

1 Kings Chapter 22

Verses 1-3: Probably the Battle of Qarqar, in which the Assyrians fought the Aramaeans and the Israelites, had kept Ahab from occupying “Ramoth in Gilead” after the previous Aramean battles. With the Assyrian threat minimized for the present, the old antagonism (Chapter 20), between ben-hadad and Ahab quickly resurfaced. Possession of Ramoth-gilead was the key to controlling the plain of Jezreel.

1 Kings 22:1 "And they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel."

“Three years”: Israel had peace for 3 years following the two years of war with Syria described (in 20:1-34). During this peace, Ben-hadad, Ahab and 10 other kings formed a coalition to repel an Assyrian invasion. Assyrian records described the major battle fought at Qarqar on the Orontes River in 853 B.C. Though Assyria claimed victory, later events show that they were stopped from further advance southward at that time. With the Assyrian threat neutralized, Ahab turned his attention to the unfinished conflict with Syria.

This peaceful time began immediately after the second war with Ben-hadad.

1 Kings 22:2 And it came to pass in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel.

“Jehoshaphat”: The king of Judah, ca 873-848, whose reign is described (in verse 41-50; see notes on 2 Chron. 17:1 - 21:3).

Jehoshaphat was a good king. There had not been good relations between Israel and Judah, since the breakup of the twelve tribes into Judah and Israel. Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, had married the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel though. We know from that, there was some communication between the two. Now we see the king of Judah coming to meet with the king of Israel. One sure thing was that Syria was their mutual enemy.

1 Kings 22:3 "And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead [is] ours, and we [be] still, [and] take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?"

“Ramoth in Gilead”: Ramoth-gilead was a Levitical city east of the Jordan River in Gilead, on the north border of Gad the home of Jephthah (Judges 11:34), and a key administrative center in Solomon’s kingdom (4:13). It seems to have been one of the cities that Ben-hadad should have returned to Israel (20:34).

The king of Israel that Jehoshaphat went to see was Ahab. We find from this, that Ben-hadad had not kept his word. He was still holding Ramoth of Gilead which he had promised to give to Israel. We see that Ahab does not have confidence that his troops alone, without the help of God, could take the city back. He not only wants the troops of Judah to help him, but Judah's God.

1 Kings 22:4 "And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I [am] as thou [art], my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses."

"Jehoshaphat" of Judah was now legally related to Ahab through the marriage of his son Jehoram (2 Kings 8:18, 27), to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel accordingly, Ahab's disputes now became family affairs for all Israel.

He could have answered no, but he probably did not like Syria holding a town so close to his own territory. Jehoshaphat jumps in quickly by saying, that what is his is also Ahab's.

1 Kings 22:5 "And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD today."

"Inquire ... at the word of the Lord": Jehoshaphat was willing to help Ahab fight Syria (verse 4), but reminded Ahab of the need to seek the will of the Lord before going into battle (1 Sam. 23:1-5, 9-13; 2 Sam. 2:1; 5:19-25; 2 Kings 3:11-20).

It is interesting that Jehoshaphat waited to call the prophets in, until after he had promised to help Ahab. Why did Jehoshaphat not ask his prophets? It is a credit to Jehoshaphat that he wanted to inquire of the Word of the LORD.

Verses 6-7: Ahab's "four hundred" prophets were prophets of Asherah (18:19), and they gave the king a unanimous green light to go to war. But Jehoshaphat wanted a "prophet of the Lord." Perhaps he sensed that Ahab's prophets had a lying spirit (22:23).

These "four hundred prophets" were doubtless proponents of the false state religion first instituted by Jeroboam I. Only "Micaiah" appears as a true "prophet of the lord".

1 Kings 22:6 "Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver [it] into the hand of the king."

"Prophets": These 400 prophets of Ahab were not true prophets of the Lord. They worshiped at Bethel in the golden-calf center set up by Jeroboam (12:28-29), and were supported by Ahab, whose religious policy also permitted Baal worship. Their words were designed to please Ahab (verse 8), so they refused to begin with the authoritative "thus says the Lord" and did not use the covenant name for Israel's God, "Lord."

These 400 prophets could have been the prophets of Astarte, but I would assume these are prophets of the LORD even if they had been the ones who practiced calf worship mingled with worship of God.

1 Kings 22:7 "And Jehoshaphat said, [Is there] not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might inquire of him?"

“A prophet of the Lord”: Jehoshaphat recognized that the 400 prophets were not true prophets of the Lord, and wished to hear from a true prophet.

Jehoshaphat for some reason, did not trust the 400 prophets. He senses that these prophets are not in good standing with God.

1 Kings 22:8 "And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, [There is] yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so."

Ahab did not like the prophet “Micaiah” because he would not conform to the king’s expectations. The parallel account of these events is in (2 Chron. 18:8-27).

“Micaiah”: His name means “Who is like the lord?”

There are several things we must see in this. Jehoshaphat did not trust the message of the 400 prophets. Ahab hated Micaiah. Micaiah was a prophet who told the truth, and he had nothing good to say about Ahab.

1 Kings 22:9 "Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Hasten [hither] Micaiah the son of Imlah."

A eunuch, as the word is sometimes used, one of the pages.

"And said, hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah”: Who, as it seems from (1 Kings 22:26), was in prison, where perhaps Ahab had cast him for his last prophecy to him, and where he had lain ever since. And this gives a reason why he could so readily send for him, knowing where he was.

Ahab felt he needed the help of Jehoshaphat so badly, that he would chance a bad report from him. He sends for him to come to the palace.

1 Kings 22:10 "And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them."

In great state and majesty.

“Throne”: A portable, high-backed chair made of wood with arm rests and separate foot stool.

"Having put on their robes”: Their royal robes, which they wore when they appeared in pomp and grandeur.

"In a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria": Where courts of judicature were held, and there was an open void space for the people to assemble in to hear. The word has the signification of a corn floor, and the Jews suppose they and their attendants sat in a semicircle like the half of a corn floor, after the same manner in which they say the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem sat.

"And all the prophets prophesied before them": Concerning this affair of going to Ramoth-gilead.

These were their robes of authority as kings of their people. It is interesting that Jehoshaphat sat on his own throne. It was possibly a portable throne, carried with him for just such an occasion. The 400 prophesied even as they sent for Micaiah.

1 Kings 22:11 "And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the LORD, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them."

"Zedekiah": He was the spokesman for the false prophets. In contrast (to verse 6), he used the introductory formula and God's covenant name.

The "horns of iron" was a familiar symbol of strong victory. It is found not only in the Scriptures (Dan. 8:7; Micah 4:13; Zech. 1:18-19), but also in the inscriptions and art of the ancient Near East.

"Zedekiah" means "Justice of Jehovah". The name lets us know that these were not prophets of Astarte. "Horns" denote power. The fact they were made of iron, means they are almost unbreakable.

1 Kings 22:12 "And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver [it] into the king's hand."

Saying, go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper": All encouraged the king to go up against this place, and prophesied of victory, as Zedekiah did.

"For the Lord shall deliver it into the king's hand": (see 1 Kings 22:6).

It seems all 400 prophets agreed that they should attack Syria and take Ramoth-gilead. They are promising the blessings of the LORD on the army of Israel and the army of Judah.

1 Kings 22:13 "And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets [declare] good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak [that which is] good."

By the way, as they came along together, as Josephus observes.

"Behold, now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth": They are unanimous that he shall prosper in his undertaking against the Syrians.

"Let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good": Which, as an ignorant man, he might advise from good will to the prophet, that he might not be branded with singularity, and a spirit of contradiction. And that he might have the favor of the king, and be released from prison, pitying his miserable condition in which he found him.

Not only had Ahab sent for him to come and prophesy, but the messenger is trying to tell Micaiah what to say. He would not be a true prophet, if he prophesied what the king wanted to hear. He would have to speak the Words the LORD put into his mouth.

1 Kings 22:14 "And Micaiah said, [As] the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak."

He swore by the living God, for the confirmation of what he was about to say.

"What the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak": Truly and faithfully, keeping nothing back, nor adding anything, whether it be good or evil, pleasing or displeasing. It looks as if as yet he had no instruction from the Lord what to say, and yet the vision he later declares seems to have been had by him before (1 Kings 22:17).

Micaiah would go, but he would say exactly what God tells him to say.

1 Kings 22:15 "So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver [it] into the hand of the king."

"Micaiah" apparently gave to the "king" the words that he wanted. However, the sarcastic tone of his voice was clearly recognizable, and Ahab demanded that he speak what he really believed (verse 16).

"Go, and prosper": Micaiah sarcastically repeated the message of the false prophets as he had been encouraged to do (verse 13). Ahab clearly sensed the sarcasm and demanded that Micaiah tell him the truth.

The king asked the same question of Micaiah that he did of the other prophets, and got the same answer the other prophets had given. So far it seems there is no reason why the kings should not proceed.

1 Kings 22:16 "And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but [that which is] true in the name of the LORD?"

Not that he had as yet adjured him at all, or not till now; but he asks him how often he must be obliged to do it. And now he adjures him once for all, that he might not be forced to repeat it.

"That thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?" For he observed he did not speak in the name of the Lord before, and what he said was not in a serious but ludicrous manner, and not to be regarded as truth.

This is the reply the king gives to Micaiah. He wants the absolute truth from the LORD.

1 Kings 22:17 "And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace."

“Sheep that have not a shepherd”: The image of the king as a shepherd and his people as the sheep was a familiar one (Num. 27:16-17; Zech. 13:7). Micaiah’s point was that Israel’s shepherd, King Ahab, would be killed and his army scattered.

This parabolic vision depicts the shepherdless Israelite forces trying to find their way home after being defeated in the battle.

Micaiah had not given this part of the prophecy, until he was pressed by King Ahab. Now he speaks that the soldiers who were sent to battle will live, but the king will die and leave them with no leader. They will return to their homes because they have no leader.

1 Kings 22:18 "And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?"

Plainly perceiving that the prophet foretold that he should fall in battle.

"Did not I tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?" Intimating that this proceeded from spite and malice, from ill will to him and hatred of him, and was not from the Lord, and therefore not to be regarded. He had told him three years ago his life should go for letting Ben-hadad go; but it had not proved true, and no more would this. And Jehoshaphat being an easy man, and too credulous, believed what Ahab said of the character of this prophet, or otherwise it is not to be accounted for that he should go with him to war after such a declaration made.

The king of Israel these verses keep referring to is speaking of Ahab. Ahab knew that he had displeased God. He could expect nothing more than what the prophet had said if he is a true prophet.

Verses 19-23: These verses contain a second parabolic vision dramatizing Ahab’s sure defeat and death at “Ramoth-gilead.”

1 Kings 22:19 "And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left."

Since he had represented what he had said as proceeding from hatred to him, he would make it clear and plain that what he had said was the word of the Lord, and according to his mind. And that what the other prophets had said was owing to a lying spirit in them, which the Lord suffered for his ruin. All which are represented as in a vision, in which things are brought down to the capacities of men, and not as really transacted.

"I saw the Lord sitting on his throne": So it was represented to his mind, as if he had seen with his bodily eyes the divine Being in a glorious form, as a king sitting on his throne, to do justice and judgment. As Ahab and Jehoshaphat were now sitting on their thrones, only as a far greater King, even the King of kings, and in a more splendid manner.

"And all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left": The ministering angels ready to do his will.

This is Micaiah speaking on. He says let me tell you even more. This is a statement from the prophet, that it is truly the LORD who is the King of all the earth and the heavens. It is His will that is done. Those standing around Him are subject to do whatever He wishes.

1 Kings 22:20 "And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner."

Not that it can be supposed that the Lord entered into a consultation with the angels upon this subject; only that it was the decree of God that he should go thither, and fall by the hand of the man whom he had let go, as a just punishment of him.

"And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner": Not that there was such an altercation among them; it only signifies, that there are various ways and means, by which the purposes and decrees of God may be and are brought about.

1 Kings 22:21 "And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him."

Not from the heavenly host on the right hand or the left, for they are pure and holy spirits, and impeccable, and cannot lie or deceive. But the evil spirit, Satan, the father of lies, the old deceiver, who came forth from his own place and his own company.

"And stood before the Lord presented himself before him" (as Satan did, Job 1:6).

"And said, I will persuade him": Or prevail upon him; evil spirits love to be employed in doing harm to men, they go about seeking whom they may devour. This could not be the spirit of Naboth, as the Jews say, seeking revenge on Ahab; that was in a state of happiness, could not move from thence, and be capable of sinning.

This is the vision that Micaiah had of what goes on in the heavenlies. The LORD dispatches a spirit to go, and persuade Ahab to go to the battle at Ramoth-gilead and fall there.

1 Kings 22:22 "And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade [him], and prevail also: go forth, and do so."

“A lying spirit”: This must be Satan, whom the Lord allowed to speak through 400 demons who indwelt the 400 false prophets.

1 Kings 22:23 "Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee."

That is, suffered the lying spirit to suggest a lie to them, and sent them strong delusions to believe that lie, whose minds were disposed at any rate to flatter Ahab, to whom they told it. Which was the way designed to bring him to the ruin appointed for him.

"And the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee”: He had decreed it in himself, declared it by Micaiah his prophet, and suffered all those steps to be taken by Satan and the false prophets, to bring him to it.

In a sense, he is accusing the 400 prophets, first brought before Ahab to be lying. He explains that the LORD, Himself sent the lying spirit to deceive even the prophets. They have given the message sent from the throne of the LORD, but it is placed in their mouths by the lying prophet.

1 Kings 22:24 "But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee?"

“Smote ... on the cheek”: This was a rebuke by the leader of the false prophets (verse 6), for the perceived insolence of Micaiah and his claim to truly speak for God. It was followed by a sarcastic question asking if the prophet could tell which direction the spirit in Zedekiah had gone.

Now Zedekiah is accusing Micaiah of lying. He strikes him on the face, to show his disgust for his prophecy.

1 Kings 22:25 "And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself."

Who would accompany Ahab to the battle, and upon his being wounded, flee to the first place of secrecy for safety. Or, upon the news of his defeat brought to Samaria, would betake himself to a private chamber for security, fearing the enemy would pursue to the very place. Or else through fear of the populace, who would attribute the death of the king to the advice of him and the other prophets.

This is a true statement. Time will prove which of the prophets are telling the truth. Zedekiah will hide in an inner chamber when he discovers that Micaiah's prophecy is true.

1 Kings 22:26 "And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son;"

To some of his officers.

"Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city": The chief magistrate under the king; a sort of sheriff, who had the care of malefactors, and of all committed to prison, from whom he was received by the messenger, and now sent back to him.

"And to Joash the king's son": Who might be over his household, as sometimes the king's son was (2 Chron. 26:21). Or might be viceroy while the king was without the city, and at the gate of it, and about to go to war.

1 Kings 22:27 "And say, Thus saith the king, Put this [fellow] in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace."

In the common prison of the city, where he had been before, as it seems; and might be now ordered into a more confined place in it, and what might be called "little ease".

"And feed him with bread of affliction, and with water of affliction": With bad bread and foul water, and but little of either; just enough to keep alive, and to continue starving.

"Until I come in peace": Which he seemed confident of, and intimates that then he would punish him more severely, even with death, as a false prophet.

1 Kings 22:28 "And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you."

"If thou return": In accordance with (Deut. 18:21-22); Micaiah declared to Ahab that if he lived to return from the battle, then he had uttered a false prophecy.

A prophet had a rough life if he told the truth. Many times, the message for the king was not what he wanted to hear and he punished the prophet. In this particular case, they put him in prison and gave him nothing but bread and water. Ahab had believed a lie, and would go to war. He believes he will come back successful, so he says, "until I come in peace". If Ahab returns, Micaiah is a false prophet.

1 Kings Chapter 22 Questions

1. How long does verse 1 say that Israel and Syria continued without war?
2. When had this peaceful time begun?
3. What kind of king was Jehoshaphat?
4. Who had married the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel?
5. Who did the king of Judah go to see?

6. What city did Syria still have, that was to have been Israel's?
7. What did Ahab ask Jehoshaphat to help him do?
8. How did Jehoshaphat answer him?
9. What did he ask the king of Israel to do?
10. How many prophets came?
11. Was Jehoshaphat satisfied with their prophecy?
12. Who was the lone prophet sent for next?
13. Why had Ahab not called him with the first group?
14. Where did the kings receive the prophets' messages?
15. Which prophet made the horns of iron?
16. What does "Zedekiah" mean?
17. What did all the prophets tell the kings to do?
18. What did the messenger to Micaiah try to get him to agree to do?
19. What was his response?
20. What vision did Micaiah have of heaven?
21. Who sent the lying spirit?
22. What did Zedekiah do to Micaiah, after he told his vision?
23. What did Ahab have done to Micaiah?
24. If a prophet told the truth, he had a _____ life.
25. If Ahab returns, Micaiah is a _____ prophet.