

Prophecy denounces Jeroboam

Notes for 25 Oct

Steve Logan

Read: [1 Kings 13](#)

We might start off this week with a look back to 1 Kings 12 where Jeroboam set up two golden calves. We didn't have time to discuss this last week but it is important background to this week's study.

Well, this is an unusual story! The history of the kings and the interactions between the various leaders is paused for this rather strange narrative. What is it saying to us? How are we supposed to interpret this story - does it have anything to say to 21st century Christians?

Setting the Scene

After the kingdom divides, Jeroboam, king of Israel, establishes alternative worship centres at Bethel and Dan to prevent his people from going to Jerusalem. This act directly violates God's command for centralized worship. Into this scene, a 'man of God' from Judah is sent by the Lord to deliver a message of judgment.

Passage Summary

Section	Verses	Summary
The Message from Judah	1–10	Read this section carefully! The 'man of God' confronts Jeroboam at the altar in Bethel and predicts that a future king, Josiah, will destroy the altar. In v3 the 'man of God' sets up a sign to <i>prove his message</i> . In v4 there's a supernatural event involving Jeroboam's hand. There's a lot of direct intervention from God in this section.
The Deceptive Prophet	11–19	An old prophet from Bethel deceives the 'man of God', leading him to disobey God's command. He eats when he is not supposed to.
The Judgment	20–32	God judges the 'man of God' for disobedience. He is killed by a lion, a miraculous sign of divine justice.
Jeroboam's Continued Sin	33–34	Despite the warning, Jeroboam continues in idolatry, sealing his dynasty's doom.

Key Themes and Lessons

Here's a harsh summary of the lessons to be learned from this chapter.

- The Authority of God's Word: God's commands are not to be altered, even by another "prophet". The man of God's downfall came from disregarding God's clear instruction. (cf. [Deut 13:1–5](#); [Gal 1:8](#))
- The Danger of Spiritual Deception: The old prophet's lie shows that disobedience can stem from misplaced trust in human authority rather than God's revealed truth. Test every message by Scripture ([1 John 4:1](#))
- Partial Obedience = Disobedience: The man of God courageously confronted a king but failed in a simple command. God expects complete obedience ([1 Sam 15:22–23](#)).
- Divine Justice and Mercy: God restored Jeroboam's hand but judged the prophet's disobedience. His justice is impartial and holy.
- The Power and Reliability of Prophecy: The prophecy of Josiah's coming was fulfilled over 300 years later ([2 Kings 23:15–16](#)) proving the reliability of God's word.

Discussion

1. There are two unnamed prophets in this chapter. Exactly how do you get to be a *prophet*? From a simple reading of these texts it would seem that being a 'prophet' was something like being a 'king'. You know it when you see it. Thoughts?
2. How does this story show the importance of obeying God's word? Does anything strike you as being a bit, well, arbitrary? (I'm thinking of other stories, eg David and the shew bread, where it seemed that God wasn't concerned at all about the apparent breaking of the rules)
3. The 'man of God' is killed by a lion, a miraculous sign of divine justice. Or is it? Does this sound a bit harsh to you? What do you think is going on in vv 23-30?
4. What can we learn about discernment from the two prophets? I think the 'man of God' was unfairly dealt with. He believed the 'old prophet' when the old prophet told him a lie, and for that he was killed. In my harsh summary, above, under "The Danger of Spiritual Deception" we read that we should test every message by scripture. Exactly how should the 'man of God' have done this?
5. What does Jeroboam's reaction reveal about repentance? Jeroboam continues in idolatry, sealing his dynasty's doom - why is this? Has he not understood the 'wrath of God'? Do you think that if the events were as obvious to Jeroboam as they appear to be in this chapter then he would behave differently? Could it be that the author of this chapter is perhaps not telling the whole story? Or, maybe, the 'spin' of the author is oversimplifying the story?
6. How can believers today guard against deception and disobedience? I want real answers to this question!

7. Is this another example of my maxim about the books of Samuel and Kings - "God did things and things happened, and people wrote them down"? Interpretation is in the mind of the reader?
8. I'm fairly sure that were the traditional Adult Sabbath School Quarterly to cover this chapter that the interpretation given would be similar to the "Key Themes and Lessons", above. Do you buy that interpretation? If not, give me an alternative!