

Ashes To Ashes

I am not talking about cremations. I am talking about the residue after all the dross and garbage has been burnt away from our daily deeds, our daily walk with God, and our daily dose of obedience ??? – disobedience ???.

1 Kings 13:1–32

At the close of chapter 12, it is stated that Jeroboam was ministering of the altar at Beth-el, using a golden calf that he himself had made. At the beginning of this chapter, he is still at the altar and about to receive a judgement from God regarding both his idolatry and apostasy.

God sent a prophet from Judah to deliver His judgement and verdict. However, notice the sequence of events at this time, the judgement was delivered and signs followed,

1. a sign was pronounced, verse 3,
2. Jeroboam threatened the prophet, and immediately became a physical sign by the withering of his hand, verse 4,
3. Upon Jeroboam's submission to the prophet, and following the prophets intercession, God restored Jeroboam's hand, verse 6,
4. The prophet refused the kindness offered him by Jeroboam, verses 7–10.

Before we looked at our text for today, I mentioned two words – obedience/ disobedience ???.

So far the prophet has been obedient, now he is about to become disobedient.

The sons of another old prophet have returned home to tell their father what has been happening.

At this time things just go from bad to worse, for the old prophet rode out on his ass that he might find the prophet from Judah for what might be called a 'satanic revenge'.

When told by the prophet from Judah that God had forbidden him to return the way he came, our prophet from Bethel states that an angel – NOT GOD – has changed the itinerary, verses 7–10.

Note the chain of events here,

1. Both prophets were sat at the table when the Word of the Lord came, verse 20,
2. The prophet of Judah had eaten, 22,
3. An ass was saddled in readiness for the journey, verse 23,
4. A lion attacked the prophet and killed him, verse 24,
5. The ass remained stationary, verse 24,

6. The lion made no attempt to attack the ass, verse 24.

That the above events were ordained of God cannot be denied, for, when the prophet of Bethel came to collect the carcass, the lion had not torn or eaten the slain prophet, or even the ass, yet remarkably made no attempt to touch the second ass or prophet.

Ashes so far have related to ashes that were in place on the altar BEFORE God broke the altar and scattered the ashes.

Vance Havner, born in 1901, who later became a student at the Moody Bible Institute, referred to Abraham being given the title 'friend of God', and Jesus referring to those who loved Him as friends, John 15:15, made the following quote, "If we are beset by an unseen foe, we are also befriended by an Unseen Friend. Great is our adversary but greater is our Ally."

We can, by claiming a little poetic licence, re-paraphrase the above statement where the unseen foe is the friend/colleague stood before us, and the unseen friend demands a penalty for what we have done amiss, and our ally has become our enemy.

Thus not only can our unseen friend be our greatest ally, He can, because of our behaviour, become our greatest enemy.

The prophet who went directly against God's Word suffered death at the hand of the lion, the two ass's who had been obedient to the commands given them remained untouched, the lying prophet still had his time of judgment to come!

We now look at the greatest human intercessor the earth has ever known Abraham, a man known as a 'friend of God', but also a man who claimed that he was no more than 'dust and ashes'.

Abraham, Genesis 18:23 was not afraid to stand before God and plead for any possible righteous people.

Yet some 675 years later his descendants would not go near the mount where God was speaking to Moses!

1. Abraham started with the possibility that Lot might have spoken, and converted fifty to a righteous living, Genesis 18:28, After making his confession that he was as 'dust and ashes', Abraham boldly proceeded to place his confidence in God's Mercy instead of possible righteous works by Lot,
2. Forty and five, Genesis 18:28.
3. Forty, Genesis 18:29.
4. Thirty, Genesis 18:30.
5. Twenty, Genesis 18:31.

6. Ten, Genesis 18:32.

We are told in Genesis 18:33, “And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place”.

How did Abraham feel? Dejected? Rejected? He hadn’t even reached the total of Lot’s family – six people.

In this very personal story of Abraham, we see that Abraham ministered in three distinct areas:

1. To the Lord, Genesis 18:1–8,
2. To his home, 18:9–15,
3. To a lost world, 18:16–33.

Hospitality is paramount in the East, and Abraham faithfully obeyed it.

As with people of the East, Abraham was taking a rest during the hottest part of the day when he saw three strangers approaching.

There was nothing about their appearance to make Abraham think that they might be special, but, as he spent time with them in the shade, he realised that he was entertaining people superior to just royal visitors.

These three common looking people were our Lord Jesus Christ and two of His angels, Genesis 18:1, 22; 19:1.

Abraham did two things that we all should be doing,

1. He ministered to the Lord,
2. He served the Lord personally

Thus it is important for us to remember what the writer of Hebrews penned, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares”, Hebrews 13:2

The following day Abraham’s visitors left, to do what? To get four people out of Sodom – Lot, his wife, and their two daughters – not even 50% of where the Lord had stopped Abraham, yet God had read Abraham’s heart as a he spiritually reached out for his family.

And what happened on that day of deliverance?

1. Lot procrastinated.
2. Lot’s wife looked back and died.
3. Lot’s daughters committed an incestuous act with their father.

There were no works or deeds from Lot’s stay in Sodom, and none came forth after his deliverance from a personal Armageddon.

Lot’s altar was smashed, and his ashes fell to the ground.

Abraham’s altar remained standing, and his ashes were received by God.

The ashes of yet another stand fast warrior of the Lord brought about

pain and discomfort for those the ashes touched.

Exodus 9:8–11, “And the LORD said unto Moses and unto Aaron, Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt. And they took ashes of the furnace, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses sprinkled it up toward heaven; and it became a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast. And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boil was upon the magicians, and upon all the Egyptians”.

Since the Egyptians had ignored the ultimate judgement – death – that had been passed on their cattle as a warning, God sent a plague that affected and afflicted their own bodies.

God, at this time used the sins of the Egyptians as their own punishment. The Egyptians had oppressed Israel in the furnaces; NOW God used the ashes of the furnace as a plague to them.

Moses' works, his life, and his attitude, all based upon what he understood of what he had been told – for the Commandments had not as yet been established – had passed through the fire of purification, and he was the only one who could pick up the ashes from the furnace, and cast them to the heavens to do God's Work.

We all know the story of the five wise and the five foolish virgins, Matthew 25:1–12, “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not”.

Grim, isn't it. You get to Heaven's Gate. You've struggled all the way up there to be told, “Put all those works in the rubbish bin over there, and just bring me the ashes”.

For many the question they will ask is “What ashes”?

The bottom line is “No ashes – No entry”.

Therefore the only way we can say “I love you in the love of the Lord”, and mean it is to let our ashes say it AFTER we have permitted our lives and works to go through the fire of purification.

The ‘coal’ was a token of forgiveness since fire symbolized cleansing and purification. The altar could have been either the altar of incense or the altar of burnt offering, both where atonement was made by the burning up of the rubbish, and the ashes purity remained.

To close. I have just two points to make with regard to your ashes and their acceptance by God:

They have nothing to do with your religious fervour or zeal.

1. They have nothing to do with whether you swept the floor, put out the seats, sung your praises from the front or the back.
2. They have nothing to do with welcoming people in, or leading them in their worship.

They have everything to do with being obedient to God’s Will in your life. They have everything to do with doing the work you believed you were called to do.

Then take your works and ask God to burn the dross off, and then offer Him the purified and dross free ashes, for without the ashes how can you feel worthy to claim a crown?