

BURNING OF DEAD MEN'S BONES

Today's lesson occurred during King Josiah's purging Judah of idolatry in the 7th century BC. It occurred while Josiah was demolishing the altar of Bethel which King Jeroboam erected at the beginning of the North Kingdom of Israel in the 10th century BC (1 Kings 11-12).

"Furthermore, the altar that was at Bethel and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made even that altar and high place he broke down. Then he demolished its stones, ground them to dust, and burned the Asherah." (2 Kings 23:15)

The altar of Bethel was the religious center of pagan worship of the North Kingdom of Israel. It was here that King Josiah took the bones from a special graveyard dedicated to the priests of idolatry and burned their bones on this altar to defile the area forever.

"Now when Josiah turned, he saw the graves that were there on the mountain, and he sent and took the bones from the graves and burned them on the altar and defiled it according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these things." (2 Kings 23:16)

This lesson will study SIX aspects of Josiah BURNING OF DEAD MEN'S BONES at Bethel.
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1. During the burning of dead men's bones, King Josiah noticed a special monument in the graveyard of Bethel.

"Then he said, 'what is this monument that I see?' And the men of the city told him, 'it is the grave of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel.'" (2 Kings 23:17)

As a result of this information, Josiah didn't burn his bones or the bones of the prophet from Samaria.

"And he said, 'let him alone; let no one disturb his bones;' so they left his bones undisturbed with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria." (2 Kings 23:18)

This was a historical monument to the truth of God's grace. It was also a monument to the faithfulness of God to His word. Paul refers to church age believers in a similar way when he called them as God's living epistles known and read by all men (2 Cor.3:1-3).

2. The burning of dead men's bones by Josiah was prophesied three centuries earlier by the man of God from Judah (1 Kings 13:1-10/ read).

"And he 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 on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.'" (1 Kings 13:2)

The man of God from Judah prophesied not only this event but also the name of the king who would do it (Josiah) and he prophesied it three centuries before the historical event (2 Pet.1:16-21).

3. The North Kingdom has come and gone and yet the altar of Bethel was still operating 300 years later.

This gives testimony to the ever presence of evil in the world and the Angelic Conflict. “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” (1 John 5:19; Acts 26:18; Col.1:13)

“In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Cor.4:4)

4. The following doctrinal principle can be established from this story – “God controls human history in its details as it relates to the plan of God regarding people, places, performances, and prophecy.”

“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; and He made one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.” (Acts 17:24-27) (Gal.4:4; Psa.75:7)

On the front end of this prophesy, the man of God from Judah faithfully proclaimed God message to King Jeroboam (1 Kings 13). On the backside, Josiah participated in its fulfillment 300 years later (2 Kings 23).

How did the man of God from Judah get buried along with a prophet from Samaria in the pagan prophet’s cemetery at Bethel?

5. The man of God from Judah died the sin unto death after delivering one of the great prophetic messages of his day (1 Kings 13:8-26; 2 Kings 23:16-18; 1 John 5:16).

The man of God from Judah was under special orders from Lord regarding departure after delivering the message to King Jeroboam (1 Kings 13:8-10, 14-17). “*For so it was commanded me by the word of the Lord, saying, ‘you shall eat no bread, nor drink water, nor return by the way which you came.’*” (1 Kings 13:9)

What happened that caused him to disobey the Lord’s command? (1 Kings 13:18-23/ read) He died the sin unto death because of **willful disobedience** to this command (1 Kings 13:20-26/ read) (Much like Adam and Eve in Gen.2-3). Miserable ending to a great mission because of willful disobedience (Heb.12:5-11; Gal.6:7-8).

6. This brings us to the third prophetic character involved in the burning of dead men’s bones at Bethel – the prophet from Samaria (1 Kings 13:11-32). How did the prophet of Israel (north) get buried with the prophet of Judah (south) in the graveyard of the pagan prophets at Bethel?

“So the prophet took up the body of the man of God and laid it on the donkey, and brought it back and he came to the city of the old prophet to mourn and to bury him. And he laid his body in his own grave, and they mourned over him, saying, ‘alas, my brother!’ And it came about after he had buried him, that he spoke to his sons, saying, ‘when I die, bury me in the grave in which the man of God is buried; lay my bones besides his bones, For this thing shall surely come to pass which he cried by the word of Lord against the altar in Bethel and against all the houses of the high places which are in the cities of Samaria.’” (1 Kings 13:29-32)

The special monument also gave testimony to the 5th cycle of divine discipline to the priest-nation of Israel because of disobedience towards the theocracy constitution of the 10 commands (Deut.28).