

1 Kings 22:1-38 // The King Who Chose Not To Listen

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[0 : 00] Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went down to see the king of Israel. The king of Israel had said to his officials, But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, So the king of Israel brought together the prophets, about 400 men, and asked them, Shall I go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?

Go, they answered, for the Lord will give it into the king's hand. But Jehoshaphat asked, Is there no longer a prophet of the Lord here who we can inquire of?

The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, There is still one prophet through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him, because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah, son of Imla. The king should not say such a thing, Jehoshaphat replied. So the king of Israel called one of his officials and said, Bring Micaiah, son of Imla, at once.

Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor, by the entrance of the gate of Samaria, with all the prophets prophesying before them.

[1 : 44] Now Zedekiah, son of Canaanah, had made iron horns and he declared, This is what the Lord says, With these you will go where they are means, until they are destroyed.

All the other prophets said the same thing, Attack Ramoth Gilead and be victorious, they said, for the Lord will give it into the king's hands. The messenger who had gone to some of Micaiah said to him, Look, the other prophets, without exception, are predicting success for the king.

Let your word agree with theirs and speak favourably. But Micaiah said, As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me. When he arrived, the king asked him, Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead or not?

Attack and be victorious, he answered, for the Lord will give it into the king's hand. 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?

Then Micaiah answered, I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd. And the Lord said, These people have no master.

[3 : 01] Let each one go home in peace. The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Didn't I tell you he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?

Micaiah continued, Therefore hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the multitudes of heaven standing round him on his right and on his left.

And the Lord said, Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there? One suggested this and another that.

Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, I will entice him. By what means? The Lord asked. I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets, he said.

You will succeed in enticing him, said the Lord. Go and do it. So now the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you.

[4 : 03] Then Zedekiah, the son of Canaan, went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. Which way did the spirit from the Lord go when he went from me to speak to you, he asked.

Micaiah replied, You will find out on the day that you go to hide in an inner room. The king of Israel then ordered, Take Micaiah and send him to Ammon, back to Ammon, the ruler of the city, and to Joash, the king's son, and say, This is what the king says.

Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely. Micaiah declared, If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me.

Then he added, Mark my words, all you people. So the king of Israel, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went up to Ramoth Gilead. The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, I will enter the battle in disguise, but you wear your royal robes.

So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. Now the king of Aram had ordered his 32 chariot commanders, Do not fight with anyone, small or great, except the king of Israel.

[5 : 15] When the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought, Surely this is the king of Israel. So they turned to attack him. But when Jehoshaphat cried out, the chariot commander saw that he was not the king of Israel and stopped pursuing him.

But someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armour. The king told his chariot driver, Wheel round and get me out of the fighting, I've been wounded.

All day long the battle raged and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans. The blood from his wound ran onto the floor of the chariot and that evening he died.

As the sun was setting, a cry spread through the army, every man to his town, every man to his land. So the king died and was brought to Samaria and they buried him there.

They washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria where the prostitutes bathed and the dogs licked up his blood as the word of the Lord had declared. This is the word of the Lord.

[6 : 23] Thanks be to God. Thanks so much Derek for reading. Do please keep your Bibles open at that extraordinary series of events. You can find an outline on the notice sheet. I have managed I think to simplify it a bit so you can follow that on the screen as well.

But let's ask for God's help. Let's pray. So Father God, we thank you that you are a speaking God and that we have your word of truth today.

And so we ask that your spirit will be our teacher and your glory will be our supreme concern. In Jesus name. Amen. In 2015, a journalist called John Bohannon wanted to see how easy it is to get people to believe something that is dubious but attractive.

He was a science journalist so he worked with a small team of scientists to do a research project with a small sample size and an unreliable method to support a hypothesis chocolate causes weight loss.

They got their research published in a small disreputable science journal. Sample size was too small. Method was hopeless. And they put out a press release.

[7 : 39] New study confirms chocolate helps you lose weight. Within days, it was shared around the world. Millions of people shared it. Newspaper headlines reported it all over the world.

And we can see why. If the headline had been new research says that eating more kale and broccoli causes weight loss, none of us would have shared that.

We're not interested in that. But the news at last, I can eat chocolate and lose weight. That's what we want to be true. We can end up doing the same kind of thing in our spiritual life.

Often, our hearts are inclined to believe wrong things about God and where we stand with Him because we would love them to be true. Well, this last chapter of 1 Kings, it's the mid-9th century BC, and amidst a king and a prophet and a great battle, God demonstrates to us in history here that His word is always true, but it's not always welcome.

Just a reminder, by this time in the Old Testament, the people of God have divided through a civil war. There's a northern kingdom, Israel, and a southern kingdom around Jerusalem.

[8 : 55] And the northern kingdom is under King Ahab, and we've seen in recent weeks that he is the worst king they have ever had. He is horrendous. And today, he asks the king from the southern kingdom, Jehoshaphat, if he'll come with him on a conquest to try and reclaim some of the promised land that they've lost.

And Jehoshaphat is all in on this quite dubious partnership. First of all, I am as you are, he says. My people as your people. My horses as your horses.

It's like a nightmare version of ecumenicalism. It's like, I don't care, Ahab, that you've led the people away from God. I'm with you. But he's soon going to learn more about King Ahab.

So that's our first point today, is that we have a stiff-necked king. A stiff-necked king. There's just one thing Jehoshaphat asks. We see he lays down a condition in verse 5.

But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, first seek the counsel of the Lord. So what Ahab does is he brings 400 prophets together.

[10 : 00] 400! And he asks them in verse 6, shall I go down to Ramoth Gilead, to go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain? And look at their answer in verse 6.

Go, they answered, for the Lord will give it into the king's hand. But Jehoshaphat thinks there's something not right here. Okay, verse 7. You can smell a rat.

Verse 7. Is there no longer a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of? And you've got to love the honesty here of Ahab, haven't you? Verse 8.

The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, there is still one prophet through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah, son of Imlah. Isn't that extraordinary? There's no sense here that the 400 prophets brought before him are prophets of Baal or another false god, but when it comes down to it, he knows that, oh, there is a real prophet.

[11:05] I just can't stand the man. Because of what he says about me. So, he only has space in his life for a God who agrees with him, who affirms him.

And then we're brought to picture a scene of great earthly power. If it was a Netflix drama today, there'd be like drone footage now flying over the White House and then seeing like a global leaders summit.

What happens in verse 10? We'll have a look. Verse 10. Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor by the entrance of the gate of Samaria with all the prophets prophesying before them.

Now, that's really interesting as an aside because there is another threshing floor in the land. It's the threshing floor in Jerusalem at which they built the temple, Solomon's temple.

So, if you want to go and meet with God, that's where you go. So, the kings, they're at the wrong threshing floor outside the great alternative capital city, Samaria, but it's majestic, isn't it?

[12:07] Great city, royal robes, royal thrones. And it tells us something here about how easy it is in any age to fall for the soothing promises of false prophets.

Their message here is affirming. And we love to be affirmed, don't we? Their message is popular, 400 of them. So, it looks like, I mean, lots of the time we judge what's true by what the majority think, don't we?

That's what we do. We think, well, that's obvious because that's what everyone thinks. 400 prophets and it walks the corridors of power. You see that? An audience with both kings.

Picture them coming on stage one by one, these prophets, like contestants on X Factor or The Voice. one after the other, all of them with the same message, go for it, kings, you will win.

So, some of them start wanting to stand out from the crowd of 400 and the highlights reel that we get gives us Zedekiah in verse 11. Do you see that?

[13:14] He's actually acting it out. Verse 11, Now, Zedekiah, son of Canaan had made iron horns and he declared, this is what the Lord says, with these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.

So, this guy, I really like this guy. I picture him like, you know when the All Blacks do the haka? Like, this is what's going on. There's always a few that just get too into it and that's this guy.

You know, he's brought his iron horns and he's going, it's going to be like this. You're going to gore them. So, he steals the show and yet, all the while, amidst all that kind of impressive acting, Ahab knows this is not really true.

That's an extraordinary thing through the chapter and when the true prophet Micaiah appears in verse 15, if we just jump down there, verse 15, when he, that's Micaiah, when he arrived, the king asked him, Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead or not?

Attack and be victorious, he answered, for the Lord will give it into the king's hand. What's going on? Has Micaiah bottled it? No. What he's doing is he's demonstrating, he's drawing out from the king, you know the answer.

[14:33] You know the answer. So, he says to him, attack and be victorious and look at verse 16, 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?

Isn't that extraordinary? He knows what the answer is. How does he know? We're not told. But for my money, I think it might be something in Ahab's conscience by now.

You wonder from what we've seen of him in recent weeks that when Elijah kept confronting him, when it didn't rain for three years, when he went up on Mount Carmel with Elijah and God sent fire on the altar, did he not start to think, I'm on the wrong side of God here?

When he wouldn't repent. Or when he went down to hang out in Naboth's old vineyard that now belongs to him and now grows vegetables and he was enjoying it but thinking, Jezebel did murder Naboth so that I could have his vineyard.

Would he not ever have started to think, God must be really angry with me? God's word is always gracious for anyone who is willing to acknowledge I've messed up, I've gone in the wrong direction, I've done this wrong, I want a fresh start from God.

[15 : 55] When we feel like that, God is gracious. But Ahab knows by now that the word from God is never good for you if you are someone who is refusing to turn back to God.

You are resolute in your sin. And that's the fundamental human problem we see captured for us by King Ahab. He wants the blessing of God without repentance.

He wants God's favour but he doesn't want to change. Now what about us? Lots of us are in church today because we have chosen that we want God to speak to us.

There may even be lots of us here today who've chosen this church over maybe other options because we like that week by week we take God at his word, we're under the word.

But how attractive the thought can be to us of a God who gives us the things that we really enjoy in our spiritual life, the hope, the purpose, the meaning, the foundation and security of his love with a bit less challenge.

[17 : 07] Isn't that attractive? It's easy for us to spot how people fall for that in other times and places. We look, don't we, at times when people accepted a Christianity that allowed racial segregation in their society and in their church and affirmed that and we think, how could they have fallen for that?

Or in the Russian Orthodox Church where people fall for the way that the Orthodox Church supports Putin's imperial policies to cause terrible evil in other countries.

The church backs it and we think, how have they fallen for that in their church? Far harder for us to spot our own blind spots. I'm conscious again of the way just after I arrived at St.

Silas. I went round to St. Mary's Cathedral to meet the ministers there around the corner and one of the clergy said to me frankly that he said, you know, churches like ours, they're full of people who started out in Bible-believing churches like yours, but over time they just wanted a little bit more wriggle room.

Well, for us, what if the false teaching that might attract us is what follows the big cultural spirit of our age? If it says you can choose your own gender or you can create your own identity based on your sexual desire or God doesn't really care who I sleep with or teaching that ties in following Jesus with a form of political populism and nationalism or that justifies us living lives that other Christians would look at and say, well, you're just being greedy.

[18 : 50] It's just selfish greed with what you have. False teaching in the name of Christianity is freely available all around us. It looks popular.

It looks powerful. And we might think that we're very far off leaving our church for it. But maybe the drift starts for us when we just start to avoid the challenges.

Maybe we avoid the accountability of brothers who are willing to admonish us with God's word. Or maybe we see that there's a growth group series coming up on being generous with your money and we decide those are the weeks when we're too busy to go to growth group.

Where might we just hide away from the truth? It is actually really good news, of course, that God is like this. That God doesn't want to leave us where we are and affirm everything we believe in Scotland in 2026.

he doesn't want to leave us as we are. He disagrees with us because he is good all the time. But sometimes we can be a bit like the stiff-necked king.

[20 : 01] But we're going to turn now to focus on another character in this epic story. It's an inspirational prophet. So in comes Micaiah. And on the staff team, let me just say, we've been so impressed with Micaiah, we've decided to do a mini-series on him later in the summer, in the evenings.

So he's going to be like Boba Fett is on Disney Plus. Disney obviously thought, Boba Fett, such a good character, we'll do a spin-off. And we're going to do that with Micaiah.

But just consider how good he is today. Think about the pressure that he was under. And just as we get into that, just for a moment, think about the places where we might feel under great pressure.

to speak up and say what God's word says is very difficult for us. It's costly. Maybe for you it would be in your school, or in your workplace, or among your family.

And we can think of those who are involved in Christian leadership, who feel under great pressure to tour the national line, to say what's popular, not what's true. Because Micaiah is being asked what God says about something in front of great power.

[21 : 15] And so in that sense, his role is a bit like the role of a pastor today, or the role of someone with a prophetic ministry. And we don't know much about Micaiah. There's clearly a history with Ahab.

Ahab knows where to find him, to summon him. He doesn't like him. And to be a faithful messenger for God, Micaiah is going to have to swim against the tide, isn't he? A very strong tide.

400 prophets have come up saying, attack and be victorious. They're very numerous. They're powerful. They're impressive. Those two kings on the thrones at the city gate in their robes.

And to make it even harder for Micaiah, in verse 13, the guy who goes to get Micaiah has a quiet word in his ear. If you have a look at verse 13, he says, look, the other prophets, without exception, are predicting success for the king.

Let your word agree with theirs and speak favourably. I just imagine that with his arm around him on the way. Come on, mate. Come on, mate. I know you've been a bit of a firebrand in the past, but for your sake today, and for everyone's sake, don't spoil the party.

[22 : 25] It won't make any difference anyway. The war's happening anyway. So come on, Micaiah, play the game, tour the line. It happens to evangelical ministers today. Think of friends who have been invited to the forums you go in where you might get nominated eventually to be a bishop.

It's great you had an evangelical start, but if you just tone things down a bit, you could be a bishop. I don't know what the Presbyterian equivalent is.

I think it might be if you just stop contending, you could be moderator one day. Micaiah, I'm sure, would have known exactly what would happen to him if he's faithful. At the end of the story, he is in prison on bread and water, and that's the last we hear of him.

He gets the command is go there until he has to be in prison like that until Ahab returns safely.

Ahab doesn't return safely. That's where faithfulness leaves Micaiah.

So what will he do against all that pressure? Well, look at verse 14. It's this real high point of the book really. Verse 14, but Micaiah said, as surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me.

[23 : 42] And so that leads him to speak the truth in verse 17. Micaiah answered, I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd.

And the Lord said, these people have no master. Let each one go home in peace. As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me.

Well, for us, what the Lord tells us is clear now on the pages of the Bible. And mainline denominations in the UK that compromise on the Bible can look numerous and impressive and powerful.

Maybe that's a prayer you could pray for me and for Jonathan and for Robbie and those of us who preach at St. Silas and our ministry trainees and those we train at St.

Silas, wherever they end up, and for each other in our ordinary lives. Would we have the courage, the steel in our spine, to say, I can only tell you what God says in the Bible, what the Lord tells me.

[24 : 48] Sometimes the pressures can be quite different today. So what I can struggle with, and maybe I'm not the only one, is when I've got a passage coming up in the Bible to preach on that I'm sure teaches something that people will not like, like husbands and wives are equal but they have different roles, or Jesus is the only name by which anyone can be saved, or God is in charge of whomever he saves, or that hell is real, or where the implication of the passage is that unborn children are people.

What I find a great pressure is, I worry, if I'm faithful to this text, people will leave. That's the pressure I feel. People, some of you will just leave.

You'll find a church that still says it's evangelical, but where they're a bit softer on that. And I know that many of you, and we will know that many of us go into workplaces where it's very difficult to say, I won't do that because this is what I believe.

I won't sign that form. I won't join in with that bit of charity work that goes against my conscience. Or family encounters that some of you have where you have to say, this is how I've chosen to live because I believe Jesus made me and I trust his word.

So that's our second point, an inspirational prophet. How does he do it? Well, that brings us to our third point. It's what Micaiah sees as he stands before that powerful earthly throne. He sees a higher throne.

[26 : 30] Our third point, a higher throne. Micaiah tells us that God has pulled back the curtain for him and shown him what the spiritual reality is of what's going on. A strikingly parallel scene.

Look at verse 19. Micaiah continued, therefore hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the multitudes of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left.

And the Lord said, who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there? And then we find out there's a debate in heaven, in the throne room.

It's like a sort of houses of parliament. We see this similar picture in Job as well, as proposals are brought before God. And nothing can happen unless God gives the say-so. And one of the spirits who comes forward with an idea, it hits the spot.

One suggested this and another that. Verse 21, finally a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, I will entice him. By what means, the Lord asked, I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets, he said.

[27 : 37] And the Lord says, that will work. Go and do it. So Micaiah is warning Ahab here. That is the reality, spiritually, behind what you are seeing today with your 400 prophets.

Verse 23, that the Lord has put a deceiving spirit into their mouths and he has decreed disaster for you. And Zedekiah, the iron horns guy, he gets up and he slaps Micaiah in the face and he's sent to prison.

But Micaiah is revealing to us and to Ahab a very big God, isn't he? What he's showing us is there is a very powerful spiritual realm that influences and governs what goes on in our world.

And God is fully in control there, even over evil. evil. He's never morally responsible for evil, but it cannot happen without his permission.

He can restrain it, he can stop it, and he allows it, where in his wisdom he can use it for good purposes. Satan is on God's leash.

[28 : 48] Immediately we might be thinking that is very hard to swallow. evil. When we think of evil in the world and we contemplate the God of the Bible is big enough to stop it.

And for reasons we don't know, he didn't stop it. But it is very good news that God is as powerful as this. It means that nothing can ever thwart his plans.

And he assures us his plans for his people are good plans. his plans for the nations is a saving plan to save a multitude. Most strikingly we see that dilemma at the cross as such a great evil happened as the good man Jesus was put to death.

And God did not forbid it because it was according to his plan that Jesus would save his people. evil. And so he's earned the right to be trusted by us when we experience evil in our lives at the cross.

That's how we know we can trust him. So that it is comforting to know his plans will always stand and he can work through all that happens for his ultimate good. Now what about God allowing Ahab to be deceived here?

[30 : 11] Does that mean he might allow you and I to get deceived? Well the interesting thing here is that Ahab is not actually deceived is he? Micaiah gives Ahab the full revelation of what's happening so that Ahab has the opportunity to repent there and then.

God is telling him you have a choice Ahab you can believe the truth from Micaiah or you can believe the lie that you want to be true that I have allowed all of your prophets to affirm.

So he can choose to follow a word that is true but inconvenient or he can choose to follow a word that he wishes was true but he's been told now by a prophet he knows is true it's a lie.

What do you go for Ahab? Well Ahab decides I'll try for the middle. That's our fourth point an inescapable word. He thinks well now I know what God wants to do to bring judgment on me so I'll just avoid it.

And in verse 30 he says to Jehoshaphat I'll enter the battle in disguise but you wear royal robes. And Jehoshaphat goes along with it. Which what does that tell you?

[31 : 32] It tells you Jehoshaphat I think he is the most gullible man in the whole Bible. It's absolutely extraordinary.

Tell you what Jehoshaphat you know the battle you dress as a king I'll just dress normally. Oh okay okay. But the other thing it shows you is again Ahab knows that Micaiah is telling the truth doesn't he?

He just thinks he can outwit God. So he goes in disguise and then for all of that in verse 34 an archer we're told draws his bow at random. Almost like this archer he wasn't trained.

He's a bit of a phony archer and he sees everyone else knows what they're doing so he just like twangs his bow and arrow doesn't even aim it and it lands just in the tiny gap between Ahab's armoured plates and he dies.

Because it doesn't matter where people are aiming God determines where arrows fire and fly. And so what happens on the battlefield that day is what always happens in 1st Kings and 2nd Kings because it always happens.

[32 : 43] History unfolds but everything always happens exactly as God has said it will happen. Where might you need to be reassured of that today?

That God's word might not always be welcome but it's always true. Other versions of Christianity in our time might look more popular, they might look more attractive, they might look more powerful but it's God's word in the Bible that endures, that always comes true.

And that is good news if we're trusting Jesus today but we struggle. If we struggle will Jesus really come in glory? Will he really bring a new world where there's no more death and pain?

Will he really wipe the tears from my eyes? Could he really forgive me for the sins that I've done? Well God's word says it and so that settles it.

It's true. And if we're here this morning and the truth is we still feel like Ahab did in our lives, we prefer a form of Christianity that's a bit more affirming of our own desires where we feel challenged to change by God's word.

[33 : 59] Well let's remember as we close that we've thought about a great prophet here Micaiah but he foreshadows our greater prophet today the Lord Jesus.

Micaiah had a haunting vision of the people of Israel scattered and he used a striking phrase of them didn't he? They were like sheep without a shepherd on the hillside because their king Ahab was going to lead them into a tragic war and then die.

But then Jesus had the same vision of his people. The people he saw the crowds Matthew tells us he saw that they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

And he had compassion on them and he taught God's word to them to show them that he is the good shepherd shepherd. And he likened himself to a good shepherd who leaves 99 found sheep behind so that he's come to seek out and find the lost sheep because he'll rejoice when that sheep comes home.

And he came to lay down his life for the sheep so that now whenever we choose to submit our lives to his word even where we might disagree with his words we know that he is the good shepherd who can lead us to green pasture as we follow him and even through the darkest valleys he leads us in safety so we can gladly submit to his will and trust and follow him.

[35 : 28] Amen.