

The Prophetic Portrayal of Judgment against King Jeroboam

When he had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. And Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD and made them commit great sin. The people of Israel walked in all the sins that Jeroboam did. They did not depart from them, until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had spoken by all his servants the prophets. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day. (2 Kings 17:21-23)

INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of critical scholarship, the passage of 1 Kings 13 has been dismissed as being a later addition to the text of Scripture. James A. Montgomery claimed that the text is “the first extensive case of midrash in the historical books.”¹ Other commentaries, through the embrace of the idea of the Deuteronomistic history (DtrH), similarly claim that the narrative events in 1 Kings 13 are later redactions and intrusions into the text and thus more legend than history, with critical scholars especially pouring scorn on the prophecy of the rise of King Josiah in 1 King 13:2.² On the neo-orthodox side, David Bosworth attempts to resurrect Karl Barth’s interpretation of this text as an expression of Barth’s unique doctrine of “Christocentric” election and reprobation, an interpretation that nonetheless still seemed to be read into not from the text.³

In contrast to such scholarship, we do not have to jettison the historicity of the events in the text. As V. Phillips Long has stated, history writing in the Bible is a “creative enterprise” and

¹ James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (ICC; ed. Henry Synder Gehman; Edinburgh, UK.: T&T Clark, 1951), 260

² Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings* (WBC 12; Waco, Tex.: Word books, 1985) 168-70. It is called a “prophetic legend” [John Gray, *I & II Kings* (The Old Testament Library; 2nd rev. ed.; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1964, 1970), 332], and a narrative which “may be based on an older tradition” reworked to serve “the interest of the Josianic DtrH” [Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 178-9]. The prophecy of King Josiah has been derisively termed a *vaticinium post eventum* [Gray, *I & II Kings*, 326]

³ David Bosworth, “Revisiting Karl Barth’s Exegesis of 1 Kings 13,” *Biblical Interpretation* 10.4 (Jan 2002): 360-383

a “representational art.”⁴ As he said, “the past does not present itself in such a way that historians need make no creative choices in the construction of a historical account of some aspect of it.”⁵ Therefore, while we can acknowledge the fact that the narrator of the events in our text has portrayed these events with a bias against the innovative reforms of King Jeroboam, this does not mean that the events recounted are not historically accurate neither is the judgment of the narrator necessarily wrong.

In this paper, we would like to look at the narrative passage of 1 Kings 13:11-34. While certainly within the larger framework, 1 Kgs 12: 30-13:34 is one large pericope, with 1 Kgs 12:30-33 and 13:33-34 forming the two ends of an inclusio, yet within this larger pericope we can discern two parts: 12:30-13:10 and 13:11-34. The second part has been termed the disobedience of the Man of God and its consequences by Werner E. Lemke, and we shall look into it in greater detail.⁶

THESIS

It is my contention that the narrator intends 1 Kgs 13:11-34 to be a prophetic drama portraying Jeroboam’s apostasy and the destruction of his house.⁷ The tragedy of the Man of God paints the picture of Jeroboam’s kingship and God’s judgment against any form of compromise and sin against His majesty, portraying to us God’s holiness, His demand for absolute obedience

⁴ V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation Vol. 5; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 63-71

⁵ Long, *Art*, 71

⁶ Werner E. Lemke, “The Way of Obedience: 1 Kings 13 and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History,” in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God — Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Earnest Wright* (Ed. Frank Moore Cross et al.; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1976), 306

⁷ James K. Mead has proposed this theme as well [James K. Mead, “Kings and Prophets, Donkeys and Lions: Dramatic Shape and Deuteronomistic Rhetoric in 1 Kings XIII,” *Vetus Testamentum* XLIX, 2 (Apr 1999): 197]. Mead however sees this as a legend used for rhetorical purposes to support the Deuteronomistic narrative [Mead, “Kings and Prophets,” 205].

and judgment that will befall those who refuse to comply with the requirements of His Law, as well as His mercy.

NARRATIVE BACKGROUND

Before we look into the narrative events themselves, let us review the historical background of the events in our text. King Solomon has died and his son Rehoboam has ascended the throne. Rehoboam however was a naïve politician whose foolishness fulfilled the prophecy uttered against Solomon for his compromise (1 Kgs 12:15 c.f. 11:11-13). After they had rebelled against Rehoboam, the people of the northern state of Israel made Jeroboam king over them.

Jeroboam, who was prophesied to be king by the prophet Ahijah (1 Kgs 11: 29-39), however apostatized after he became king. Being king of a newly formed kingdom, he distrusts God to keep his kingdom stable. He therefore set up rival cult centers in Bethel and Dan so that the people of Israel do not have to go down to Jerusalem and thus risk having their political loyalties to him shaken (1 Kgs 12:26-7). Jeroboam made the golden calf statues not as other gods beside YHWH, but as representations of His presence just as how the Ark of the Covenant has functioned.⁸ On top of this, Jeroboam consecrated many high places, ordain priests from all the

⁸ 1 Kgs 12: 28ff identifies the object of worship as the God who brought Israel out of Egypt, with Jeroboam using the same words as that uttered in Exod. 32:4 (הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֵעֲלֵינוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם) [See also Wesley I. Toews, *Monarchy and Religious Institution in Israel under Jeroboam I* (The Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 47; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1993), 65]. Just as the original golden calf was meant to represent the true God, not another god or gods (Exod. 32:5ff — תָּחַג לַיהוָה מִקָּהָר), so likewise the narrator by the usage of the same words here in 1 Kgs. 12:28ff shows us that Jeroboam’s sin was not the violation of the first commandment but of the second (“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” —Exod. 20:4), contra the statement by Donald J. Wiseman, who described the sin of Jeroboam as “creating man-made idols to be worshipped as national gods” [Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings* (TOTC; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 144]. It is true that the prophet

tribes not just from the Levites, changed the date of a religious feast (1 Kgs. 12: 31-33), and overall caused Israel to sin against YHWH.

Prior to our text, a Man of God from Judah went to Bethel to prophesy against the altar there, and thus as a synecdoche against the entire religious system Jeroboam has set up.⁹ The Man of God pronounced judgment against Jeroboam's religious innovations (1 Kgs 13: 2-3), and his prophecy was validated by the sign of the altar being torn down and the ashes pouring out. In fact, Jeroboam himself received a personal "sign" from trying to oppose the prophetic word (1 Kgs 13: 4). Having failed in stopping the prophetic word, he next tries to co-opt the prophet by inviting him to eat and drink with him, which the prophet, citing God's command, refuses.¹⁰

Ahijah charged Jeroboam for making other gods and casting YHWH behind his back (1 Kgs. 14:9), but such is what YHWH thinks of Jeroboam's innovations, not what Jeroboam thinks he is doing.

As Wesley I. Toews argues, "the ardent Jehu who destroyed the temple of *habba'al* at Samaria in his zeal for Yahweh (2 Kgs 10:18-28) apparently took no measure against the golden calves, presumably because for him and his contemporaries they did not represent *habba'al*" [Toews, *Monarchy*, 42]. While it has been argued that they served as pedestals [DeVries, *I Kings* (WBC 12), 162], Toews argues that since the calf images were installed "singly at two different shrines," they should not be seen as pedestals but functioning for "securing and attesting the active presence of the deity." [Toews, *Monarchy*, 53]

⁹ Contra Toews, who claimed that there is no "opposition to the calf images in the prophetic story of the unnamed man of God who prophesies against the altar at Bethel" (Toews, *Monarchy*, 42). Toews omits the fact that one of the golden calves was there at Bethel, and therefore the prophecy against the altar was done with a golden calf at least in the background, not to mention that if the golden calf was supposed to represent YHWH, the sacrifices at the altar were made towards the golden calf.

¹⁰ Gray, *I & II Kings* (Old Testament Library), 322. Sweeney also shows how the turning down of Jeroboam's invitation also "point to the evaluation of Beth-El as unfit for Judea worship." [Sweeney, *I & II Kings* (Old Testament Library), 181]. Victor Matthews states that "the prophet's statement may be an unwillingness to become a partner in Jeroboam's gift-giving strategy," and "legitimize the king's cultic actions at Bethel" [Victor H. Matthews, *Old Testament Turning Points: The Narratives that Shaped a Nation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2005), 120]

Our text begins with the Man of God leaving the altar at Bethel and the presence of King Jeroboam. Subsequently, the old prophet from Bethel emerges as another key actor in the ensuing narrative.

THE OLD PROPHET

We are first introduced to the old prophet at Bethel (v. 11), the third major human actor after Jeroboam and the Man of God. In our pericope, he is constantly called a prophet (נְבִיא) as opposed to the Man of God (אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים) from Judah.¹¹ The old prophet heard of the Man of God and his prophetic proclamation against Jeroboam's religious innovations from his sons. Subsequently, the old prophet asks his sons to saddle his donkey so that he can find the Man of God and invite him home to eat bread and drink water.¹²

The question comes as to the nature of the quest of this old prophet. What is his motive for seeking out the Man of God? John Gray claims that the prophet was "testing the authority of his colleague," to see if "he really had the authority of God and was not the agent of political opponents of the regime in North Israel."¹³ Such however is a cynical political interpretation which the text nowhere hints at. The narrators of the book of Kings has made it plain that the kingship of Jeroboam is not the issue, as Jeroboam was promised a lasting kingdom if he had

¹¹ The only exception seems to be in verse 23, where a textual variant involving the Septuagint shows that the phrase לְנְבִיא אֲשֶׁר הָשִׁיבוֹ is replaced with the phrase καὶ ἐπέστρεψεν. The BHS editors suggest that וַיָּשָׁב is the vorlage behind the LXX here. In this light, Werner E. Lemke has argued that the LXX is probably original [Lemke, "The Way of Obedience" in *Magnalia Dei*, 313 endnote 70]. However, since ἐπιστρέφω can have a causative sense (BDAG), the vorlage may actually be הָשִׁיבוֹ interpreted in the sense of "and he caused him to return." The omitted words (לְנְבִיא אֲשֶׁר) could be omitted because of the scribal error of homoeoteleuton. Therefore, the Hebrew is likely original, and the exception is significant

¹² Verse 11 begins with the singular forms and then change to the plural forms at the end. It is probably that either the sons are taken as a collective whole in the beginning, or that one son was the main reporter to their father.

¹³ Grey, *I & II Kings* (Old Testament Library), 322. See also Toews, *Monarchy*, 113

actually obeyed God's commands.¹⁴ Walter Gross on the other hand claims that the motivations of characters remain "impenetrable," and thus only their actions are important.¹⁵ However, is that really the case? Given that the narrative is portrayed by the narrator in a particular way, I would suggest not.

In the parallel passage in Chronicles which alludes to Jeroboam's apostasy, 2 Chr. 11: 13-16 tells us that the Levites and godly men from the region of north state of Israel have migrated south to Judah in reaction to Jeroboam's apostasy. Therefore, that the old prophet remained at Bethel with his sons imply that the old prophet had either compromised or apostatized. The latter is unlikely as the old prophet from the beginning professes to follow YHWH, and he has already in the beginning recognized that the Man of God from Judah was sent by YHWH (v. 14ff, 18a).¹⁶ The old prophet is thus probably someone who had compromised his faith like Lot in Sodom (2 Peter 2:7-8), and his invitation to the Man of God to eat bread and drink water was made because of his desire for fellowship as the godly have one by one left Israel for Judah.

In his desire for fellowship, the old prophet became desperate even to the point of lying, an action with severe consequences for the Man of God who listened to him.

PORTRAYAL OF JEROBOAM'S TURNING

¹⁴ Furthermore, Grey's interpretation [Grey, *I & II Kings* (Old Testament Library), 322] is untenable as the narration of the books of Kings is focused not so much on political intrigue but rather the focus is on the spiritual obedience or disobedience of the kings and the covenant communities of Israel and Judah.

¹⁵ Walter Gross, "Lying Prophet and Disobedient Man of God in 1 Kings 13: Role Analysis as an Instrument of Theological Interpretation of an OT Narrative Text," *Semeia* 15 (Jan 1979): 122

¹⁶ It is granted that Jeroboam intended to worship YHWH also, not strictly speaking other gods. Yet the old prophet showed forth that he was truly worshipping YHWH because he recognized the authority of God's prophet and God's Word. Jeroboam however showed forth his unbelief by rejecting the prophetic word of the Man of God, showing that his and Israel's worship of YHWH is mere ritualism and one borne out of custom.

As stated, the events in 1 Kgs 13: 11-34 is a prophetic drama portraying Jeroboam's apostasy and destruction. The first point of portrayal lies in the turning of the Man of God from obedience to disobedience.

The first thing we notice of the Man of God is he is found "sitting" (יָשָׁב) under a massive tree. The Word of YHWH states that he was supposed to be returning back to Judah by a different way, yet the narrative portrays him as not walking but sitting down. Given that the qal stem is also used to refer to remaining, staying, lingering or dwelling, the narration begins our portrayal of the Man of God on a bad note, as a portent of what is to come.¹⁷ Instead of walking and returning to Judah, here we see the Man of God enjoying his rest under a massive tree in or near Bethel.

The old prophet interacted with the Man of God and invited him to come to his house to eat bread and drink water; to have a meal. The Man of God initially refuses this invitation as he had refused Jeroboam's earlier. It seems that the Man of God was sticking to his convictions, but even here we note a slight hesitancy. First, God's word to him was that he was not to eat bread and drink water but to return by another way to Judah (v. 17), but in his answer, the Man of God merely said that he was "not able" (לֹא אֵיכָל) to turn and come with the old prophet (v. 16).¹⁸ This indicates that he probably desired to do so, a hypothesis further strengthened by his easy capitulation to the lie later uttered by the old prophet. In this light, Pamela Reis has analyzed such phrases, compared the speeches the Man of God made to Jeroboam and to the old prophet and concluded that the Man of God actually desired to stay in Bethel, with his asking price for

¹⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, "יָשָׁב" (*TWOT* 1: 412)

¹⁸ The command to return by another way is because in the OT, "the retracing of one's footsteps" is "regarded as voiding the mission and abandoning the goal" [Uriel Simon, "1 Kings 13: A Prophetic Sign — Denial and Persistence," *HUCA* 47 (Jan 1976): 90].

compromising YHWH's message being half of Jeroboam's wealth.¹⁹ In response, it must be said that her argument proves too much. Firstly, just because the Man of God desired to stay longer does not imply that he is looking to do so for a price. The examples given by Reis of such no-means-yes transactions are all commercial transactions. In contrast, the Man of God was not stating a monetary price but claiming he wouldn't go with Jeroboam even if Jeroboam were to give him "half his house" (חֵצֵי בֵּיתוֹ), a phrase which is referring not to Jeroboam's wealth but his kingdom and rule.²⁰ Just as how King Ahasuerus had offered to grant Esther up to half the kingdom (Esther 5:3), likewise the Man of God was not telling Jeroboam his asking price but rather saying that even if Jeroboam were willing to give up everything, he would not return with him. Secondly, the only way to get the Man of God to turn and eat and drink was to state that such was the will of YHWH for him, not offer a monetary incentive of any sort.

The Man of God therefore was desirous of tarrying in Bethel. In this frame of mind, he was susceptible to be taken in by the lie spoken by the old prophet. Any hint that YHWH has willed differently thus allowing him to stay at Bethel will be easily taken up and believed. When the old prophet claimed to be also a prophet just like him, and he has a word from YHWH allowing him to remain, the Man of God believed it easily without discerning if what the old prophet said was genuinely true. Further in the narrative, the narrator in verse 17 shows that the Man of God treated this part of God's command to him as a mere word (דְּבָרָה) (v. 17), while God

¹⁹ Pamela Tarmakin Reis, "Vindicating God: Another Look at 1 Kings XIII," *Vetus Testamentum* XLIV 3 (1994): 377-84

²⁰ Thus the reign of Jeroboam is the reign of his house (1 Kgs 11: 38; 14:14). Although the Man of God was not seeking monetary reward in 1 Kgs 13: 8, the narrator nevertheless plays on this word בֵּיתוֹ to show forth the disobedience of the Man of God, who though he will not compromise with Jeroboam later compromised for much less in the house of the old prophet, to show forth the foolishness of disobedience

treated it as a command (הַמִּצְוָה) to be strictly followed (v. 21), thus showing the attitude the Man of God had towards this part of God's command.²¹

Another word שׁוּב features especially prominent in the text, with an occurrence of 16 times in the entire chapter of 1 Kings 13.²² The usage of this term succinctly shows the turning away of the Man of God from God's command, thus portraying the apostasy and turning away of Jeroboam from YHWH.²³ The ESV has translated the hiphil form of שׁוּב in the text as "bring back," which is a fine translation yet it obscures the motif of turning as the qal and hiphil patterns could not be seen as being related. In verse 18, the old prophet claimed that God commanded him to turn back (הִשְׁבֵּהוּ) the Man of God to his house, with the result that the Man of God did indeed turn (וַיָּשׁוּב) to the house of the old prophet (v. 19). Verse 26 perhaps best shows the turning away of the Man of God, whom the old prophet turned from the way (הַשִּׁיבֵנו מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ). When we look at this phrase, this construction of שׁוּב together with the preposition מִן and the noun דֶּרֶךְ is mostly used in a metaphorical sense.²⁴ Lemke suggests therefore that this phrase is an idiom which is not to be taken literally but theologically, as referring to the disobedience of the Man of God who "turned from his divinely ordained way."²⁵ Since however the turning of the Man of God was a historical event, the phrase in verse 26 is probably meant by the narrator to have a dual purpose showing forth both the literal turning of the Man of God from the road which he was supposed to be traveling on, and metaphorically his disobedience in turning away from obedience to God's command.

²¹ Reis, "Vindicating God," 384

²² Lemke, "The Way of Obedience," in Cross et al., *Magnalia Dei*, 310

²³ "The third most important use of *shûb* in the Qal, and theologically the most crucial, is in passages dealing with the covenant community's return to God (in the sense of repentance), or ... turning away from God (in the sense of becoming apostate)." [Victor P. Hamilton, "שׁוּב" (*TWOT* 2: 2340)]

²⁴ Lemke, "The Way of Obedience," in Cross et al., *Magnalia Dei*, 311

²⁵ Lemke, "The Way of Obedience," in Cross et al., *Magnalia Dei*, 311

The actions of the Man of God in our text therefore portray Jeroboam's apostasy. The Man of God was appointed by God to do YHWH's will, just as Jeroboam was appointed by God through the prophet Ahijah to do the same earlier. The Man of God used his autonomous reason to reject what seemed trivial to him (a mere "word" by YHWH), while Jeroboam used his autonomous reason to implement his religious innovations and in so doing reject what seemed to him to be trivial (the second commandment).²⁶ The Man of God heard the *other* voice of the old prophet and turned (שׁוּב) from God's command. This portrays Jeroboam's taking counsel (1 Kgs 12:28) from *others* and subsequent turning away from God.²⁷ The turning of the Man of God in disobedience therefore is a prophetic drama depicting Jeroboam's apostasy.

PORTRAYAL OF PROPHETIC PROCLAMATION OF JUDGMENT

We would look next at the portrayal of Jeroboam's receiving of the prophetic word of judgment. But before we look at that, a word has to be said about the nature of the old prophet and the supposed theme of true and false prophets, or the idea that the text teaches a criterion "for distinguishing between the message of a true and false prophet."²⁸

It is admitted that one can see a criterion or criteria for distinguishing between the message of a true and false prophet in the text. D. W. Van Winkel is therefore right when he says

²⁶ However, ultimately, "it was not important why the man of God disobeyed the command but only that he did" [Gross, "Lying Prophet and Disobedient Man of God," 124]. The main issue here is disobedience to God's commands, not the motives of the two actors although we can deduce them to some degree.

²⁷ "Both men make incorrect choices based on bad advice and personal uncertainty" [Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings* (New American Commentary 8; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 189.

²⁸ D.W. Van Winkel, "1 Kings XIII: True and False Prophecy," *Vetus Testamentum* XXIX No. 1 (1989): 37. Also Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Way of the Man of God from Judah: True and False Prophecy in the Pre-Deuteronomiac Legend of 1 Kings 13," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (Jul 1982): 392

that the criterion to differentiate between a true and a false prophet is that of obedience.²⁹ But showing that this can be seen in the text is different from saying that this is the main theme of the text or even one of the intended goals of the narrator in the narrating of that text. The issue of dealing with false prophecy can be found in passages such as Deut. 13:1-3, 1 Kgs 22:1-28 and Jer. 28, and is thus not unique to our text.

As we have seen, the false prophecy uttered by the old prophet in violation of the third commandment was the formal cause for the turning of the Man of God away from God's commandment to him, thus portraying Jeroboam's turning away from God's commandments as he took counsel with others. Our portrayal continues with a prophecy from YHWH against the offending party. After turning back and having his fill of food and water, the Man of God heard the word of YHWH coming in the pronouncement of judgment against him for transgressing the command of YHWH given to him (vv. 21-22). The prophetic judgment against the Man of God portrays the judgment this same Man of God had previously uttered against Jeroboam's religious reforms, and anticipates Ahijah's later prophetic judgment against Jeroboam and his entire house.³⁰ God Himself will judge those who violate His commands, and the prophetic word against Jeroboam's disobedience is portrayed in the word uttered against the Man of God for his disobedience.

It is notable that after the proclamation of the judgment against the Man of God, the Man of God is called by the same term נְבִיא in verse 23 like the old prophet, thus showing forth that his disobedience has caused him to be identified with the people in Israel in their sin against

²⁹ Van Winkel, "Prophecy," 40. Also Lemke, "The Way of Obedience," in Cross et al, *Magnalia Dei*, 317

³⁰ All of these pronouncements contain the prophetic formula כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה.

YHWH.³¹ In the subsequent narrative, this identification with the people of Israel in their sin is deepened as the narrator portrays the Man of God as riding on the donkey owned by the old prophet at Bethel in his attempt to return to Judah (v. 23), which though a kind act by the old prophet is used by the narrator as a literary device of identification to show the descent of the Man of God into disobedience. The Man of God through his disobedience is now just like Israel and Jeroboam in their disobedience and receives judgment just as Jeroboam had received judgment, and will receive more pronouncement of judgment from the prophet Ahijah in the future.

PORTRAYAL OF JUDGMENT

After receiving the pronouncement of judgment for his disobedience, the Man of God went on his way. A lion found him on his way however and killed him, fulfilling the judgment pronounced against him through the old prophet. Through his death, the Man of God portrayed for us the manner of God's judgment against Jeroboam's religion and Jeroboam's house.

The prophecy against the Man of God was that he would be killed, and his body or corpse would not be buried in the grave of his fathers. This came true as his death by a lion in a place far away from Judah would mean that he could not be buried there, which is a dishonor as it was “a disgrace to be buried away from the family among strangers.”³²

The narrator frames this episode as a portrayal of judgment against Jeroboam's religion. The body of the Man of God has now become “the corpse thrown on the road” (הַגְּבֵלָה מִשְׁלֶכֶת) (בְּדֶרֶךְ). Through discourse analysis, James K. Mead has shown how this corpse thrown on the

³¹ If we have the identification of the pairs of “Judah and Davidic religion—Man of God” and “Israel and Jeroboam's religion—Prophet,” taking on the title of “prophet” identifies the Man of God with Israel and Jeroboam's religion.

³² Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings* (TOTC), 147

road parallels Jeroboam's altar at Bethel that was torn down, with both events being the fulfillment of the prophetic word against the religion of those who rebelled (מרה, v. 21) against YHWH.³³ The death of the Man of God therefore is a portrayal of Jeroboam's torn down altar. Just as the Man of God through his disobedience has been identified with Israel in her religion and sin, his being "thrown on the road" as being analogous to the altar being torn down is YHWH's sign of the judgment that comes and will come against Jeroboam's religion.³⁴

We can also see here a portrayal of the manner of judgment against Jeroboam's house. The Man of God was killed and left in the open, before the old prophet came to retrieve the body. In like manner, Ahijah in his later pronouncement of judgment against Jeroboam's house will say, "Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone who dies in the open country the birds of the heavens shall eat, for the LORD has spoken it" (1 Kgs. 14:11). The bodies of Jeroboam's descendants will be left unburied and their bodies will be eaten by animals.³⁵ The death of the Man of God and its remaining there in the open unburied and being "thrown on the road" is a portrayal of the judgment that will come upon Jeroboam's house for the wickedness he did.

In the description of his posture of death, the Man of God portrays God's judgment against the religion of Jeroboam who rebelled against Him. In the description of the manner of

³³ Mead, "Kings and Prophets," 195, 202

³⁴ Mead suggests that the donkey on the side of the corpse recalls Jeroboam standing beside the altar [Mead, "Kings and Prophets," 202]. However, the preposition used in verse 1 (עַל) and verse 24 (לְפָנָיו) are different. Furthermore, the lion was also standing beside the corpse so why is the donkey chosen and not the lion? Mead further suggests that the lion represents YHWH [Mead, "Kings and Prophets," 203-4] but this is not clear from the context.

³⁵ The body of the Man of God was not eaten by the lion, which constituted a miracle, showing that the lion was sent by God to execute judgment, not a random killing by a hungry lion. The contrast of the body of the Man of God and the bodies of Jeroboam's descendants will be discussed further below.

his death, the Man of God portrays God's judgment against the house of Jeroboam, a word which will be fulfilled in the day of Jeroboam's son Nadab by Baasha who wiped them off from the face of the earth (1 Kgs. 15: 29-30)

ANTITHETIC PORTRAYAL — THE FATE OF JEROBOAM AND HIS HOUSE

We have so far seen how the Man of God has portrayed Jeroboam's apostasy and coming judgment on his house. The Man of God however does not portray Jeroboam in every aspect. Most notably from our last section, we see that the body of the Man of God was not eaten while the bodies of Jeroboam's descendants were cursed to be eaten.

It is here that we see how the Man of God differs from Jeroboam and portrays Jeroboam antithetically. We start by stating that the Man of God is painted by the narrator as having repented of his sin. In verse 24, the Man of God went off (וַיֵּלֶךְ). This seems to be a resumption of his former course of action of going towards Judah in verse 12 (וַיֵּלֶךְ), with the verb שׁוּב used primarily in our text for his sinful diversion to the house of the old prophet.³⁶ Logically too, there is no reason why the Man of God should decide to go off from the house of the old prophet immediately unless he had repented and decided to go back to Judah.

Jeroboam on the other hand continues even deeper into his apostasy. In verses 33 and 34, we are told that Jeroboam continued the same course of action he was already doing back in 1 Kgs 12: 30-33, with the narrator using the same word "turn" (שׁוּב) to denote Jeroboam's

³⁶ If, as Reis thinks, "the man of God is anxious to return with the old prophet because he prefers to defect to Bethel and unite with its inhabitants in apostasy" [Reis, "Vindicating God," 383], it is questionable why he would have even prophesied against the altar, and why he would go off after hearing the prophecy against him. Furthermore, if he does defect to Bethel, he would certainly not be buried in the grave of his fathers so the prophecy of the old prophet would mean nothing to him.

continued apostasy.³⁷ As opposed to the Man of God who “went,” Jeroboam “did not turn from his wicked way” (לֹא-שָׁב יָרְבֵּעַם מִדְּרִכּוֹ הָרָעָה) but he continued to “turn” (וַיִּשָּׁב) against YHWH (v. 33), thus manifesting Jeroboam’s unrepentance despite the sign of divine displeasure in the destruction of the altar at Bethel given in his presence. Together with 1 Kgs 12:-30-33, these verses formed the two bookends of an inclusio and points to “a reversal that does *not* take place,” as Jeroboam remained hardened against God.³⁸

The repentance of the Man of God therefore causes him to portray antithetically the fate of Jeroboam and his house. The corpse of the Man of God though “thrown down on the road” was not eaten, an action which of course shows the sharp contrast between the Man of God who we would expect “to abstain from food long enough to finish the work which God called him,” and the lion whom we expect to “eat its prey.”³⁹ Yet in another layer of portrayal, the uneaten body of the Man of God is contrasted with the eaten bodies of Jeroboam’s descendants. The body of the Man of God was retrieved by the old prophet who mourned over him (v. 30) and buried him in his grave (v. 29), something denied to Jeroboam’s descendants. The fate of the body of the Man of God here parallels that of Jeroboam’s son Abijah, who received the honor of YHWH being said to have found something pleasing in him (1 Kgs 14:12), and thus he of the house of Jeroboam was mourned over and buried (1 Kgs. 14: 13).

We notice also that Jeroboam’s further apostasy in verses 33 and 34 followed upon the events narrated in the previous verses. Verse 33 begins with the phrase “after this matter” (אַחַר הַזֶּה) which can also be translated as “after this word.” Jeroboam would probably have come

³⁷ Lemke, “The Way of Obedience,” in Cross et al., *Magnalia Dei*, 310-11

³⁸ Jerome T. Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 67. Italics original

³⁹ Mead, “Kings and Prophets,” 204

to hear of this entire incident since it was spoken about in the city. The narrator by placing this phrase here shows us that Jeroboam did not have regard for this prophetic portrayal. Jeroboam was given a chance to repent, yet verses 33 and 34 show us that he continued in his turning away from God. The subsequent episode of 1 Kgs 14: 1-18 therefore makes explicit the judgment against Jeroboam and his house, for since he has disregarded the earlier prophetic message against the altar, the threatened judgment will now be explicitly pronounced personally against him and his house by the prophet Ahijah.

CONCLUSION

The narrative of the Man of God in 1 Kgs 13:11-34 therefore portrays to us Jeroboam's apostasy and judgment against him, and portrays antithetically the fate of Jeroboam's house. God demands full obedience, and compromise no matter how small is punishable by Him. The seemingly trivial sin of the Man of God is matched by the seemingly trivial sin (at least as seen in Jeroboam's eyes) of worshipping YHWH in whatever manner he thinks fit. The holiness of YHWH is presented here in its absolute nature, and the justice of God is shown in the judgment of YHWH against sins regardless of how trivial they may seem to us.

We also see in our text the mercy of YHWH, who calls sinners to repent and sometimes do not mete out punishment in this life as sinners deserve. The mercy of YHWH is such that the body of the Man of God is preserved from being further defiled by beasts, and his corpse being given the decency of mourning and proper burial. The mercy of YHWH is seen in that the judgment against Jeroboam and his house was not proclaimed initially but only later after he had disregarded the prophetic word, as Jeroboam was given an opportunity to repent. The mercy of YHWH is also seen in that the old prophet was spared judgment for giving a false prophecy to

the Man of God, and just like Lot was spared from the destruction of Sodom, so likewise the old prophet was spared the desecration of his remains during the time of Josiah.

The prophetic word and drama was done to call Jeroboam to repentance. Let us therefore not be like Jeroboam, who turned against YHWH for his own personal gain and refused to repent of his sins.

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