

AABNER

ADVANCES IN ANCIENT BIBLICAL
AND NEAR EASTERN RESEARCH

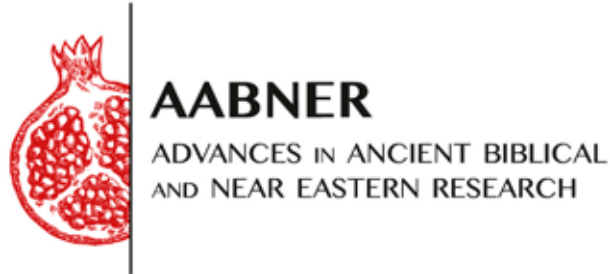
Varia Issue



EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK



1 KGS 13

**A CRITERION TO DETERMINE THE
AUTHENTICITY OF AN ORACLE**

Emanuelle Pastore

Source: *Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research*
5, no. 1 (Spring, 2025): 1–21

URL to this article: DOI 10.35068/aabner.v5i1.1154

Keywords: Books of Kings, Deuteronomistic History, false
prophecy, oracle, prophecy, true prophecy

(c) 2025, Emanuelle Pastore, via a CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.

Abstract

The pericope of 1 Kgs 13 deserves to be re-examined through the prism of true/false prophecy, despite the objections of some scholars. The question is not so much why the prophet lied—thereby formulating a false prophecy—but rather how to explain the man of God's failure to recognize his confrère's false prophecy. Why did the man of God, if truly assisted by God, not discern that it was a lie? It may well be that the pericope of 1 Kgs 13 offers some answers to this question, providing a new kind of criterion for detecting a lie and, therefore, a false prophecy.



La péricope de 1 R 13 mérite d'être réexaminée à travers le prisme de la vraie/fausse prophétie, malgré les objections de certains chercheurs. La question n'est pas tant de savoir pourquoi le prophète a menti – formulant ainsi une fausse prophétie –, mais plutôt de savoir comment expliquer que l'homme de Dieu n'ait pas reconnu la fausse prophétie de son confrère. Pourquoi l'homme de Dieu, s'il était vraiment assisté par Dieu, n'a-t-il pas discerné qu'il s'agissait d'un mensonge ? Il se pourrait bien que la péricope de 1 R 13 apporte quelques réponses à cette question, en fournissant un nouveau type de critère pour détecter un mensonge et, par conséquent, une fausse prophétie.

Die Perikope aus 1 Kön 13 verdient es, trotz der Einwände einiger Wissenschaftler erneut durch das Prisma der wahren/falschen Prophetie betrachtet zu werden. Die Frage ist nicht so sehr, warum der Prophet gelogen hat –und damit eine falsche Prophetie formulierte–, sondern vielmehr, wie es zu erklären ist, dass der Mann Gottes die falsche Prophetie seines Kollegen nicht erkannt hat. Warum hat der Mann Gottes, wenn er wirklich von Gott assistiert wurde, nicht erkannt, dass es sich um eine Lüge handelte? Es könnte gut sein, dass die Perikope aus 1 Kön 13 einige Antworten auf diese Frage gibt, indem sie eine neue Sorte von Kriterien liefert, um eine *Lüge* und damit eine falsche Prophetie zu erkennen.



Source: *Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research*
5, no. 1 (Spring, 2025): 1-21

1 KGS 13

A CRITERION TO DETERMINE THE AUTHENTICITY OF AN ORACLE

Emanuelle Pastore



The criteria for judging between a true and a false prophet or between a true and a false prophecy have been the object of numerous publications,¹ especially as these criteria are numerous, diverse, and sometimes difficult to apply. Whether one pays attention to the object of the prophecy, its fulfillment, the moral rectitude of the prophet who pronounces the oracle, the divine legitimacy of the prophet, the suffering destiny of the prophet, or the coherence between the oracle and the Law, it is never simple to evaluate the authenticity of an oracle.

The pericope of 1 Kgs 13 offers a fine opportunity to reflect on this theme in a fresh way. Indeed, the story immediately raises a number of questions that have often been resolved by appealing to one or the

¹ Crenshaw 1971; Hossfeld and Meyer 1973; Vogels 1977, 681–701; Mündlerlein 1979; Wénin 2004, 351–360; Römer 2014; Ebach 2023.

other criterion as a way to distinguish between true and false prophecy.² The episode refers to a man of God who came from Judah to deliver an oracle of evil and condemnation to the wicked king, Jeroboam. The oracle would come true much later, in the time of Josiah. It is therefore presented as true prophecy. Yet, a few verses further on, the man of God is accused of having been disobedient to Yahweh. Yahweh sends a lion to kill him. This brutal end was caused by a second prophet who lied to the man of God, urging him to disobey the instruction not to accept any invitations of hospitality. Not only does Yahweh not rebuke this lying prophet, Yahweh goes so far as to deliver a new oracle announcing the death of the man of God. Finally, the episode ends on a tragicomic note with a final scene in which the prophet buries the man of God in his own grave and begs his sons to, when it is his time, bury him beside the man of God, and he then reaffirms the authenticity of the first oracle that had been formulated against Jeroboam.



The strange episode raises several questions: Why does a man of God from Judah deal with a prophet from Bethel? Why does the prophet lie to the man of God, thus provoking his death? Is this a test, a ruse, or a conflict of interest between the two prophets? Are both prophets “true” prophets? What is really being reproached to the man of God for dying so brutally? Why is the man of God punished for his disobedience but not the prophet for his lie? Is God’s behavior arbitrary?

As we shall see, these questions have been answered in a variety of ways. However, I would like to draw attention to certain conclusions that we will have to re-evaluate in the light of our study. Let us start with that of Gerhard Munderlein:

Despite the experience of classical prophecy, it is not possible to establish an applicable criterion. Actual prophecy is clearly too complex to be summed up in formulas. This resigned realization is illustrated in the Old Testament by the prophet’s account in 1 Kings 13. Here, the distinction between true and false prophet is totally abandoned. Even the true prophet is in constant danger of disobeying God (v. 19), and a

² All biblical quotations, unless otherwise specified, are taken from: *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition* (= National Council of Churches of Christ 1993).

prophet's deception does not prevent him from subsequently proclaiming Yahweh's word (v. 18 ff.). This story presupposes a history of the phenomenon of prophecy, which teaches that there are no criteria for distinguishing between prophets, since the message of one and the same prophet can be the word of God, but also a lie.³

Münderlein is right to point out that the story of 1 Kgs 13 leads us to abandon the traditional opposition between the true and false prophet, since the same prophet can assume both roles successively. But what about the prophet's message, that is, the oracle itself? Does this story offer a criterion for discerning whether the oracle is true or false? Walter Gross replies that the text does not even deal with the theme of false prophecy:

The nabi's lie is of interest ... only with respect to its effect, not to its motivation. How is it that the nabi could only make up a word from YHWH by lying? The text does not ask the question. Nor does the problem of possible punishment of the nabi arise. The lie is only of interest because and to the degree that it is suited to move the plot forward. 1 Kings 13 is not about false prophecy. It is about obedience and disobedience.⁴



Gross observes that very little importance is attached to the false oracle of the prophet of Bethel, since the reason for the lie is not made explicit and since there is never any mention of divine punishment for the lie. He thus concludes that this story has nothing to do with the theme of true or false prophecy. This is the statement that most interested me and forms the starting point of my study. Why? Because, *a priori*, the prophet's lie in 1 Kgs 13:18 has all the characteristics of false prophecy. It is clearly introduced by four elements: (1) he presents himself as a prophet; (2) he claims that an angel spoke to him; (3) he pronounces it at Yahweh's command; and finally (4) it is specified that the prophet was lying. It is therefore to the assertion that 1 Kgs 13 is *not* about false prophecy that I wish to respond. The question that interests me is not so much why the prophet lied—thereby formulating a false prophecy—but rather how to explain the man of God's failure to recognize his col-

³ Münderlein 1979, 139–40.

⁴ Gross 1979, 123.

league's false prophecy. Why did the man of God, if he was truly being assisted by God, not discern that the angel story was a lie? It may well be that the pericope of 1 Kgs 13 offers some answers to this question, providing a kind of criterion for detecting a lie and, therefore, a false prophecy.

Delimitation and Structure of the Pericope (1 Kgs 12:32–13:34)

Without entering into the diachronic debate concerning 1 Kgs 13,⁵ I shall consider the pericope as a whole and attempt to explain its narrative coherence.⁶ I follow the delimitation proposed by Manhee Yoon from 1 Kgs 12:32 to 13:34:⁷



⁵ The pericope of 1 Kgs 13 is generally considered in two main parts. The first part (1 Kgs 13:1–10) concerns King Jeroboam and the first intervention of the man of God. Their encounter seems to fit naturally into the context of an opposition between kingship and prophecy. But in the second part of the pericope (1 Kgs 13:11–32), King Jeroboam no longer plays any role. The man of God encounters another prophet, bringing to the surface another issue: the man of God's death. The change of theme between the two parts of the pericope has led to several redactional hypotheses. Two independent narratives may have been combined into one, or the second may have been an amplification of the first. Moreover, because of the similarities between 1 Kgs 12:30–32 and 1 Kgs 13:33–34, chap. 13 is often considered an insertion within the cycle on Jeroboam. Many believe that the insertion took place in the time of Josiah, since he is the subject of a prophecy (1 Kgs 13:2), which, according to the chronology of the books of Kings, will be fulfilled three centuries later. On this subject, see Dozeman 1982, 380–84; Eynikel 1990, 237; Walsh 1996, 176–92; Bosworth 2002, 365–66; Yoon 2016, 11–19.

⁶ Others have already taken the same approach, and I will be basing myself on their work: Mead 1999, 191–205; Cogan 2000, 373; Walsh 2001, 179–80; Yoon 2016, 51–52.

⁷ Although I have changed the titles of the parts, I have borrowed this proposed structure from Yoon 2016, 47–49, 50–51.

- A – 12:32–33 Jeroboam’s actions
- B – 13:1–2 Prophecy against the altar of Bethel
- C – 13:3–6 Sign confirming the oracle of the man of God
- D – 13:7–10 Obedience of the man of God
- X – 13:11–14 The two central questions
- D’ – 13:15–19 Disobedience of the man of God
- C’ – 13:20–26 Sign confirming the prophet’s oracle
- B’ – 13:27–32 Prophecy against the altar of Bethel
- A’ – 13:33–34 Jeroboam’s actions

The pericope opens in A and ends in A’ with the reprehensible actions of King Jeroboam. In B, a man of God from Judah delivers an oracle of destruction concerning the altar of Bethel, the authenticity of which is finally proclaimed by the prophet in B’ at the end of the narrative. In C and C’, the word announced, respectively, by each of the two men is immediately followed by an action attributed to Yahweh: Jeroboam’s hand is paralyzed, and a lion kills the man of God. The man of God’s faithfulness to Yahweh’s word is tested twice: in D, he shows obedience, while in D’ he disobeys. Finally, at the core of the pericope, in X, are the two questions posed by the prophet to the man of God, which I believe are the key to interpreting this text.



The Obedience of the Man of God (1 Kgs 13:1–10)

The story begins in 1 Kgs 13:1 with a mysterious, unnamed man of God from Judah who appears before Jeroboam, who then proclaims:

O altar, altar, thus says the Lord: “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.” (1 Kgs 13:2)

The prophecy is indeed fulfilled a few chapters later, in 2 Kgs 23:15, in the time of Josiah. Thus, the mixed history of the two kingdoms in

1–2 Kings brings together two royal figures: Jeroboam⁸ and Josiah. The history of the divided kingship is presented under the sign of ambivalence; the North is systematically qualified negatively, and the South, despite several bad kings, remains placed under the patronage of the good king, Josias.

The prophetic oracle of the man of God is accompanied by a first miracle. When Jeroboam ordered the man of God to be seized, the hand he had raised against him withered (1 Kgs 13:4). At the same time, the sign (מופת) of the prophecy of doom is fulfilled: the altar is cracked and ashes spread (1 Kgs 13:5). This is indeed a sign, since it is given in preparation for a final fulfillment in the time of Josiah, when he will destroy the altar and burn the bones from all the tombs (2 Kgs 23:15–16).

While the sign certainly provides a confirmation function for the oracle—to which I will return below—it also evokes an ambivalence. Indeed, in Deut 13:2–5 the same term (מופת) is used to warn against prophets who, although performing signs, actually go astray from Yahweh by not observing his commandments. The theme of unfaithfulness to the commandments is mentioned in exactly these terms (verb שמר + noun מצוה) in Deut 13:5 and 1 Kgs 13:21. The man of God will rightly be reproached, a little further on in the pericope (in 1 Kgs 13:21), for not having followed the commandment that Yahweh had given him.

Two other aspects of Deut 13 are worth noting. Firstly, according to Deut 13:4, there is the idea of a testing (נסה) on Yahweh's part. Although the same verb is not used in 1 Kgs 13, we shall see that this aspect is nonetheless present in the pericope. Secondly, according to Deut 13:6, a disobedient prophet deserves death. In fact, the man of God will not pass the test of obedience to Yahweh to which the prophet will submit him and will die in 1 Kgs 13:24. In short, the intertextuality between Deut 13 and 1 Kgs 13 seems to shed light on the destiny of the man of God.

⁸ With a few exceptions, the Northern kings who succeed Jeroboam are always described as having imitated Jeroboam's sins. See, for example, Nadab in 1 Kgs 15:26; Basha in 1 Kgs 15:34; Zimri in 1 Kgs 16:19; Omri in 1 Kgs 16:26; Ahab in 1 Kgs 16:31; and so on.



Let us return to the sign of the broken altar. Jeroboam is clearly not paying attention to this sign. His main concern is the health of his hand. At the king's request, the man of God intercedes for his hand to be healed, which happens immediately. The king promptly invites the man of God to his home, promising him a reward, to which the man of God responds in the negative, revealing a word that had been spoken to him earlier: "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" (1 Kgs 13:9).⁹ And he leaves. At this point, the faithfulness of the man of God to the word of Yahweh contrasts with the attitude of the king, who shows no sign of repentance over the condemnation of the altar at Bethel. Jeroboam is characterized by his refusal to listen to the prophetic word. In fact, the episode could have ended here, followed by the concluding verses (vv. 33–34), which state that Jeroboam did not rectify his conduct. But a twist takes place on the way back, when the man of God has a decisive encounter.



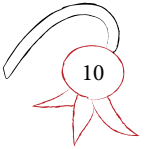
The topic of the road is in fact very present in the pericope. The term **דרך** appears for the first time in v. 9. This path leads either out of Bethel or into Bethel. It is interesting to note that in 1 Kgs 13:1–32, there are eleven occurrences of **דרך** ("path") and eleven occurrences of the verb **שוב** ("to return"), again in connection with the idea of the road.¹⁰ This numerical correspondence is certainly not due to chance. The two terms refer to the prohibition, against the man of God, from taking "the road of turning back," that is, from returning to Bethel in the literal sense (man) and from returning to sinful ways in the figurative sense (Bethel). Indeed, it is in this figurative sense that the terms **דרך** and **שוב** are used a twelfth time again in 1 Kgs 13:33, concluding the sequence on Jeroboam:

⁹ The reason and meaning for not taking bread and water can be explained through the figure of Moses. The same fast is asked of him in Deut 9:9, 18. The man of God in 1 Kgs 13 is thus described as following the example of Moses (Poirier 2022).

¹⁰ The verb **שוב** is also used three times in 1 Kgs 13:3, 6, but not in the sense of which road to travel on. It refers to the physical state of Jeroboam's hand.

Even after this event Jeroboam did not turn (שוב) from his evil way (מדרכו הרעה) but made priests for the high places again from among all the people; any who wanted to be priests he consecrated for the high places. (1 Kgs 13:33)

Fidelity to the Law is evoked through the metaphor of the road. In 1 Kgs 13:33, Jeroboam is judged according to the Torah. He must “turn aside” (שוב) from his evil ways. In 1 Kgs 13:9, the man of God must “turn aside” from the path that leads to Bethel. We understand that Yahweh has his demands on both the king and the man of God. No one must stray from the divine will manifested through the Law. This indicates that the possibility for the man of God to turn back is clearly an option. He too is a tempted man, and he too must faithfully follow Yahweh’s will. If, in v. 10 the man of God shows immediate obedience to Yahweh, he will nevertheless disobey him in the rest of the story. The destinies of Jeroboam and the man of God are intertwined in the story. As Robert Cohn says: “The transformation of the man of God from God’s ally to his enemy mirrors the fate of Jeroboam himself” (1985, 35).



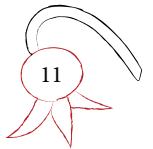
The Disobedience of the Man of God (1 Kgs 13:11–22)

From 1 Kgs 13:11 on, “an old prophet” from Bethel comes on the scene. From the outset, a distinction in terms appears between the “man of God” (איש אלהים) and the “prophet” (נביא).¹¹ But in action, the two visionaries clearly perform a similar role, since they both receive and transmit words from Yahweh (1 Kgs 13:2, 21–22). It is therefore difficult to give a satisfactory explanation of the difference between the two titles.¹² However, the origin of the two visionaries—one from Judah (Southern Kingdom), the other from Bethel (Northern Kingdom)—is an echo of the two kings already mentioned in the pericope: Jeroboam, king of the North, and Josiah, king of the South.

¹¹ For a brief overview of the discussion, see Knauf 2016, 391.

¹² For a brief overview of the discussion: Bosworth 2002, 366–67.

The old prophet has heard of all the actions the man of God has taken with the king and all the words that he has spoken (1 Kgs 13:11). Before having his sons saddle his donkey to meet him, he asks them a question that turns out to be decisive for the rest of the story: “Which way did he go?” (1 Kgs 13:12). The question can be easily understood at the surface level—in which cardinal direction did he go?—but it could also be understood at a deeper level as asking the man of God about his deeper choices.¹³ In other words, is he following Yahweh’s way? In the same light, we can interpret the new question formulated by the prophet once he has reached the man of God: “Are you the man of God who came from Judah?” (1 Kgs 13:14). Here, too, the question has a twofold meaning: not only is it a question aimed at identifying the man of God, but above all it is aimed at determining whether he is *really* a man of God, in other words, whether he is being faithful to his mission. The idea of a test, mentioned above through intertextuality with Deut 13, is beginning to take shape. Remember that our proposed structure for 1 Kgs 13 places these two questions at the center of the narrative. Thus, everything that happens in the episode depends on how these two central questions are answered.



The feeling of being put to the test—What way are you going? Are you a man of God?—can still be detected in the prophet’s invitation to the man of God. It is the same invitation that King Jeroboam had made: to go to his house and enjoy a meal. The repeated request to come and eat and drink in Bethel sounds like a real test¹⁴ for the man of God. Will he maintain the same position? He responds as before:

But he said, “I cannot return with you, or go in with you; nor will I eat food or drink water with you in this place; 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.” (1 Kgs 13:16–17)

It is indeed on faithfulness to the word received from Yahweh that the man of God is tested. Neither the king nor the prophet have been able

¹³ Dozeman 1982, 387–88; Reis 1994, 381.

¹⁴ The term “test” to describe the prophet’s actions is used by Thomas Dozeman (1982, 380).

to make the man of God accept anything so far. But the prophet finally succeeds by setting a trap.

The prophet makes quite a different argument, saying: “I too am a prophet like you, and an angel told me this, by order of Yahweh: ‘Bring him back with you into your house so that he may eat food and drink water.’ But he was deceiving him” (1 Kgs 13:18). The prophet’s ruse is shameless: he takes advantage of his rank as a prophet to issue a false message supposedly received through an angel. The man of God falls into the trap: he follows him back to his home in Bethel, where he eats and drinks. Then, paradoxically, a true word from Yahweh is sent to the man of God through the lying prophet:



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 no water,” your body shall not come to your ancestral tomb. (1 Kgs 13:21–22)

Prophetic inspiration clearly left the man of God at the very moment when he stopped being faithful to the first word he had received. And prophetic inspiration then immediately joined the other prophet who, until then, had lied. This reversal of roles is all the more surprising given that the criterion of moral rectitude is not a criterion for holding the word of Yahweh. Lying does not prevent the prophet from receiving a true oracle from Yahweh (Yoon 2016, 70). What lesson can we draw from this reversal? At this stage of the story, we still do not know what the old prophet’s motives are or what he is going to do. Let us continue our commentary in order to clarify matters.

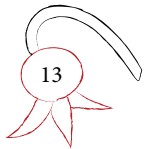
The Death of the Man of God and His Burial (1 Kgs 13:23–32)

The death of the man of God is somewhat precipitated in the story. Indeed, there was nothing to suggest that it would take place so quickly. At most, the divine punishment announced in 1 Kgs 13:22 foretold the

impossibility of a family burial for the man of God, not his death. No details were given regarding the moment of his death or the circumstances in which it would take place. However, along the way, the man of God is killed by a lion. Once again, the news reaches the ears of the old prophet through intermediaries (in 1 Kgs 13:25 as well as 13:11), to which he responds without any hesitation:

When the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard of it, he said: "It is the man of God who disobeyed the word of the Lord; 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." (1 Kgs 13:26)

The prophet immediately discerns and recognizes that these facts concern his guest. Moreover, the lion is clearly perceived as Yahweh's instrument (see also 1 Kgs 20:36).¹⁵ Finally, the reason for the death of the man of God is also made clear: it is due to his disobedience to the divine word. This tragic ending comes as no surprise to the reader, given the reference to Deut 13:6. What is harder to explain is why the old prophet put the man of God to the test by deceiving him with a false word. I will deal with this issue below in the final section.



When the prophet finds the body (1 Kgs 13:28), he is surrounded by the lion and the donkey. The situation is curious: the lion has not devoured either the man of God or the donkey,¹⁶ and the donkey has not fled. Both stand quietly beside the body of the man of God, as if waiting for what is to happen next. This surprising situation confirms that the lion's attitude was divinely commanded (Yoon 2016, 78).

The old prophet takes the lifeless body of the man of God and buries it in his own tomb while stipulating to his sons his wish to be buried beside him. Why does he wish to be joined to him in the grave? He gives the reason in v. 32:

¹⁵ The lion could even be a metaphor for Yahweh's action (see, for example, Amos 3:8; Dozeman 1992, 389).

¹⁶ Nor will he devour the old prophet when he comes to recover the body of the man of God in 1 Kgs 13:28–29.

For the saying that he 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. (1 Kgs 13:32)

Not only does the correspondence between vv. 2 and 32 concerning the altar of Bethel contribute to the unity of the pericope, it also refers to the reign of Josiah in 2 Kgs 23:16. The old prophet had already understood this in 1 Kgs 13:26. The reason why he buried the man of God in his own tomb finally becomes clear: the mortal remains of the man of God would logically be spared by King Josiah, who, much later, would remember the oracle pronounced about him. The bones of the old prophet, placed in the same tomb as those of the man of God, thus escaped the profanation foretold in 1 Kgs 13:2.



We now understand why the prophet had buried the man of God in his own tomb and instructed his sons to bury him with him. On the one hand, the prophet was seeking to preserve his grave and prevent his bones from being burned to ashes by Josiah on the impure altar of Bethel, a fact that has led several commentators to describe the prophet's actions as "selfish."¹⁷ On the other hand, the prophet's request to be buried with the man of God is not necessarily to be judged negatively, since it helps to highlight the authenticity of the oracle pronounced by the man of God (Yoon 2016, 79). A middle position between these two views would be that the old prophet was simply being clever: once he had confirmation of the authenticity of the oracle, he himself contributed to its realization by burying the man of God; moreover, by burying him in his own grave, he knew that his bones would be preserved in the future.

However, it remains to be elucidated—if that is possible—why the old prophet would manipulate the man of God to put him to the test. After all, in v. 18, when the old prophet had deliberately claimed that an angel had spoken to him and instructed him to communicate a counter-order to the man of God, he had not yet received any word from Yahweh that there would be anything to gain if he succeeded in making the man of God stay in Bethel. So, he was not lying for his own benefit yet. Why, then, did he do it?

¹⁷ Marcus 1993, 71; Knauf 2016, 388.

The Lie and Confirmation of Prophecy

I agree with Yoon, who says that “the old prophet’s lie is just an instrument by which the man of God’s disobedience was brought about” (2016, 70). Indeed, we must not attach too much moral importance to this lie. The story does not focus on it. Paradoxically, it is the lie that reveals the disobedience of the man of God and highlights the authenticity of his prophecy. As contradictory as it may seem, the lie ultimately serves true prophecy. How should we interpret this?

Let us leave aside the possible reasons why the prophet lied and ask ourselves *why the man of God failed to discern his confrère’s lie*. Is there anything that would have enabled the man of God to detect the lie? Most likely, there would indeed have been. My hypothesis is that the mistake made by the man of God was to trust a prophecy when he had no guarantee that it was true. Indeed, there is a criterion proposed throughout 1 Kgs 13 for authenticating a prophecy. This criterion is based on the possibility of verification. In this text, the two “true” oracles (1 Kgs 13:2 about Josiah and the altar and 1 Kgs 13:21–22 about the burial of the man of God)—in contrast to the false oracle of 1 Kgs 13:18—are both confirmed by an immediate, though partial, fulfillment: the altar of Bethel split before Jeroboam (1 Kgs 13:5) and the man of God was killed by a lion, as the prophet was able to verify (1 Kgs 13:28). In this text, the criterion of true prophecy is based on the immediate realization of a sign that testifies to the authenticity of the word that has been received. The two “true” oracles can be recognized as such because they are accompanied by a sign (proof) anticipating their full realization:

- **Oracle concerning Josiah and the altar (1 Kgs 13:2)**
 - sign: the split altar (1 Kgs 13:5)
 - final fulfillment with Josiah (2 Kgs 23:15)
- **Oracle concerning the burial of the man of God (1 Kgs 13:21–22)**
 - sign: the death of the man of God at the hands of the lion (1 Kgs 13:26)
 - final fulfillment with burial in the prophet’s tomb (1 Kgs 13:30)



When the old prophet delivered his so-called “angelic oracle,” he was unable to provide any proof of the authenticity of his words. The man of God’s mistake was to rely on it, omitting the criterion of verification that is imperative for the other two (true) oracles in the episode. The oracle of the man of God in 1 Kgs 13:2 is confirmed by the precursory sign of the breaking altar. And the old prophet’s oracle regarding the burial of the man of God in 1 Kgs 13:21–22 is confirmed by the precursory sign of the lion killing the man of God. In the absence of a sign confirming the oracle, it is not to be considered a message from Yahweh but a lie. The test to which the old prophet submits the man of God is, in my opinion, about this verification criterion. The man of God was negligent in disregarding the requirement of a sign or proof that is supposed to accompany any authentic oracle.



What is more, the literary context in which the episode takes place, that is, the entire Jeroboam cycle, supports my hypothesis. As we shall see, the sequence 1 Kgs 11:26–14:20 is also structured according to the same logic: oracle → sign → final fulfillment. I have adopted the proposed structure below from the work of Cohn (1985, 24), but I have changed some of the part titles:

- A – 11:26–28 Introduction: Presentation of Jeroboam
- B1 – 11:29–40 Ahijah’s prophecy announcing the establishment of Jeroboam’s kingship**
 - sign: the divided coat
- B2 – 11:41–12:24 Fulfillment of the prophecy**
 - C – 12.25–33 Jeroboam’s sins
 - X – 13:1–32 The prophecy of the man of God and its (partial) fulfillment**
 - C’ – 13.33–34 Jeroboam’s sins
- B1’ – 14:1–16 Ahijah’s prophecy announcing the end of Jeroboam’s dynasty**
 - sign: the death of Jeroboam’s son
- B2’ – 14:17–18 (Partial) fulfillment of the prophecy with the death of Jeroboam’s son**
- A’ – 14:19–20 Conclusion: Obituary of Jeroboam

The episode of 1 Kgs 13:1–32 lies at the core of the concentric structure. According to Cohn, the story of the disobedience of the man of God is placed at the center because the fate of the man of God prefigures that of king Jeroboam, who also disobeyed (1985, 33–34). But this proposition about the structure of the tale also considers another logic, that of the systematic fulfillment of oracles. In B1, the prophet Ahijah announces the division of Israel into two kingdoms: ten tribes to the north, and two tribes to the south (Judah and Benjamin, according to 1 Kgs 12:21). The coat, divided into twelve pieces, is the sign that this is going to happen. Then, in B2, the circumstances leading to the fulfillment of the oracle are described: Rehoboam's harshness drove the ten tribes to rally to Jeroboam. In v. 15 of 1 Kgs 12, it is stated that this happened in accordance with the oracle in B1: למען הקים את דברו אשר דבר יהוה ("that he might fulfill his word, which the Lord had spoken"). The idea of the oracle's fulfillment is thus clearly present. In a mirror image, in B1', as Jeroboam's wife goes to consult Ahijah about her ailing son's health, the prophet announces the end of Jeroboam's dynasty (vv. 7–11). As a sign (although this term is not used), Ahijah proclaims the son's death (vv. 12–16). In B2', the child's death is enacted, already anticipating the end of the dynasty. The dynamic oracle → sign → final fulfillment is thus clearly apparent between B1/B2 and B1'/B2', just as it is in the central narrative (X) in 1 Kgs 13. The Jeroboam cycle is thus unified around this dynamic, and 1 Kgs 13 is the key to its interpretation.



Conclusion

This argument, then, leads to three conclusions. Firstly, there is no false prophet in this text, nor is there any opposition between the two prophets, as indicated by the old prophet's emotional words to his deceased confrère: הוי אחי ("Alas, my brother!", 1 Kgs 13:30). Both, moreover, spoke an oracle that turned out to be authentic and that was introduced by the same solemn formula: כה אמר יהוה ("Thus says Yahweh," 1 Kgs 13:2, 21), although the morality of each is reprehensible. It is not a question of distinguishing between a true and a false

prophet,¹⁸ for that is basically impossible. Rather, the challenge is to discern the word spoken by the prophet. The story of 1 Kgs 13 does offer a criterion to discern the authenticity of an oracle.

Secondly, what exactly is this criterion? A true prophecy is recognizable by the precursory sign of its fulfillment. This sign highlights the efficacy of Yahweh's word. If the oracle is true—whether it comes true quickly or in the indefinite future—it must begin to appear partially in the present through a sign. This is the guarantee of its authenticity. In this respect, we have seen that the entire cycle of Jeroboam is structured according to this same logic of the fulfillment of the divine word. Even more broadly, 1–2 Kings tell how the two kingdoms, Judah and Israel, disappeared: because the kings and the people did not listen to Yahweh's word, the two kingdoms were destroyed. In this sense, the episode of 1 Kgs 13 reflects and fits in perfectly with the Deuteronomistic theology of the books of Kings, which Gerhard Von Rad has called a theology of Yahweh's word fulfilled in history.¹⁹

However—and this will be my third conclusion—the episode of 1 Kgs 13 stands out from certain convictions that are nonetheless Deuteronomistic, such as those we read in Deut 18.20–22:

“But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to



¹⁸ This distinction does not exist in the Hebrew Bible. The expression “false prophet” (ψευδοπροφήτης) is found only in the Septuagint, and only ten times: Jer. 6:13; 33:7, 8, 11, 16; 34:7; 35:1; 36:1; 36:8; Zech. 13:2. Since this name is only used in the Hebrew Bible translation, it is already an interpretation, as Walter Vogels says (1977, 682), probably to help the reader understand the stories.

¹⁹ “The Deuteronomist’s conception is manifestly this: Jahweh revealed his commandments to Israel; in case of disobedience, he threatened her with severe punishment, with the judgement of total destruction, in fact. That had now actually taken place. Jahweh’s words had been ‘fulfilled in history they had not Tailed’, as the Deuteronomist is also fond of saying. There thus exists, the Deuteronomist means, an inter-relationship between the words of Jahweh and history in the sense that Jahweh’s word, once uttered, reaches its goal under all circumstances in history by virtue of the power inherent in it. This conception can be reconstructed very clearly from the Deuteronomist’s work” (Von Rad 1961, 78). See also Vogels 1977, 685; Yoon 2016, 154–57.

“speak—that prophet shall die.” You may say to yourself, “How can we recognize a word that the Lord has not spoken?” If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it. (Deut 18:20–22)

According to v. 20, the prophet who speaks a word that does not come from Yahweh must die. Yet the old prophet of Bethel does not die after lying to the man of God. The episode of 1 Kgs 13 therefore departs from Deut 18:20 on this point. The episode of 1 Kgs 13 supports the obvious: not every lying prophet dies immediately. We have seen that even lies can paradoxically serve true prophecy. Discernment is therefore more complex than what Deut 18 asserts.

Moreover, again according to Deut 18:10–22, the criterion for discerning the authenticity of a word is its fulfillment. But this criterion raises a major difficulty: it only works in retrospect. For example, if the prophecy is not fulfilled until after the prophet’s death, how can we accept his word when he speaks it, and how can we consider him a true prophet during his lifetime? The episode in 1 Kgs 13, along with the whole of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11:26–14:20), solves this difficulty: the sign is, in a way, already a guarantee of the truthfulness of a prophecy; the sign anticipates the full realization of the prophecy, which can take place long after the prophet’s death.



Bibliography

- Bosworth, David A. 2002. “Revisiting Karl Barth’s exegesis of 1 Kings 13.” *Biblical Interpretation* 10, no. 4: 360–83. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15685150260340743>.
- Cogan, Mordechai. 2000. *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday.
- Cohn, Robert, L. 1985. “Literary Technique in the Jeroboam Narrative.” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 97, no. 1: 23–35. <https://doi.org/10.1515/zatw.1985.97.1.23>.
- Crenshaw, James, L. 1971. *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect upon Israelite Religion*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

- Dozeman, Thomas. 1982. "The Way of the Man of God from Judah: True and False Prophecy in the Pre-Deuteronomistic Legend of 1 Kings 13." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44, no. 3: 379–93. <https://www-jstor-org.icp.idm.oclc.org/stable/43716233>
- Ebach, Ruth. 2023. *Trügende Prophetenworte: Zum Umgang mit falscher und unerfüllter Prophetie im Alten Testament im Kontext altorientalischer und antiker Divination* [Deceptive prophetic words: Dealing with false and unfulfilled prophecy in the Old Testament in the context of Ancient Near Eastern and ancient divination]. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Eynikel, Erik. 1990. "Prophecy and Fulfillment in the Deuteronomistic History: 1 Kgs 13; 2 Kgs 23,16-18." In *Pentateuchal and Deuteronomistic Studies: Papers Read at the XIIIth IOSOT Congress*, edited by Chris Brekelmans and Johan Lust, 227–37. Leuven: Leuven University Press.
- Gross, Walter. 1979. "Lying Prophet and Disobedient Man of God in 1 Kings 13: Role Analysis as an Instrument of Theological Interpretation of an OT Narrative Text." *Semeia* 15: 97–135.
- Hossfeld, Frank Lothar, and Ivo Meyer. 1973. *Prophet gegen Prophet: Eine Analyse der alttestamentlichen Texte zum Thema: Wahre und falsche Propheten* [Prophet against prophet: An analysis of the Old Testament texts on the topic: True and false prophets]. Fribourg: Verlag Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk.
- Knauf, Ernst A. 2016. *1 Könige 1–14*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder.
- Marcus, David. 1993. "Elements of Ridicule and Parody in the Story of the Lying Prophet from Bethel." *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies: The Bible and Its World*, Div. A.: 67–74. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23535749>.
- Mead, James. 1999. "Kings and Prophets, Donkeys and Lions: Dramatic Shape and Deuteronomistic Rhetoric in 1 Kings XIII." *Vetus Testamentum* 49, no. 2: 191–205. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853399774228975>.
- Münderlein, Gerhard. 1979. *Kriterien wahrer und falscher Prophetie: Entstehung und Bedeutung im Alten Testament*. Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang.
- National Council of Churches of Christ. 1993. *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.
- Poirier, Jean-Michel. 2022. "À l'ombre de Moïse, l'homme de Dieu et le prophète de Béthel (1 R 13)" [In the shadow of Moses, the man of God and the prophet of Bethel (1 Kgs 13)]. In *Vrais et faux prophètes: comment discerner?* [True and false prophets: How to tell them apart?], edited by Cyprien Comte, 43–55. Paris: Parole et Silence.

