

Encountering Misguided Prophecies: When to Say No to a 'Thus Saith The Lord'

Twenty-three-year-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 a failed mission to Georgia. He opened the letter and was stunned by what he read. Wesley wrote that when he saw that the same wind that brought him in was taking Whitefield out, he inquired of the Lord about Whitefield's journey. Wesley emphatically stated that the word God gave him for Whitefield 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.

Whitefield went to prayer, and as he prayed, there came to his mind a story from the Old Testament about a "man of God" who lost his life because he listened to the words of an "old prophet" instead of diligently adhering to what God had instructed him.

I Kings 13 tells this story of the unnamed "man of God" whom God instructed to go to Bethel and prophesy against the idolatrous altars that had been established there by King

Jeroboam. God also 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, he went to Bethel. As he prophesied against the idolatrous altars, they miraculously split apart, and the ashes were poured out on the ground. As he departed Bethel according to the Lord's instructions, an "old prophet," who heard of what had happened, saddled his donkey, caught up with the "man of God" and invited him to his home to eat and drink.

When the "man of God" recounted to the "old prophet" what the Lord had instructed him, the "old prophet" said, "'I am a prophet like you, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'Bring him back with you into your house so that he may eat bread and drink water'" (1 Kings 13:18). The "old prophet," however, was lying.

The "man of God" went back with the "old prophet" in contradiction to the instructions the Lord had given him; and as a result of his disobedience, he lost his life and was not buried in the burial ground of his ancestors.

With this story so vividly impressed on his mind, Whitefield knew what he must do. He sent back a reply to Wesley in which he said, "I cannot return to London." Whitefield said no to Wesley's "thus saith the Lord."

History has demonstrated that Whitefield made the correct decision, for he became the major figure in the Great Awakening that rocked Colonial America and prepared her for statehood. Everywhere he went, great revival followed his preaching.

Because of God's blessing on his labors, he became the most recognizable person in colonial America and Thomas S. Kidd, who teaches history at Baylor University, calls him "America's Spiritual Founding Father."

We can all be thankful that Whitefield said no to Wesley's
"thus saith the Lord."