

1 Kings 22: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Kings chapter 22 For three years Syria and Israel continued without war, but in the third year Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel.

And the king of Israel said to his servants, Do you know that Ramoth-Gilead belongs to us, and we keep quiet and do not take it out of the hand of the king of Syria? And he said to Jehoshaphat, Will you go with me to battle at Ramoth-Gilead?

And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses. And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, Inquire first for the word of the Lord.

Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-Gilead, or shall I refrain? And they said, Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king.

But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here another prophet of the Lord of whom we may inquire? And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah the son of Imla, But I hate him, For he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil.

[1 : 0 4] And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. Then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said, Bring quickly Micaiah the son of Imla. Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria, and all the prophets were prophesying before them.

And Zedekiah the son of Canaanah made for himself horns of iron and said, Thus says the Lord, With these you shall push the Syrians until they are destroyed. And all the prophets prophesied so and said, Go up to Ramoth-Gilead and triumph.

The Lord will give it into the hand of the king. And the messenger who went to summon Micaiah said to him, Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favourable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them and speak favourably.

But Micaiah said, As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak. And 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?

And he answered him, Go up and triumph. The Lord will give it into the hand of the king. But the king said to him, How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?

[2 : 1 6] And he said, I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, These have no master. Let each return to his home in peace.

And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil? And Micaiah said, Therefore hear the word of the Lord.

I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him, on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?

And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward, and stood before the Lord, saying, I will entice him. And the Lord said to him, By what means?

And he said, I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, You are to entice him, and you shall succeed. Go out and do so.

[3 : 13] Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets. The Lord has declared disaster for you. Then Zedekiah the son of Canaanah came near, and struck Micaiah on the cheek, and said, How did the spirit of the Lord go from me to speak to you?

And Micaiah said, Behold, you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide yourself. And the king of Israel said, Seize Micaiah, and take him back to Ammon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son, and say, Thus says the king, Put this fellow in prison, and feed him meager rations of bread and water, until I come in peace.

And Micaiah said, If you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me. And he said, Hear all you peoples. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-Gilead.

And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes. And the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. Now the king of Syria had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, Fight with neither small nor great, but only with the king of Israel.

And when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, It is surely the king of Israel. So they turned to fight against him. And Jehoshaphat cried out. And when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him.

[4 : 36] But a certain man drew his bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the scale armour and the breastplate. Therefore he said to the driver of his chariot, Turn around and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded.

And the battle continued that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians, until at evening he died. And the blood of the wound flowed into the bottom of the chariot.

And about sunset a cry went through the army, Every man to his city, and every man to his country. So the king died, and was brought to Samaria. And they buried the king in Samaria.

And they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria. And the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed themselves in it, according to the word of the Lord that he had spoken. Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house that he built, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

So Ahab slept with his fathers, and Ahaziah his son reigned in his place. Jehoshaphat the son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel.

[5 : 43] Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azuba, the daughter of Shilhai. He walked in all the way of Asa his father.

He did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord. Yet the high places were not taken away, and the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places.

Jehoshaphat also made peace with the king of Israel. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his might that he showed, and how he warred, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

And from the land he exterminated the remnant of the male cult prostitutes who remained in the days of his father Asa. There was no king in Edom, a deputy was king. Jehoshaphat made ships of Tarshish to go to Ophir for gold, but they did not go, for the ships were wrecked at Ezion-Geber.

Then Ahaziah the son of Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with your servants in the ships. But Jehoshaphat was not willing. And Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father, and Jehoram his son reigned in his place.

[6 : 51] Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned two years over Israel. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

He served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked the Lord the God of Israel to anger in every way that his father had done. Throughout the books of the kings, the prophets are central actors.

Whether or not kings respond in the appropriate way to the message of the prophets is an important part of the story throughout. This has been an especially prominent theme in the story of Ahab. He and his wife Jezebel have killed prophets of the Lord.

Elijah has had a number of run-ins with them. In chapter 20, a prophet declared judgment upon him after his failure to judge Ben-Hadad. In the previous story of Naboth's vineyard, he had been responsible for the death of Naboth, a man whose name recalls the term for prophecies.

At the end of that chapter, Elijah had declared the doom of his house. Now, in chapter 22, the last chapter of 1 Kings, we find a story in which prophets are prominent once more.

[8 : 02] After three years of peace between Syria and Israel, Ahab is angry because Syria has not kept up their end of the treaty. Ben-Hadad had promised to restore to Ahab all of the cities that had been taken from his father, presumably Baasha, not his actual father, but one of his predecessors on the throne.

However, Ramoth-Gilead, in the Transjordan, on the border between Israel and Syria, had not been restored to Israel. It's an important strategic city. It's also on a trade route. And the city should have been returned to Israel after chapter 20, according to the agreement with Ben-Hadad.

Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, has come to Israel, and he is allied with Ahab. In verse 4 he declares, Jehoshaphat fighting alongside Ahab and identifying himself with Ahab is a concerning development.

Jehoshaphat is a righteous man, as he's described later in this chapter, but Ahab seems to be playing the dominant role in this alliance, and Jehoshaphat's alliance with him is an over-identification with an unfaithful ruler and kingdom.

Jehoshaphat's father Asa had paid the Syrians to turn against Israel, this is something for which the Lord had judged him, and now his son Jehoshaphat is helping Israel to fight against the enemies that he had raised up against them.

[9 : 17] The concerning prospect here is the possibility of a kingdom united under Ahab in idolatry. One of the blessings of division is that it provides a firebreak for sin. As long as Israel and Judah are separated, the idolatry of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and his successors, such as Ahab, cannot spread to the southern kingdom so easily.

However, in the reign of Jehoshaphat and his son, there will be a much closer identification between the two kingdoms until Jehu comes on the scene in judgment. Jehoshaphat is a righteous king, and before he is prepared to take any action, he wants to call for the prophets.

400 prophets are gathered together. The gathering together of prophets might remind us of chapter 18, verse 20. The same language is used there, which is not common elsewhere. And we also see another 400 prophets there, the 400 prophets of Asherah, and we see the 450 prophets of Baal.

In chapter 18, we have one true prophet facing off against 400 false ones at Mount Carmel, Elijah against the prophets of Baal. But now these court prophets are the false prophets of the Lord, and they are going to be standing against Micaiah, who is the true prophet of the Lord.

When Jehoshaphat hears the word of Zedekiah, he either recognizes that something is off, or he wants to find some confirming word from some other prophet. The fact that the 400 prophets are speaking the exact same word together suggests to him that either they need some confirmation in a secondary witness, or the prophecy is a flattering one and a false one.

[10 : 49] When the prophet Micaiah is mentioned, despite the fact that he tends to bring negative words, he insists on summoning him. That he is fairly easy to summon, suggests that he might be near at hand in the king's prison, to which he will be returned later on.

Whereas the prophets of chapter 18 were false prophets of Baal, these are false prophets who seem to be speaking in the name of the Lord. This is a much more subtle form of falsehood and takes a lot of wisdom to discern.

We might recall the story of chapter 13 with the false prophet of Bethel who leads astray the man of God from Judah. Now there is another man from Judah, Jehoshaphat, who is in danger of being led astray by the false prophets of the king of Samaria.

As he is summoned to the king, Micaiah is requested to give a flattering word, to say what he ought to say, and yet he insists he will speak only in the name of the Lord. When he does give an answer to the king, his answer is originally a mimicking of the other prophets.

In verse 15, go up and triumph, the Lord will give it into the hand of the king. He repeats the words of the court prophets, but Ahab charges him not to lie. Perhaps he is speaking in a sarcastic manner, or perhaps Ahab himself knows that his court prophets are flatterers rather than speakers of the truth, and that Micaiah, as a righteous prophet of the Lord, would not willingly engage in such flattery, so must purposefully be lying to him.

[12 : 08] When Micaiah gives his full answer, he predicts the defeat of Israel, and then he declares a vision of a higher court. There is a parallel between two scenes, Jehoshaphat and Ahab in their rule, and the Lord in his rule.

There is an earthly court with its kings, and then there is a higher heavenly court with its king. In verse 10, Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria, and all the prophets were prophesying before them.

And then in verses 19 to 20, I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who will entice Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?

And one said one thing, and another said another. The vision here is of the divine council. On a number of occasions in scripture, we have visions or accounts of the Lord sitting on his throne, surrounded by his various ministers, his angels and other heavenly beings, and also prophets, who by visions are also part of this assembly.

We might have some sense of the divine council in such expressions such as let us in Genesis chapter 1 verse 26, or the let us go down in the story of the Tower of Babel.

[13 : 24] We might also get some sense of the divine council in places such as Job 1, with the sons of God presenting themselves before the Lord, or in Isaiah 6 and the vision of Isaiah the prophet, or in Revelation and the various scenes of the throne room, or in places like Zechariah and the vision of the dispute between the angel of the Lord and Satan.

Here the Lord seeks someone to entice Ahab to his doom, and after a number come forward, a spirit, or perhaps the spirit, comes forward and says that he will entice Ahab, he will be a lying spirit in the mouths of all of his prophets.

The Lord sends the spirit and with him deception to Ahab. The Lord sends the deception, but he also declares that he is sending the deception in the prophecy of Micaiah, concerning the truth of which Ahab has some sense.

In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 9-12 we read, The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan, with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved.

Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

[14 : 39] Those verses suggest that people's susceptibility to lies arises in part from the hatred of the truth. If you do not love the truth, you will easily be taken in by lies.

Throughout the book of Proverbs we find a similar theme. Those who love to be flattered, those who will not be humble and start with the fear of the Lord, are people who are ripe for being deceived.

Deep down they want to be deceived, they want to be told things that flatter them and make them feel good, things that confirm them in their current way. They will, like Ahab with his court prophets, gather people around them who confirm them, and refuse to listen to people like Micaiah who oppose them or suggest that they might have to change in some respect that they do not want to.

Many of the speakers of our own age are false prophets, people who seek the praise of men by telling them what they want to hear. Such people will never be short of an appreciative following and it is worth noting the way that people will seek after false prophets even though they know that they are not people who are committed to the truth.

They want to be confirmed in their way and they will gravitate towards the flatterer even though they know that the flatterer is not telling them the truth. True servants of God must follow the example of Micaiah speaking the truth of the Lord even if it leads to persecution while also recognizing the judgment of the Lord in the deception that he has spread among his people.

[15 : 57] Deception that exposes those who truly love the truth from those who have no appetite for it and want to believe the lie. Zedekiah, the leader of the false prophets, strikes Micaiah on the cheek.

Micaiah has humiliated him, declaring his prophecies to be false and he asks how did the spirit of the Lord go from me to speak to you? If the spirit of the Lord is really deceiving then how did he get into your mouth?

Micaiah answers behold you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide yourself. We might recall the hiding of Ben-Hadad in chapter 20 here. Ahab is angry and he puts Micaiah into prison with the instruction that he be fed meager rations until he returns in peace proving his prophecy wrong.

Yet Ahab does have some sense of concern and so he determines that he will disguise himself while he instructs Jehoshaphat to wear his robes. Jehoshaphat will be the target while Ahab will not be easy to find.

The king of Syria seeks to kill the king of Israel and isn't especially concerned about everyone else and so they pursue Jehoshaphat thinking him to be Ahab yet when Jehoshaphat cries out it becomes apparent to them that he is not in fact Ahab and they turn off from the pursuit.

[17 : 06] Elsewhere in 2nd Chronicles we are told that he cried out in prayer to the Lord. Ahab was foolish to believe that he could escape the judgment of the Lord. A certain man draws his bow at random and unerringly the arrow finds its target a weakness in the armor of Ahab.

The king is propped up in the chariot and he gradually bleeds out. Then according to the prophecy of Micaiah all of Israel are sent back to their homes and they return in peace. The king dies he is brought to Samaria and then the dogs lick the blood after the chariot by the pool of Samaria reminding us of the prophecy of Elijah in the preceding chapter.

The prostitutes also wash themselves in the water whether they are doing this because they are usually washed in that pool or for superstitious reasons about the blood of a king giving some particular power the important point is that Ahab's end is a humiliating one.

After a summary account of the reign of Ahab we are told about Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat the son of Asa is a faithful king. He follows in the footsteps of his father Asa although he fails to remove the high places and he makes peace with the king of Israel seemingly on more favourable terms to Israel than to Judah.

Like Solomon before him he has power over the kingdom of Edom and as a result has access to the port of Ezion-Geba. He constructs ships of Tarshish presumably we are to understand by this ships according to the design of Tarshish perhaps with the help of the Phoenicians however the ships will not be in the Mediterranean but going down the Gulf of Aqaba perhaps down to Africa or parts of the Arabian Peninsula.

[18 : 34] Various suggestions have been put forward for the intended destination of this fleet of ships. We don't know where Ophir was some have speculated that it was India. While Solomon's fleet of ships was amazingly successful Jehoshaphat's fleet fails they are wrecked at Ezion-Geba.

Like Solomon Jehoshaphat is someone who enjoys a great period of peace he follows after a faithful king and walks in his ways he builds ships and sends his men for gold his kingdom is extended and his various cosmopolitan dealings with other kings however in inviting such comparisons with Solomon what we see more than anything else is how the house of David has declined over the years their former glory has been much diminished even though there is still faithfulness to be found in the house of David the kingdom has greatly declined from the zenith of its golden age under Solomon alongside the tarnishing of the glory of the southern kingdom the northern kingdom continues in its way of wickedness continuing in the path of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin Ahaziah the son of Ahab and Jezebel continues in their way and brings Israel along with him a question to consider how can we develop a love of truth that saves us from deception