about himself having been given instructions to guard a particular man, but while he was “busy here and there”, he escaped. Ahab then declared that the prophet WOULD die because of it. At this point, the prophet removed his disguise, showing that HE was a prophet. Ahab then knew that the account was intended for HIM to convict himself for not guarding Ben-Hadad who had been captured after a battle, but was allowed to get away after a treaty had been made.

Now with these two accounts before us, let's see what we can learn. There are several SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES, and SAME LESSONS that we can observe.

FIRST, THE SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES. (1) Both stories involve “prophets” that SINNED and prophets that REBUKED. The young prophet in Jeroboam's encounter both rebuked the king, but later sinned himself by disobeying the word of God. The old prophet who led him into sin, later rebuked the younger prophet FOR sin. The prophet in Ahab's encounter rebuked the other prophet for disobedience, and he rebuked (warned) Ahab of his destiny. He died in battle (1 Kings 22:29-40).

(2) Both prophets that died DID things that *might appear to be excusable*—by human reasoning. After all, the young prophet of 1 Kings 13 had come a long way in his

journey, and it was only natural that he would be hungry and thirsty. He was no doubt sincere and courageous, and stood up to Jeroboam in denouncing sin, and in refusing hospitality. Also, since the older prophet was ALSO a prophet of God, and CLAIMED to have the truth on what the younger prophet could do—who can blame him for disobedience? But GOD did—even through the words of the older prophet who had already lied to him. The young prophet had gone to Bethel because the word of the Lord came to him with instructions as to his own actions while IN Bethel. He should have made sure God had changed His mind, and inquired of the Lord. In the case of the “neighbor” of the prophet in the encounter with Ahab, who could blame him for not wanting to strike the prophet and bring wounds to him? One might think that surely, God would stop him, as he stopped Abraham from killing Isaac on the altar in Genesis 22. However, we remember that God's ways are not man's ways, and it is not in man to question, but to obey (Isa. 55:8f). God knew what He was doing, in preparing a message of rebuke and warning that a prophet was to give to AHAB.

(3) Both prophets were harshly dealt with. They had been clearly told what TO do, and they failed to obey. They were not extended mercy or a second chance. Their sin was obvious, and they were deserving of punishment. In both instances it was INSTANT PUNISHMENT. The first young prophet was told what would happen, and as soon as he had eaten and got on his donkey to leave, a lion attacked him and fiercely killed him. It was not a quiet or peaceful death. The same is true with the second man killed by a lion. There was hardly time for the men to meditate on what was going to happen to them.

(4) Both prophets who died were surely familiar with the “word of the Lord”, and knew how exacting God can be in His dealings with man. They knew they were not to add to, or take from the word of the Lord. Both knew of the penalty of death that was to be inflicted on the disobedient.

(5) Both prophets involved the same INSTRUMENT of death—a LION—truly the kings of the jungle. They could claw, strike a blow, and eat—as they chose. Nothing in either case indicates that they did anything more than “kill” the men. In the first instance, the lion appeared to be guarding the body of the man until he was discovered by another human (1 Kings 13:24f). There were other instances where God sent lions among a disobedient people (2 Kings 17:25), but here the lion appears on the scene (one on one) as soon as they were apparently called for by the living prophet.

SOME LESSONS. There are two obvious lessons that should be noted by people of ALL ages. First, we clearly learn that God's commandments are given to be obeyed—without question or hesitation. Both prophets were TOLD what to do, and there was no valid excuse for not obeying. Today, all of God's commandments to us are to be obeyed. We have to OBEY THE GOSPEL if we want forgiveness of sins. We should not quibble as to whether or not grandma, mother or father obeyed, but what God expects of US. All of the accounts of conversion in the New Testament show how they obeyed as soon as they KNEW what to do. The 3,000 were baptized the same day. The jailer was baptized the same hour of the night that he heard the gospel. Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all that OBEY Him (Heb. 5:8f).

Second, we learn that stern punishment must be kept. We are not the Lord, and may not know just how quickly WE should be involved in the punishment of the disobedient in the church. We need to exercise human judgment. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira who lied to God, HE dealt with them sternly and immediately. In the cases of some who sinned in the early church, there was to be admonition to a certain point, and then ultimately a withdrawal of fellowship (punishment, 2 Cor.2:6) was to be done. Delay can be dangerous in causing others to sin. Solomon said, *“Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is*

fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). Paul said that a little leaven will leaven the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:7). Today, some appear to think THEY can sin and get away with it, because they do not receive immediately the punishment that may be due, but surely, their sin will find them out (Num. 32:23). Today, Satan is that roaring lion that is lurking around, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). There are immediate consequences of sin, and one of those is spiritual death, in that sin separates man from God (Isa. 59:1f). Ultimately, the final phase of God's wrath will take place in eternal death and separation from God. Solomon said that the way that seems right to man, will lead to his death (Prov.14:12). Paul declared that the wages of sin is death (Rom.6:23). A look at the two prophets who sinned and were killed by a lion should be a good lesson for all of us to remember.

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