

# SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

**DEVOTIONAL READING:** 1 John 3:23–4:3a; Deuteronomy 18:19-22

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 1 Kings 22:1-40

**TODAY'S SCRIPTURE:** 1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28

## I. A Sarcastic Prophecy

**1 Kings 22:15-16**

**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?**

15. Ahab despised *Micaiah* because of the series of negative reports that the prophet had made against the king. Little is known about this prophet.

*Ramothgilead* was a city of refuge within the tribe of Gad (Deuteronomy 4:43). It was located on a large plain, making chariot warfare possible (1 Kings 22:31-38). In Ahab's day, the Arameans held the city (22:3). In the days of Rome, this people group came to be known as Syrians. Israel had some ethnic relationship to Arameans (Deuteronomy 26:5), including Bethuel who was Rebekah's father (Genesis 22:20-23). Despite these ancestral links, the Arameans were often opposed to Israel, either instigating or experiencing warfare with the nation.

Micaiah surprised *the king*, Ahab, by telling him exactly what he wanted to hear and

what the other prophets had already told him. Based on Ahab's prior characterization of Micaiah (1 Kings 22:8), we might also be surprised that Micaiah has immediately agreed with the majority of prophets affirming Ahab's future success (22:13-15).

16. King Ahab interpreted Micaiah's affirming response as a bald-faced lie, not even meant to be believed. Ahab's asking *how many times* implies that Micaiah had fallen into the pattern of sardonically telling the king whatever it was he wanted to hear.

*The king* ironically demanded that Micaiah fulfill his prophetic duty and only relay God's word (Deuteronomy 18:18). But Ahab wasn't interested in hearing God's actual will. He only used his prophets to legitimize the plans that were already in his heart (1 Kings 22:22).

## II. A Sincere Prophecy

**1 Kings 22:17-23**

**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.**

17. Micaiah dropped his act, causing the atmosphere in the room to immediately darken. *Israel* would be thrown into as much disarray as *sheep* without a *shepherd* (1 Kings 22:28). When they realized they had *no master*, the army would scatter—not haphazardly but *every man to his house*. Returning *in peace* might mean that, though leaderless, the army would be better off without their previous master. Or it might simply mean that the fighting would be over for a time.

18. Ahab's response to Micaiah's prophecy suggests that the prophet was brought to court more as a jester than as a legitimate adviser. Ahab's heart was so hardened against God that he was able to dismiss Micaiah's warning as just one more *evil* thing the prophet said about *the king of Israel*.

King Jehoshaphat's nonreaction is equally disturbing. Jehoshaphat worshipped the God of Israel and took measures to suppress idolatry in his nation. But here he failed to advise the other king to heed the

word of the Lord. The northern kingdom enjoyed military prowess during this period of their combined histories. With their allies, Israel held off the encroaching Assyrian Empire. The alliance between Israel and Judah was secured by the marriage of Ahab's daughter Athaliah to Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram (2 Kings 8:16-18). So we see two kings, one idolatrous and one godly, who witnessed the testimony of God's true prophet and for their own reasons refused to alter their foolhardy plans.

19. Unlike verse 15, here Micaiah uses the *word of the Lord* formula to reveal that what followed came from God, not the prophet's own mind. *All the host of heaven* may refer to angels (Psalms 103:20-21; 148:2; Luke 2:13); another possibility is that the phrase refers to the heavenly bodies worshipped as gods by pagan nations (Deuteronomy 4:19; 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3; Jeremiah 19:13). Whether real angels or fictitious deities, the image is that God is the only one *sitting on a throne*. This is a visual image of God's sovereignty over everything, real or imagined.

20. This verse makes explicit what was implied in 1 Kings 22:17, above: *Ahab* would die on the battlefield. Such a sentence was just since Ahab had followed the ways of his evil queen, Jezebel, and led the northern kingdom into the idolatrous worship of Baal (1 Kings 16:31-33). Unlike Ahab's prophets, who all answered the king in unison, God's court was filled with lots of ideas, giving various plans for how to lure Ahab to his death.

21. From among the council, a volunteer stepped forward and expressed willingness to take up the task of luring King Ahab into battle, and, by extension, to his death. Keeping in mind that court members might be composed of fictitious deities, the exact identity of the *spirit* is less significant than is his depicted role in the unfolding spiritual drama.

22. Psychologists today might say that the spirit enticed Ahab with the king's own confirmation bias. This false belief arises from choosing only to consider evidence that confirms what a person already wanted to believe. In this case, the *lying spirit* unified *all* the king's *prophets* in order to strengthen the evidence that favored Ahab's false hope: that he would have victory over his enemies.

*The Lord* giving approval to this plan is one example of God's sovereign right to judge evildoers. Although Ahab had humbled himself following the theft of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21), old habits apparently die hard. Ahab did not want to listen to the prophet of the Lord, preferring the pleasant prophecies of his old prophets. Ironically, if Ahab chose to listen to Micaiah now, the prophecy would not have come true! But the man's character was known not only to the prophet but also to God (22:29-38).

23. Micaiah presented Ahab with a message of judgment. But implicit in that message was the opportunity for repentance (compare Jonah 3). Mercifully, Ahab was given the opportunity to admit his sinful state, repent, and break off his doomed campaign.

*The Lord* used Ahab's character and the deference of the king's prophets to deceive the man. God never lies, but He does work through humans to accomplish His purposes, whether they do good or ill. God also never does moral evil, but He can put events into motion that from a human perspective are catastrophic. In this case, the *lying spirit* intensified human dynamics already in play to ensure that Ahab would be fooled.

### III. A Sure Prophecy

#### 1 Kings 22:26-28

**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.**

26. Ahab's response was anything but one of repentance. Referencing *the governor of the city* and *the king's son* lets the reader know that Ahab was so determined to silence Micaiah that he evoked both local and national authorities to ensure the prophet's secure incarceration.

27. Micaiah was to remain in his cell and be given grim rations until Ahab returned safely from battle. Ahab's sentence assumed that his triumphant return would expose the jailed prophet as a charlatan. Though Ahab expected to return *in peace*, the prophecy had revealed that only his men would do so (1 Kings 22:17, 28).

Ahab's command had the effect of silencing the prophet. The king knew that if word got out that he himself was under divine judgment, it could lead to poor troop morale on the eve of battle or even embolden a rival to attempt a coup. Plus, the king just didn't like the prophet.

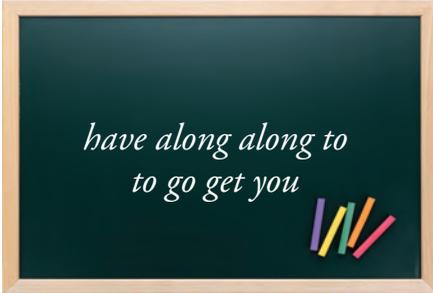
28. The question of whether *Micaiah* spoke the truth would be determined on the battlefield. If Micaiah truly spoke for God, then Ahab would die, never returning home *in peace* as the king assumed. Micaiah was so confident in what he'd heard from God that he challenged those present to be witnesses. Ahab's death would not only vindicate Micaiah, but God as well.

Ahab died, just as Micaiah said (1 Kings 22:29-38). Micaiah's fate in prison is unknown.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

## SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

### Into the Lesson



Arrange the scrambled words into a sentence.

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Today's text will help you see the outlook of this saying in a biblical light.

### Into the Word

Read and summarize the following passages:

1 Kings 16:29-33

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2 Chronicles 17:1-6

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2 Chronicles 18:1

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1 Kings 21:25-29

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1 Kings 22:1-5

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1 Kings 22:6-14

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Match each character with their action:

Ahab in rebellion against the truth

Jehoshaphat aligned with the truth

Micaiah uncommitted to the truth

### Into Life

How does the scrambled sentence from the Into the Lesson activity relate to today's lesson?

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List how people in general might be like one of the following characters—that is, how and why people rebel against truth, compromise truth, or stand up for truth in spite of pressure to do otherwise.

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Which character in today's story challenges you most, and why?

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### THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Our commitment to truth is measured in our actions.