

### 1<sup>ST</sup> KINGS

#### Week 35, chapter 22 END of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings

This week we conclude our extensive journey through the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings and when we meet next time we will start the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings. Remember when we do, however, that there is no actual division between these two books; the divide was artificial and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings simply continues without delay from 1<sup>st</sup> Kings. That said, there is one aspect of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings that is noticeably different from 1<sup>st</sup> Kings and it is that 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings focuses mostly on the Kings of Judah, while 1<sup>st</sup> Kings has focused primarily on the Kings of Israel. There is good reason for that and we'll discuss that when we start 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings.

We finished up the last lesson with one of the few remaining true prophets of Yehoveh that still remained in the northern kingdom of Israel, being summoned to prophesy before King *Achav* of Israel and King *Y'hoshafat* of Judah. *Mikhayahu* was brought from his prison cell to the threshing floor just outside the gates of Samaria at the behest of King Jehoshaphat, who was skeptical of the 400 prophets that King *Achav* had produced to essentially rubber-stamp his plan to attack the city of Ramot-Gilead.

Ramot-Gilead was a city located east of the Jordan River and along the critically important trade route known as the Kings Highway. It was currently in the hands of the king of Syria, and this king had no intentions of turning it over to the King of Israel. Likely it was King *Achav*'s goal of acquiring Ramot-Gilead that was the premise for arranging this state visit of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah. By winning this city back in a joint effort, it would be of substantial economic benefit to both kingdoms. Yet, *Y'hoshafat* was well aware of just how far away from Yehoveh and into idol worship that *Achav* had led his people. So when Jehoshaphat was reluctant to seal the agreement to establish an expeditionary military force with *Achav* unless the Lord was consulted first, *Achav* naturally called upon his willing group of false prophets who would tell the king anything he wanted to hear.

When Jehoshaphat proved to be unconvinced with the unanimous pronouncements of easy victory by these 400 prophets and their leader, *Tzidkyah*, Jehoshaphat asked if there wasn't an old-school prophet of Yehoveh still around and *Achav* grudgingly admitted that there was one. But not surprisingly this prophet was imprisoned because the last thing any dictator wants is for the truth to get out. And King *Achav* wanted nothing to do with this old-school prophet of God because all *Mikhayahu* ever seemed to bring to *Achav* was a divine message of warning, chastisement and judgment.

We concluded by discussing that when boiled down to its basic elements, the reality is that King *Achav* didn't want to

hear the real Word of God, he preferred something that sounded like the Word of God but was more in tune with the political correctness of his era. He wanted a word that was more flexible and accommodating to his preferences and plans. Unfortunately, modern Believers are living under the same circumstances when today many of our mainstream churches profess that they are teaching the Word of God, when in fact they are teaching doctrines of men that purport to reflect the Word of God. And these teachings mostly tell the congregation what they want to hear.

Let's re-read of portion of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings chapter 22.

RE-READ 1<sup>ST</sup> KINGS CHAPTER 22:13 – end

We have discussed Holy War in the past, and how Holy War is NOT war that is waged by someone who merely thinks that they have a good pious reason for engaging in such a conflict (such as the Crusades). Rather Holy War is war that is specifically ordained, or perhaps openly sanctioned, by Yehoveh. I think that while one reason that *Y'hoshaphat* King of Judah wanted to inquire of the Lord's prophets about *Achav's* proposal to attack Ramot-Gilead is that it was typical of kings of that era to want to know in advance what the outcome would be (and this was accomplished by divination). But another reason is that Jehoshaphat needed to know if this was Holy War or not; the difference between Holy War and other kinds of war is crucial.

Since the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings tends to focus on the wicked and godless kings of the northern kingdom, we can lose sight of the fact that the kings of Judah (though hardly perfect) still called Yehoveh their God, and maintained the Levite priesthood and Temple Worship at Solomon's Temple. The Torah was still their civil law code and to varying degrees Judah's kings sought to follow it. *Y'hoshafat* was seen as a relatively good king, and his actions here indicate that.

Yet one of the questions that scholars openly ask is why a Torah knowledgeable person like King Jehoshaphat would hear God's true word from Micaiah that to attack Ramot-Gilead would result in a humiliating loss, but yet he went ahead and did it anyway? And there is really no strong Scriptural indication that God saw Jehoshaphat's participation in the battle as disobedience. Thus it seems to me that what we see here is this: as a result of Micaiah's prophetic utterance it became clear to Jehoshaphat that this battle against Ramot-Gilead was NOT Holy War. God neither ordained nor sanctioned this war. On the other hand, God did not prohibit it; He merely warned that the outcome would be a serious setback.

CJB 1 Kings 22:17 *Then he said, "I saw all Isra'el scattered over the hills like sheep without a shepherd; and ADONAI said, 'These men have no leader; let everyone go home in peace.'"*

In fact, the final words of *Mikhayahu* state that the defeated armies of Israel and Judah will return home in *shalom*. You don't return home in *shalom* if you have a problem with God. So to be clear: it is not that God is necessarily against war that is not Holy War. Rather it is that Holy War has an entirely different purpose, and that God is the actual Warrior Leader of Holy War, and thus Holy War is fought under a different set of rules (called the Law of *Herem*) than regular war.

What Jehoshaphat discovered from *Mikhayahu* is that the battle for Ramot-Gilead was not Holy War and so despite the warning that the outcome would be a disaster, Jehoshaphat remained hopeful that somehow the joint forces of Israel and Judah might come out with a victory; and thus the treatment of the all-important spoils of war would be at *Achav's* and Jehoshaphat's discretion. They could keep the spoils of war, keep the city of Ramot-Gilead intact and use it for economic benefit, and suffer no consequences from God. Had it been Holy War, the spoils would have become God's holy property, and the city would have to have been burned. Entirely different outcomes aren't they?

But after *Mikhayahu* had finished prophesying a military loss, King *Achav* merely insisted that he was only lying because he had such personal animosity against the king. But then the other shoe fell: starting in verse 19 the old prophet tells of a vision that is given in parable-like fashion. And he makes it clear that despite *Achav's* insistence that the words spoken against *Achav* were Micaiah's, in fact what is being spoken is from Yehoveh. It is indeed a very strange vision/parable and is set in Heaven with God deciding upon how to deal with this wicked King *Achav*.

In this parable the Lord is acting like a typical earthly king. He is sitting on His throne surrounded by His royal council. The term used for those surrounding him is the host of Heaven, or in Hebrew *tsava ha'shamayim*. In this context it is speaking of angels. Because the Lord had sentenced *Achav* to die for his involvement in *Navot's* murder and theft of his ancestral land, the only thing that remained was to decide how and when the king's death sentence would be carried out.

So since *Achav* is considering going on this military excursion the Lord has determined that this will be the time when the king is to die. So the question asked is, "Who will entice (or lure) *Achav* to decide upon going to war at Ramot-Gilead, so that he can die there". There is a discussion among God and his heavenly hosts and various suggestions are put forward but finally a spirit (a *ruach*) volunteered to be the one to entrap the king.

When the Lord asked how the spirit would accomplish this, the *ruach* said he'd do it by putting a deceiving spirit into the mouths of those 400 false prophets that were advising King *Achav*. And the Lord agreed and said, "Go". So, says *Mikhayahu*, that is exactly what has happened.

A parable is a metaphor, wrapped into a story, that creates a good illustration that is designed to be easily remembered or that helps to reveal a difficult concept. This parable was instantly understood by all involved and it infuriated the chief of the 400 false prophets, Zedekiah. But before we talk about his reaction let's look at a couple of points. First, the deceiving spirit is not to be taken as Satan. This is not a demonic spirit, so God is not sending a

demon to the false prophets. Rather, because this is a parable the deceiving spirit is a metaphor and it is meant to personify the spirit of prophecy. Only this spirit of prophecy is the kind that appeals to the *yets'er ha-rah* (the evil inclination) that is built-in to all humans. And this evil inclination of the false prophets is being intentionally and divinely energized so that God's death sentence can be carried out on King *Achav*.

Second is that it's almost as if *Achav* is committing suicide. He is on the one hand unknowingly being lured into this battle, but on the other he has been specifically and publically warned that if he pursues this course of action it will result in his death. Yet he chooses to ignore the warning and go to battle. *Mikhayahu's* parable could have been equally applied hundreds of years earlier to the Pharaoh of Egypt who had refused to let God's people go until his country was decimated. And even though calamity upon calamity befell Pharaoh, and his own advisors told him NOT to keep fighting the God of the Hebrews, at times God sent a deceiving spirit to the Pharaoh that hardened his resolve. But now the Pharaoh hardened his own evil inclination, chased down the fleeing Israelites, and the end result for Pharaoh was similar to *Achav's*.

Thus in this situation, while the evil inclination of *King Achav* and his lying prophets had been stimulated by a spirit of deception, *Micaiah's yetser ha-tov* (good inclination) was stimulated by a Holy Spirit, and thus he told the truth; he delivered God's Word accurately even under severe threat of personal harm or execution.

So in verse 24 Zedekiah, leader of the false prophets, is enraged at being told that he has but pronounced the lies of an evil deceiving spirit; essentially used as a dupe to draw King *Achav* to the just sentence of death that the Lord pronounced upon him back in chapter 20 verse 42. The slap on the face was meant to shame *Mikhayahu*; such a slap in public often brought about an ensuing murder because in the honor-shame based society that all of the Middle East was (and mostly still is), one of the few ways available to get one's honor back is to the kill the one who shamed them. Interestingly Zedekiah's argument was one of belittling and discrediting *Micaiah* by saying that his own powers of prophecy were superior. Thus the slap on the cheek was to humiliate and put *Micaiah* in a position of being seen as an inferior prophet to Zedekiah.

But Zedekiah's action was of itself an indictment of his character and indication of his falseness. It shows that indeed that the source of his words and deeds was his evil inclination. In its plainest sense of these passages Zedekiah was a deluded charlatan. *Mikhayahu's* response was to tell *Tzidkiyah* that soon he would be running and hiding; meaning that because prophets who are wrong in their prophesies are killed (this is so even among pagans) and it wouldn't be long until that was Zedekiah's fate.

Both Kings *Achav* and *Y'hoshafat* were witnessing all that happened and the infuriated King *Achav* ordered *Mikhayahu* back to his prison cell to be treated severely and to be fed only bread and water and a bare minimum of that. But the old prophet's response was to state the truth; to state what the Torah states: if the king comes back alive (he returns from Ramot-Gilead in shalom like the rest of his men are going to) then it is *Mikhayahu* who has not heard from God and is the false prophet.

Let me rub a bit of salt into a wound that I have opened up on a number of occasions in Torah Class. I want to dwell on it a little because it is something that runs rampant among modern Christians and it is a matter of spiritual well being and harmony with God. For some reason a few well-meaning people who become properly enamored with God's Word tend to get carried away and think they are now the bearers of God's divine oracle. Over and over they make startling pronouncements (sometimes very pleasant and welcome) of coming events, claiming to have special divine knowledge that has been divulged only to them. They will tell of people who will do certain things, predict calamities and are quite fond of telling others that the Lord has given them something to tell you. Only when some time has passed and you look back, the overwhelming majority of these prophesied events and calamities never take place. But this fact never seems to deter those who consider themselves as prophets; they'll just keep doing it.

And have you ever noticed that the true prophets of the Bible never seem to have very happy lives? They invariably become outcasts or die terrible deaths because what God usually has to say through them is not, "Just wanted to tell you all that you're doing a swell job.....keep it up!" Rather it is almost always to harshly chastise and warn of the people's or the king's wicked ways and of God's displeasure with it and what He's about to do about it. Things people don't want to hear; things that people vehemently deny and naturally get exceedingly mad at the messenger. So I can tell you that I have NO interest in being a prophet and for the life of me don't know why anyone would want to be a prophet.

I tell you this not to embarrass or condemn, but rather to caution of the great danger you put yourself in (if this describes you). Are there true prophets today? Yes, I think there must be (although I've never personally met one). The Biblical definition of a true prophet is one who actually hears from God and thus it is inherently impossible for them to ever be wrong (whether in substance or in timing). The Biblical definition of a false prophet is well portrayed in *Mikhayahu's* vision/parable that says a spirit of deception is put into the mouth of a false prophet, not an enlightened word from the Lord. A false prophet is a self-declared prophet, not one who was chosen by the Lord. And we all are aware that the Biblical penalty for daring to be a false prophet is death. How do we tell the difference between a true and a false prophet?

Deut. 18:21-22 CJB

***21 You may be wondering, 'How are we to know if a word has not been spoken by ADONAI?'***

***22 When a prophet speaks in the name of ADONAI, and the prediction does not come true- that is, the word is not fulfilled- then ADONAI did not speak that word. The prophet who said it spoke presumptuously; you have nothing to fear from him.***

Have you ever prophesied a word to someone and claimed that it's from God? Do you have the courage of conviction to say, as did Micaiah, that if what you say doesn't happen then you are NOT a prophet of God? Did your prophecy come true precisely as you spoke it? If not then you were acting as a false prophet even though that was probably not your conscious intent. In fact, the Rabbis are near unanimous in saying that the Zedekiah of our story was convinced in his mind that he WAS a true prophet of God. He didn't think he was telling a falsehood when he told King *Achav*

that he would be victorious in battle, he completely believed it. As the parable says, he believed the lie of a false spirit and so was, himself, completely taken in. But the Lord doesn't do that to his true anointed prophets; only to those self-appointed ones who, no matter their sincere attempt to do good, never had the divine authority of a prophet in the first place.

Despite all they saw and heard *Achav* and *Y'hoshafat* took their armies to Ramot-Gilead and attacked. But *Achav*, that double-minded coward, wasn't completely deaf so he decided that just to hedge his bets he'd wear a disguise when they began the fighting so that they enemy didn't know he was Israel's King. But, he also advised Jehoshaphat to go ahead and show up in his royal robes! Hard to believe that the King of Judah couldn't see that he was being set-up as living decoy by *Achav*. It seems that the Syrian army had a standing order when they went into battle to make a bee-line towards the enemy's King and take all measures necessary to kill him as soon as possible. It was typical in that era that when the king was killed in the battle the army got scared and scattered. *Achav* knew of the tactic; Jehoshaphat knew it. So why Jehoshaphat ever agreed to be a visible target while *Achav* blended in with the troops is hard to fathom except that he may have taken *Mikayahu's* prophecy to heart that if any king would be killed that day, it would be King *Achav*.

And sure enough verse 32 has the Syrian chariot commanders spot King *Y'hoshafat*, assume that he was the King of Israel, and chase after him. No doubt because only a few months earlier they had been allies with *Achav* and Israel in a war against Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, the Syrian chariot commanders recognized right away as they closed in for the kill that the one wearing the royal robes was NOT *Achav*, so they pulled off and continued their hunt for the real king of Israel.

But God's providence is never denied. As *Achav* was riding around in disguise in his chariot a nameless Syrian soldier shot an arrow at random towards the crowded battlefield and it struck the only unprotected spot not covered by King *Achav's* armor. He was mortally wounded. The rest of the story is gruesome to be sure. As the king's life blood uncontrollably leaked from his body all over the now slippery chariot floor, and as he grew weaker and weaker, his chariot driver literally tied him up to the front of the chariot so that the Israelite troops could see him and think he was still able to fight and lead. The driver well understood that if the soldiers knew he was dead or dying, they would lose their courage and flee towards home.

All battles ended at sundown, because no one could see to fight in the dark. So as night fell, the word spread through the ranks to run for home; the king was dead. *Mikayahu's* prophecy came true exactly as he foretold it; Zedekiah and his 400 prophets were outed as the false prophets that they were.

When the Israelites brought his corpse back to Samaria, the king was given a proper burial. But in a sign of the filth and abomination that God viewed *Achav* as being, his chariot was cleansed of its blood at the place where the whores of Israel bathed. The wild dogs came to lick at the king's gore that had been washed off of the royal chariot. And all this was also a prophetic fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy that although *Achav* was to die and have his body thrown into Navot's vineyard, God would be merciful and instead have this happen to *Achav's* son (1<sup>st</sup> Kings 21:19 and

21:29). In other words, *Achav* would die but he would receive an honorable burial; in some later years his son would also die but he would not be so fortunate as to have a respectful burial. Instead he would be dumped unceremoniously into *Navot's* former vineyard to be eaten by scavengers.

Verse 39 begins to wrap things up for this era of the Kings and so the last several verses are for housekeeping purposes to tie up some loose ends. We're reminded that much more than is recorded here about King *Achav* is written down in the long lost Annals of the Kings of Israel. And that his son *Achazyah* was his successor.

As is typical of the book of Kings, King Jehoshaphat of Judah is now listed and this is so his reign can be put into synchronization with the reigns of the Kings of Israel. And we find that Jehoshaphat began his reign (or more likely co-reign with his father *Asa*) in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of King *Achav's* reign. Let me pause to say that it was quite typical for a king to name his successor some years before he died; and once he did that, there was a sort of co-regency occurring in which both men were considered as kings. Of course the father was senior and carried the most authority for as long as he was able. We even saw this with David and Solomon. So when we look at a chart of when it is said that person became king, and who he took over from, often time the numbers don't seem to make sense. But that is because as often as not there was an overlap as a king and his son ruled simultaneously for anywhere from a few months to a few years.

We are given further information that *Y'hoshafat* was 35 years old when he assumed the throne and that he ruled for 25 years; he is praised here and in the book of Chronicles as a righteous king. Even so he was only 60 years old when he died. Not terrible, but not a long life span usually ascribed to a leader who led with great piety. He is given the accolade that he lived in the manner of his father *Asa* who followed in the ways of the Lord. He is given one particular black mark in that he also continued to allow the existence and use of personal *bamah*, high places, in his kingdom of Judah. This is referring to shrines and altars of sacrifice. But the reason that this wasn't considered as too terribly serious is that these were *bamah* to worship Yehoveh; these weren't pagan altars to bow down to pagan gods. Yet, these were not authorized altars of sacrifice as the Jerusalem Temple was the only place where sacrifice to Yehoveh was to occur, and the Temple at this time was in full operation. Even so this black mark is balanced out in that he rid the kingdom of cult prostitutes that his father King *Asa* had allowed to continue to operate.

We're also given the information that at the beginning of Jehoshaphat's reign, there was no king in the neighboring kingdom of Edom. That is because at this time Edom was a vassal state operating under the authority of Judah, and King *Asa* had assigned a prefect or governor over Edom. But at some point Jehoshaphat decided to allow Edom to have a king (no doubt an Edomite), probably to quell some growing dissatisfaction of the Edomite people of being ruled by a Judahite. This information is included because it affects what we learn next.

Jehoshaphat had entered into some kind of joint seafaring venture with King *Achav's* son *Achazyah* (obviously some years after *Achav's* death at Ramot-Gilead). The goal was to build and sail some large Tarshish-class ships. This ship building venture took place in Edom, on the shore of what is called today the Gulf of Aqaba. It is very near the modern Israeli port city of Eilat. This merely proves that there had been an extended period of peace and alliance between *Achav* and Jehoshaphat quite some time before the ill-fated attack of Ramot-Gilead and it continued well after *Achav's* death. But what is missing from this account is that *Achazyah* was every bit as evil as his parents, and

God was very unhappy with *Y'hoshafat* for collaborating with such wicked people (even though they were fellow Israelites). We find this in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles:

2Chronicles 20:35-37 CJB

***35 It was after this that Y'hoshafat joined up with Achazyah king of Isra'el, who was acting very wickedly.***

***36 He joined together with him to build large ships capable of going to Tarshish; they made the ships in 'Etzyon-Gever.***

***37 Then Eli'ezer the son of Dodavahu from Mareshah prophesied against Y'hoshafat: "Because you joined yourself with Achazyah, ADONAI is wrecking your project." And the ships were wrecked, so that they couldn't go to Tarshish.***

Interestingly, after the Tarshish ships were destroyed *Achazyah* approached Jehoshaphat for another and different joint venture involving ships, and it was that *Achazyah* would supply sailors to help man whatever ships Jehoshaphat already had before the Tarshish ship disaster. What advantage that might be to Jehoshaphat is not recorded, but what we do see is that he declined the offer. The Rabbis say that it was because he took to heart the Word from the Lord that the prophet *Eli'ezer* had pronounced and knew he should no longer associate economically with the king of the northern kingdom.

After *Y'hoshafat* died, his son *Y'horam* succeeded him.

In another effort at synchronization, we are told that *Achazyah* (son of *Achav*) become King of Israel in the 17<sup>th</sup> year of Jehoshaphat's reign. But *Achazyah* was very evil and he ruled only 2 years before his accidental death. He is described as having lived the way all of the kings of Israel had since Jeroboam; that is they all did what was evil in God's eyes. And as the leader of Israel he led his people into sin, and thus God's anger, by worshipping and serving Ba'al (his mother's god).

And so the stage is set for the next round of Kings of Israel and of Judah. But what we're going to find is that there will be only a few more kings of Israel before God finally acts on a national basis and allows the king of Assyria to overrun the northern kingdom and send them into exile all over the Asian continent. It is from this event that will eventually come the legend of the 10 lost tribes of Israel. However Judah will survive for almost 150 years after Israel is gone, and so will have a longer continuous list of kings of Judah.

**This ends the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings.**