

THE AMAZING WORD OF THE LORD

God is a God who speaks. In the beginning He brought everything into existence when He said, "Let there be..." and it was so. Sometimes the Old Testament speaks about the Word of the Lord as if it had a personal existence. Think of the repeated formula, "The Word of the Lord came to (a certain person), saying..."

The Word of the Lord often announced God's judgment against those who resisted Him. Egyptians who did not take the word of the LORD seriously left their slaves and their livestock out in the fields when Moses warned about a severe hailstorm. They suffered death and dreadful loss. Pharaoh's officials who feared the word of the LORD brought their servants and their livestock indoors and were safe.

At Sinai the Lord wrote down on stone tablets the words of His covenant, the Ten Commandments. According to the Mosaic Law, sacrifices were prescribed for thoughtless sins. However, a person who sinned deliberately insulted the LORD. No sacrifices were prescribed for them. That person would be cut off from his people and his guilt would remain on him. "For he has despised the Word of the LORD and has broken His commandment."

Prophets who declared the Word of the Lord to the people were intermediaries between God and them. When the Israelites asked not to hear God's own spoken voice again from Mount Sinai, Moses declared the Word of the LORD to them.

The word of the Lord unerringly worked out its results. Often when something happened, it was said to have been "according to the Word of the LORD", which had been uttered previously. The Word of the Lord had said that, because of Moses' disobedience, he would not enter Canaan. He died in the land of Moab, according to the Word of the LORD.

Sometimes threats by the Word of the Lord were fulfilled to the letter hundreds of years afterwards. After the Israelites destroyed Jericho, Joshua said, "May the man be cursed before the LORD who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho. He will lay its foundation at the cost of his firstborn son. He will set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son." Centuries later, at the time of Ahab and Elijah, the book of 1 Kings reports, "In his days Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun."

Consider the references to the Word of the Lord in the following incidents from 1 Kings. The Word of the Lord would not tolerate any inaccurate observance. Jeroboam became king over ten of the twelve tribes of Israel, as the prophet Ahijah had predicted, giving him ten out of twelve pieces of the new coat he had torn up. Because Jeroboam was afraid that the Israelites would restore their allegiance to Rehoboam, he wanted to prevent his people from going to Jerusalem to worship. He provided golden calves at Bethel and Dan instead. He made temples on high places and appointed priests from all kinds of people, who did not belong to the Levites. He arranged a festival for them like the one that was held in Judah. This provoked the Lord to anger. A man of God came **by the word of the LORD** from Judah to Bethel. While Jeroboam was standing beside the altar to burn a sacrifice, the man of God cried out against the altar by the word of the LORD, "O altar, altar, this is **what the LORD has said**: 'Indeed, a son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. He will sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who are burning sacrifices on you, and human bones will be burned on you.'"

The man of God gave a sign the same day. He said, "This is the sign that the LORD has declared: 'Look, the altar will be torn apart, and the ashes that are on it will be poured out.'" When Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, he pointed at the man over the altar, and said, "Seize him." However, his hand shrivelled up, so that he could not pull it back. The altar was also split apart, and the ashes poured out of it, according to the sign that the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. At Jeroboam's entreaty, the man of God interceded for the king, and the king's withered hand was restored.

However, the Word of the Lord also bound God's prophet. When an unsettled Jeroboam invited the man of God to come to his palace and take refreshment, he answered, "If you were to give me half your house, I would not go in with you. I shall not eat any bread or drink any water in this place. For this is what I have been **commanded by the word of the Lord**, 'You shall not eat any bread, you shall not drink any water, and you shall not come back by the road on which you have gone.'"

In spite of his obedience to this point, God's Word did not protect the man of God from disaster for what may appear to us to be excusable. An old prophet was living at Bethel. His sons reported to him the words that the prophet from Judah had spoken to the king, and the old prophet found out which way the man of God had gone, caught up with him, and invited him to come to his home to take a meal. The man of God replied, "I dare not go back with you, or go in with you, and I shall not eat any food or drink any water with you in this place. For the message came to me **by the word of the LORD**, 'You shall not eat any bread or drink any water there, and you shall not come back by taking the road on which you have gone.'"

However, the old prophet told him, "I also am a prophet like you." However, he lied: "An angel spoke to me **by the word of the LORD**: 'Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat some bread and drink some water.'" An alleged Word of the Lord contradicted the previous Word of the Lord. What was the man from Judah to do?

The prophet from Judah then went back with the old prophet, and ate and drank in his home at Bethel. While they were sitting at the table, **the word of the LORD** came to the old prophet, who had brought him back. He cried out to the man of God who had come from Judah: "**This is what the LORD has said**: 'Because you have rebelled against the word of the LORD and have not kept the command that the LORD, your God, has given you, but have come back, eaten some bread and drunk some water at the place about which He told you, "Do not eat any bread and do not drink any water", your body will not come to the tomb of your fathers.'"

That happened. A lion met the prophet from Judah on the road and killed him, but left his body, and the lion and the donkey the man had been riding also remained at the roadside. When the old prophet of Bethel realised that his prophecy had come true for the prophet who had **rebelled against the Word of the Lord**, he brought him back, mourned for him, and buried him in his own grave. Then he told his sons, "When I die, you shall bury me in the grave in which the man of God is buried. Lay my bones beside his bones. For the message that he has proclaimed **by the word of the LORD** against the altar in Bethel and against all the shrines on the high places that are in the cities of Samaria will certainly come true."

Some time later, when a son of Jeroboam became ill, Jeroboam sent his wife to Ahijah at Shiloh. While Solomon was still king. Ahijah was the prophet who had predicted that Jeroboam would become king over ten of the tribes. Jeroboam's wife came in disguise, but the Lord had told the old, blind Ahijah who was coming to him and what to say. Ahijah told her that, when she got back to the palace, her son would die, and that is what happened. However, Ahijah also pronounced the Word of the Lord against the family of Jeroboam for his idolatry. The son of his who would die would be the only member of his family for whom the

Israelites would mourn, and who would receive a decent burial. “I shall bring calamity on the family of Jeroboam, I shall cut off every male from Jeroboam, both slave and free in Israel, and I shall sweep away the family of Jeroboam, as someone sweeps away dung pellets until they are all gone. The dogs will eat anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city, and the birds of the sky will eat anyone who dies in the open country. For **the LORD has spoken!**”

Jeroboam’s son Nadab was king for only two years. Baasha conspired against him killed him, took his throne, and then eliminated every male in Jeroboam’s family. This fulfilment of this was mirrored later in the destruction that Jehu worked on the family of wicked Ahab.

What about the altar at Bethel and the prophecy about human bones burnt on it? When Josiah became king of Judah three hundred years after this, he had the nearby tombs of the priests who had served there dug up and their bones burnt on the altar. He also demolished the altar and the high place at Bethel.

However, the Word of the Lord was full of faithful love for many generations to many people. The promises to David were carried out. The Word of the Lord finally came in person in the Only Son, who revealed the Father. His Word of salvation is crucial for everyone. This is the Word that is preached to us, and administered to us in the visible forms of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It works powerfully to bring about the results in us of forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. Through the preaching of Paul and Barnabas, the Word of the Lord kept spreading through the entire region of southern Asia Minor. So it continued, as the Acts of the Apostles reports. We pray that this Word of the Lord will continue to sound forth today with its grace and power.