

1. Welcome to one of the strangest sections of the book. In these chapters, the focus is going to be on several prophets (some named and some unnamed) and how they are either obedient or they are disobedient to God's will for their lives. The strangest part of the story is about one prophet who gets killed for disobeying God's word. Yet we read of another prophet who gets to live on after lying to the one who dies here. Another prophet near the end of his life gets to tell the king of upcoming doom to his family and to his kingdom. All in all, it's not happy text. OK, so why should I read all of this if it's going to depress me? Let me give my answer by way of my lesson title, "prophets, prophecy and obedience to God". Yes it is confusing, but I promise that this is a valuable lesson in learning to trust God with our lives, so bear with me while I explain it.
 - a) First, let me explain what prophecy is: It literally means to "speak first". It usually refers the act of declaring God's word. Any time one is teaching God's word in any setting, one is prophesying. When Paul taught on spiritual gifts, he declared that Christians should seek above the other spiritual gifts to prophesy. (See 1st Corinthians 14:1). My point is that prophecy isn't just a gift to predict the future. It is to declaring God's word to others or even just state what God desires of us, and declaring that desire that to others.
 - b) With that said, one type of prophecy is to be given a direct message from God that is to be given to others. It tended to be more common in the Old Testament than it is in the New, just because today we have the written word of God so readily available to us, that direct communication from God is not needed as much. Still, it exists today and it is never to be taken lightly. That is an underlying point of this message.
 - c) Whenever someone tells me they have a direct message from God for me my first thought is usually, "What, has God lost my phone number that He couldn't tell me directly?" That is why such direct messages are usually designed for someone not willing to listen to God in the first place and they need something more dramatic to get their attention. If one is called to teach the bible, one is prophesying to others willing to hear what it is God has to say to us through His word.
 - i) Speaking of which, there is a character in this story that lies about receiving such a message. The ones who get hurt the most is the one (killed in a dramatic fashion) was the prophet who received (not gave) the false message. That was because he turned from doing what God told him to do. The point is there's a large price to be paid for obedience to Him: That is our responsibility and our accountability to Him. That is in effect the key point of this message.
 - d) There is an old expression about Christianity that applies well here: It costs us nothing to become a Christian and it cost us everything at the same time. It costs us nothing because Jesus paid the complete price for our sins and we can't do anything to prove our worth to God by our efforts, period, period, period. At the same time, if we say we are one of His disciples, in effect it costs us everything. The idea is God desires to be in complete control of every aspect of our lives. Living the Christian life is all about learning to do His will at any given time and at all given times. It is a volunteer choice to constantly make.
 - i) That leads me back to the issue of prophesy. If one has the ability or even just the desire to prophesy or say teach about God to others, He holds us accountable for the gifts we use and the time we use to make a difference for Him. Think of it this way, if we are telling others about God, then we are held accountable for what we say and how we say it. It is His reputation on the line, and He takes that seriously.
2. With that said, these two chapters are full of intertwining stories about different people called by God to prophesy about Him and for Him. What is to be learned from them is lessons in what it is that God calls us to do in being a living witness for Him in whatever role or responsibility that He calls us to do. The rest as they say is the details. Speaking of which its time to get started.

3. Chapter 13, Verse 1: By the word of the LORD a man of God came from Judah to Bethel, as Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make an offering.² He cried out against the altar by the word of the LORD: "O altar, altar! This is what the LORD says: 'A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who now make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you.'"^{1 3} That same day the man of God gave a sign: "This is the sign the LORD has declared: The altar will be split apart and the ashes on it will be poured out."
- a) To explain these verses, it is probably best to explain where we last left in the book.
 - b) In the previous chapter, we read of Israel splitting up into two separate countries. That split is going to last for several hundred years. We read of the first king of each of those countries. I referred to them as Rehoboam the jerk, who was the son of Solomon and the king of the Southern Kingdom. Then we had Jeroboam the rebel, who was the first king of the Northern Kingdom. Most of these two chapters are going to focus on events that occur in the Northern Kingdom under Jeroboam. These two chapters will bring us to the end of both kings. A key word to remember here is simply "disobedience" to God. In fact it is that concept that gets Jeroboam killed by the end of this lesson as well as the prophet who gives Jeroboam that message.
 - c) Let me repeat a point from the last lesson that will help us to remember who is who. That centers on the concept that the names Jeroboam and Rehoboam rhyme. To remember who is who, remember that this is a time of opposites. Rehoboam reigns in Jerusalem. I like to associate the "J with the R and the R with the J" to remember who is who. That's why the nickname I give for each king is: Jeroboam is the rebel and Rehoboam is the jerk. When in doubt again, associate the J with the R and R with the J. With that concept beaten over our heads now, we can come back to this text.
 - d) This text focuses on Jeroboam the rebel, who is the king of "Northern Israel". In the bible, God called the priests to be in charge of the temple, and not the kings. Further, Jeroboam built an altar to a false god. My point is Verse 1 states that Jeroboam is offering incense at this altar that he built. No matter how you cut it, he's in big trouble. What makes it worse is he should have known better. God somehow told him message many years earlier that He was God and He should worship Him as God as stated in a previous chapter.
 - e) Therefore, while Jeroboam is offering incense to a false god, and while Jeroboam was in this religious mood, it is a good time for God to come on the scene to tell this king what it is he's doing wrong. Therefore, while he's in this act of offering incense to a false god, an unnamed prophet of God does show up to say in effect what the king is doing is wrong.
 - f) What I was curious about is why was this prophet even allowed to be close to a king? I suspect that because this prophet had no weapons on him and he approached the altar and not the king himself, the guards probably saw this prophet as harmless. Therefore, he was allowed to approach the altar the same time the king was there.
 - g) Now that I've painted the scene of what this looks like, let's talk about what this prophet actually said. Remember that this prophet's name is not given. Speaking of things not stated in the text, we don't know how he became a prophet of God or how he even got this message to give to the king. What is logical is that God picked someone that already had loyalty to him and someone who could travel quickly and get access to this king. With that said, here he is, next to the king and the prophet explains two facts about the future that have not happened yet:
 - i) First, is that there will be a descendant of King David who will burn the bones of the priests to this altar at this location. This descendant is named Josiah. To give the future here, this man does not come on the scene until hundreds of years later. He is discussed in 2nd Kings 25, and Josiah literally burns the bones of the priests on this altar, again hundreds of years later. This unnamed prophet doesn't state when it occurs so they both have to watch the future play out.

- ii) The point for King Jeroboam is if he knows this prophecy now exists, he has to live with the fear of his worship of a false god coming to a violent end sometime in the future. This is God's way of saying to the king, "What you are doing is so wrong, it will not only cost you (the king) his life, but also the lives of the priests who are in charge of worshipping at this idol's altar".
- h) All of that leads to Verse 3. The prophet makes a second prediction. The second one is to say, "Just to prove what God says is true, today this altar will split apart and ashes will be poured out of it". The prophet is also saying, "Just to prove my long term prediction will come true, here's an immediate fulfillment of prophesy as something amazing will occur right here and now. For my new comers, prophecy often has double fulfillments in the bible. There is usually a short-term fulfillment to validate the prophet as a legitimate prophet and a separate long-term fulfillment that is the main message being delivered.
 - i) OK, why does the bible do that? Why give long-term predictions? The answer is it is the best way I know to prove that the bible IS the word of God as well as the fact that God knows all of history in advance. Roughly a third of the entire bible is based on predictions and prophecy. Again it shows the bible is the word of God by those events coming true and it shows the accuracy of bible prophecy as well.
 - ii) I could deviate here into a whole study of Old and New Testament prophecies that tie to Jesus First and Second Comings, but that's getting off topic. Books exist that count over 300 predictions about Jesus' First Coming in the bible and over 600 that tie to events of His Second Coming. I'm convinced every aspect about the events of Jesus First and Second Coming is predicted somewhere in the bible so in effect nothing that happens at those events are surprises to those who study their bible.
 - iii) With that statement finished, let me now state why we should care about what this unnamed prophet says about this altar being split. The issue is not the miracle of the altar somehow coming apart. It is the fact that there is a price to be paid when we turn from God. Like I said in the introduction, to be a follow of Jesus costs us both nothing and everything. The "nothing" is Jesus paid the complete price for our sins and we can't earn our salvation. The "everything" is that God demands obedience to Him if we have committed our lives to Him. This king knew of God and choose to rebel against Him and willfully choose to worship a false god. That is why He is about to suffer based on what this prophet is predicting both in the short term as the altar will break apart. The long-term fulfillment is that the dead bones of the priests who worship here will be burned on this same location.
- 4.
 - i) With all that said, it is time to see how the king reacted to this prediction being made: Verse 4: When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, he stretched out his hand from the altar and said, "Seize him!" But the hand he stretched out toward the man shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back. ⁵ Also, the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out according to the sign given by the man of God by the word of the LORD.
 - a) I suspect that the prophet spoke in earshot of the king, but not standing close enough to the king that the guards would arrest him for approaching the king. Anyway, the king did hear what this prophet predicted and immediately ordered a guard to seize him.
 - b) As the king stretched out his arm to point to the prophet and say, "Him, seize him", the king's arm somehow shriveled up so that he could not even retract it. Think of it as one's elbow and shoulder no longer working so the arm stayed in that position. If you want proof as to not mess with God, this sign is pretty good.
 - c) By the way, right as this event happened, the altar split apart as the prophet predicted.
 - d) OK, so why can't we do that? Let's say we witness someone worshipping a false God or say involved in a cult? Why doesn't God shrivel up their arm in our presence? To quote what Jesus said, "If they don't believe Moses and the prophets, they won't be convinced even if someone returns from the dead." (Loosely based on Luke 16:31.)

5. Verse 6: Then the king said to the man of God, "Intercede with the LORD your God and pray for me that my hand may be restored." So the man of God interceded with the LORD, and the king's hand was restored and became as it was before.
 - a) This king is still surrounded by his guards with his shriveled hand stretched out. All the king could think about at this point is, "What about my hand?" Notice the king is aware of who God is, but won't pray to God himself. Instead he asks the prophet who the king admits is a prophet to pray to God for him. The king doesn't say, "Oh how I have sinned and now must now turn back to God". Instead he's only concerned about his hand being better again and asks the priest to pray for him.
 - b) The related point is the king has now been validated that this man was a prophet of God. The altar has been split apart and the king heard the prediction that one day in the future the priests who worship at this altar will have their bones burned here. It's a colorful way of saying these people who come from a Jewish background and should know better are condemned for turning from God with their lives.
 - c) Here is the amazing part: the prophet agrees to pray to God for this king. Now the hand of the king (or his arm) is restored to how it was before the miracle occurred. All of this shows everyone in eyesight that God not only has perfect knowledge of our future, but at any time can control any part of our bodies for His glory. Again, that scary thought alone should keep us obedient to Him.
 - d) The order to arrest this prophet was still there and I suspect that healing the king kept the prophet out of jail. The point for us is when we see others suffering due to some sin issue, we shouldn't say, "Oh you sinner, you got yourself in this mess, too bad for you!" Instead it is the role of all Christians to encourage others to help them draw closer to Him. That is why this unnamed prophet prays for the king and God does another miracle and restores his hand (or arm).
6. Verse 7: The king said to the man of God, "Come home with me and have something to eat, and I will give you a gift."
 - a) The king is grateful that his arm got better and invites the prophet to dinner and promises him a gift for restoring his arm. What we don't read about here or in these chapters is the king actually turning back from God or changing his ways. This miracle reminds us that true repentance doesn't come from single miracles but a change of a heart to want to seek God with our lives. If you really want to see someone's life changed for God pray for God to open their hearts for Him. That is what causes true change and not cute little miracles.
 - b) With that stated, let's read what the unnamed prophet says to the offer of food and a gift:
7. Verse 8: But the man of God answered the king, "Even if you were to give me half your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here. ⁹ For I was commanded by the word of the LORD: 'You must not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came.' " ¹⁰ So he took another road and did not return by the way he had come to Bethel.
 - a) Time for another of my "John's loose translations": God told the prophet to take with him on this trip his own food and water and not to take anything offered in this land. It was God's way of saying, just deliver this message and get back home. I doubt that God said anything about restoring the kings' hand. That was just done in order for the prophet to be a good witness to this king and to keep him out of prison.
 - b) So why would God order the prophet to do this? The issue is not the requirements, it is the obedience to God. Jesus is also famous for teaching the principal, "to much is given, must is required" (based on Luke 12:48). This comes back to the idea that if we are called to be a disciple of God, it comes with the heavy price of obedience.
 - c) In fact, we are about to read about this prophet being tested more about being obedient to God's desires for our lives. The lesson for us is not about the specific test, it is about His requirement for our lives to being obedient to whatever it is He calls us to do. Therefore, I keep on writing until I am told otherwise. In the meantime, it's time to continue the story.

8. Verse 11: Now there was a certain old prophet living in Bethel, whose sons came and told him all that the man of God had done there that day. They also told their father what he had said to the king. ¹² Their father asked them, "Which way did he go?" And his sons showed him which road the man of God from Judah had taken. ¹³ So he said to his sons, "Saddle the donkey for me." And when they had saddled the donkey for him, he mounted it ¹⁴ and rode after the man of God. He found him sitting under an oak tree and asked, "Are you the man of God who came from Judah?" "I am," he replied.
 - a) Remember I said this is one of the strangest stories in the book? Well here, the story gets even stranger. We get introduced to another unnamed older prophet who lives in Bethel, which is part of the Northern (Jeroboam's) kingdom. The background story is if this was a true prophet of God, he should have moved south to "Rehoboam the jerk's" kingdom when Jeroboam's kingdom turned to idol worship.
 - b) The point here is this old prophet still knew and cared somewhat about worshipping the true God and wanted to go meet this younger prophet who gave the king the message. Therefore, the old prophet worked with his sons to arrange to meet the young prophet. What happens at that meeting is coming up in the next verse.
9. Verse 15: So the prophet said to him, "Come home with me and eat." ¹⁶ The man of God said, "I cannot turn back and go with you, nor can I eat bread or drink water with you in this place. ¹⁷ I have been told by the word of the LORD: 'You must not eat bread or drink water there or return by the way you came.' "
 - a) Time for more of my very loose translation: The old prophet was probably thinking, I do miss hearing from God and hearing about God. We don't get much of that here under the reign of Jeroboam the rebel, so please tell me more about your encounter with God.
 - b) While the old prophet actually said, "Come home and eat with me?" The young prophet who gave the message to Jeroboam repeated his speech that God told me pack up my own food and water for this trip and not to eat with anyone in this kingdom. Personally I visualize the young prophet with a big backpack full of food and water he took with him.
 - c) At this point the old prophet still wants to spend more time with the young one and lies to him that he too, got a message from God. With that said, let's read on.
10. Verse 18: The old prophet answered, "I too am a prophet, as you are. And an angel said to me by the word of the LORD: 'Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water.' " (But he was lying to him.) ¹⁹ So the man of God returned with him and ate and drank in his house.
 - a) At this point, the old prophet was so desperate to spend time with another prophet that he literally lies to the young man and says, "God told me to tell you to come to my house".
 - b) Think about this scene from the perspective of the young man: He knew God told him not to stop anywhere in the Northern Kingdom. Now through this old prophet he's told that God said for him to stop and eat here. You may recall that I said in my introduction that if someone has a message for me from God, my first thought is, "What, has God lost my phone number? He has to work through someone else?" The difference between the young prophet giving the king the message is that the king wasn't interested in God. The young prophet also had direct instructions not to delay after that message and here that same man is being tested by God to see if he was obedient.
 - c) Let me put it this way: Should the young man have known the old man was lying? No. However, he should know that God told him not to eat here and now he is being tested in what God required him to do.
 - d) So what does any of this have to do with you and me? The answer is God gives us our marching orders through His word. In effect God says, "Live this way and not that way". When we go through our lives we are tested to see whether we are actually obedient to God based on how we live. As we will read, the price of disobedience can be deadly. The issue is not our salvation, but our witness to God in what He calls us to do in our lives.

11. Verse 20: While they were sitting at the table, the word of the LORD came to the old prophet who had brought him back. ²¹He cried out to the man of God who had come from Judah, "This is what the LORD says: `You have defied the word of the LORD and have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you. ²²You came back and ate bread and drank water in the place where he told you not to eat or drink. Therefore your body will not be buried in the tomb of your fathers.' "

 - a) The short version here is the old prophet who just lied to the young prophet, now out of nowhere, starts to prophesy to the young man. The young man is told because you were not obedient to what God desired of you, you will not be buried where your family grave site is. One has to understand the issue is not where one is buried. The young prophet is being told, "You have blown your witness for God and now you must suffer for it."
 - b) What is amazing about this story is we don't read of the old prophet suffering for lying but just the young prophet suffering badly for not being a witness for God.
 - c) In effect the old prophet has already blown his chance by still living in the North kingdom where idolatry rules the land. However, God still uses him one last time in order to tell the young prophet that he too has blown his witness for God by stopping for lunch.
 - d) The issue is not that the young prophet stopped for this meal. The issue is us about being obedient to whatever it is God has called us to do. If we can't be trusted in a job to deliver a message and immediately return, how can God trust us with greater tasks in the future?
 - e) The old prophet lost his witness for God as he didn't either go live in the South or speak out against anyone living in North. The young prophet now blows his witness even after being lied to because he didn't do what God ordered him to do.
 - f) If this isn't a scary lesson in obedience for all of us, I don't know what is. In the meantime, it is time to read about the outcome of the life of the young prophet:

12. Verse 23: When the man of God had finished eating and drinking, the prophet who had brought him back saddled his donkey for him. ²⁴ As he went on his way, a lion met him on the road and killed him, and his body was thrown down on the road, with both the donkey and the lion standing beside it. ²⁵ Some people who passed by saw the body thrown down there, with the lion standing beside the body, and they went and reported it in the city where the old prophet lived.
 - a) I warned you at the start of this lesson it is strange, and here it gets stranger. We read that as the young prophet left this house, he was attacked and killed by a lion. The lion didn't eat the carcass or drag it back to its pack, but just stood there. Further, the donkey that the prophet rode on just stood there too and the lion never attacked the donkey.
 - b) Apparently other people saw this spectacle. The logical thing is the other people didn't want to get close to a lion. However, because of the strange site of a lion just sitting there and not either eating the dead body or dragging it away or the donkey just sitting there, got the bystanders to report what they saw in town. That is when the old prophet heard about it and thought, "The prophesy I gave about this young man just became true."
 - c) In the next set of verses, we'll read about the guilt the old man had for lying to him.
13. Verse 26: When the prophet who had brought him back from his journey heard of it, he said, "It is the man of God who defied the word of the LORD. The LORD has given him over to the lion, which has mauled him and killed him, as the word of the LORD had warned him." ²⁷ The prophet said to his sons, "Saddle the donkey for me," and they did so. ²⁸ Then he went out and found the body thrown down on the road, with the donkey and the lion standing beside it. The lion had neither eaten the body nor mauled the donkey. ²⁹ So the prophet picked up the body of the man of God, laid it on the donkey, and brought it back to his own city to mourn for him and bury him. ³⁰ Then he laid the body in his own tomb, and they mourned over him and said, "Oh, my brother!"
 - a) At the least one has to give the old prophet credit for his bravery. He walked up to where the lion was, and took away the human corpse. Over and above that risk, it is considered forbidden to touch a dead corpse as that makes one ceremonially unclean for a while. The old man knew he had sinned and was dealing with his guilt by burying the young man.

- b) Remember how I said that the old man didn't suffer for his lying? In effect he did. He had to live with the guilt of what he did and now he was doing his best to make up for what it was he did wrong. The old prophet referred to the young dead prophet as "His brother", which refers to a fellow believer in the true God who was used by God for prophesy.
 - c) By the way, before one desires to have the ability to predict the future, consider the price that both men had to pay for their disobedience. At the least, that should make us think twice about desiring to have a special ability to share God's words or predictions with others. There is a high price to be paid for disobedience. If we desire to teach God's word either in a small group or as a pastor, stop and consider the cost of disobedience as taught in this strange lesson about the cost of disobedience.
 - d) As to the text itself, sometimes it is so clear in its explanation, that it does not require a lot of commentary and that is the case here. The old man didn't fear the lion, which means he didn't fear for his own life, but just focused on doing the right thing, which was to give a fellow believer in God a proper burial and take care of him.
 - e) This little story has an epilogue, which is the next four verses.
14. Verse 31: After burying him, he said to his sons, "When I die, bury me in the grave where the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones.³² For the message he declared by the word of the LORD against the altar in Bethel and against all the shrines on the high places in the towns of Samaria will certainly come true."
- a) The epilogue for the old prophet was that he asked to be buried when he dies next to the young prophet who died. What the old man wanted was his body to be a witness to the true God by being associated with the other prophet.
 - b) By the way, this is the first time that the Northern Kingdom was referred to as Samaria. That becomes the nickname for this kingdom as it will become the capital in Chapter 16. The point is this kingdom was now full of shrines to false gods. The old prophet realized God was God and wanted to end his life by being a witness for the true God. In effect, he repented of his lying and became a good witness in his death.
15. Verse 33: Even after this, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways, but once more appointed priests for the high places from all sorts of people. Anyone who wanted to become a priest he consecrated for the high places.³⁴ This was the sin of the house of Jeroboam that led to its downfall and to its destruction from the face of the earth.
- a) I said the last four verses were an epilogue and I meant it. Here is "epilogue number 2". It is about what happened to King Jeroboam of the Northern Kingdom. You would think if he saw his arm (or hand) shrivel up and then get instantly restored, that might have made him return to God, but as I stated, miracles are not enough to change people. It is only by a commitment to seek God that we truly change. Therefore, once the young prophet was out of sight and out of mind of the king, he went back to worshipping idols.
 - b) Remember that God called the tribe of Levi to be the priests. As I stated in the last lesson, most of the Levites moved to the Southern Kingdom to live under Rehoboam as he was still loyal to the true God. (Again, this stated in 2nd Chronicles 11:13-16.) The bottom line here is that Jeroboam turned out to be a bad witness for God even though God Himself called him to be the first king of the Northern Kingdom.
 - c) Now it is time for another "however". The however, is that Jeroboam did not know that his time was up as he failed to be good witness for God. In that sense, these two verses are not really an epilogue, but lead very well into our next story in the book.
 - d) To remind our newcomers, the chapter breaks were not added to the text until about the 11th Century AD. In the original text, this is one continuing story.
 - e) Next we will read how Jeroboam's son gets sick. Instead of praying to the altars Jeroboam had built, he goes to seek out the true prophet of God who first told Jeroboam he would be king. It is amazing how people are willing to seek out the true God when they are in real trouble as opposed to what they know is false. With that said, Chapter 14, Verse 1.

16. Verse 1: At that time Abijah son of Jeroboam became ill, ² and Jeroboam said to his wife, "Go, disguise yourself, so you won't be recognized as the wife of Jeroboam. Then go to Shiloh. Ahijah the prophet is there--the one who told me I would be king over this people. ³ Take ten loaves of bread with you, some cakes and a jar of honey, and go to him. He will tell you what will happen to the boy." ⁴ So Jeroboam's wife did what he said and went to Ahijah's house in Shiloh. Now Ahijah could not see; his sight was gone because of his age. ⁵ But the LORD had told Ahijah, "Jeroboam's wife is coming to ask you about her son, for he is ill, and you are to give her such and such an answer. When she arrives, she will pretend to be someone else."
- a) At this point in the story we get introduced to Jeroboam's son named Abiajah. This gets a little confusing in that Rehoboam's son in the next chapter has the same name.
 - i) The difference is the Abiajah we read about in this chapter dies before the chapter is over. The name Abiajah means, "God is my Lord". It's amazing to think about King Jeroboam giving this name to his son. This king appointed priests all over his kingdom to go worship a false god. Yet when it came to naming his own son, he named him after the true God.
 - ii) The Hebrew text implies the age of this son could be anything from a young boy to a teenager. What is interesting here is when this boy became sick, we don't read of King Jeroboam praying to the altars he built to the false gods, but instead wants to seek out the true God for help. This boy was destined to be the next king. That is why King Jeroboam is desperate to do what he can to save his life.
 - iii) The king probably thought, I remember before I was ever called to be king, I met a man who told me my whole future. Maybe I should visit him and he will tell me the fate of my son. However, people would recognize me as the king, so it would be dangerous to travel to the Southern Kingdom to go seek out this prophet. What is more, that prophet probably wouldn't come up here to the Northern Kingdom as it's now associated with worshipping idols. Therefore, the king needed to get a secret message to this prophet to find out what will become of his son. It makes me wonder if the king has already made all sorts of efforts to save his son via the idols that he had worshipped before making this attempt to contact this prophet.
 - b) With all of that background in mind, we read of the king asking his wife to go find this guy and ask him what is to become of his son. The problem is the queen would also be recognized by her clothes or her looks. Therefore King Jeroboam told his wife to go put on a disguise. Then the king thought, "You should not go empty handed. This prophet needs to be paid for his services."
 - c) The queen brought ten loaves of bread some cakes and a jar of honey. This is the gift of a peasant woman and not a queen. The point is part of the disguise would be, "If I really was the queen, why would I only be carrying this small gift with me?" The bottom line is the disguise worked, and the queen was able to secretly travel to the Southern Kingdom, find the prophet and ask about the fate of her son.
 - d) That leads us to discuss the prophet himself. His name is Ahijah. Again, it can be a little confusing as his name is similar to the name of the boy that is near death. Speaking of being near death, this prophet Ahijah is now old. He is at an age in life where he cannot see well any more. He probably thought, "I'm old now. I can't be used by God much any more. I'll just pray for my family and my country, but I'm too old to be used by God."
 - i) A good point to learn from this lesson is one is never too old or even too young to be used by God. Here was this nearly blind prophet being told by God that the wife of the Northern Kingdom was about to visit him. Then God told Ahijah what it is He wants Ahijah to say to her when she visits.
 - ii) The point is from God's all knowing perspective, the disguise by the queen is a big waste of time. The disguise is also a waste of time to the now old prophet. This is God saying, "Cut out the disguise act, I know who you are and why you are here".

- iii) The point to get across is that God knows all things. He knows the ultimate fate of all people. When He desires He can share with us the fate of others as we'll read in this text coming up.
- e) Before I move on, let me answer the question of, why doesn't God tell me what is going to happen to me or those I love? When my child is sick, why won't God tell me their fate? In other words why can't I disguise myself, go find a prophet and go find out what is the fate of my issue of the moment? Why does this bad king get that privilege?
 - i) My first answer is simply that God is God and we have to accept His will. If it is His will to miraculously cure one person and let another die of say cancer, it is His business as in effect this is His world and not ours.
 - ii) My second answer is life is about trusting God through whatever it is we have to deal with. God is not a "genie in a bottle" to grant our wishes. Our job is to serve Him and not vice versa. We are free to ask Him whatever it is we want, but we're here again, to serve Him and do His will for our lives. Our rewards for service do come in the next life, but not necessarily in this life.
 - iii) With all that said, sometimes God can and does make exceptions when it serves His purpose. We are more than welcome and even encouraged to pray for what ever the situation is we are dealing with at the moment. The secret to remember is that God is listening. He is dealing with it on His timing, His way. We may not like how He is choosing to deal with it, but we have to accept that reality that He is in charge of our lives and not us.
 - iv) With that not to happy thought stated, it is time to get back to the story.
- 17. Verse 6: So when Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps at the door, he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why this pretense? I have been sent to you with bad news.⁷ Go, tell Jeroboam that this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I raised you up from among the people and made you a leader over my people Israel.⁸ I tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you, but you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes.⁹ You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have provoked me to anger and thrust me behind your back.
- a) Before I start to discuss these verses, know that we are not told until this point what it is that God desired to say to the wife of the queen. However, before the wife could even say one word to the prophet or before she even sets foot in his house, the prophet calls out to her. He says in effect, "You've found the right house. Forget your disguise, I know who you are and what is your purpose for coming here. While you think that you have been sent to me the prophet from your husband, the truth is that God has sent me to you and I didn't even have to leave my house to be sent to you. Now have a seat, get comfortable and be prepared to receive some bad news". (That's my paraphrase of Verse 6.)
- b) Speaking of paraphrasing, let me continue and describe the next few verses here:
 - i) The text in Verse 5 says in effect "God said to give "this" answer". The specifics of what God wanted to say are stated in these answers.
 - ii) The bad news is that God is chewing out Jeroboam through his wife. The reason the king didn't travel himself is there was war between the two kings (Verse 30). The king couldn't risk getting caught traveling here. Also think about the fact the king was seeking God by his wife after turning from Him with his own life. Does all of this mean it is too late for Jeroboam to repent? As I like to state, the issue isn't salvation, it is about being a witness for God. There can come a time in our lives where God makes it clear to us that we are not being a good witness for Him and we can lose what ministry we do have for him.
 - iii) The rest as they say, is the details. Speaking of the details, let me describe what it is that God is condemning Jeroboam for and what is his fate for disobedience.

- c) The first message that this prophet has for the king is in effect that God is really ticked off at him. The prophet tells the king through his wife that God raised him up to be the king over the Israelites and have them worship Him. Out of fear of no longer being a king, he ordered the Israelites to worship other gods. In fact, I God, consider you Jeroboam worse than all the other kings so far. That includes Solomon and Saul. Jeroboam is considered to be worse than Saul because Saul believed in God but just suffered from fears. Solomon believed in God but let his wives turn his heart away. Jeroboam willfully turned to idols and that is why God is in effect very disappointed in how he turned out.
 - i) But John, you said God knows all things. Of course he does. However he's letting Jeroboam be aware of this through this prophet through the king's wife.
 - ii) But couldn't the queen say, "It's not my fault my husband's a rebel?" I suppose the prophet could say to the queen, "I didn't exactly see you turn to God yourself."
 - iii) The bottom line here is God is saying, "You've both lost your witness in that you will both be dethroned from your ruling". It is amazing to consider that the king turned to idols out of fear of losing his kingdom and now he is losing his kingdom because he has done that. The lesson is about turning to God to face our fears as opposed to trying to solve them based on our own power.
- d) With all of that said, the prophet is not done chewing out this couple:

18. Verse 10: `Because of this, I am going to bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every last male in Israel--slave or free. I will burn up the house of Jeroboam as one burns dung, until it is all gone. ¹¹ Dogs will eat those belonging to Jeroboam who die in the city, and the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country. The LORD has spoken!"

 - a) You have to wonder at this point was the queen thinking, "This really was a bad idea". Here the prophet is telling her that their whole family will be cut off. The sad implication is that every descendant of this king will die a violent death. As graphic as this paragraph is, the actual Hebrew is even worse. The phrase "I will cut off" can literally be translated "I will urinate on the wall". I state that to show the idea that just as Jeroboam publicly did turn from God, so God is giving this soon to be former king what he wants. This is God saying in effect, "You don't want me, great! Then I reject you as you have rejected me."
 - b) A good question to ask is, "What did Jeroboam's other children do to deserve this fate?" After all, it's not their fault Jeroboam was a bad egg. I hold the view that God will judge all people fairly. This is God saying in effect I see the same rebellious factors in the kids of this couple that God sees in the king and queen themselves.
 - c) However, this prophet is not done being graphic yet. The word "dog" in Hebrew is not about a pet dog one keeps at home. It is about a wild pack of dogs, almost like coyotes. The point is his children will all die violent deaths and those wild dogs will devour their corpses and if they flee to the country area, wild birds will eat their dead bodies.
 - d) At this point the queen has to be thinking, "Boy was this a mistake coming here. I need to get out of here as fast as I can and warn my family." However, the prophet's not through yet. The prophet still needs to talk about the sick son, which was the visit's purpose.

19. Verse 12: "As for you, go back home. When you set foot in your city, the boy will die. ¹³ All Israel will mourn for him and bury him. He is the only one belonging to Jeroboam who will be buried, because he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the LORD, the God of Israel, has found anything good.

 - a) Time for more of my loose translation: As to the boy that you named in effect "seeker of God", he too will die, but not a violent death. All of North Israel will mourn for Him as they knew he sought God and would have been a good king. In effect, he is the exception to your family of rebels.
 - b) So if this boy was going to be a good king, why did he have to die? Most likely to show us that the sins we commit hurt innocent people. Most likely this son is saved, so to live an eternity in heaven is a greater reward than his suffering and young death.

20. Verse 14: "The LORD will raise up for himself a king over Israel who will cut off the family of Jeroboam. This is the day! What? Yes, even now. ¹⁵ And the LORD will strike Israel, so that it will be like a reed swaying in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land that he gave to their forefathers and scatter them beyond the River, because they provoked the LORD to anger by making Asherah poles. ¹⁶ And he will give Israel up because of the sins Jeroboam has committed and has caused Israel to commit."
- a) While I was explaining the fate of the young prince of Northern Israel, the prophet is still on a role and still explaining the bad fate that awaits this king and queen. In fact, now he is expanding this bad prophesy to condemn the Northern Kingdom. To put it simply, we are about to read a summary of the Northern Kingdom in one thought. That is, that there will be no God fearing kings in this place and I, God will destroy this place.
 - i) Let me give a little history to explain this. For the next several hundred years, the northern kingdom will have a whole bunch of kings that all worship idols. It will get to a point where God says in effect, "I've had enough of this and I'm going to bring this kingdom to an end." There was a powerful empire at that time called the Assyrians (northern Iraq). That empire will one day conquer this Northern Kingdom. All the Israelites who lived there will end up being part of that empire. A long time later when the Babylonians conquered the Assyrians, those Israelites became part of the Babylonian Empire.
 - ii) I state all of that history in advance as it is predicted here. Verse 15 says that these Israelites will be scattered beyond the River. Notice the word River is capitalized as it refers to the Euphrates River hundreds of miles away in what is today Iraq.
 - iii) Verse 16 says the Israelites made Asherah poles. Think of carving trees into large phallic symbols and worshipping them. The Israelites started to worship a false god that promised prosperity. That false god had to be sexually aroused by having illicit sexual activity. It was the worship of this false god that caused the original inhabitants of the land of Israel to be killed in the first place for this activity as well as offering up their babies to this false god. Now God is saying in effect, "What is good for the goose is good for the gander". That means if you the Israelites are not acting any better than them, then I'll eliminate you from this land as I eliminated them many centuries earlier.
 - b) OK John, I get the idea the Israelites were in big trouble. I wouldn't recognize an Asherah pole if I saw one and I don't worship this deity. Why should I care about any of this? The answer comes back to part of my lesson title, "Obedience to God". A purpose of prophecy is to draw us back to God or closer to Him. Studying our bible should remind us that we are accountable to Him for our lives. If we belong to Him than whatever privileges we do have as witnesses for Him can and will be taken away from us if we choose to turn from Him. Just as Jeroboam allowed idol worship to exist in the land of Israel started a slow but steady downfall of those Israelites against God, so can a slow but sure turning from God in our lives cause our own downfall.
 - c) So if what they did was so bad, why did the downfall take hundreds of years? The answer is God always wants us as a nation (or say a church) to turn back to Him. He is willing to be patient to get us to turn to Him. God holds us accountable to Him both individually and collectively and both issues are in play here.
 - d) Meanwhile, the prophet who gave this message, has now condemned the king, the queen, his family and the entire Nation of Israel. Now the queen is going to travel home and tell of this wonderful news to her husband.
21. Verse 17: Then Jeroboam's wife got up and left and went to Tirzah. As soon as she stepped over the threshold of the house, the boy died. ¹⁸ They buried him, and all Israel mourned for him, as the LORD had said through his servant the prophet Ahijah.
- a) If I was told my child was going to die when I get home, I might delay that trip a little.

- b) I was thinking about this from the Queen's perspective. Would she go right home, or would she believe the words of this prophet and delay that trip? I suspect she thought, I have nowhere else to go so I might as well go home, tell of this to my husband and see if what the prophet said would come true. Besides she had to travel the Southern Kingdom in disguise as she might be killed if they knew she was the king. So she went home and her son died just as the prophet predicted.
 - c) Verse 18 gives this interesting comment about all of Northern Israel mourning for him. It makes me wonder how much of this prophecy has spread to that kingdom. Not too long before I wrote this message, there was a new baby prince born in England and that was world-wide news. Therefore, I can sort of see how the next prince who is to be king was mourned by a whole country. What is implied here is that this prince was thought of well by God and the fact he had a proper burial implies that the prince was saved despite how his father acted. However, right now we need to finish reading of Jeroboam's reign:
22. Verse 19: The other events of Jeroboam's reign, his wars and how he ruled, are written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel. ²⁰ He reigned for twenty-two years and then rested with his fathers. And Nadab his son succeeded him as king.
- a) The bottom line here is the time period that Jeroboam ruled as the king is summed up in these two verses. Whoever organized "Kings" had access to a book that chronicled these kings and that book no longer exists. This does not refer to "Chronicles" as it focuses on the rulers of the Southern Kingdom.
 - b) The important point here is that Jeroboam heard this prophesy, probably believed it as his son did die, but didn't do anything to repent or change the religious situation there. As I said earlier a purpose of receiving bible prophesy that is, having God's word explained to us is designed to drive us closer to Him. That is my purpose as well as anyone who does take God's word seriously.
 - c) That convicting thought would be a great way to end the chapter, but it doesn't end here. We still need to learn the fate of the king of the Southern Kingdom in this chapter. Bear with me as this lesson is going to run a little long as I explain what is happening "down there" as we are done explaining what happened "up there" in the Northern Kingdom.
23. Verse 21: Rehoboam son of Solomon was king in Judah. He was forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel in which to put his Name. His mother's name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite.
- a) You may recall from a few verses back that King Jeroboam up north reigned for 22 years. Here in Verse 21, King Rehoboam reigned for 17 years. Remember they both started at the same time as the single kingdom of Israel split in two. Therefore, Jeroboam reigned a little longer and we are now going back in time a little from Verse 20 to Verse 21 to focus on what was happening down in the Southern Kingdom while God was pronouncing a judgment on the Northern Kingdom.
 - b) Remember that Rehoboam was the son of Solomon and grew up under the riches and power that Solomon had. Also remember that Solomon had hundreds of foreign wives. One of those wives is this woman named Naamah whose background was "Ammonite".
 - i) Here's the problem. The Ammonites were part of the original inhabitants of the land of Israel that God wanted to destroy for the sexual deviancy described earlier in this chapter. (Remember the "Asherah poles", which is trees carved into sexual symbols designed to encourage illicit sex?) Let's just say Rehoboam mom came from that background and now that her son was on the throne in the South, that type of worship was spreading. Rehoboam's father and grandfather were both devout believers in the true God. Now that Rehoboam is on the throne, we start to see this idolatry start to occur in the Southern Kingdom as the king had this mixed heritage affect them. The point is what we allow does affect others around us.

24. Verse 22: Judah did evil in the eyes of the LORD. By the sins they committed they stirred up his jealous anger more than their fathers had done.²³ They also set up for themselves high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree.²⁴ There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.
- a) If you recall, I refer to this king as "Rehoboam the jerk." Because of his heritage those that lived in the Southern Kingdom also set up the same sort of phallic symbols. Then we read of male religious prostitutes. Think of them as engaging in homosexual activity in order to sexually arouse this false god. I could go on, but one gets the idea that these Israelites did turn from God based on the immediate gratification that came from this idol worship.
 - b) So if they were as bad as the Southern Kingdom, why didn't God wipe them out as fast as He did the Northern Kingdom? The answer is that promise was made to King David that a son of his would rule forever. I believe God was hoping that with the fall of the North, might entice the South to turn back to God, so He gave the Southern Kingdom more time to repent. However, eventually they too fell to the Babylonian Empire. This is why God takes idolatry so seriously as it causes us to turn from trusting Him ourselves.
 - c) The only good news here of this tragic story of two kings is this lesson will mercifully end in a few more verses. Speaking of which, let's keep moving.
25. Verse 25: In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem.²⁶ He carried off the treasures of the temple of the LORD and the treasures of the royal palace. He took everything, including all the gold shields Solomon had made.²⁷ So King Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace them and assigned these to the commanders of the guard on duty at the entrance to the royal palace.²⁸ Whenever the king went to the LORD's temple, the guards bore the shields, and afterward they returned them to the guardroom.
- a) If you have been reading all of my lessons on 1st Kings or if you just know the story, the original wife of King Solomon was an Egyptian princess. This Egyptian king was either the father or brother of that princess. I suspect, he was mad at Solomon for turning from his Egyptian wife to marry all of those foreign women, including the one that produced the current king of Southern Israel, Rehoboam.
 - b) The point is just as the Northern Kingdom had to suffer for their idolatry, so the Southern Kingdom is about to suffer for their idolatry. An army from Egypt now invaded Israel.
 - i) What is implied, but not stated, is that Rehoboam bought off the Egyptian army by giving them some of the gold that his father Solomon had accumulated. I say that because Southern Israel still existed as a kingdom long after this attack. The army from Egypt probably said, "Give us a whole bunch of gold for our trouble, and we won't do too much damage" to put it mildly. A few chapters back we read about how Solomon had so much gold he had an armory full of gold shields. That's what was taken by the Egyptians. Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace them for his own protection as the king.
 - c) Again, the point of learning all of this ancient history is all about obedience to God and what is the penalty for disobedience. If you get nothing else out of this long lesson, just know that there is a big price to be paid to turn from God with our lives. Speaking of long lessons, what do you say we look at the last few verses here:
26. Verse 29: As for the other events of Rehoboam's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?³⁰ There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam.³¹ And Rehoboam rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the City of David. His mother's name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite. And Abijah his son succeeded him as king.
- a) Let's finish by comparing the two kings. King Jeroboam up north married an Ammonite and had a son named Abijah. Here we read of King Rehoboam down south marrying an Ammonite and had a son by the same name. You can see why Kings can be confusing.

- b) The last thing we learn here is that the two kings had warfare during their reigns as kings. Most likely this was border battles as opposed to all out warfare. As to Rehoboam's son, we'll read about him in the next chapter. Rehoboam's death is recorded here and the text states that more information about Rehoboam can be found in "Chronicles".
- 27. OK enough of all of that, I'm really running long. In a short time from now, we'll probably forget most or all of these details about the two kings and their kingdoms.
 - a) What I hope all of us learned is the purposes of bible prophesy. It is not just to predict the future, but to show others that there is a God, He knows all things, He desires we trust in Him to guide our lives as He knows what is best for our lives. The reason we don't get a lot of direct prophesy today is God gave us His word and says in effect, "Study this book, pray for guidance and trust Me to guide all of us through whatever it is we have to deal with at any moment of our lives." The failure of these two kings to turn to God and also the failure of these Israelites is designed to teach all of us to trust Him for guidance for our lives. Therefore, let us pray for and encourage each other to be obedient to Him. Speaking of which, I'm way overdue for my closing prayer.
- 28. Father, all of so easily wander from what it is You desire for our lives. Help us to learn that there is a big price to be paid for a lack of obedience of Your desire for our lives. Help us to encourage each other to keep on trusting in You for guidance. Help us to use our time to make a difference for You and Your kingdom in our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.