

SUMMER 2 - A Prophet, A False Prophet and the Word of God

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] or whatever in a film. But there is usually some form of a hero. Now of course in very simplistic stories things are very black and white. So the hero is a white character dressed in white coming in you know blazing on his in his horse or charger to defeat the very baddies who are always dressed in black always look dirty and mean they always have sort of low bass notes playing in the music in the background in the films. It's very clear from the music at least and what they're wearing who the goodies and the baddies are. Now of course when you become a bit more sophisticated heroes are a little bit greyer. Usually we can tell who the heroes are but often in plots there is a sort of twist so that the the goodie hero has some compromising characteristical behaviour and the baddies may actually have something that endear us to them in some way or other.

One of the intriguing things in 1 Kings 13 in particular as a chapter is that there is no real hero. That is so compromised are each of the characters they're either in a sense almost totally black or they're very dark shades of grey and even the people or persons that we think might be the heroic type goodies they are so compromised and in the case of the man of God his end is so tragic that we question well who are the goodies here? Who is the hero? Who is the model that we might be expected to follow in some form or other? The king of course in the story is clearly not a goodie or a hero at any point. He is defiant consistently to the word of God despite various ways in which God addresses him and performs miracles around him and signs for him that are fulfilled. He remains stubborn and intransigent, apostate and thoroughly evil from beginning to end. The man of God we might expect to be the hero type figure. He is however disobedient to the word of God at points and he dies and is buried away from home, away from his ancestors without returning to Judah. And so the person who looks to be the hero, the goodie of the story in the first few verses is so compromised at the end that we have to say that he's almost like an anti-hero.

The old prophet, he looks to be a liar and a deceiver as he is, a trickster, a tempter in trying to con the man of God back to his house. And we might expect when the good man of God goes back to this old deceiving prophet's house that somehow he, the man of God, will detect the deception and rescue himself from being seduced by it but not at all. And then oddly this old seducing, tempting prophet actually speaks words of truth at the end. And he goes from being a sort of anti-hero to a bit more of a hero at the end. But in no sense really in the chapter of 1 Kings 13 is there a striking and clear hero. That's very rare in stories and by stories I mean things that are both fictional and things that are true. Here I believe this is true but I use the word story to really encompass narrative whether or not it is true or fictional. So we find here a king, a man of God and an old prophet, three people, a triumvirate of treachery someone called them in this chapter.

This chapter also shows, chapter 13, that there's a sense in which trickery triumphs here. As I've said there's no clear black and white, there's no clear winner, victor at the end.

It's sadness really throughout in many respects. Some people actually find or have found in the past this chapter somewhat offensive morally. That somehow a man of God might be tempted by a prophet of God and how could a deceiving prophet speak words of truth and so on. As though there's such moral compromise that we might even be offended by it. When we look more closely though into chapter 13 and we'll look at the end of chapter 12 as the preface to this chapter, when we look more carefully at chapter 13 we find in fact one thing that does actually triumph. It triumphs despite the trickery, treachery and deception and evil of the king, the man of God and the old prophet. And that is, as it is termed in this chapter, the word of God. The word of God in a sense is the victor or the hero of this chapter and it is addressing us to a very important thing about how we read biblical history.

[5 : 06] That it's not just the story of kings, we might get deceived by the title of this book into thinking that. And though kings have a preeminent role in the books of kings, one and two kings as we call them, is actually the word of God that is the key character. In saying that it's really God who's the key character expressed by his word time and time again, more often than not in the mouth of a prophet or a man of God, whether or not they are heroes or morally compromised. In the Hebrew scriptures and by that I mean the way the Jews of Jesus' day and leading up to that and still today regard their old, what we call the Old Testament. They don't have a section that they call the history books as we do. Joshua to the end of Esther I suppose is for us regarded as sort of the books of history. But in the Jewish terminology what we're dealing with here is what's called one of the former prophets. That's a more helpful way in some respects of thinking because what we're dealing with is the word of God in prophecy throughout history. They are in fact former prophets and the prophets throughout the book of kings in particular, there are many of them in fact, not all of them are named, they are characterised by speaking the word of God or the word of the Lord. That's a healthy description for the book and one that we should keep in mind tonight not least. What we find not only in chapter 13 but actually through the whole of one and two kings as indeed the whole Bible is the triumph of the word of God. What God says comes to be no matter how it's said, by whom it's said or where it's said.

And indeed what we might call the book of history or Jews would call the former prophets begins with the book of Joshua at the end of the, after the Pentateuch and there at the beginning of the book of Joshua. Joshua is the first leader of God's people in the land, is commanded to meditate on the word of God day and night and that ringing charge to Joshua in a sense sets if you like not so much a pattern as a standard by which those who lead God's people not least are meant to be judged and so keep that in mind as we're looking at the lives of these three people within this chapter of 1 Kings 13. The word of God is in effect the hero of this story. It prevails against a defiant king, it is fulfilled despite its bearer's disobedience, it is confirmed even by a false prophet and we ought not lose sight of a fact that in this chapter, chapter 13, the expression word of God or word of the Lord occurs in verses 1, 2, 5, 9, 17, 18, 32, several times. It's the sort of expression that we might just overlook but it's there frequently so it's a key character if I can put it like that in this chapter.

But really of course the issue is not so much the hero. I'm using really narrative type terminology in looking for a hero. The real issue is authority and it's the word of God's authority, not the king's or the prophet's or the man of God's authority that matters most. Now remember the historical context as we saw last week. In 922 thereabouts BC, a long time ago, the Kingdom of Israel divided in two at the death of Solomon. We saw last week the reasons for that. The stupidity of Solomon's son Rehoboam in saying that he would treat the people even harsher than his father Solomon had done.

The rebellion by the ten northern tribes under the leadership of a former army commander, minister if you like, of Solomon's army and government, Jeroboam and so the kingdom divided. What now is then called Judah in the south and Israel in the north. Now I think we've got a slide just to show you up on the wall. This is slightly contrived as you can see but it's slightly enlarged but don't worry about that too much. The kingdom's divided. Judah it's now called in the south after the main tribe and in the north it's now called Israel. Ten tribes put together. Rehoboam's the king of the south, son of Solomon.

In the north it's Jeroboam, not of Davidic descent, not related to David or Solomon in any way. In the south Jerusalem is the capital, still as it was in David's day. In the north Samaria is at least after a little while it seems the capital near Shechem, not far from Shechem. Oh, we've even got a little flashing light on it. I don't know how we do that but we have and you can still go to in fact Samaria. And in Jesus' day Samaria from the city became the name for the area in the middle and the Samaritans take their name from that place as well, the area more than the city. And just so that we finish with the map once and for all. The long blue splotch is not an ink trip but it's the Dead Sea and going up from it the thin line is the Jordan River and there's a little blue blob in the middle of the E of Israel that might be hard to see. That's the Sea of Galilee. And north of that is Dan on the border of Lebanon and Syria today in the high mountains almost. And down the bottom of the northern kingdom is Bethel, two names of places that we'll find later on. And over on the left, slightly anachronistically Jonah is being thrown overboard from a ship.

[10 : 48] So that'll do from our map. I hope that's been helpful. If not, it's been some light relief. We're then picking up a story at a crucial time in Israel's history. In a sense it is the founding of the northern kingdom that we're dealing with. The kingdom that has separated from the Davidic dynasty under Solomon's son Rehoboam. It's under an army commander called Jeroboam and it's the very beginning of his reign that we're dealing with. At the end of chapter 12 we find the first things that are mentioned about Jeroboam's reign as king. We find in fact being told here both motivation as well as his action. Not always are we told motivations of people in stories, in the biblical stories, but we are here and we're told of his motivation is a rejection of the promises made to David about a temple and about a Davidic dynasty. Jeroboam in the north is rejecting that for fear of his own security in effect. See what it says in chapter 12, 26 and 27. Jeroboam said to himself, literally it's actually

Jeroboam said in his heart and we should have alarm bells ringing because if you remember last week all the time it was Solomon's heart that was leading him astray and as soon as we hear here as it should be written, Jeroboam said in his heart, we should think uh-oh something's going wrong and usually the expression to say in your heart in the Bible is actually indicating wrong thinking and wrong behaviour.

Whenever Israel said in their heart something wrong in Deuteronomy 7, 8 and 9 it was always to lead them into sin. So here with Jeroboam. He said in his heart, now the kingdom may well revert to the house of David. If this people continues to go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, the heart of this people will turn again to their master, King Rehoboam of Judah. He actually knows that he's not really their master. He knows that in a sense he's a usurper to the throne although as we saw last week there is an element of divine promise to him to be in charge of ten tribes as a new kingdom. They will kill me he says and return to King Rehoboam of Judah. Now see the fear that is being expressed there. God told him in what we saw last week that God would make him king of these ten tribes in the north. Jeroboam is not trusting God's word to him. He is fearful. He's wanting to build up a humanly founded security system independent of the word of God to him that he refuses to trust.

In a sense it's a personal grasp of power and security not relying on what God had said to him that would give him in effect kingship over ten tribes of Israel. That promise we can see back in chapter 11 in fact verses 31 to 38. Now of course those who want to divorce the spiritual side would acknowledge that there's political astuteness here. We could understand King Jeroboam being fearful because if the people had to go down to Jerusalem into Judah's territory they may well see the grandeur of Jerusalem's temple and think well actually they've got more than we have. We quite like it here.

We might want to stay here or be allied with them. There is a political astuteness about what he does. He's clever but he's sinful. From the beginning Jeroboam doesn't trust in God's promise and he's also rejecting as king the promises made back to David as well. He's wanting to separate himself entirely from the people of God and rejecting the promises to David about a temple in Jerusalem and the promise to David about an eternal dynasty flowing from David, the person and the temple.

[14 : 59] So the action, or I should say, in rejecting that temple and that king he is not rejecting something trivial. He is rejecting something central to the promises of God because it is from the son from David that will come the Messiah descended from him, the anointed one. And it is from Jerusalem, the place where God meets with his people that is crucial in the life of God's people. He's rejecting two foundational pillars of what we might call orthodoxy.

Both of those pillars, David's descendants and the temple at Jerusalem have their climax in Jesus Christ as the person, son of David and as his work in dying and rising to create a new temple, a living temple.

So though of course it's a thousand years nearly before Jesus, there is a sense in which he's rejecting foundational truths of God's promises to create his people and bring about world blessing.

This is a serious rejection is really what I'm saying. The activity then, we've explored a little bit of his motivation, the activity then of King Jeroboam is very clear.

We're told it and we're also told an assessment of it. That doesn't always happen in the scriptures. Sometimes we're meant to have ears to hear or eyes to see. But here, just in case we might miss it, it is very clear for us that what he does is wrong.

[16 : 31] In verse 28 to start with, the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. He said to the people, you've gone up to Jerusalem long enough, here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

Now for those who know their Bibles reasonably well, not necessarily very well, should have alarm bells ringing in their ears. Those words are well known.

Here are your gods who brought you up out of Egypt, said Aaron to Israel at the bottom of Mount Sinai. Yet they bowed down and worshipped exactly what Jeroboam makes, a golden calf.

In that gross act of idolatry, that terrible sin in the Sinai Peninsula. Here it is happening all over again. In many respects, as we saw even hinted last week, Jeroboam is a sort of anti-Moses.

He's come out of Egypt, as Moses did. But unlike Moses leading the people by and large well, we find here somebody who is consistently against the word of God.

[17 : 43] Moreover, in verses 29 and 30, he builds two shrines, one in Bethel, one in Dan. Politically astute perhaps, southern and northern parts of the kingdom, so both sides of the kingdom have access.

But maybe also because Bethel was a significant place where Jacob had stayed a night on his way off to get a wife and ended up with two wives and lots of sheep and cattle and children and so on.

Up in Dan as well, a place significant in the book of Judges. So, not in consequential places, both for tradition and accessibility. And this thing became a sin.

We're told very explicitly here. For the people went to worship before the one at Bethel and before the other as far as Dan. This is very serious. When the Bible tells us explicitly something's a sin, it really is.

Not that when it doesn't tell us it need not be either, but it's not leaving anything to be overlooked here in the story. Then, thirdly, he also made houses on high places.

[18 : 43] Something explicitly forbidden in the book of Deuteronomy in particular. High places were places where the Canaanites, the pagans, would have their worship. And here he's building houses on them and appointed priests from among all the people.

Now, even that bit should be enough to send alarm bells through us because the priests were, we're told, in the book of Leviticus only to come from the tribe of Levi. He's appointed them from all the people and just so that we don't miss it, who were not Levites?

The end of verse 31 tells us. Then, further, in a total corruption of all the key aspects of Old Testament religion, he now sets his own feasts up.

Jeroboam appointed a festival on the 15th day of the 8th month. Like the festival that was in Judah, but different time. It was a sort of pseudo-event and he offered sacrifices on the altar.

That indicates, it seems, that Jeroboam himself might have offered sacrifices on the altar, something forbidden to a king. It ought to be something that a priest would do. In this, perhaps, there are echoes of what Saul did that was wrong back in 1 Samuel 13 to 15.

[19 : 46] And so he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he'd made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he'd made. He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the 15th day in the 8th month at this feast that he's just devised.

Notice that the end of, the middle of verse 33 says, In fact, in the language of those verses, it's he made, he made, he made.

Made's a common word, but seven or eight times in those verses, he made, he made. Jeroboam has constructed a completely new religion, only really to bolster his political power.

It's a rejection of all that God had said. He's not only not trusting God's word, as we saw earlier, he's disobeying God's word. God's word, in a sense, coming to us as promise and law.

He's not trusting the promise, he's disobeying the law. It's an act of clear apostasy. And so right from the beginning, the northern kingdom of Israel begins in outright defiance of God's word.

[20 : 53] It's an atrocious start. Last week we saw the foolishness of Rehoboam in the south that led to the north seceding. And we might well have had some sympathy for the north at the time.

Not so now, surely. Though, in a sense, those people were rejecting bad leadership by Solomon and Solomon's son, their own start under their king, is atrocious.

It's a completely false religion. False gods, false places, false priests, false festivals, etc. Well, just as at this devised feast, Jeroboam is, in a sense, bolstering his security, we find now, in a sense, he gets mocked.

It's almost humorous. We're meant to smile, I think. While Jeroboam was standing by the altar to offer incense, perhaps this is the very inaugural event at the shrine of Bethel.

A man of God came out of Judah by the word of the Lord to Bethel and proclaimed against the altar by the word of the Lord and said, O altar, altar, thus says the Lord.

[22 : 05] A son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, and he shall sacrifice on you. The priests of the high places who offer incense on you and human bones shall be burned on you.

It's a fairly abominable sort of thing to predict. A fairly horrifying thing. You imagine at this solemn occasion, the king and his new temple, shrine of Bethel.

No doubt, lots of people looking on as this big sacrifice at this newly instituted feast happens. And in comes this man of God from Judah. Walks up the front, everyone stares, points his hand at the altar or whatever he does.

I mean, we're not quite sure how it was done. But you can imagine that it would be a fairly dramatic sort of thing. You can imagine that the people were there, would go home and they'd be saying to the people back home, you should have seen what happened at church today.

Well, that's the sort of thing that's going on. It's a very rare word from this man of God, let me say. We're told that he's, in a sense, directed by the word of God to go there in verse 1.

[23 : 07] That tells us that what he's saying indicates that we ought to hear God's word being spoken here. It's a strange word. It's the only time, I think, in the Old Testament where somebody addresses an inanimate object, the altar here.

And also it's, I think, one of only two predictions, other than the prediction of Jesus to come, where a person in the future is predicted by name.

Now, here it's Josiah. It's 280 years before Josiah comes to the throne, 640 BC. The only other case, I think, in the Old Testament where this happens is the prediction of Cyrus in Isaiah 44 and 45.

The man of God condemns the altar. He goes on in verse 3 and we read, He gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign that the Lord has spoken.

The altar shall be torn down and the ashes that are on it shall be poured out. That's a fairly drastic sort of sign, not something that you'd expect on opening day at the Bethel Cathedral or whatever it was called.

[24 : 19] He's come and interrupted this act of worship. Probably people are aghast. But in a sense, he has pinned the validity of his words on this sign, that the altar will in effect fall apart.

A strange prediction. But of course it comes true. Firstly, though, the king, Jeroboam, rejects it and defies the word.

He cries out, or Jeroboam rather stretches out his hand, we're told in verse 4, from the altar saying, Seize him. So presumably Jeroboam is standing right up at the altar.

The prophet has come down the aisle or whatever and he's standing nearby. And Jeroboam turns from the altar, points at the prophet and says, Seize him. And what happens?

The hand that he stretched out against him withered, so that he could not draw it back to himself. How foolish would a king look with such a withered arm, having firstly just pointed it in anger and authority against this rather rebellious man of God from Judah.

[25 : 36] What happens next? The altar was also torn down and the ashes poured out from the altar according to the sign that the man of God had given by the word of the Lord.

Exactly what was predicted comes true. Astonishing. The altar there would have been all very nice and all of a sudden it just sort of crumbles and the ashes come forth.

Now the purpose of the sign was to validate the word of God about Josiah to come. Josiah, when he came in 640 BC, right near the end of two kings, so it sort of brackets this long stretch of divided kingdom stuff, does in fact do what he's predicted to do here.

The sceptics of course say that this has been written into the Bible way after the time of Josiah. But in a sense the whole story crumbles if that's the case because it's a prediction, a long term prediction that is validated by a short term prediction that's fulfilled.

So when the man said the sign will be the altar falling apart and the altar falls apart within minutes, we are meant to trust the word that Josiah will come and will clean up the worship as is promised by the man of God.

[26 : 52] We don't know when if we're reading this for the first time. 920 BC, 640 BC is when Josiah eventually comes on the scene. We should just pause too because we're told in verse 5 that the altar also was torn down.

Now it's not an unusual word to tear it but if we remember last week the cloak being torn away and torn into ten parts, the kingdom being torn away, the language of tearing is language of judgement.

There is hint here of judgement against Jeroboam in the words that are going on. Well Jeroboam has seen now not only a word of God but he's seen a sign that's been fulfilled, he's seen the power of God at work but he still rejects God.

He says in verse 6 to this man of God, entreat now the favour of the Lord your God, he's distancing himself from Yahweh in that, and pray for me so that my hand may be restored to me so the man of God entreated the Lord and the king's hand was restored to him and became as it was before.

There's an act of mercy, totally undeserved for a defiant king. God of course is free to dispense mercy whenever he wants, especially when it's undeserved, then it's mercy really.

[28 : 07] But in effect the first sign was an act of mercy, it's a warning sign to Jeroboam to stop doing the things that he's doing. It's a statement that God will judge the high places and the wrong priests and so on by sending Josiah.

It's a call to Jeroboam to repent, one that he refuses. At both levels God is being merciful in giving a foreshadowing of judgement to Jeroboam but Jeroboam refuses it.

Instead he decides to invite the man of God for a meal. We don't know his motivation, we're not told, in fact there's lots we're not told in this chapter.

He invites him for a meal in verse 7, the man of God declines. He may feel that he's compromising fellowship, maybe the invitation's a bribe. He's offered a gift after all in verse 8. But the man of God is under the word of God.

The same word that he spoke in authority to the king is the word that he himself is under. So in verse 9 and 10 he says, For thus I was commanded by the word of the Lord, you shall not eat food or drink water or return by the way that you came.

[29 : 09] So he went another way and did not return by the way that he'd come to Bethel. And the story could easily end there. It's been a word of judgement and mercy against a king who's refused it. The prophet has both proclaimed the word of God and been under the word of God and now he's gone home the way that he's meant to have gone.

We don't know why God told him not to eat there. That's not told to us. It doesn't actually matter. But of course now comes the twist in all of this story. Another character enters, an old prophet of Bethel whose sons it seems were at the church that day.

They've come home and said, You'll never believe what we heard and saw in church today. And then he decides to go chasing after this man of Judah, a man of God from Judah. The sons have seen which way he was going back to Judah.

So he saddles his donkey and he sets off after him. And he comes in verse 15 to the man and he says, Come home with me and eat some food. And the man of God rightly replies, Well, I cannot return with you or go in with you, nor will I eat food or drink water with you in this place.

That implies that he's not that far from Bethel when he says in this place. Or certainly he's still in the northern kingdom, not into Judah yet. For it was said to me by the word of the Lord, You shall not eat food or drink water there or return by the way that you came.

[30 : 25] Same answer in effect to what he gave the king. Here is the man of God still under the word of God. So far so good. But then the old prophet lies.

The other said to him, I also am a prophet as you are. And an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, Bring him back with you into your house so that he may eat food and drink water.

But he was deceiving him. We made it very clear here that this is deception. And the man of God, we're told, went back with him and ate food and drank water in his house.

The man of God has yielded fairly straightforwardly. There's no bargaining here. Oh, but you know, God hasn't told me that. He just goes.

We don't know why. We're not told why the old prophet lied, but he did. We're not told why the man of God succumbed to that lie, but he did.

[31 : 22] Narrative, you see, often leaves lots of questions unanswered. And one of the dangers, I think, for Christians reading narrative, that is history in the Bible, the stories of things, is that sometimes we try and answer questions that we have no answer for.

It can be very dangerous, actually. Because sometimes here we might think, well, why did he go back? He must have been hungry and vulnerable. So what this story is telling us is that you be careful when you're vulnerable and hungry.

Or something like that. I mean, I've read stuff like that on passages like this. It's actually nonsense, I think. We have to be very careful not to build our interpretation on reading in between the lines.

There is lots that we're not told in narrative. We don't need to know. We have to have ears to see, here, and eyes to see allusions to things that indicate answers to questions, but we're not told the motive here.

We're not told why he succumbed. He just did. So we have to be careful not to over-interpret this. We have to therefore be looking for what is told to us, and that, what is told to us, indicates what we are meant to learn from this account.

[32 : 36] What is unsaid is not necessary. What we do know is that he shouldn't have gone back with the old prophet. What's happened now is that the bearer of God's word, the man of God from Judah, has himself disobeyed God's word.

That's actually a trap, I think, in Christian leadership. The ministers, pastors, youth leaders, Bible study group leaders, and so on. We can sort of become the professional proclaimers or teachers of God's word and actually drift from submitting ourselves to it as well.

Sometimes we can be so hung up about what it means that we don't actually obey what it says. Maybe he was hungry, lonely or vulnerable.

It still would be no excuse. Maybe he couldn't understand why God had told him not to eat. It's still no excuse. Whatever the reason, here is a man who's failed to do what Joshua 1 said to Joshua to do, what Psalm 1 tells all God's people to do, and that is to meditate on the word of the Lord and do not deviate from it to the left or the right.

And so he faces judgment as a result. At the meal, now, ironically, the false prophet who's lied to him now speaks a true word. Oh, is this ever confusing? You know, you read those books and it's hard to work out what's going on and who's saying what.

[33 : 58] It could be a little bit like that. The goody has become a baddie. The baddie looks to become a gooddie. What is going on here? So this old prophet who's spoken a lie so far, we don't know why he spoke a lie, we don't know what motivated him to try and get the man of God from Judah back to his place.

Who knows? We're not told. It doesn't matter. But now he speaks the truth. We're told in verse 20 that the word of the Lord, note the expression yet again, came to the prophet who had brought him back and he proclaimed to the man of God who came from Judah, thus says the Lord, because you have disobeyed the word of the Lord and have not kept the commandment that the Lord your God commanded you, but have come back and have eaten food and drunk water in the place of which he said to you, eat no food and drink water, your body shall not come to your ancestral tomb.

That's the judgment. There's nothing there of God's judgment against this old prophet for lying. Presumably the judgment faced him one day.

And this word of judgment comes true because in the extraordinary events that follow, the man of God we're told doesn't sort of get up and rant and rave and say, you deceived me, you silly old man or anything like that.

He just goes on his way, oddly enough, after that statement from the old prophet. And as he went on his way, we're told that a lion met him. There were lions in ancient times around Israel, Palestine area, so this is not fanciful.

[35 : 21] A lion met him on the road and killed him. His body was thrown in the road and the donkey stood beside it and the lion also stood beside the body. That doesn't happen normally. If a lion kills a man or a donkey, he'd eat them.

That's why he'd kill them. So when a lion kills him, doesn't touch the donkey and doesn't eat the man, we're meant to say this is unusual. This is odd.

This is God's doing. That is, it's addressing attention to God whose hand is behind the events. It's God who's fulfilling the word of the old prophet who spoke the word at the meal.

People passed by and saw the body thrown in the road with the lion standing by the body and they came out and told it in the town where the old prophet lived. You'd imagine that. If you saw a lion, you'd be fleeing for your life. You'd be telling people.

And so when the prophet who'd brought him back from the way heard of it, he said, we're told in verse 26, it's the man of God who disobeyed the word of the Lord. And I wonder how he felt. We're not told.

[36 : 21] It doesn't matter. But of course he disobeyed because of the lie of this very man who's saying he disobeyed. Therefore the Lord has given him to the lion which has torn him and killed him according to the word that the Lord spoke to him.

And then he said to his son, saddle a donkey for me. So they saddle one, they get him, they bury him. He's away from his ancestral home. He's not even back in Judah. He's in Bethel where the false shrine is. The judgment of God has been fulfilled.

There perhaps are echoes of earlier bits of the Bible here. Perhaps there are echoes of even the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve ate what they should not have eaten.

This man has eaten what he should not have eaten. Perhaps. And then ironically as he's killed he himself is not eaten by a lion. He refrains, the lion refrains from eating as the man should have done.

What this is showing us is that God's word is not limited by its bearer. Even a false, lying, old prophet can speak the word of God. And a man of God, a true prophet perhaps, can disobey the word of God.

[37 : 31] We have to be careful if we're listening and if we're speaking. What it does show then is that God's word is sovereign. God is not limited by human beings.

He's not limited by our ability to obey or disobey. There actually ought to be an element of encouragement here that God's word perseveres, triumphs and is fulfilled regardless of our failures, our lies, our deceit, our disobedience.

No excuse for it at all but an encouragement that God's word is sovereign. That ought to encourage us I think. And just as God's word was firstly addressed in authority over the king, then it was addressed in authority over the man of God from Judah.

All the leaders of God's people are to be under the word of God. And that's what this chapter is making so very clear at the beginning of this apostate reign in the northern kingdom.

It is set up outside the word of God by and large. And all the leaders of God's people whoever they are wherever they're from are not only to speak the truth but are to live under it and obey it.

[38 : 42] Yet of course in every age we see leaders of God's people who are in their eyes in some form above the word. We see it in Old Testament false prophets here.

We see it in the Pharisees perhaps of Jesus' day. We see it in the false teachers in Ephesus when Paul writes his second letter to Timothy. We see it in the medieval papacy setting itself over and above the word of God.

We see it in the liberal bishop Spong and others of his ilk who seem to tear apart the scriptures. I remember when I was at university the student Christian movement not that I was a member of it had a weekend conference and their aim of their conference was to go through the gospels and to decide amongst themselves which were the genuine words of Jesus and which were not.

We might think that that's a bit foolish and naive of young university students. Saddest still has been in the last decade the group of theologians under the title of the Jesus movement or the new quest for Jesus or whatever that's done in effect the very same thing at a slightly more academic and highfalutin way.

But really what they're doing is setting themselves over and above the word of God. But for we evangelicals the same danger is there that we somehow want to teach it and understand it but not submit to it.

[40 : 04] We can't afford to do that. From time to time there are people in my experience in ministry a bit like the old prophet who comes to the man of God and says a word of the Lord came to me that you can come back to my place for lunch.

And sometimes in ministry as a pastor people come to me and say God's told me that I should do something. Let me say usually what that means is that they can preach.

Striking how often people get a word of the Lord that they can preach. It's never God's told me or a word of the Lord has come to me that I am to do all the grounds and clean the dishes.

Sometimes people come to me and say well this has only happened in one occasion and it's a bit blunt in the way I tell it now but God's made me realise that I shouldn't have married this person, that there is somebody else.

We must be very careful if we think God's speaking to us like that or if somebody says that to us. For God's entrusted to us of course the scriptures to which we submit and any other word of God will never contradict those scriptures.

[41 : 13] It will never progress onto modern themes like liberal theologians try and tell us. Often what's happening of course is personal desires are being transferred in some way. One response to that is I'm just warning you those who are members of Holy Trinity if you try that trick on me God's told me that this should happen.

My response is well when God tells me I'll agree with you. But more dangerously is the pastor telling a congregation or a member of the congregation I have a word of the Lord or somehow distorting the word of God in their teaching or application to get their own way.

That's dangerous. More dangerous because there's an element of power in the place of a pastor and vulnerability in those who are not. And human pride after all is insidious.

We're all subject to the sin of human pride. We all want to somehow stand over and above God's word at some point or other. But we can't. It's the authority in all things for us all.

We've got to be testers of the word. And for those who sit in the pews Sunday by Sunday you ought to be as Psalm 1 says meditating on the word of God not drifting from it so that you know the word of God so that you can test what you hear from the pulpit and for those who are in the pulpit Sunday to Sunday we are to be like Psalm 1 says or like Joshua 1 says meditate on the word of God let it not depart from your mouth so that what we say and do is under the word of God.

[42 : 47] We're not quite at the end of the story. The old lying prophet who then spoke a word of truth to the man of Judah at the meal about his judgment now in fact confirms in a word of truth the original word of the man of God who's now dead.

in verse 32 the saying that the man of God from Judah proclaimed by the word of the Lord against the altar in Bethel and against all the houses of the high places that are in the cities of Samaria shall surely come to pass.

As if we doubted it anyway but see how in this chapter God is making it very clear where he stands with this nation and king. he is over it and against it.

He's proclaimed against it at the beginning of the chapter. He's validated that judgment with a sign that was instantly fulfilled. He's later validated it in the word of an old prophet who despite his earlier deceit speaks the truth which is also fulfilled in the death of the man of God from Judah.

And then finally he validates it in the words of the old prophet echoing the words of the man of God that God's judgment will come against the northern kingdom, its capital Samaria and its cities.

[44 : 03] And that's what happens. It takes 280 years in a sense for Josiah to come on board but less. Now the tape's being changed at this point. God's word is true.

God's word is not frustrated or thwarted. By the person who speaks it or by refusal to obey it or believe it. And of course that's what's going on in the whole Bible not just in this book.

It's the word of God from the start that creates, that redeems, that predicts and prophesies and will come to its final and total fulfilment on the day when God's people are around his throne in heaven.

God's word triumphs in the end. Well here is the challenge then, not only to Christians but to Christian leaders as well.

God's word is powerful and reliable. Despite appearances, despite rejection, despite sin in the speaker and sin in the hearer, it will be fulfilled.

[45 : 05] That's why we should preach it. That's why we should obey it. That's why we should meditate on it day and night. That's why we should be Psalm 1 people who are meditating on the word of God and not straying from it.

That's why leaders should be Joshua 1 people, letting not the word of God depart from their mouth. And in all of this we ought to see more encouragement as well, that despite our failings and our sins, our deceit, our wrongness, our disobedience, our lack of trust, whether we're preachers or hearers, despite all of that, we ought to have more motivation here to preach God's word and submit to it because it is so reliable and will be fulfilled.

Jeroboam didn't heed even the last warning. The end of the chapter tells us that he continued in his evil ways. He didn't repent, despite the signs of mercy, despite the words of judgment. After all, sinners don't like their sin exposed, nor do we.

Well, let me pray. Oh God, our Father, your word is like a two-edged sword piercing to our heart and we thank you for that, though it's painful, and we pray that your powerful word will indeed take away the sin within our heart, purify our heart, so that we may follow you and obey your word and speak it wholeheartedly, full of faith, willing submission and total obedience, that Jesus may be honoured and glorified in all that we do and say and think.

And we ask this in his name. Amen. The question is, is there any significance in the old prophet who was there in Bethel all the time, said nothing, stayed behind, spoke the word of God at the end and stayed in the area?

[46 : 55] Difficulty is not much is made of that. I mean, we don't know that he was silent up to that point. I mean, in a sense we assume so, but we're not told explicitly so. No significance is drawn from the passage about that.

So I'd be hesitant to make too much out of what is not stated too explicitly. Yeah. Anything else? Joy. Yes.

Joy's comment is that Rahab in Joshua was an ancestor, not a descendant, big difference, of Jesus and was involved in deception, which actually in a sense contributed to her becoming in the end one of the ancestors of Jesus.

And certainly there is the case. I mean, we see that in the scriptures. There is deception, there is murder, there is theft, all sorts of sins conducted by the so-called heroes of God in different ways. I guess the significance is that none of those acts is ever condoned.

God uses sinful people to bring about his purposes. There is both challenge to us to be holy, encouragement that despite our frailty, God can still work through us and in us and so on.

[48 : 07] Yeah. Any other questions? Well, let me pray for us and then we'll sing our final hymn and then you can have a drink if you want to stay for one.

Heavenly Father, we live in a fallen world, a world where each one of us is a fallen, though as Christian redeemed person, a whole universe that is fallen and subjected to decay and futility and crying out with longing for the day of the Lord to come and Jesus' return.

We see that around us in our newspapers and on our television screens, not least in the last two and half weeks. We know, Lord God, that we ourselves are a mixture of motive, of good and bad, of shades of grey in our thinking, in our speech, in our character and behaviour.

We know that our churches are imperfect. We know that there is often elements of compromise in what we think and do, in our relationships with people, in our structures within church life and so on.

This chapter has painted that sort of picture vividly for us, but it's directed us to what is reliable, what is true, what will be fulfilled.

[49 : 38] And we thank you, Lord God, that you, through your word, are so sovereign that nothing and no one can ever thwart and stop and frustrate your good purposes for this universe from fruition.

That you use even sinful people to bring about your purposes, not least in the sinfulness of the betrayal, arrest and crucifixion of your son, so that life may be given for many.

Our Heavenly Father, as we have reflected upon the significance, power and authority of your word tonight, we pray that you will stir us up to meditate on it day and night, not to let it depart from our mouth, not to veer from your path, that we may be people of God, men and women committed to your word and its truth and committed to obeying it and trusting it.

Lord God, may your word still work in our lives. Give us mercy where we fail, mercy where we seek to stand over it in our pride and sinfulness.

Unlike Jeroboam, we pray that your spirit will lead us to repentance and to a change of character and behaviour. Father, we thank you that you are a holy God and that you do not let sinfulness run away with itself forever or be unjudged.

[51 : 19] We look forward, Lord God, to that day of final judgement when your enemies will stand under your word finally in judgement and we know, Lord God, that we will stand on that final day only because of the blood shed for us in Jesus Christ.

And we thank you for that atoning blood for we know all too well from a passage such as tonight that we too are guilty of so many things. But we thank you, Lord God, that out of the richness and depth of your mercy and love to us in sending Jesus for us, that our sin is atoned for, forgiven, that our hearts are being changed by the power of your word applied by your spirit.

And we look forward with eager longing to that day where we will stand perfected in your presence. We pray, Lord God, for all those who teach your word, those who preach on Sundays, those who teach it in Bible colleges, in Bible study groups, in youth groups, in Sunday school, in schools.

And we pray, Lord God, that you will bring about a renewal of teaching of truth in all those that claim to be in the name of Jesus, that you will correct error and heresy, that you will humble those who are proud to stand over your word, that you'll block up the ears of those who listen to heresy, that they will not follow it or believe it.

We pray, Lord God, that those who teach your word in whatever forum will not only teach the truth but be obedient to it. And as we've seen tonight, the apostate king, the disobedient man of God, the deceptive prophet, we know all too well, not only from them but others in the pages of scripture, who though leaders of your people fail so glaringly, preserve us from such failure, from error, from immorality, we pray.

[53 : 28] Lord God, we once again submit ourselves to your authority and sovereignty. Though disobedience is costly and sometimes we might think inexplicable, we pray that nonetheless we'll obey, that unlike the man of God will resist temptations along the road, we won't veer to the left or right but keep in your straight paths.

And we pray this, Lord God, so that Jesus, your perfect son, the one who is the word of God incarnate, will be our authority and our saviour and be glorified in and through us.

We ask it in his name. Amen. Let's close by singing again the praise of God from the Blue Hymn Book. God's word is true.

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[62 : 57] We pray, Lord God, that those who teach your word in whatever forum will not only teach the truth but be obedient to it. And as we've seen tonight, the apostate king, the disobedient man of God, the deceptive prophet, we know all too well, not only from them but others in the pages of scripture, who, though leaders of your people, fail so glaringly.

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