

# Micaiah Speaks for God

History teaches a timeless truth: When faith is co-opted by a government or politicians the result is not only



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the truth, risking more than public shame.

The end of Solomon's reign produced division of the Jewish kingdom with Jehoshaphat ruling the southern kingdom of Judah and Ahab ruling the northern kingdom of Israel. There has been a continuing threat from the Syrians and the king of Israel decides it is time to settle this conflict to the advantage of both Judah and Israel. Jehoshaphat confers with Ahab about combining their forces to take control of Ramoth-Gilead in the land of Aram as a buffer against their mutual enemy. But before they launch this offense Jehoshaphat calls for four hundred prophets to inquire if God will bless this battle. That seems like an overwhelming number of possible opinions, but the "professional spokesmen" for God are unanimous: "Go up; for the Lord will give it to the hand of the king" (v. 6).

Jehoshaphat hesitates and asks Ahab if any prophet has been left out. Ahab had a reputation for duplicity and immorality, which may be Jehoshaphat's concern. Ahab mentions Micaiah, with the disclaimer, "I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favorable about me, but only disaster" (v. 8). Jehoshaphat does not want to hear Ahab's opinion. He wants another opinion before he gets into a battle that could result in full-scale war with Syria. Micaiah states he will only declare what God reveals, without loyalty to any king or popular sentiment: "As the Lord lives, whatever the Lord says to me, that I will speak" (v. 14).

There follows a fascinating message that contrasts the self-serving thinking of rulers who see the situation for their own political advantage, prophets who love their own positions of influence more than they love God vs. the single

voice of truth that no one wants to hear. Micaiah describes a vision of heaven in which a spirit comes before God and volunteers to be "a lying spirit in the mouths of his prophets" (v. 22). Micaiah explains: "So you see, the Lord has decreed disaster for you" (v. 23).

Is God playing games with Jehoshaphat and Ahab? No. God is allowing them to choose, not just between the 400 and 1, but to choose between a disastrous military action or the guidance of God. History is littered with horrendous wars that resulted in generations of hatred, violence, poverty and injustice, a heritage that shapes our headlines and politics today. Predictably, the two kings listen to the 400 prophets and lock Micaiah in prison for telling the truth.

The battle for Ramoth-Gilead goes exactly as Micaiah predicted. The Jewish forces are defeated and King Ahab is killed in battle by an arrow from an enemy archer who does not realize he has killed a king (v. 34)! Schemes are formulated, circumstances unfold, desires override reality, and we often wonder why life does not serve our preferences. The recorder of this story is creative in his portrayal of God's concern for his people – and the people's ability to choose their version of God's will and how to get the advantage. The answer was in the clear vision of a single prophet who stood against the flawed desires of the many.

There is a haunting similarity between this ancient story of tragedy when God is ignored in the realm of government and politics. In this setting you could describe the 400 prophets as the real "fake news" voices of their day. You could also describe the kings as self-serving political leaders or the religious leaders who hear only what they want to hear. But there is one clear voice of truth, not coming from a political leader or the religious leaders who pander to his desires. Micaiah is the lone voice from God because Micaiah has walked faithfully with God in all life's challenges. Was Jehoshaphat's push to war with Syria a plan for Israel to be great again? Was his alliance with Ahab, one of Judah's most ungodly kings, justified by a desire for victory at any cost?

## Formations

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Scripture: 1 Kings 22:6-9, 12-14, 19-23

Jesus faced similar challenges. The Jews wanted freedom from Rome and restored greatness as God's people. But Jesus did not come to restore David's political throne. He came to complete God's plan to love all the world. Even though Jesus fulfilled the prophecy and promises of all the Old Testament and embodied the grace of God he was killed by the people he loved. But the resurrection proved the truth of God's love above all else. Micaiah knew God and stood against all odds to tell the truth. As people of God we must live by that kind of assurance and hope.

Micaiah was grounded in faith. He was not a member of any king's staff or political advisors, blind to the selfishness and immorality of the court. He was the lone true voice against the 400 false prophets. In recent years we have witnessed the acceptance of hatred, immorality, ethnic divisions and dishonesty pushed to the background by some religious leaders as they support politicians. The immorality of the world has become the foundation for the beliefs and practices of society in general. We are hungry for 400 prophets who will offer us convenient lies and call them truth! Second Timothy 2:15 tells us to "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth."

There is a decline in church attendance in the United States as people are less and less impressed by big organizations, troubled by a religious superstructure that too often separates and divides rather than brings us together, and a longing for faith that applies where we live daily. What might have happened if Micaiah had been heard over the voices of the court prophets? What if Israel and Judah had heard a clear call back to the God who loved them? But the "fake news," pretending to be God's news, won the day and tragedy ensued. Micaiah spoke for God, but the message was ignored and God's people suffered.

We who profess to be followers of Christ must live and speak the truth daily if there is to be a change in our society and hope for our world.

*Retired after almost 50 years in pastoral ministry, Michael K. Olmsted enjoys family, supply preaching and interim work, literature, history, the arts and antiques. Formations is a curriculum series from Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc. through NextSunday Resources.*