

Micaiah: Speaking Truth to Power

Bible Background • 1 Kings 22:1-40 | Printed Text • 1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28

Devotional Reading • 1 John 3:23-4:3; Deuteronomy 18:19-22

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will IDENTIFY with Micaiah’s boldness in declaring the word of the Lord, ASPIRE to be like Micaiah when speaking the word of the Lord, and COMMIT to tell those in power what the Lord has said.

In Focus

Martin Fairchild stared at the spreadsheet. There was no way around it, his family would not be able to go on a vacation this year. There just was no money for it. He thought about all the fun vacations they had had in years past and how much the kids looked forward to the week of adventuring. Even though they were teens now and too cool to admit it. But with the extra costs of college admission tests and application fees, plus a new transmission for the car, there just wasn’t the extra money. He broke the news to his family at dinner. The kids quickly offered new ways of getting the money.

“What if we just borrow some money from Uncle Phil?” Raymond asked. “What if we skip just a week or two of tithing?” Denise asked. Mrs. Fairchild shook her head. “Your father has made the wisest decision he can in this situation.”

Martin nodded to his wife, thanking her for the support. “We are not going into debt just to go someplace. And we are certainly not going to forget to give back to the Lord. I know it’s not what you want to hear, but it’s what God has provided for us this time.”

How have you followed God’s guidance even when others didn’t like what God had to say?

Keep in Mind

“But Micaiah replied, ‘As surely as the LORD lives, I will say only what the LORD tells me to say.’” (1 Kings 22:14, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Prophecy (1 Kings 22:18) naba (Heb.)— To cause to bubble up, to pour forth words abundantly to be inspired, to speak by divine power

B. Lying Spirit (v. 22) sheqer (Heb.)—The spirit sent to entice, trick, or deceive. An untruth, lie. A way contrary to God.

Say It Correctly

Micaiah. mi-KIE-yuh

Jehoshaphat. jeh-HOE-shaw-fat

Ramoth-gilead. RAH-moth-GILL-ee-add

Benhadad. BEN-haw-DOD

KJV

1 Kings 22:15 So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramothgilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king.

16 And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the LORD?

17 And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace.

18 And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?

19 And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.

20 And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.

21 And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him.

22 And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.

23 Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee.

26 And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son;

27 And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace.

28 And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.

NLT

1 Kings 22:15 When Micaiah arrived before the king, Ahab asked him, "Micaiah, should we go to war against Ramoth-gilead, or should we hold back?" Micaiah replied sarcastically, "Yes, go up and be victorious, for the LORD will give the king victory!"

16 But the king replied sharply, "How many times must I demand that you speak only the truth to me when you speak for the LORD?"

17 Then Micaiah told him, "In a vision I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep without a shepherd. And the LORD said, 'Their master has been killed. Send them home in peace.'"

18 "Didn't I tell you?" the king of Israel exclaimed to Jehoshaphat. "He never prophesies anything but trouble for me."

19 Then Micaiah continued, "Listen to what the LORD says! I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the armies of heaven around him, on his right and on his left.

20 And the LORD said, 'Who can entice Ahab to go into battle against Ramoth-gilead so he can be killed?' There were many suggestions,

21 and finally a spirit approached the LORD and said, 'I can do it!'

22 'How will you do this?' the LORD asked. And the spirit replied, 'I will go out and inspire all of Ahab's prophets to speak lies.' 'You will succeed,' said the LORD. 'Go ahead and do it.'

23 So you see, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all your prophets. For the LORD has pronounced your doom."

26 "Arrest him!" the king of Israel ordered. "Take him back to Amon, the governor of the city, and to my son Joash.

27 Give them this order from the king: 'Put this man in prison, and feed him nothing but bread and water until I return safely from the battle!'"

28 But Micaiah replied, "If you return safely, it will mean that the LORD has not spoken through me!" Then he added to those standing around, "Everyone mark my words!"

The People, Places, and Times

Ramoth-gilead. This border city between Aram (Syria) and Israel, modern Tel ar-Ramith, is located on the eastern side of the Jordan River. It is called Ramoth-gilead or Ramoth in Gilead to distinguish it from another city also named Ramoth, which was in the Negev (1 Samuel 30:27). It was declared a city of refuge by Moses (Deuteronomy 4:43) and provided pastureland for the Levites (Joshua 21:38). The city changed hands several times between Syria and Israel. Ahab notes that Syrians occupy the city, even though it belongs to Israel (1 Kings 22:3). He fails to recover it and the Syrians later cement their control of it (2 Kings 10:32-33).

Benhadad. This king of Syria adds to the tumultuous political intrigue of the time. King Asa of Judah bribes Benhadad to break his treaty with King Baasha of Israel and form a treaty with him instead (1 Kings 15:18-20). Later, he attacks Samaria, the capital of Israel. This attack and his attack the following year fail, as the Lord shows His might to defend His people (1 Kings 20). Finally, Benhadad falls ill and asks the prophet, Elisha, if he will recover. Elisha prophesies that he will not and the king's messenger Hazael brings this prophecy about by smothering Benhadad (2 Kings 8:7-15).

Background

In 1 Kings 22, we find the kings of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms having trouble accepting the Word of God from His prophets. The king of the North, the evil Ahab, now holds the upper hand, while the king of the South, the God-fearing Jehoshaphat, has become his vassal. By treaty, Jehoshaphat is under obligation to help Ahab in any way he asks. Syria was presently at peace with Israel and Judah but held a section of land called Ramothgilead. After three years of not receiving Syria's promised tribute, Ahab wants to go to war against Benhadad, the Syrian king. Ahab asks Jehoshaphat, "Will you join me in battle to recover Ramoth-gilead?" (1 Kings 22:4, NLT). Jehoshaphat has no alternative other than agreeing to help Ahab. But wisdom prevails and Jehoshaphat wants counsel from the Lord (v. 5). Ahab agrees to listen to a god but not the God of Abraham; instead, he listens to the prophets of his own state religion, prophets of Baal (v. 6). These men are false prophets who tell Ahab what he wants to hear. Jehoshaphat wants to hear from a true prophet of God, not these pseudo-prophets, so he asks Ahab if such a prophet is available (v. 7). Ahab then calls his officials to bring forth Micaiah, the son of Imlah (vv. 8-9). This passage is the only place Micaiah is mentioned in Scripture.

At-A-Glance

1. Micaiah's Prophecy (1 Kings 22:15-18)
2. Micaiah's Vision (vv. 19-23)
3. Micaiah Imprisoned (vv. 26-28)

In Depth

1. Micaiah's Prophecy (1 Kings 22:15-18) Once a true prophet knows the word of God, no one can prevent him from delivering the message. Micaiah did not avoid God's words even when they were unwelcome, discouraging, or negative. No matter if it cost him his life, Micaiah was committed to being true to God and His Word. When Micaiah sarcastically told Ahab to attack and be victorious, the king knew something was wrong because Micaiah never agreed with Ahab's prophets (vv. 15-16). Ahab knew his false prophets were only saying what he wanted to hear and he knew if the truth was to be heard, it was going to come from someone who really knew God. Ahab demanded the truth of Micaiah though he really didn't want to hear it. Micaiah reported the opposite of what the false prophets had been saying. He told Ahab that he would be killed and his army scattered. This battle, according to Micaiah who spoke on behalf of the Almighty God, would be a disaster. Although Ahab asked for a true word from God, when it was spoken he pushed it aside and blamed the prophet for always being against him.

When you ask God in prayer for the truth about yourself, are you willing to accept His answers?

2. Micaiah's Vision (vv. 19-23) The prophet spoke about a vision. Micaiah saw the Lord sitting on His throne surrounded by a host of angelic beings. These angelic beings were not there to advise God; instead, they served as witnesses of God's omniscience and omnipotence. The Lord asks how He can persuade Ahab to fight Ramoth-Gilead. One spirit came forth with the plan to lie to the king through his prophets. Then Yahweh gave him permission to go and do so.

Ahab sought to suppress divine authority and truth. God in His omniscience affected His sovereign will by allowing this "lying spirit" to feed the king's own destructive ego through the untruths of his prophets. God gave Ahab what he wanted—his own wish instead of God's truth—and it led to Ahab's death. Our God is the God of those with pure hearts as well as those with perverse hearts. God can and will use any means necessary to carry out His sovereign will (John 12:40; 2 Thessalonians 2:11; Exodus 14:4, 8).

3. Micaiah Imprisoned (vv. 26-28) Ahab didn't like what Micaiah said so he did what all tyrants do. He put him in prison to shut him up. When a person or a nation stifles the truth by silencing those who speak out for the truth, it is denying a basic right. But also, it is halting the very flow of truth that might be its own salvation. Ahab did not see that Micaiah was warning him of defeat and death. Ahab was too bent on doing what he wanted. But killing a man who tells the truth does not change the truth. Truth will conquer and often with deadly accuracy. Micaiah was the kind of person who usually had the last word. His final warning to Ahab in verse 28 was, "If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me." Micaiah had real confidence in the accuracy of the message he received from God. There are times when we have to stand up for what is right and true, even if everyone else is playing loose with the truth.

Shall we follow the way of the crowd and serve ourselves or shall we wait on the word of the LORD however He chooses to send it?

Search the Scriptures

1. Did Micaiah yield to the pressure of the status quo or did he serve the Lord? (v. 15)
2. Can a prison cell stop the word of God from coming to fruition? (vv. 26-28) Explain.

Discuss the Meaning

1. Does Jeremiah's reflection of his people's suffering capture the pain felt by all of the Jews? Is he effective?
2. How does remembering God's sovereignty shift the pleas in this lament to hope in His mercy?

Liberating Lesson

We live in a society that encourages excuses and glorifies lies. When someone tells the truth, especially biblical truth, most people do not want to hear it. People who want to live in lies and deception often lash out at the person telling the truth. Sometimes it hurts to hear the truth because then we might have to admit we are wrong or confess a sin. To stand for the truth in a difficult situation can be hard. Many times God is the only one pleased with our honest decision. Christians must always weigh the risks of being truthful against the consequences of getting caught in a tangle of lies and inconsistencies. Commit to stand for the truth and speak it in love, no matter the consequences. What statement would your church make to its community about the truths it stands for?

Application for Activation

Micaiah was called to deliver some hard truth. He spoke boldly but also spoke with love for the king and love for the people. Truth must be spoken, yet the Scripture exhorts us to speak "the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). It is also necessary to pray and ask God for the best time to speak the truth. God directed Micaiah at this particular time to speak to these kings. When we decide to speak the truth, let's make sure that God—not our flesh, our desire to get back at someone, or our need to dump on someone—is the motivation prompted by the Holy Spirit.

Is there something you've been holding back that God wants you to say? What's your next step?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28 15 So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramothgilead to battle, or should we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it unto the hand of the king.

King Ahab of Israel was planning to join forces with King Jehoshaphat of Judah to fight against the Syrians to take back the city of Ramoth in Gilead. Four hundred prophets had been queried and had all agreed that this battle would turn out favorable for these allied kings. However, King Jehoshaphat wanted to be sure they had consulted with all the prophets, so he asked if there were any prophets of Yahweh to ask. So Ahab sent for the prophet, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, to add his voice to the 400 prophets who had been consulted.

Perhaps this is what signaled a problem to King Jehoshaphat. One of the criteria for distinguishing false prophets from true prophets was that the false prophet told the king what he wanted to hear, while the true prophet told the king what was difficult or unfavorable. When Micaiah arrived, he answered the king in the same manner as the other prophets.

16 And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the LORD?

Micaiah's response must have sounded completely insincere to King Ahab, too agreeable, and too sweet. Verse 8 indicates that Micaiah and Ahab's relationship had been full of conflict to the point that the king hated this prophet. His opinion would not have even been sought after if it were not for King Jehoshaphat. Ahab did not care to hear what Micaiah had to say, because he knew it would not be good. Ahab knew he must be lying if Micaiah agreed with the others. This alerted King Ahab that there might be a problem because Micaiah had never been agreeable, as King Ahab had done many things to anger the Lord. Under his leadership, altars were built for foreign gods. Micaiah was one of the few prophets who dared to speak out against the king's behavior. King Ahab, in his most pious sounding voice, said, "How often must I tell you to only speak that which is true in the name of Yahweh?" This from the mouth of a king who built altars to Baal!

17 And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: And the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace.

So Micaiah revealed what the Lord had truly said. He had seen a vision of the army scattered upon the hills in Gilead, confused and wandering aimlessly. The phrase "sheep that have not a shepherd" uses the same imagery of a common term for a king at that time, "the shepherd of his people." If these people are without a shepherd,

their king must be dead. The vision was confirmed by the word of the Lord saying, “These have no master.” This meant that King Ahab would be killed in the battle and that his death would bring an end to the war. They would not make peace, but the loss of their king would end their desire to fight.

18 And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?

King Ahab was correct. Micaiah’s prophecy regarding him was terrible, as expected. That was why he avoided Micaiah. What a demoralizing prophecy to go into battle with. Ahab did not wish to hear anything like this. He had known a truthful prophecy from Micaiah would end this way and hated to be proven right.

There are many people, like Ahab, who think that because they have heard a certain truth before, it no longer merits attention. The person says, “I knew that’s what you were going to say.” And even though it’s the truth, it carries no weight with them because they anticipated it. Such people don’t want to hear the truth, only what they want to hear. How often have we made up our minds to do something we know is not best and then get angry at a counselor for warning us away from it? How often do we ignore our conscience, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, or our own better judgment, simply because we hate their being a spoilsport? It is not wisdom simply to seek advice; wisdom is shown in actually acting on good advice.

19 And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand on his left. 20 And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.

King Ahab has not yet heard all that the Lord had to say concerning him. Micaiah continues by telling him what the Lord has really said. Micaiah begins to describe a human-like vision of God. God and His angels are spiritbeings and cannot actually sit or stand or have a right hand or left. These bodily images of the spirits are how God reveals Himself to Micaiah’s limited human mind.

God, the King of Heaven, is seated on His heavenly throne, with His heavenly army standing around him. This scene is reminiscent of the vision Isaiah described (Isaiah 6). Here, too, the Lord is seated upon His throne, surrounded by angels, delivering unfavorable news to the nation. John would see a similar sight in his vision of the heavenly throne room. The image is one of awesome power.

According to the vision, the Lord inquired amongst the heavenly host (Heb. tsaba’, tsah- BAH, a large army) to see if any might have a strategy to convince Ahab to go into battle, so that he might meet his end there. As He has from the beginning, God invites His creation to join Him in the unfolding of history. God already knows how He will go about killing the evil king Ahab, but He still asks for the angels’ ideas and suggestions. God means to “persuade” Ahab to ride into battle and meet his death. The word translated “persuade” (Heb. patah, paw-TAW) carries the sense of causing one to be deceived, or enticed. Various ones answered with differing approaches. But none came up with an acceptable plan to Yahweh.

21 And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. 22 And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.

This part of the story also reminds one of the story of Job whom Satan sought to harm, but could not do so without God’s permission (Job 1). However, it is not useful to think of the agent here as an independent entity of evil. In the eyes of the people, God was responsible for the origin of good and evil. Thus God could be thought of as being responsible for the deception of Ahab. Ahab was not a righteous king. So here we find God participating in his demise, instead of offering protection.

As in Isaiah 6, the Lord prepares to dispatch an agent to accomplish His will. It is believed that the “spirit” referred to here was the Spirit of Prophecy who inspired prophets to speak truth or lies. The Lord wanted to know the details of how this spirit hoped to achieve the results. He responded that he would inspire all of Ahab’s prophets to lie. This lying spirit perhaps even influenced Micaiah in his first answer to Ahab’s question (v. 15). Thus, even Yahweh’s prophet would agree with one voice with Baal’s prophets. This seemed like an effective plan, so the Lord gave this spirit permission to do as he had said.

23 Now, therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee.

So concludes Micaiah’s story, explaining how it was that all the other prophets agreed upon the plan for battle. Amazingly, the false prophets were prophesying under the power of the true God this time. Even when using them in His plan, however, they are filled with a lying spirit and not a trustworthy source of guidance. It must have required a lot of courage to be the lone dissenting voice when Micaiah knew what King Ahab wanted to hear. Micaiah was already very unpopular with the king, but he never changed the word that he was supposed to deliver from the Lord.

26 And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon, the governor of the city, and to Joash the king’s son; 27 And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace.

When Micaiah has finished his prophecy, King Ahab is furious with him. Ahab was expecting a negative word, but this was a bit too much. In his fury, King Ahab orders that Micaiah be arrested and taken back to the capital, Samaria. He is to be jailed in the palace, under the custody of the governor and the king’s son. Micaiah is given prison food, the bread and water “of affliction” (Heb. lakhats, LAH khats) which refers to oppression, pressure, and distress. The only other reference to the bread and water of affliction is in a prophecy of Isaiah, where God promises to be with His people, teaching and guiding them, even when their fare is affliction (Isaiah 30:20). Ahab planned to return shortly from the battle and then gloat in Micaiah’s face. He said, “Until I come in peace” in defiance of Micaiah’s prophecy. If he returned, Micaiah would appear the fool and would be discredited forever. Ahab figured that would put an end to this pesky prophet. If he did not return, then Micaiah would die in prison.

28 And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.

Micaiah’s reputation as a prophet of the Lord and his life are at stake. Yet he does not back down from what he knows to be the truth. King Ahab would not return. Micaiah calls for the attention of everyone around. The word “hearken” in Hebrew (shama’, shaw- MAH) means not just to hear the words, but to internalize them. These people would be witnesses to the words that were spoken. Thus, even in death, Micaiah would be vindicated. Once again God gives Ahab a chance to repent and to follow His instructions, but he does not take it. This, however, was his last chance. Just as Micaiah had predicted, Ahab does not come back alive. His army was defeated and King Ahab died in battle.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Elisha Prophesies Truth to King Jehoshaphat
(2 Kings 3:9-17)

TUESDAY

Kings Propose Battle Against Aram
(1 Kings 22:1-6)

WEDNESDAY

Micaiah Resists Pressure to Prophecy Falsely
(1 Kings 22:7-14)

THURSDAY

A Lying Spirit Brings Disaster
(2 Chronicles 18:18-22)

FRIDAY

King Ahab Suffers Fatal Injury
(1 Kings 22:29-40)

SATURDAY

Jehoshaphat Promotes Peace with Israel
(1 Kings 22:41-46)

SUNDAY

Prophet Micaiah Speaks the Truth
(1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28)