

My Father is Yahweh!

I Kings 14:1-20

Maybe the most common charge against the God of the Bible is that He is harsh and uncaring.

Who really would want to love a God who does not care for the details of their lives?

The book of Kings speaks to this issue.

It was compiled during the Exile. God's people had watched Jerusalem fall, the Temple destroyed, and the Davidic dynasty come to nothing. They had lived through war and famine and exile. Some people remained in the Land, but only under the reign of the Babylonians.

How could these suffering people go on believing that God really cared for them?

How could they go on trusting God's promises?

Chapter 14 begins with a mother and father worried about the sickness of their son. They fear that for his life.

And naturally, we think that God, if He is a good God, should be compassionate and loving towards this sick child and his parents.

Right?

What if I told you that God takes the life of the son?

What would you conclude about God?

That God doesn't care.

That God is not good.

Maybe even that the Bible presents a God that I want nothing to do with.

Today's story will not answer the questions of every loss. But it will give us one example where there is much more going on than at first meets the eye. And the conclusion that God doesn't care or is not good could not be further from the truth.

Read I Kings 14:1-4.

At that time
Abijah (which means "My Father is Yahweh") the son of Jeroboam fell sick.
2 And
Jeroboam said to his wife,
"Arise,
and
disguise yourself,
that it not be known that you are the wife of Jeroboam,
and
go to Shiloh.

Behold,
Ahijah the prophet is there,
who said of me
that I should be king over **this people**.

3 Take with you
ten loaves,
some cakes,
and
a jar of honey,
and
go to him.
He will tell you what shall happen to the child."

4 Jeroboam's wife did so.
She arose
and
went to Shiloh
and
came to the house of Ahijah.

These verses are very important in setting the stage for the coming interaction. Jeroboam and his wife are deeply concerned for their son. He is very sick and could very well die.

They have obviously made various attempts to secure the healing of their son. There is a feeling of desperation that oozes from their actions. Why else would a king feel the need to send his wife in disguise to the prophet?

Ahijah is the prophet who told Jeroboam that Yahweh would give the kingdom to him. So, why is there bad blood between them?

Jeroboam has directly disobeyed God's clear commands to him. He was tasked with leading God's people in the same way that David had led God's people. Instead, he led them into false worship.

In the last chapter, we saw how God mercifully sent a prophet to Jeroboam declaring that the altars that he had built would all be destroyed.

Jeroboam ignored God's gracious warning.
Jeroboam knows that He has ignored God's Word.
But he has no intention of acknowledging his guilt before Yahweh, or Ahijah.
He has no desire to seek God's mercy for the wrongs he has committed.

His only concern is that he does not want his son to die.

He sends his wife in disguise because he thinks that he can fool Ahijah. If Ahijah believes this woman is just fellow Israelite in need, then he just might speak some word of blessing over her child. And so, Jeroboam might trick Yahweh into healing his child.

To us, that might sound silly. But you must remember that it was not obvious to Jeroboam that Yahweh was all knowing. He might be a smart and powerful God. But that did not mean that he could not be fooled. Or at least, that His prophet might be fooled.

Did we not see in the last chapter that the man of God from Judah was fooled?

And we also must remember that in those days most people believed that the prophet's power worked something like a talisman or a good luck charm. If Ahijah could be tricked into speaking a blessing, then the blessing would come to pass.

We are not so unlike Jeroboam. Is it not true that we will ask God to help us in our times of need even though we have no intention of bowing our heart to Him?

There is one more detail that we are to see in verse 2. It is easy to miss. But it is the narrator's way of cluing you in to what is really going on in this story.

Jeroboam tells his wife that Ahijah is the one who told him, "I should be king over THIS people."

Jeroboam speaks of the people that he rules in a very generic way. His choice of "This people" makes it sound like he rules over an insignificant people.

But who is it that he has been made a steward over?

He has been made ruler over God's treasured people.

In just a few verses, Ahijah will give a word to Jeroboam.

7 Go, tell Jeroboam,
 'Thus says the LORD,
 the God of Israel:
 "Because
 I exalted you from among the people
 and
 made you leader over **my people Israel**

Notice the language that God uses.

"I am the God of Israel." That means that Israel is not just any people. They are the people with whom God has become bonded in covenantal love. God has made Jeroboam leader, not over "this" people, but over "my people Israel."

The contrast could not be more stark.
Jeroboam was given the calling of caring for God's people.
Jeroboam does not love Yahweh or His people.

And yet, Jeroboam is hoping to trick Yahweh into saving his son.

Let me make this even more piercing.

When we look at the broader Scriptures, we can see clearly that God considers the entire nation to be His son.

When God was redeeming His people out of Egypt through Moses, He emphatically declares how He feels towards Israel.

Exodus 4:22-23 ²² Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, ²³ and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'

God deeply cares for His people. So much so that if someone harms His children, as a loving Father, God takes it personally. It makes him angry.

God has appointed Jeroboam to be the temporary custodian of His child. Think of a babysitter, if it helps. Jeroboam, as the custodian/babysitter, purposely abuses God's child. The wording of Scripture is that he "made Israel to sin."

Imagine someone purposely harming your child.
Then, with no remorse for his actions, he comes to you and asks you for help with his child.

How would you react?
Is not anger appropriate?
Is it not even demanded?
Does not love for your child demand some response?

Far from being harsh, God's reaction will reflect His deep and abiding love for His son.

But before we see God's reaction, there is another question that must be answered, and answered definitively.

That question is this: Can any human being fool God into giving them blessing?

Before you think this is absurd, did not Jacob fool his father into giving him the covenant blessing?

And just in the last chapter, the man of God was fooled by a false prophet.

So, fooling another person is not absurd.

But if by fooling another person, one can also fool God, we have a problem.
God must teach Jeroboam, and us, that no one can fool God.
What is more, God does not tolerate any to come to Him out of deception.

Let's see how this is played out in the text.

Now Ahijah could not see,
for his eyes were dim because of his age.

In other words, Ahijah would naturally have been fooled by the ruse. It is not Ahijah who sees through the deception. It is Yahweh, the God of Israel.

And so, Yahweh speaks to Ahijah before Jeroboam's wife arrives.

5 And
the LORD said to Ahijah,
 "Behold,
 the wife of Jeroboam is coming to inquire of you
 concerning her son,
 for he is sick.
 Thus and thus shall you say to her."

We are not told the content yet, because we are to feel the doom of the word at the same time as the wife of Jeroboam hears it.

When she came,
she pretended to be another woman.
6 But
 when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet,
 as she came in at the door,
he said,
 "Come in, wife of Jeroboam.
 Why do you pretend to be another?
 For I am charged with unbearable news for you.

Before the wife of Jeroboam even gets a word out, Ahijah lets her know that he knows everything. Talk about eerie.

Ahijah tells her to come in. (I am not sure I would have wanted to.)
And then he asks a question that would have cut to the heart?
Why do you pretend to be another?
(Why do you feel the need to lie to me?)

As readers, we know that Jeroboam resorts to tricking God because he knows his own guilt.

He knows that he deserves the anger of God.

Ahijah does not give her time to answer.

7 Go, tell Jeroboam,
 'Thus says the LORD,
 the God of Israel:
 "Because
 I exalted you from among the people
 and
 made you leader over **my people Israel**
8 and
 tore the kingdom away from the house of David
 and
 gave it to you,
 and yet
 you have not been like my servant David,
 who kept my commandments
 and
 followed me with all his heart,
 doing only that which was right in my eyes,
9 but
 you have done evil
 above all who were before you
 and
 have gone and made for yourself
 other gods
 and
 metal images,
 provoking me to anger,
 and
 have cast me behind your back,

What has Jeroboam done to anger God so deeply?

Basically, Jeroboam has spit in the face of God's kindness to him.

Israel is God's treasured son. God graciously entrusted Jeroboam to care for His son. Instead of following God's commands, Jeroboam did more evil than any king before him.

By his false worship, Jeroboam has cast the LORD behind his back. That means that he treated God absolute disdain.

Without this understanding of the heinousness of the evil of Jeroboam, we might conclude God is being too harsh with him. But as it is, God is acting out of great love for his precious people.

Are you ready?
This unbearable news cannot be sugar-coated.
It is terrible, and it is stated in very vulgar language.

10 therefore behold,
 I will bring harm upon the house of Jeroboam
 and
 will cut off from Jeroboam every male,
 both bond and free in Israel,
 and
 will burn up the house of Jeroboam,
 as a man burns up dung until it is all gone.
11 Anyone belonging to Jeroboam
 who dies in the city
 the dogs shall eat,
 and
 anyone
 who dies in the open country
 the birds of the heavens shall eat,
 for the LORD has spoken it."

We are rightly offended by vulgarity. But in this instance, vulgarity is used by God to make his point. God is not mildly offended.

The translators of the ESV thought that the vulgarity was a bit too offensive and so they use more mellow language.

Listen to the King James Version in verse 10.

KJV 1 Kings 14:10 Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall, *and* him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone.

He "that pisses against the wall" is an idiomatic expression for males. The ESV is correct. But the expression is designed to be vulgar. God is treating Jeroboam and his household like human waste.

It is normally right to treat the dead with respect. Even an ungodly person should be shown respect. But in this case, God is so angry with Jeroboam that He prevents Jeroboam's household from receiving a proper burial.

Dogs will eat their bodies.
And birds will peck at their remains.

This is truly gruesome, truly unbearable.

But even this unbearable news is intended to call Jeroboam to repentance.
How do I know this?
Because God announces it in advance to Jeroboam. And God gives to Jeroboam another sign that unless there is repentance, this Judgment will indeed come to pass.

What is this sign to Jeroboam?
It is the death of his sick son.

Ahijah tells Jeroboam's wife to go home.

12 Arise therefore,
go to your house.
When your feet enter the city,
the child shall die.
13 And
all Israel shall mourn for him
and
bury him,
for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave,
because in him there is found
something pleasing to the LORD,
the God of Israel,
in the house of Jeroboam.

The child for whom you care so deeply will die.
But unlike your other children who will not be shown any dignity in their burial, this son will be treated with honor.
And then, in a way that shocks us, God states that this son is the only son, in whom there is found something pleasing to the LORD.

This is where I became most convinced that God's providence is too wonderful for me to understand with my own reason.

Normally, we would conclude that the child dying would indicate some failure of God to love the child.

But in this situation, the child's death is an act of God's mercy.

1. This son is the only son given a proper burial. He will not suffer the indignities of the other children of Jeroboam. He is set apart from these other children because God has set him apart from them.
2. This son is being used as a witness to call his parents to repentance and faith.
 - a. The death of the son should have confirmed to Jeroboam and his wife the certainty of the general word of condemnation.
 - b. And should they have heard that word and repented, God's word is clear that He would have relented and given Jeroboam forgiveness and new life.

3. We are explicitly told that this son was pleasing to the LORD.

The text does not tell us what made this son pleasing. Hebrews 11 tells us that without faith it is impossible to please the LORD.

And Ephesians 2 tells us that faith itself is a gift from God.

In the end, I am convinced that God sovereignly chose this son to be a recipient of his mercy.

And even in his death, God used this son to call others to faith in God's covenant promises.

However you work that out, it is clear that we are not to take the death of this son as a sign that God did not care for this son. I cannot think of a situation that goes more against what my feelings would tell me if it were my son being killed.

This story does not give you the answer to your trials. But it does help you to see that there is more going on than you can possibly understand.

We do not need to understand all that God is doing. But we must believe that God loves His children. And we need to humble ourselves before a God who is truly good and wise in all that He does.

That does not mean that we must hide our feelings before God. No, the Psalms clearly give us examples of God's people expressing their emotions to Him. But it does mean that we recognize that we are dust. We are not the judge of God.

In the last chapter, God sent a prophet to declare the destruction of all false worship. Now God gives a direct word of Judgment against the house of Jeroboam.

¹⁴ Moreover,
the LORD will raise up for himself a king over Israel
who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam today.

But Jeroboam's judgment is to be an example for everyone who refuses to repent of their stubbornness before God.

The people sitting in exile, have themselves worshipped false gods. And they are desperately in need of repentance. And so, Ahijah speaks a word against Israel, God's precious son.

¹⁵ And henceforth,
the LORD will strike Israel
as a reed is shaken in the water,
and
root up Israel out of this good land
that he gave to their fathers

and
scatter them beyond the Euphrates,
because they have made their Asherim,
provoking the LORD to anger.

16 And
he will give Israel up
because of the sins of Jeroboam,
which he sinned
and
made Israel to sin."

How ironic and even eerie that this verse has proved true.
This is where the first hearers of Kings found themselves. They were exiles in Babylon.
How strange to read that God predicted their exile hundreds of years before!

Notice how Ahijah blames Jeroboam, but not exclusively. The people are responsible for the sin of worshipping Asherah. Jeroboam may have "made her to sin." But they are also responsible.

And just as God was calling Jeroboam to repentance in the death of his son, so God is calling the exiles to repentance as they lived in exile.

Human rebellion is always the problem.
Jeroboam's problem is the problem of the exiles.
And it is our problem today.
We want God to be our servant, but we do not want to bow our hearts to Him.

We do not want to love him supremely.
We expect Him to love us supremely.
But we have no intention of loving Him wholeheartedly.

Try to imagine what might be going through the heart of Jeroboam's wife as she left Ahijah.

Was she angry?
Did she dismiss Ahijah as a kook?
Was she obstinate?
We are not told.

17 Then Jeroboam's wife arose
and
departed
and
came to Tirzah.
And
as she came to the threshold of the house,
the child died.

18 And
 all Israel buried him
 and
 mourned for him,
 according to the word of the LORD,
 which he spoke
 by his servant Ahijah the prophet.

Just in case you have not noticed. Everything happens “according to the word of the LORD.”

But do not see the word of the LORD as fate. The whole purpose of revealing the word of the LORD in advance is to call us to repentance.

God has told us that a Day of Judgment is coming.

Until that Day, God is calling people to repentance.

And if a person repents, the Day of Judgment will become a glorious resurrection unto glory.

But apart from repentance and faith, no one will escape God’s anger. Everything will happen according to the word of the LORD.

Do not think that you will be able to fool God on that day.

Today is the time for repentance and faith.

On that day it will be too late.

But knowing that you are guilty, and knowing that you must repent, will not produce in you a heart of repentance.

Something more is needed.

The writers of the Larger Catechism understood this added ingredient.

WLC 76 What is repentance unto life?

A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace,(1) wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit(2) and word of God,(3) whereby out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger,(4) but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins,(5) **and** upon the apprehension of God's mercy in Christ to such as are penitent,(6) he so grieves for(7) and hates his sins,(8) as that he turns from them all to God,(9) purposing and endeavouring constantly to walk with him in all the ways of new obedience.(10)

“upon the apprehension of God’s mercy”

No person will repent to a God whom they believe to be cruel.

As long as you think that God is the One who indiscriminately kills children, you will never come to Him in repentance and faith.

You must have some apprehension that He is always motivated by love towards his children.

And if you are doubting that love, my encouragement is to fix your eyes on Jesus. The son in this story who was taken by God was named Abijah.
“My Father is Yahweh.”

Jesus too was God’s beloved Son.
And the Father spoke on more than one occasion that He was pleased with Jesus.
And yet, because the Father wanted to make a way for sinners to enter into His presence, He did not spare His Beloved Son.

And the Beloved Son willingly took the anger for our sin upon Himself.
We are told that He did this for the joy set before Him. The joy of our redemption. The joy of our experiencing the fullness of His love.

So, we proclaim Christ, the greatest expression of the love of God that the world has ever known.

Do not let your experience of pain fool you into thinking that God is not full of mercy. His hand of providence may appear harsh.
But for those who love God and are called according to His purpose, even the most seemingly harsh realities of this world, God is working for our good and for His glory.

Humble yourself under God’s hand.
Confess your sin.
Come clean before Him, with honesty of heart.
Cast yourself upon Christ and his death on the cross.
And all the promises of God’s love will be yours.

Amen!