

Prophecy 105 (Mess With the Word and the Word Will Mess With You)

I Kings 12:25-13:34, 2 Kings 23:15-18

March 21, 2021

Peter Hiatt

Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/prophecy-105-mess-with-the-word-and-the-word-will-mess-with-you/>

Transcript document prepared by: Heather Eades (eades.heather@gmail.com).

This document was prepared by Heather Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Heather know. Thank you!

Prayer

And so who can stop the Lord Almighty? Well, God, you know we think we can... we nailed you to a tree...but even that didn't stop you. Even that was according to your plan. And so God, we ask that you would help us to submit to your plan—surrender to your plan, surrender to your Word. God, I pray that you would help us to preach this morning. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Message

As I told you, we've been preaching from The Prophets, and this morning I want to share this amazing story with you from the book of 1 Kings.

In I Kings, chapter 12, the nation of Israel splits in two. A man named Jeroboam leads the 10 northern tribes of Israel (that are now called Israel) in rebellion against Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, of the House of David, of the Tribe of Judah (now the nation of Judah).



It's through the House of David and Tribe of Judah that God promises the Messiah – “The Lion of the Tribe of Judah” (Genesis 49:9).¹ And yet, directed by God, Jeroboam establishes the northern kingdom called “Israel” or sometimes called “Samaria” —that’s where we get the word “Samaritan.” But King Jeroboam worries that his people will reject him if they continue to leave Samaria to worship in Jerusalem of Judea.

1 Kings 12:28 · So the king [Jeroboam] took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.

Understand? Jeroboam messes with the Word of God in order to create a religion more conducive to his own political ambitions. He makes idols, like the ones the Israelites made in the wilderness on their journey to the Promised Land. Israel had been commanded to make “no graven images,” and yet they had chosen to make graven images in the wilderness—They made calves.

Have you ever wondered why they would make something like golden *calves* and not something totally cool like a lion? Well, lions are a bit dangerous and not safe, and a calf would be pretty useful to a Bronze Age farmer. Worshipping a calf would be like worshipping one of these:



...a 410 horsepower John Deere tractor.

Or maybe it would be like worshipping one of these:



...a 490 horsepower Corvette Stingray—that's cool. And it's really not dangerous; I mean, you drive it and wear a seat belt.

Jeroboam may have chosen the calf because everybody wanted one like a Corvette, *or* he may have chosen the calf to appeal to worshippers of Baal, the Canaanite fertility god who was depicted as a calf or a bull. For them, worshipping a golden calf would be like worshipping one of these:

[Image on screen showing famous poster of Farrah Fawcett in swimsuit.]

I had one of these on my bedroom wall in high school.

Or maybe like worshipping one of these:

[Image on screen of still image of Sean Connery as James Bond leaning against car.]

You worship one of these idols from a distance in a theater where it's safe.

Probably Jeroboam was going for something more like this:



He was trying to capture the immensely rich tradition of Israel, keep it locked up in a shrine in Bethel, and then utilize it for his own purposes.

“Respectable Civic Religion” is by far and away the most dangerous type of idol—which is thoroughly ironic, for it seems that type of idol would be so safe.

But it wasn't raging, sex-crazed pagans who delivered Jesus up for crucifixion; it was religious Jews who felt threatened by the real Jesus and preferred a false Jesus: a false Jesus who was dangerous to Romans but who was entirely safe for them—one who worked for them, like a calf would work for a farmer or a pretty girl would work for a man or a high school boy.

Dorothy Sayers wrote:

The people who hanged Christ never...accused Him of being a bore—on the contrary, they thought Him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later

generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround Him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certifying Him “meek and mild,” and recommended Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies.

We’ve pared the claws of the Lion of Judah and turned him into a pet for clerics and pious old ladies...but we’ve also turned him into an elephant for Republicans and a donkey for Democrats.

For fifteen hundred years, ever since the church became part of Rome, governments and empires have used Jesus, who is the Word of God, to unify worldly kingdoms and judge other people *out* of those kingdoms.

In my lifetime, we’ve used the Word of God to promote racism in places like the Middle East where Christians have actually taught that God loves Jews more than Arabs and actually needs the help of the U.S. military to advance his kingdom.

We’ve taken the Word of God and twisted him to justify warfare, murder, slavery, racism, adultery, fornication, and divorce... twisted him, declawed him, and tamed him, so as not to feel the sting of his words.

As a pastor, I know that for the sake of getting people to approve of me and give money to the church budget, there are certain portions of the Word of God recorded in Scripture that are abundantly clear, but nonetheless prudent to simply avoid.

For instance: Scriptures that address divorce, fornication, and all sexual sin.
But even more: scriptures that address the extreme danger of wealth.
And perhaps even more: scriptures that address our duty to outcasts, foreigners, and immigrants.

But even more than that—and this is the one that’s really shocked me over the years...
Even more than that: the place where pastors are most tempted to pare the claws of the lion of the tribe of Judah, the thing we’re most tempted to avoid, the thing that is most offensive about the Word of God... is Grace.

People do not like to hear that God is Absolute Love, and so they’re saved entirely by Grace...
For that means that they are no better than their neighbor,
that they must forgive their enemies to enter the Kingdom,
and that, if God gets his way, everyone that’s anyone will be saved.

Grace is the lion’s claw that cuts most deeply into human flesh.

See? Church—



--Church is pretty easy to turn into an idol. And it's pretty easy to get that thing to *work for you* and against your enemies.

But this...this, not so much...



...this naked man hanging on a tree, for the sins of the world--How do you work this? ...Or does this *work you*?

Well anyway, I was just saying: Jeroboam messes with the Word of God in order to make a new and improved religion. Jeroboam messes with the Word of God, and now the Word of God messes with Jeroboam.

1 Kings 13:1· **And behold, a man of God came out of Judah by the word of the Lord to Bethel.** [He prophesies, but he's not called "a prophet," but "a man of God"—we're all supposed to be men and women of God.] **Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make offerings.** ² **And the man** [*ha adam* in Hebrew: "the Adam"] **cried against the altar by the word of the Lord and said, "O altar, altar, thus says the Lord: 'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who make offerings on you, and human bones shall**

be burned on you.’ ” ³ And he gave a sign the same day, saying, “This is the sign that the Lord has spoken: ‘Behold, the altar shall be torn down, and the ashes that are on it shall be poured out.’ ” ⁴ And when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar at Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, “Seize him.” And his hand, which he stretched out against him, dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself. ⁵ The altar also was torn down, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign that the man of God had given by the word of the Lord.

Jeroboam messes with the Word of God, and now the Word of God messes with Jeroboam.

The Word of God causes this unnamed “man of God” to journey from the southern kingdom to the northern kingdom and rebuke the king. And when the king resists the Word, the Word turns his hand into something like shriveled up leather or stone.

Now, we know that Jesus is the Word, and we know that Jesus is the Lion of Judah—not *a calf*, but a lion.

In the chronicles of Narnia, he’s a lion named “Aslan.”

“Is he – quite safe?” asks Susan in the story when she discovers that the King of Narnia is a lion. “Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver, “If there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver. “Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good.”ⁱⁱ

Technically, the Lion of Judah is the Word of the Good. As Jesus said, *“No one is good but God alone.”*ⁱⁱⁱ So, no thing is “good-er” than the Word of God, who is the Good.

The Word of God is faithfully recorded in Scripture...but the Word of God, living and incarnate in human flesh, is Jesus.

“In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.... the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”^{iv}

Jesus is the Word of God in human flesh. And that Word of God, on the tongue of the man of God, is also, somehow Jesus... the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

There is nothing “good-er” than the Word of God, and nothing more powerful.

“The lion has roared, who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy?” writes Amos the Prophet.^v

Through Isaiah, God says, “My Word... shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose.”^{vi}

- In the beginning, God spoke space and time itself into existence with his Word.
- He spoke earth and heaven, planets, and stars into existence with his Word.
- He spoke plants, fish, and animals into existence with his Word.
- And then he spoke this Word: “Let us make man (*adam*: humanity) in our own image, after our likeness.” Not “some men” ... just man, humanity.

Do you suppose his Word fails? It sometimes feels that way if you look around...

..But did you know that God is still speaking his Word?

In the *Chronicles of Narnia*, Aslan the Lion sings the world of Narnia into existence. But Uncle Andrew, who stumbles upon Narnia, is a magician; he idolizes himself. He thinks he has sung himself into existence and so won't be sung into Aslan's existence. He won't hear the words to the song; he only hears roaring. He's insane.^{vii} So, in his mercy, Aslan breathes on him and puts him to sleep.

You know, everyone in the Old Testament, except Elijah and Enoch, get put to sleep like that; they sleep with their fathers in *Sheol*, sometimes translated “hell.”

In the fourth book of the *Chronicles of Narnia* series, a girl named Jill suddenly finds herself in Narnia, all alone and desperately thirsty. She spies a river of fresh water, but then she sees an immense lion in the way. The Lion says, “*If you are thirsty, come drink.*” But she is terrified.

“*Are you not thirsty?*” said the Lion...

“I’m dying of thirst,” said Jill...

“*Then drink,*” said the Lion.

“May I – could I – would you mind going away while I do?” said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl.

“Will you promise not to – do anything to me, if I do come?” said Jill...

“*I make no promises,*” said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer... “Do you eat girls?” she said.

“*I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,*” said the Lion. It didn’t say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

“I dare not come and drink,” said Jill...

“*Then you will die of thirst,*” said the Lion.

“Oh dear!” said Jill, coming another step nearer. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.”

“*There is no other stream,*” said the Lion.^{viii}

The Lion in the way...is the Way. To him, you have to lose your life to find it.

But that’s just a children’s story... right?

So anyway, King Jeroboam messes with the Word of the Lord and the Word of the Lord messes with King Jeroboam: turns his arm to stone! Next verse:

⁶ And the king said to the man of God, "Entreat now the favor of the Lord your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me." And the man of God entreated the Lord, and the king's hand was restored to him and became as it was before. ⁷ And the king said to the man of God, "Come home with me, and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward." ⁸ And the man of God said to the king, "If you give me half your house, I will not go in with you. And I will not eat bread or drink water in this place, ⁹ for so was it commanded me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'You shall neither eat bread nor drink water nor return by the way that you came.' " ¹⁰ So he went another way and did not return by the way that he came to Bethel.

¹¹ Now an old prophet lived in Bethel [So this fellow was part of the religious establishment... So he had a vested interest in King Jeroboam's new and improved religion; he was a professional prophet.] ...an old prophet lived in Bethel. And his sons came and told him all that the man of God had done that day in Bethel. They also told to their father the words that he had spoken to the king. ¹² And their father said to them, "Which way did he go?" And his sons showed him the way that the man of God who came from Judah had gone. ¹³ And he said to his sons, "Saddle the donkey for me." So they saddled the donkey for him and he mounted it. ¹⁴ And he went after the man of God and found him sitting under an oak. And he said to him, "Are you the man of God who came from Judah?" And he said, "I am." ¹⁵ Then [the old prophet] said to him, "Come home with me and eat bread." ¹⁶ And [the man of God] said, "I may not return with you, or go in with you, neither will I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place, ¹⁷ for it was said to me by the word of the Lord, 'You shall neither eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by the way that you came.' " ¹⁸ And [the old prophet] said to him, "I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water.' " But he lied to him. ¹⁹ So he [the man of God from Judah] went back with him [the old lying prophet from Bethel in Samaria] and ate bread in his house and drank water.

Does that make sense to you? It sure does to me...

Imagine how frightened and alone this man of God from Judah felt? He's utterly alone, speaking a Word that everyone hates, and now this "prophet" says, "Hey, God revised the plan."

And so, desperate to belong, he quickly doubts the Word in his own heart, the Word in his own understanding, the Word in his own experience, and gladly surrenders to the words of someone who offers him validation; in other words, he surrenders to religion. Next verse:

²⁰ And as they sat at the table, the word of the Lord came to the prophet who had brought him back [the formerly lying prophet]. ²¹ And he cried to the man of God who came from Judah, "Thus says the Lord, 'Because you have disobeyed the word of the Lord and have not kept the command that the Lord your God commanded you, ²² but have come back and have eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which he said to you, "Eat no bread and drink no water," your body shall not come to the tomb of your fathers.' " [Wow!] ix ²³ And after he [the man of God from Judah] had eaten bread and drunk, he [the old prophet] saddled the donkey for the

prophet whom he had brought back. ²⁴ And as he [the man of Judah] went away a lion met him on the road and killed him.

The man of God messed with the Word of God, and the Word of God messed with him.

Actually, religion messed with him first, and so he messed with the Word of God in his heart, and... a lion in the way killed him.... Holy Crap! I mean, did Aslan just kill the guy?

Understandably, people get rather stressed by Scriptures like this... I used to; but I really don't anymore. I suppose that's because I've had an experience in which I really thought Jesus was going to kill me, and in a way he did, and well... it was wonderful.

I suppose it's also because I've become more aware that this old body of mine will die—it's inevitable—and it's comforting to know that Jesus is in charge.

(In the Revelation, Jesus the reaper; He's my Beginning and my End, which is a constant beginning. He said that he'd come for each of us; and, in the meantime, he tells each of us to pick up a cross and follow...) And of course, this makes a *huge difference*: I've come to believe that Jesus has no interest in endless torture, but only in setting me free to love and be loved.

And so, he's not safe; but he's Good.

The Lion kills the man of God who surrenders the Word of God in his heart, to Religion.

And now people will say, "We know better now. That's just the Old Testament, it's not the same in the New Testament..." which reveals that they may not have actually read the New Testament or believed it.

In Acts chapter 2, the Holy Spirit baptizes the church with fire. There are amazing miracles, and people happily and freely share everything with each other—it's like the New Jerusalem coming down. And then this couple, Ananias and Saphira, they sell some property and they say that they give all the proceeds to the church... but they keep some of the proceeds for themselves. They lie.

In other words, they crucify the Word of Truth in their own hearts to make themselves look good in the sight of the church—that's religion. Human religion

Peter confronts each of them, saying, *You could've just kept the property, because you owned it, or you could have just told the truth, but instead you "contrived this deed in your heart..."*^x And then and there, both of them die... or maybe, Aslan just puts them to sleep.

Whatever the case, God protects his infant church from those who would sacrifice his Word in their heart in order to look good and feel accepted by the church—which then is not really the church but a religious crowd... just like the one that had just nailed Jesus to the tree.

God protects his infant church from human religion. And God protects and delivers Ananias and Saphira from themselves. Actually, I think he does that with each and all of us.

Everyone must die to the opinions of men and the religious act that they call themselves... When you do that willingly, it's called "faith." And this faith is not of yourselves; it's the gift of God that none may boast.^{xi} Faith.

Vincent Donavon was a missionary to the Maasai tribe in Africa. He struggled to define “faith” for the Maasai—he had tried to define it as some sort of intellectual assent or thing you do in your head. He struggled to define Faith, until one day, when an old Maasai elder shared this; he said:

“Faith [is not like] a white hunter shooting an animal with his gun from a great distance...for a man really to believe is like a lion going after its prey. His nose and eyes and ears pick up the prey. His legs give him the speed to catch it. All the power of his body is involved in the terrible death-leap and single blow to the neck with the front paws, the blow that actually kills. And as the animal goes down, the lion envelops it in his arms, pulls it to himself, and makes it part of himself. This is the way a lion kills. This is the way a man believes. This is what faith is.”

Then he said:

“We did not search you out, Father Vincent ... We did not even want you to come to us. You searched us out. You followed us away from your house into the bush, into the plains, into the steppes where our cattle are, into the hills where we take our cattle for water, into our villages, into our homes. You told us of the High God, how we must search for Him, even leave our land and our people to find Him. But we have not done this. We have not left our land. We have not searched for Him. He has searched for us. He has searched us out and found us. All the time we think we are the lion. In the end, the lion is God.”^{xii}

Religion is what man does; it’s how we mess with the Word of God.
Faith is what God does; it’s how the Word of God messes with us.

You know, when a lion kills, it does so by isolating its prey from the herd—that is, the crowd.

“The crowd in its very concept is... untruth,” wrote Kierkegaard.^{xiii} The crowd makes everyone just the same.

Jesus doesn’t want a crowd; he doesn’t want one more disciple; he wants *you*. In fact, he’ll leave the 99 in the wilderness just to find you. He doesn’t want religion; he wants you.

The crowd is untruth, but the Lion is the Truth.

Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice.”*^{xiv} And he calls them *“by name.”*^{xv}

If you’ve ever watched a shepherd in Palestine, you know that the goats are driven by the shepherd with a switch, but the sheep just follow his voice. They don’t follow the crowd; they follow the voice of the shepherd.

If you call him *Lord*, with just a mustard seed of faith, you are one of his sheep. You are a sheep, and your Shepherd is a Lion, which explains why this can all be a bit stressful if you don’t trust that Lion—faith is trust.

If you call him Lord, you’re one of his sheep, and you know his voice. He calls you by name.

This is how a shepherd sounds to a sheep: *“blah blah blah fluffy blah blah”* or *“blah blah blah Peter blah blah”* or *“blah blah blah Vince blah blah.”*

So, you may not be able to comprehend individual words, like, *“Hey Vince, over the hill you will find some green grass.”* But you know his Voice.

You know what Love sounds like; you know what Truth sounds like, and so you’ll follow the voice of Truth in Love over the hill and to the grass. You know his voice in the Sanctuary of your soul.

Your Shepherd is a Lion, who is the Word of God, that is, the Word of Love—the Truth.

Now sometimes, by the Grace of God, sheep can comprehend individual words and then pass them on to you—that’s called prophecy.^{xvi} And sometimes, seduced by their own flesh, “prophets” will knowingly, or unknowingly, lie about what they hear—that’s called false prophecy. Human religion is basically false prophecy.

So, St. Paul writes, *“Don’t despise prophecies, but test everything.”*^{xvii} The words of a prophet can be an incredible and powerful gift. But the words of a prophet on the outside should never, ever trump the word of God on the inside, in the Sanctuary of your own soul.

Never, ever abdicate your faith to a prophet or the opinions of any political power, religious group, or social institution. They cannot believe for you, and they do not know who you are. To them, you are a name on a list.

To Jesus, you are his unique and utterly priceless creation. And he chooses to dwell in the temple of your soul.

Jesus is jealous for you...individual and particular you.

And I am grateful for you. Because I know that by just tuning in to the Sanctuary Denver, some of you are branded as heretics by your conservative evangelical brothers who don’t believe all can be saved, or perhaps by your liberal mainstream brothers who don’t believe anyone actually *needs* to be saved from themselves.

The biblical message that all humanity must die with Christ and rise with Christ is not popular with the principalities and powers of this world. But you have recognized the Voice of Truth in Love, the Voice of Grace, and you are not willing to sacrifice the Word in your heart to the religion of men and women.

And now, it’s also imperative that you don’t simply follow me or Chris or Vince or Kathleen or Frances; you must always follow the Word in your heart. You must walk by faith.

So anyway, the man of God surrenders the Word of God in his heart to religion, in order to belong to the crowd. And the Lion kills him and guards him on the Way—the lion is the Way.

²⁴ And as he went away a lion met him on the road [derek: way] and killed him. And his body was thrown in the road [derek: way], and the donkey stood beside it; the lion also stood beside the body. ²⁵ And behold, men passed by and saw the body thrown in the road [derek: way] and the lion standing by the body. And they came and told it in the city where the old prophet lived.

²⁶And when the prophet who had brought him back from the way [*derek*] heard of it, he said, "It is the man of God who disobeyed the word of the Lord; therefore the Lord has given him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him, according to the word that the Lord spoke to him." ²⁷And he said to his sons, "Saddle the donkey for me." And they saddled it. ²⁸And he went and found his body thrown in the road [*derek*: way], and the donkey and the lion standing beside the body. The lion had not eaten the body or torn the donkey.

Understand? This is a very unusual lion.

In 2005, I got to travel with John and Sharna Coors and some of you to Kenya, where some people in our church sponsored local energy stations. While there, we got to go on a safari, not far from where Vincent Donovan worked with the Maasai.

At one point, we drove right up to a lion. It had just gorged itself on a water buffalo and was covered in blood. It was awesome! We were so close, I could have leaned out of the Jeep and touched it. The guide said, *"Don't worry, lions only kill what they plan to eat, and this lion is so stuffed— he won't kill you because he doesn't want to eat you."*

So, this Lion in 1 Kings 13 is a very unusual lion. It kills the man of God; but doesn't eat him.

Along with Bible scholars and theologians, like Karl Barth, I think it is pretty clear that Scripture is telling us that this lion is the Lion of Judah.^{xviii}

The old prophet would have guessed that this was the Lion of Judah—but he would not have known what you know: that the Lion of Judah actually is the Word of God, who is God, through whom all things have been made and without whom not anything was made that is made, who became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, whose name is Jesus.

And now, I know some of you may be getting stressed; you're thinking, *Holy Crap! I used to love Jesus, but now I'm scared to death of Jesus, 'cause you're saying that if I mess with Jesus, he's going to mess with me."*

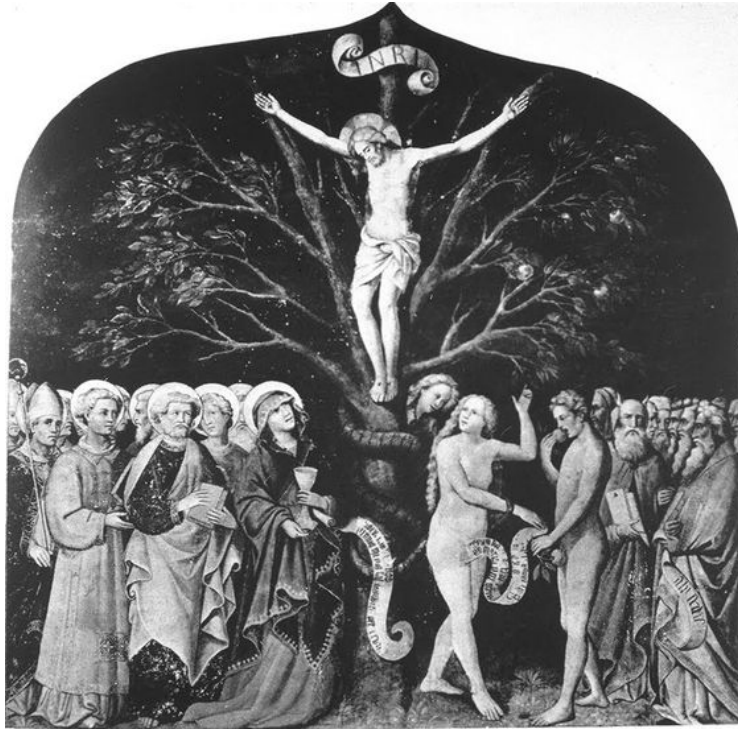


Figure 1 "Mystery of the Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena (1420)

... Yep!

The truth is that you have already messed with Jesus; the moment you first sinned, you took the life of the Word from a tree in a garden.

You messed with the Word of Love that is the Truth, and you lost your Way—the Way. The Moment you sinned, you messed with the Word. But this is the Gospel: Mess with the Word and the Word will mess with you. For the Word isn't safe, but the Word is Good; nothing is "good-er" or more powerful, than the Word.

So, when the man of God loses his way, the Lion who is the Way kills him and drops him in the way. This lion kills him but does not eat him, in fact he guards him. He's waiting for the old prophet... waiting for the old prophet to do what?

²⁸ ... The lion had not eaten the body or torn the donkey. ²⁹ And the prophet took up the body of the man of God and laid it on the donkey and brought it back to the city to mourn and to bury him. ³⁰ And he laid the body in his own grave. And they mourned over him, saying, "Alas, my brother!" [Notice that this is basically a Samaritan who just referred to a Jew as "his brother."] ³¹ And after he had buried him, he said to his sons, "When I die, bury me in the grave in which the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones. ³² For the saying that he called out by the word of the Lord against the altar in Bethel and against all the houses of the high places that are in the cities of Samaria shall surely come to pass."

So much is going on here, we can only begin to point.^{xix}

But notice that the old prophet is saved, for he now believes the Word of God because the man of God from Judah communed with him and died because of the old prophet's sin that became his sin...and that sounds vaguely familiar.

You see the Lion of Judah wasn't only *on* the road, the Lion of Judah was also *in* the man of God, communing with the old lying prophet, in spite of the fact that the man of God had sinned. And then the Lion of God, the Word of God, was even in the old prophet, as he then prophesied to the man of God, who had now sinned at his table.

And notice that the old prophet places the body of the man of God in his own grave, just like Joseph of Arimathea placed the body of Jesus in his own grave.... Just like you place the Body of Christ in your stomach at communion every Sunday.

Notice that the Word of God, the Lion of Judah, accomplishes the purpose for which he was sent...

300 years later, King Josiah of Judah marches to Bethel and digs up the bones of Jeroboam's false prophets and priests and burns them on King Jeroboam's altar, defiling the altar, just as the man of God prophesied. But then, 2 Kings 23:17, King Josiah says:

"...What is that monument that I see?" And the men of the city told him, "It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and predicted these things that you have done against the altar at Bethel." ¹⁸ And he said, "Let him be; let no man move his bones." So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came out of Samaria [the old lying prophet].

100 years later, Ezekiel prophesies to the dry bones and has a vision of the whole house of Israel (that's the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom) rising from their graves and coming into the Promised Land.^{xx}

600 years later, Joseph of Arimathea places the bones of Jesus, the Lion of Judah in his tomb^{xxi}, and Matthew 27:52 · *"The tombs were opened. And many bodies of the holy ones who had fallen asleep were raised and coming out of the tombs with his resurrection, they went into the holy city."*

And that's all just a glimpse of the truth, that *"As in Adam all die, so in Christ—[the last Adam, the Adam of God, Man of God, Word of God, Lion of Judah]—all will be made alive."*^{xxii} The man of God from Judah and the lying old prophet have been, or will be, wakened from their sleep and perfected by the blood of the Lion of Judah, who is also *"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*

There's nothing "good-er" or more powerful than the Word of God who is God.

I'm trying not to get too philosophical, but I hope you see that the man of God from Judah and the old prophet from Samaria both wrote themselves out of the Story that God is telling with his Word. They wrote themselves out with sin, but God was constantly writing them in with Grace—God is Love, and his Word is Grace, and that's the Truth who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

[Image on screen showing previous artwork of "Fall and Redemption."]

And hopefully, you remember that this is the Sixth Day of Creation, and you and I are still being made in the image of God.^{xxiii} On the Sixth Day of Creation, sixth day of the week, sixth hour of the day, we took the Life of the Lion of Judah on a tree in a Garden.

And in the same moment on the same tree, he gave his life—he forgave it—and so it's there that we are finished in the image of God; it is there that we write ourselves out of the story, and he constantly writes us back in.

And you see, he doesn't do that with religion. We can't get faith by messing with the Word; we get faith by watching the Word mess with us. We get faith by confessing our sin and believing God's Grace, but that's not something we can simply do; it's something the Word of God does in us.

[Peter sings] "I heard there was a secret chord that David played, and it pleased the Lord..."

It's *confession*, that's the sixth chord, on the sixth day; we confess sin and watch the Word of God turn it into Grace and finish us in his image, perfected on the Seventh Day.

[Peter sings] "I heard there was a secret chord that David played, and it pleased the Lord, but you don't really care for music, do you? It goes like this, the fourth, the fifth, the minor fall, the major lift... a baffled king composing Hallelujah."

You see, it's the major lift after the minor fall that makes the Hallelujah.^{xxiv}

The "major lift" is not the words of God written in books. It's the Word of God, rising in the tomb that is the sanctuary of your soul.

"He is... a lion in hiding," wrote Jeremiah, "*he turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces...*" (Do you ever feel torn apart by God?)

"He is... a lion in hiding; he turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces... But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:10-11, 21-23)

The Word of God exposes our *faithlessness*, which truly is death. And the Word of God gives us his *faithfulness*, which is eternal life.

You know, when I first read the *Chronicles of Narnia*, being a good modern day evangelical protestant, I thought that C. S. Lewis kind of messed up the story of the atonement. Instead of Aslan being killed by an angry God to feel better about us, Aslan is killed by the witch on a stone table as if *he is* what's for dinner.

[Movie clip shows on screen of a video montage created juxtaposing the death of Aslan from the movie *Narnia* combined with video clips from the crucifixion scene from *The Passion of the Christ*, while version of Leonard Cohen's song "Broken Hallelujah" plays in background.]

Communion

So, on the night that we all betrayed him—that his creation betrayed him and wrote themselves out of his Story, the Lion of the tribe of Judah took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body broken for you. Take and eat."

And in the same way after supper and after giving thanks, he took the cup saying, "This is the covenant in my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you."

See, this is the surprise: he doesn't eat you. He wants you to eat him, that you might even become him. The Word of God in human flesh. In Jesus's name, believe the Gospel. Ingest the Gospel. And become the Gospel. It's Good. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

And so, Lord God, we confess that since the very beginning, we've been doubting that your Word is good. Thank you, God, for revealing that your Word is Jesus, and it's the absolute best, and that nothing is more powerful than your Word. So that even if we write ourselves out of the Story, it's still part of the Story that you're writing, and you write us back in, and you reveal the depths of your glory and your infinite love for us. So, Lord God, thank you for what you have shown us. Thank you that you are helping us to believe; you're helping us to trust. We thank you, Lord God, in Jesus's name. Amen.

I always do this: I start out writing a sermon with a simple application point in mind—like: Don't mess with the Word or the Word will mess with you.

And I do mean that: Don't ignore the Word of God in Scripture, the Word of God through others, and most of all, don't ignore the Word of God in your heart. In other words: don't sin— don't tell lies, don't be a jerk, even if religious people are encouraging you to do so. Most of all: Don't deny the Word in your heart in order to be accepted by men.

So, don't mess with the Word or the Word will mess with you... and that can be quite painful... so try not to mess with the Word. But actually, we've already messed with the Word of God. And *actually*, the Word of God is *already* messing with us. ^{xxv} That's why our life here is painful and hard...

But have hope. Although the Word of God is not safe, He is Good. And that's the Gospel.

So, it seems that I often do this. I start out with a practical application point: "Don't mess with the Word." And I end up preaching the Gospel: "The Word is messing with you. And nothing is "good-er" or more powerful than the Word. He will accomplish that for which he was sent. You will be finished in the image and likeness of God. That you might enjoy him forever without end, his children."

In Jesus's name, believe the Gospel and you become the Gospel.
Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ And through Balaam the prophet Israel is also called a lion or lioness (Numbers 23:24, 24:9) Jerusalem is also called Ariel, which mean lion or lioness of God. (Isaiah 29:1-2)

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1950), p. 75-76

ⁱⁱⁱ Mark 10:18, Luke 18:19 NRSV

^{iv} John 1:1-3, 14

^v Amos 3:8

^{vi} Isaiah 55:11

^{vii} C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1955)

^{viii} C. S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1953), p. 17

^{ix} This is so wild! Did you notice that as they sat at table, they like... switched lives, or psyches? The one who had not sinned, sinned, and the one who had sinned, now speaks the Word. It reminds me of the other Man of God from Judah, that sits at table with each one of us, not sinning, but in fact, becoming "sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God."

God tells such amazing stories! We will go on to see that the lying prophet is somehow saved by the death of the "man of God." In fact, just like Joseph of Arimathea, the lying prophet has the bones of the Man of God, placed in his own tomb. He not only learns of the true Word of God from the Man of God, he dies with him and he will rise with him in a New Creation.

^x Acts 5:4

^{xi} Ephesians 2:9

^{xii} I can sympathize with and feel with young Americans, whom I have met. Who are going through the agony of unbelief. I used to think that faith was a head trip, a kind of intellectual assent to the truths and doctrines of our religion. I know better now. When my faith began to be shattered, I did not hurt in my head. I hurt all over.

Months later when all this had passed, I was sitting talking with a Masai elder about the agony of belief and unbelief. He used two languages to respond to me—his own and Kiswahili. He pointed out that the word my Masai catechist, Paul, and I had used to convey *faith* was not a very satisfactory word in their language. It meant literally "to agree to." I, myself, knew the word had that shortcoming. He said "to believe" like that was similar to a white hunter shooting an animal with his gun from a great distance. Only his eyes and his fingers took part in the act. We should find another word. He said for a man really to believe is like a lion going after its prey. His nose and eyes and ears pick up the prey. His legs give him the speed to catch it. All the power of his body is involved in the terrible death leap and single blow to the neck with the front paws, the blow that actually kills. And as the animal goes down the lion envelops it in his arms (Africans refer to the front legs of an animal as its arms), pulls it to himself, and makes it part of himself. This is the way a lion kills. This is the way a man believes. This is what faith is.

I looked at the elder in silence and amazement. Faith understood like that would explain why, when my own was gone, I ached in every fiber of my being. By my wise old teacher was not finished yet.

"We did not search you out, Padri," he said to me. "We did not even want you to come to us. You searched us out. You followed us away from your house into the bush, into the planes, into the steppes where our cattle are, into the hills where we take our cattle for water, into our villages, into our homes. You told us of the High God, how we must search for him, even leave our land and our people to find him. But we have not done this. We have not left our land. We have not searched for him. He has searched for us. He has searched us out and found us. All the time we think we are the lion. In the end, the lion is God."

- Vincent J. Donovan, *Rediscovering Christianity*, p. 48

^{xiii} "A crowd in its very concept is the untruth, by reason of the fact that it renders the individual completely impenitent and irresponsible, or at least weakens his sense of responsibility by reducing it to a fraction." inauthenticity lies precisely in the attempt to live "as a numeral within a crowd, a fraction within the earthly conglomeration." For Kierkegaard, where there is the crowd, "there is externality, and comparison, and indulgence, and evasion."

-Editor Charles E. Moore, Kierkegaard, *Provocations* (Farmington, PA: The Plough Publishing House, 1999), p. xxviii

^{xiv} John 10:27

^{xv} John 10:3

^{xvi} Most accurately stated this is "words of knowledge," and anytime you testify in Jesus, of Jesus and to Jesus in Truth, you prophesy (Revelation 19:10).

^{xvii} 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21

^{xviii} The progress of the cause which the man of God from Judah represents is irresistible. Like the cause of David before it, it is the cause of God Himself. The strict obedience with which the man of Judah at first follows his commission, and the intransigence with which he refuses any compromise, testify to this majestic irresistibility. So, too, does the fact that scarcely has the commission of God been betrayed by its legitimate bearer that it straightway finds a new representative in its opponent, the prophet of Bethel. So, too, does the fact that the lion of Judah immediately appears and strikes when the man of Judah ceases to will to be that which he still is, and shall be, and cannot possibly cease to be. One thing does not happen. He is killed but he is not devoured by the lion. His body is preserved, and also buried. Admittedly, it is buried in a foreign grave. But it is buried properly, securely and with honour. And even later, when judgment breaks on Bethel, the remains of this man of Judah are providentially spared—only his bones, but still his genuine remains. The consistency of the cause which he represented has stood the test, not only of his sin but also of his punishment, and even his death and what followed. His remains are preserved. The grace of God towards Jerusalem, the faithfulness of the God of Israel, constant to itself, does not abandon even this representative of His cause who has proved unworthy.

- Barth, K., Bromiley, G. W., & Torrance, T. F. (2004). *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God, Part 2* (Vol. 2, pp 398-399). London; New York: T&T Clark.

^{xix} The Word of God, which abides forever, in our flesh; the man from Bethlehem in Judah who was also the prophet of Nazareth; the Son of David who was also the King of the lost and lawless people of the north; the Elect of God who is also the bearer of divine rejection; the One who was slain for the sins others, which he took upon Himself, yet to whom there arose a witness, many witnesses, from the midst of sinners; the One lifted up, in whose death all was lost, but who in His death was the consolation and refuge of all the lost—this One truly died and was buried, yet He was not forgotten and finished on the third day, but was raised from the dead by the power of God. In this one prophet the two prophets obviously live. And so, too, do the two Israels—the Israels which in our story can finally only die, only be buried, only persist for a time in their bones. They live in the reality and unity in which they never lived in the Old Testament, but could only be attested. They remain in Him, and in Him the Word of God proclaimed by them remains to all eternity.

- Barth, K., Bromiley, G. W., & Torrance, T. F. (2004). *Church Dogmatics: The doctrine of God, Part 2* (Vol. 2, p. 409). London; New York: T&T Clark.

[For a fascinating exposition of 1 Kings 13, read all of pp. 393-409 of the work just cited.]

^{xx} Ezekiel 37

^{xxi} Matthew 27:57-60, Mark 15:43, Luke 23:50, John 19:30

^{xxii} 1 Corinthians 15:22

^{xxiii} Please read *The History of Time and the Genesis of You* by me: https://www.amazon.com/History-Time-Genesis-You/dp/B08CPG3B1P/ref=tmm_pap_title_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=

^{xxiv} Hallelujah in Hell: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F27jxwHDrzM>

^{xxv} In *The Horse and His Boy*, Shasta, the unluckiest boy in the whole world, runs away and tries to get to Narnia. But over and over he encounters troubles, just like the rest of his life. He has a litany of woes, not least of which is encountering so many lions in his journeys. He calls himself "the most unfortunate boy that ever lived." Towards the end of the book finds himself in one more disaster. He is walking down a narrow path through woods in which he has never been. He is lost and confused. It's dark, and he's alone. He begins weeping as he walks, recounting all his woes and troubles, the unluckiest boy in all the world.

As he is walking, weeping, and talking into the darkness, suddenly he senses somebody is next to him. He feels a breath on his arm. He realizes that whatever it is, it is huge. He cannot escape from it; he cannot run. He is terrified. Finally he whispers, "Who are you?" And he hears, "One who has waited long for you to speak." Shasta is terrorized and says, "Oh, I am the most unlucky person in all the whole world." And the Voice says, "Tell me your sorrows." And Shasta does. He unloads all of his sorrows, his litany of woes.

"I do not call you unfortunate," said the Large Voice.

"Don't you think it was bad luck to meet so many lions?" said Shasta.

"There was only one lion," said the Voice. . . . "I was the lion." And as Shasta gaped with open mouth and said nothing, the Voice continued. "I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the Horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you."

"Then it was you who wounded Aravis?"

"It was I."

"But what for?"

"Child," said the Voice, "I am telling you your story, not hers. I tell no one any story but his own."

"Who are you?" asked Shasta.

"Myself," said the Voice, very deep and low so that the earth shook: and again "Myself," loud and clear and gay: and then the third time "Myself," whispered so softly you could hardly hear it, and yet it seemed to come from all round you as if the leaves rustled with it.

Shasta was no longer afraid that the Voice belonged to something that would eat him, nor that it was the voice of a ghost. But a new and different sort of trembling came over him. Yet he felt glad too.

- C. S. Lewis, *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1952), p. 173-176