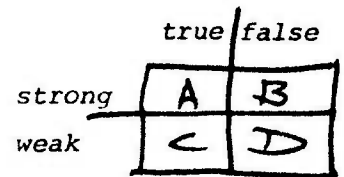


What a curious, confused, high-impact, koan-like ancient tale we have in 1K.13! A southern [Judean] "man of God" (only in LXX text does the story call him "prophet") speaks at Bethel against Jereboam's apostasy, resists the king's flattery and bribery, and yields to a northern [Israelite] "prophet"'s temptation driven home with the sanction of a sham inspiration--and gets, for his minor infraction in spite of his major faithfulness, captial punishment from the Lord! As in its present form the story's in the style of Josiah's annals, let's put it [though it's time-locus is a few centuries earlier] just after Josiah's reform--say, ca.BC610.

This thinksheet is heuristic, a series of exploratory statements the story sparked in me. As such, it's different both from an exegesis and from an exposition. It's closest to a meditation, with narrative as mandala for the inner eye--and is thus rabbinic-associative. Humorously I may say that the new priest, the therapist, uses a similar stream-of-consciousness technique, in the now old saw "What comes to mind about that?"....In this form of "Bible study," certain rules obtain: (1) Faithfulness to the text, not violating it consciously; (2) Prayerfulness in the process; (3) Courageous playfulness in both brain-hemispheres!

1. When the job's done, get the hell away. The devil has been waiting for you to be tired and proud. As SK said, "Purity of heart is to will one thing"--at a time?
2. Often your friends "get to you," in the bad sense, when your enemies can't. The Judean was fortified against power but unguarded against heresy. Strong-willed, but weak in spiritual perception-discernment.
3. From Sam. on, "prophets" have been king-confronters as Word-obeyers. 1Sam.15.22 ["to obey is better than sacrifice"] is followed by a vs. saying reject the Word and you'll be yourself rejected. Watch out, the Word is coming to bless the obeyer--king or prophet or people--and curse the resister (cp.Is.55.10f), and it is more powerful than all the powers of earth. Our story kills off a true prophet, by the instrumentality of a false prophet, to cause this truth to glow psychedelically! It's a control story with double sanctioning: the king gets warned against apostasy, and all prophets get warned against not keeping "the command which the LORD your God commanded you" but rather "rebellling against the Word of the LORD."
4. Not the old or the new, but the true, is to be obeyed. The false message came both from the old [Bethel prophet] and from the new [a "revelation" subsequent to the one in obedience to which the Judean arrived in Bethel]. How tricky of the devil to combine the sanction of age with the taste for the latest thing! Moral: Don't trust old folks with new ideas.
5. Chiasmus: I'm strong when I'm weak (2Cor.12.10; cp.1Cor.1), and vice versa (1Cor. 10.12). On the diagram, "A" is stage one of the Judah prophet, "B" is stage two of the Bethel prophet, "C" is stage two of the Judah prophet, and "D" is stage one of the Bethel prophet.
6. Study your biorhythm: when you're low, the tempting opportunity may meet the susceptible disposition.
7. The protest was unsuccessful in the short run but not in the long; with the Judah prophet, the reverse was true. I can think of a number of things to make of that! E.g., "Give it time!" versus "Yesterday's credit is spent already."
8. Some stories--e.g., this one--are so open as to invite cooptation: "Look at it this way!" I can imagine many uses of the story in dealing with "the -isms" and must caution myself vis-a-vis my own first rule [above] in this type of interpretation, viz. heuristic meditation. At various times for various people, the story will glow with various colors, various insights-inspirations-revelations. Why not?
9. Our centerpiece prophet was faithful, flawed, failed, forgotten (nameless). Take the consolation of 1.Cor.15.58: "Your labor is not in vain in the Lord."
10. Get it firsthand: angels sometimes lie (as we're warned in Gal.1.8).
11. Jesus says "Watch!" We're undone in the unguarded moment.
12. Quoting revelation, the devil sneaks up on our secret wishes, answering according to our idols. God often punishes us by "answering" yes to our prayers.
13. Table fellowship, now as then, establishes covenant. "Try the spirits" (1Jn.4.1)!



14. What God kills Jews for being friendly with Samaritans? Not Jesus'. Set Jn.4 over against 1K.13.