

MICAIAH: SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 22:1–40

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Micaiah said, “As the LORD lives, whatever the LORD says to me, that I will speak.” (1 Kgs. 22:14)

Daily Bible Readings			
M	Apr. 26	2 Kgs. 3:9–17	Elisha Prophesies Truth to King Jehoshaphat
T	Apr. 27	1 Kgs. 22:1–6	Kings Propose Battle Against Aram
W	Apr. 28	1 Kgs. 22:7–14	Micaiah Resists Pressure to Prophesy Falsely
Th	Apr. 29	2 Chron. 18:18–22	A Lying Spirit Brings Disaster
F	Apr. 30	1 Kgs. 22:29–40	King Ahab Suffers Fatal Injury
Sa	May 1	1 Kgs. 22:41–46	Jehoshaphat Promotes Peace with Israel

STEPPING INTO THE WORD

A young couple named their new baby Micaiah, choosing the name of a biblical prophet. But when their friends and family kept mispronouncing the baby’s name as Micah, the couple began to introduce their baby by saying, “His name is Mi-ki-ah. Like Micah, but with an ‘I’ in the middle.”

The Micaiah we read about in 1 Kings is certainly a prophet with an “I” in the middle. Micaiah used the “I” that God gave him to speak truth to power: “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd . . .” (1 Kgs. 22:17); “I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven . . .” (22:19). He told the king what God wanted the king to hear, rather than what the king wanted to hear. When Micaiah’s courage cost him his freedom, he had already won liberation by being obedient to God and speaking boldly.

Typically, we think of Elijah and Elisha when we are remembering first-century prophets in the Northern Kingdom. Other less-well-known prophets like Micaiah were also at work there. During this time, Israel and Judah were allied against Syria, but alliances could change very quickly.

Jehoshaphat, king of Judah during this era, relied on prophecies to help him rule. Many of these prophets he relied on are “yes men” who pander to the king. But one prophet, Micaiah, could not be threatened or bought. When he met with Jehoshaphat and Ahab, Micaiah utilized a biblical theme of sheep without a shepherd to describe a leaderless army. His words hearken back to Isaiah 13:14, “like sheep with no one to gather them, all will flee to their own lands.”

Shepherd God, show us the path of life that relies on faith in you and dares to speak truth to power. Amen.



SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 22:15–23, 26–28

22:15 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.” ¹⁶But 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?” ¹⁷Then 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.’” ¹⁸The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy anything favorable about me, but only disaster?”

¹⁹Then 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. ²⁰And 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, ²¹until a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, ‘I will entice him.’ ²²‘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.’ ²³So you see, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has decreed disaster for you.” . . .

²⁶The king of Israel then ordered, “Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king’s son, ²⁷and 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.’” ²⁸Micaiah said, “If you return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me.” And he said, “Hear, you peoples, all of you!”

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

MICAHIAH


What is going on in this story? Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, had a meeting with Ahab, king of Israel. They agreed on a plan to take back an area called Ramoth-gilead from the king of Aram. This action would involve battle and depended on their alliance. Before they moved forward, they decided they would need God's guidance. So they called on 400 prophets to ask whether to attack Ramoth-gilead. All 400 prophets said, "Go for it." Somehow Jehoshaphat was still not convinced, and King Ahab sent for Micaiah. Ahab hated this prophet because Micaiah always spoke the truth, and the truth was usually dire for the king. Nevertheless, Ahab sent for Micaiah. The king's assistants tried to convince Micaiah to speak in agreement with the 400 other prophets. But Micaiah would only say that he will repeat what God says to him. In a dramatic scene, Micaiah stepped up to speak God's truth to power. He undoubtedly used a sarcastic tone when he said, like the other prophets did, "Go for it." But his mocking style belied his deeper meaning. King Ahab then demanded that Micaiah tell the truth (the king still hoped the truth was to proceed with battle).

In verses 17, Micaiah told the king what he didn't want to hear: "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the LORD said, 'These have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'" With these words Micaiah proclaimed that Israel would be defeated, and the king will perish. King Ahab said that he wanted the truth—but he couldn't handle the truth. Ahab despised God's messenger even more.

Micaiah explained to King Ahab how he could be right while the host of other prophets could be wrong. Verses 19–23 lay out God's relationship with evil. Ultimately, God's way will win. Goodness is stronger than evil. The false prophet Zedekiah responded violently when bested in the argument and confronted with the truth. Ahab then sought to have Micaiah imprisoned and treated poorly. The king of Israel ordered, "Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon 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 on reduced rations of bread and water until I come in peace'" (vv. 26–27). Micaiah went on to make one more appeal to the king. He pleaded to be judged whether or not his prophecy came true.

Ultimately, Ahab went into battle, but not before he disguised himself. He made this move to avoid being a special target as a

king and to help protect him against Micaiah's prophecy of doom. But Ahab's disguise plan failed; he died in the battle.

 **Who are some quiet heroes that you know who speak the truth with one small voice and stand up for God's causes?**

THE ROLE OF PROPHET

To appreciate the role of a prophet, we can look at the context in which the prophets appeared in biblical history. When kings ruled God's people, some of them proved to be faithful rulers, such as King David. Other kings were not as faithful! After King Solomon's reign upended Yahweh's vision, God's people split into two separate nations and increasingly worshiped other gods. But a shred of hope remained. A small group of people still believed in God's covenant and sought mercy and righteousness. From among this group, God lifted up powerful preachers called prophets. Through the prophets' words, God pleaded with the people to return to faithfulness and repent of their sinfulness. In today's story, King Jehoshaphat and King Ahab acknowledge one of Yahweh's prophets. Many national leaders, however, tried to silence the prophets. Their messages were too grim and egalitarian. Better to name false prophets who would always promise people—at least the people in power—happiness and security.

Among the prophets whom God chose was Micaiah. Micaiah was not alone in his call of speaking truth to power; all the biblical prophets challenged false systems that perpetuated both corporate and individual sin. Doing so was part of their prophetic call.


God called prophets to deliver crucial messages, such as these:

- God works through prophets to bring people back to God.
- Because we are created by God, we are continually longing to be united with God's will.
- Human beings need to confess and repent.
- God's realm is lived out in human history. (The prophets risked taking on world leaders to make this point.)
- Both hope and judgment are part of prophecies, which made sense for people who defined God as both savior and final judge.

The word for *prophet* translates as “called by God.” Just as ancient kings were anointed, prophets, too, were specifically

named and expected to serve. That service was to deliver God's message to humans. A prophet can be defined as a seer—one who, inspired by God, notices the events of the world around them and also see God's purposes. Throughout the Old Testament, prophets are formed by their faith in God to bear God's revelation for the world. Appealing to imagine, isn't it? Such a closeness to God that one can hear and interpret God's word for others to heed. This was the role of a prophet.

Unlike kings who were often born into their role (the "family business"), prophets were named by God, not the world. Like Jesus's disciples who came from many professions, prophets emerged from a spectrum of backgrounds. Some spoke, some acted, some did both. When they spoke, the words held the power of both law and gospel. The relationship between prophets and God provided the foundation for their credibility. "Thus says the LORD," claimed the prophets, and they were undoubtedly as moved and amazed as any audience member by what came out of their mouths.

 How did Micaiah personify these aspects of the role of a prophet?

STEPPING INTO THE WORLD


Matt had become more and more uncomfortable with his friends' statements that blamed people for being homeless. Matt and his wife served breakfast at a local shelter, and he enjoyed flipping pancakes and talking to some of the people while he cleared the tables. Matt was surprised to find out how similar the guests' lives were to his. Many of them were rushing off to get their kids to school and go to work. And they seemed genuinely grateful for the cinnamon rolls and hot drinks.

Matt increasingly became frustrated with himself for not having the courage to speak up. In a sense, Matt's predicament was the same as Micaiah's—how to speak truth to power? But in this case, the power wasn't a king or political leader, it was the power of peer pressure. What if he tried to defend his position and didn't have the words? What if his buddies rejected him for his views?

Matt finally came up with an idea. He thought about how his own understanding evolved and realized that seeing was believing. He respected his friends enough to imagine they might feel

the same. Matt invited the guys to help make and serve pancakes one month. Matt sensed God's hand in this idea; peace washed over him because he was finally doing something to take a risk and show courage.

We can get paralyzed if we measure the boldness of our prophetic actions against that of the biblical prophets. Certainly, *some* of us are called to make courageous stands and change the world at systemic levels. But *all* of us are called to stand up to the powers of sin within and around us.

 **How have you been a prophet who pointed to God's vision? In what circumstances do you wish you could be a prophet?**

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes provide additional information about today's Scripture that may be helpful for your study.

1. While some biblical prophets were named, other prophets were only identified by the role they played, not by name (1 Kgs. 13:1–34; 20:13–22, 35–43).
2. In the days of the divided kingdom, alliances were fluid. At times the Southern Kingdom allied with Aram (Syria) against the Northern Kingdom (1 Kgs. 15:16–19). At other times, the Northern and Southern Kingdoms allied with each other against Aram (22:1–5).
3. In the early years of Jehoshaphat's reign, he maintained the adversarial relationship with the Northern Kingdom that was the policy of his father, Asa (2 Chron. 17:1–2). That relationship changed when Jehoshaphat's son married Ahab's daughter, forming a marriage alliance (18:1).
4. For most of Ahab's reign, he rejected prophetic messages from Yahweh. After Elijah predicted Ahab's bloody downfall, Ahab briefly repented, and Yahweh relented (1 Kgs. 21:25–29).
5. Micaiah uses a common biblical metaphor to describe an army that has been cut off from its leader—sheep without a shepherd (1 Kgs. 22:17, 2 Chron. 18:16). The metaphor is used elsewhere in the Old Testament (Num. 27:17, Isa. 13:14) but most notably in describing Jesus' compassion for the crowds coming to him (Matt. 9:36, Mark 6:34).