

# Micaiah: Speaking Truth to Power

## 1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28

<sup>15</sup> When he had come to the king, the king said to him, “Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?” He answered him, “Go up and triumph; the LORD will give it into the hand of the king.” <sup>16</sup> But the king said to him, “How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?”

<sup>17</sup> Then Micaiah said, “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd; and the LORD said, ‘These have no master; let each one go home in peace.’” <sup>18</sup> The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy anything favorable about me, but only disaster?”

<sup>19</sup> Then Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him. <sup>20</sup> And the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ Then one said one thing, and another said another, <sup>21</sup> until a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, ‘I will entice him.’ <sup>22</sup> ‘How?’ the LORD asked him. He replied, ‘I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ Then the LORD said, ‘You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do it.’ <sup>23</sup> So you see, the

LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has decreed disaster for you.” . . .

<sup>26</sup> The king of Israel then ordered, “Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king’s son, <sup>27</sup> and say, ‘Thus says the king: Put this fellow in prison, and feed him on reduced rations of bread and water until I come in peace.’” <sup>28</sup> Micaiah said, “If you return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me.” And he said, “Hear, you peoples, all of you!”

## Theme Statement

King Ahab planned a war to capture the city of Ramoth-gilead, wrongly believing in his own ultimate authority to do so. Although warned by Micaiah, Ahab fought the Arameans and thus achieved the end the Lord had determined for him.

## Exploring the Word

*The story of Micaiah ben Imlah introduces us to a cast of characters, one familiar and others new.*

*Ahab.* We met Ahab in session 4. For most of his reign, Ahab had little interest in prophetic messages from Yahweh. An exception came after Elijah pronounced Ahab and Jezebel’s bloody doom. On that occasion, Ahab briefly repented (1 Kings 21:25-29). As the next chapter of 1 Kings reveals, however, his repentance did not endure.

*Jehoshaphat.* Jehoshaphat’s name means “The Lord has judged.” The son of Asa (1 Kings 15:24), Jehoshaphat ruled Judah for twenty-five years (2 Chronicles 20:31), approximately 873–849 BCE. His biography appears in 1 Kings 22:41-50.

*Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah.* The spokesperson and leader of the four hundred professional prophets at Ahab's disposal.

*Micaiah ben Imlah.* Micaiah's name means "Who is like Yahweh?" Little is known about this prophet. He was, however, well known to Ahab (1 Kings 22:8).

### **1 Kings 22:1-6 Kings plan war**

Israel and Aram had enjoyed a three-year truce. During that third year, Judah's king, Jehoshaphat, visited Ahab's court. Ahab proposed a joint military operation against the neighboring kingdom of Aram to capture the city Ramoth-gilead (22:3-4).

In spite of Ahab's encounter with the Lord through Elijah, the question of Yahweh's will in any decision about war did not enter his mind. Ramoth-Gilead was desirable. He would have it.

Jehoshaphat agreed to the military action and pledged his person, his army, and his cavalry (22:4). Prudently, however, he requested a "word of the Lord" (22:5) before placing "sandals" on the ground. Accordingly, Ahab convened about four hundred professional prophets to determine whether the campaign would be blessed by Yahweh. The verdict was instant and unanimous: "Go up; for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king" (22:6). But which king?

### **1 Kings 22:7-17 Summon Micaiah!**

Jehoshaphat insisted further on a word from a "prophet of the Lord" (22:7), so Ahab grudgingly sent for Micaiah. While the two kings waited for Micaiah to arrive, the four hundred prophets continued to prophesy. They cheered as one: Go, go, go! (22:12). The prophet Zedekiah fashioned iron horns as a symbol of the king's pending "goring" of the Arameans.

When Micaiah was asked whether the kings ought to go to war or refrain, the prophet uttered what should have been good news to Ahab. He echoed the nationalism of the four hundred: "Go up and triumph" (22:15). But Ahab was suspicious (22:16); Micaiah never spoke favorably about him! Now compelled, Micaiah announced that Israel would be scattered. Neither royal seated before him could have missed the metaphor. The sheep/army would be scattered for lack of a shepherd/king (22:17).

### **1 Kings 22:18-29 What Micaiah saw**

Micaiah reported seeing and listening in on the divine council. He heard the Lord ask who would entice Ahab so that he would go up and die at Ramoth-gilead. A debate between the hosts of heaven continued until one proposed to put a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets (22:20-22a). Yahweh agreed and commissioned the deception (22:22b).

Micaiah denounced Ahab's prophets but added that Yahweh inspired their lies because the Lord had determined to terminate Ahab (22:23). The irony of Ahab's situation lay in the divine intention to use Ahab's own headstrong plans and ambitions as the means to bring about the Lord's royal policy.

Micaiah's last word was the announcement that, should Ahab return "in peace"—that is, alive and well—then Yahweh had not spoken through him. He called upon all within hearing to witness (22:28). Micaiah's authenticity as a prophet would be confirmed not by Ahab's triumph but by his death. Although Micaiah did not quote Deuteronomy 18:22, both he and his listeners knew that an authentic prophetic word is to be verified by whether what the prophet has said occurs.

Micaiah was a true prophet.

## The Word Today

Neither the king of Israel nor his chorus of religious cheerleaders would tolerate a challenge to state authority and policy. Micaiah's description of a level of decision making that superseded and thoroughly neutralized Ahab's authority could only be answered with violent resistance. Micaiah's word, the word of the Lord, must be silenced! Zedekiah struck Micaiah and mocked his prophetic authority (22:24). The king ordered Micaiah thrown in prison and put on starvation rations of bread and water until such time as Ahab would return from battle (22:27).

How little has changed since the days of Ahab and Micaiah!

In September 2011, a protest rally occurred in Zuccotti Park in the Wall Street financial district of New York City. The point of Occupy Wall Street was to criticize the income inequality between the 1% of the population that controls most of the wealth and the other 99%. Protesters hoped to reduce the influence of corporations on government, reform banks, and have student loans forgiven. Some months later, the protest was quelled by police in riot gear.

In May 2020, George Floyd, an African American man, suffocated to death beneath the knee of a Minneapolis police officer. Floyd's death precipitated nationwide Black Lives Matter protests that are ongoing at the time of this writing. The reaction of too many authorities to peaceful protests has thus far included tear gas, rubber bullets, arrests, and the force of US military personnel.

No one can claim that all the protesters involved in Occupy Wall Street or Black Lives Matter are religiously motivated, although some are. Nor can anyone claim that

protesters are not capable of their own violence; some are. It does seem clear, however, that the goals of the movements just described are consistent with matters about which God is deeply concerned, including economic justice, sufficient resources for life for all of God's people, and communities characterized by love, not hate. It appears equally clear that the Ahabs of our time do not care to have their plans challenged by cries for justice and change. They engage the police, religious "prophets," and anyone else who will stifle a prophetic voice.

Meanwhile, one wonders what is going on in the divine council.

## Questions for Discussion

### Beginnings

1. Is lying ever justifiable?

### Exploring the Word

1. Describe, compare, and contrast the two courts in this story.
2. Is Ahab's fate sealed? Could the king have averted personal disaster?
3. What is Jehoshaphat's role in this story? Why did he join Ahab in battle?
4. Does God lie in this story? If so, what questions does this raise for you?

### The Word Today

1. List ways people use God as an excuse for dishonest behavior or bad choices.

2. How might you discern a genuine from a false word of the Lord today?
3. What word of truth might God be urging the church to speak about the following?

race

poverty

immigrants

income disparity

hunger

the environment/climate  
change

### **Closing Prayer**

*Lord, give us the courage of Micaiah to speak your word to power and, if we must, to suffer the consequences of speaking truth. Amen.*

### **Further Study**

Mark 13:1-13; Mark 14:53-65; Acts 26:1-32

### **Daily Readings**

M. 2 Kings 3:9-17

T. 1 Kings 22:1-6

W. 1 Kings 22:7-14

T. 2 Chronicles 18:18-22

F. 1 Kings 22:29-40

S. 1 Kings 22:41-46

S. 1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28

### **Memorization**

**1 Kings 22:14**

Micaiah said, "As the LORD lives, whatever the LORD says to me, that I will speak."