

3 Keys George Whitefield Used to Hear God's Voice Clearly

At 23 years old, George Whitefield sat on a ship ready to sail for America from the port of Deal, located approximately 70 miles southeast of London. For some time, he had experienced a compelling call to preach the gospel to Colonial America and now the day for his departure had finally arrived. His heart was filled with gratitude, excitement and expectation.

As he waited for the ship's crew to hoist anchor and sail, a letter was delivered to him from John Wesley who had just returned from Georgia. He opened the letter and was stunned by what he read.

Wesley had written, "When I saw God, by the wind which was carrying you out, brought me in, I asked counsel of God. His answer you have enclosed." The message Wesley had enclosed was, "Let him return to London."

Whitefield was shocked and momentarily confused. Wesley was 10 years his senior and had been a mentor to him. He held the Wesley brothers, John and Charles, in very high esteem. However, this word from John contradicted everything he believed about his call to America.

He Finds the Answer in Prayer and God's Word

Whitefield went to prayer with a friend, and as they prayed, there there came to his mind a story from the Old Testament where a prophet lost his life because he listened to the words of another prophet instead of diligently adhering to what God had told him.

First Kings 13 contains the story of an unnamed prophet to whom God spoke and instructed to go to Bethel and prophesy against the idolatrous altars that had been established there

by King Jeroboam. God instructed him not to stop to eat or drink but to return directly home to Judah when he had completed his assignment.

Based on this directive from the Lord, the prophet went to Bethel. As he prophesied against the idolatrous altars as instructed, they miraculously split apart and the ashes were poured out on the ground. As a result of that miracle and a miracle of healing for King Jeroboam, the king invited the prophet to his home. He refused and recounted to the king what the Lord had told him.

But as he departed Bethel, an old prophet, who heard of what had happened, saddled his donkey and caught up with the prophet and invited him to his home to eat and drink. When the first prophet recounted to him what the Lord had instructed him, the old prophet said, "I too am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house that he may eat bread and drink water.'" The old prophet, however, was lying.

Contrary to the instructions given him by the Lord, the prophet went back with the old prophet. While they were eating, the Spirit of the Lord came upon the old prophet and he prophesied to him that because of his disobedience he would not be buried in the tombs of his ancestors. Sure enough, upon leaving the old prophet's home, he was met by a lion in the road, which killed him, fulfilling the old lying prophet's prediction of his demise because of his disobedience.

3 Powerful Lessons

As Whitefield prayed about Wesley's letter, this story was powerfully impressed on his mind and heart. He knew that God was highlighting to him the importance of obeying the directions he had received from the Lord and to not listen to this word from another party, even such a respected one as John Wesley.

It turns out that Wesley had “cast a lot” concerning whether Whitefield should go to America. This was something Wesley and others practiced, if after diligent prayer they were unable to discern the will of God.

Exactly how he cast the lot is not clear, but it may have been as simple as putting two sheets of paper in a bowl on which was written, “Proceed to America” and “Let him return to London” and then drawing the one that said, “Let him return to London.”

Hindsight is 20/20 and it is abundantly clear that Whitefield made the right decision in ignoring Wesley’s prophecy and sailing for America. He ignited the Great Awakening that transformed Colonial America and prepared her for statehood. Through his incessant travels he became the most recognizable figure in America and earned for himself the title “America’s Spiritual Founding Father.”

Here are three powerful lessons to be derived from Whitefield’s experience:

1. We are not to be led by lots, omens or prophecies. We are to be led by the indwelling Holy Spirit as Paul tells us in Romans 8:14.
2. Prophetic utterances are to be tested, even when they come from the most esteemed among us.
3. We can be confident in our own ability to hear God and know His will. {eo}

*This article is derived from **Dr. Eddie Hyatt’s** latest book entitled, George Whitefield, with the subtitle, From Poor English Inn-Keeper to the Revivalist Who Became America’s Spiritual Founding Father. This book and others are available from Amazon and his website at .*