



THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 9: JEHOVAH JUDGES HIS PEOPLE (1KINGS 22)

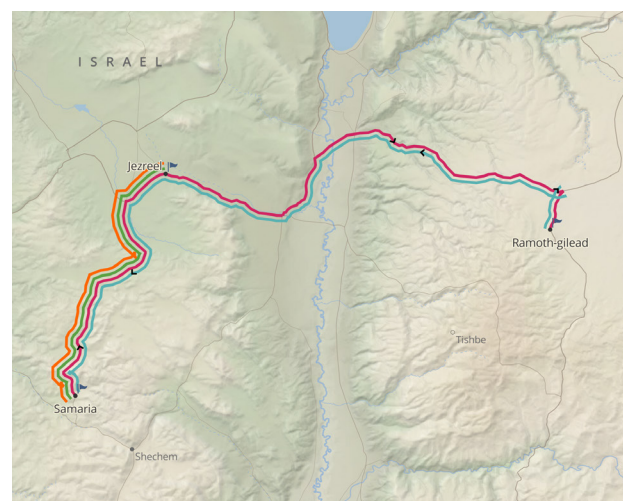
In foreseeing the day when His people would request a king to rule over them, the Lord gave a series of instructions to Israel's future rulers. Those instructions culminated with the command for the king to write a copy of the law and to "read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel." (Deuteronomy 17.19-20). Tragically, most of Israel's kings would not be faithful to Jehovah's commandments, thus their descendants would not rule long over Israel. This was true of...

- Saul (1Samuel 13.13-14)
- Solomon (his descendants would continue to reign, but part of the kingdom was taken away, 1Kings 11.11-13)
- Jeroboam (1Kings 14.10-11)
- Baasha (1Kings 16.2-4)

In our past few studies we've noted how God's judgment was impending for Ahab and his house. As Elijah prophesied, the Lord would "bring evil upon you, and will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, both bond and free in Israel; and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and because you have made Israel sin. Of Jezebel also has the Lord spoken, saying, 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel.' The one belonging to Ahab, who dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and the one who dies in the field the birds of heaven will eat." (1Kings 21.21-24). In this lesson and the next we will see how God's judgment came upon Ahab and would ultimately come upon all Israel.

NOTES FROM THE TEXT:

- Vs. 1, "It is generally assumed that the reason their alliance remained strong was because of the threat of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III who was making his way westward. He finally posed a threat to southern Aram in 853, where he was met by a coalition of twelve western nations at the Battle of Qarqar. Shalmaneser lists Ahab of Israel and Hadadezer of Damascus as two of the most significant parties in the alliance which was led by Iarhuleni of Hamath. Qarqar is on the Orontes River about 150 miles north of Damascus, but only



25 miles north of Hamath. Though Shalmaneser claims victory, study of subsequent history suggests that the western coalition succeeded in their major objective. It was not until ten or twelve years later, after the confederacy had eroded, that Shalmaneser finally shows any indication of control in the region. It is most likely the general success against Shalmaneser that gave Ahab the confidence to take military action against the Arameans and try to regain Ramoth Gilead." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)

- Vs. 2, note that Jehoshaphat was allied with Ahab by marriage (2Chronicles 18.1), having taken the daughter of Ahab, Athaliah, to be the wife of his son Jehoram (2Chronicles 21.6).
- Vs. 3
 - » Note 1Kings 20.34. Ben-hadad had not been faithful to his promise.
 - » "Ramoth Gilead (Tell Ramith, thirty-six miles north of Amman, Jordan) was occupied by Israelites when they arrived in Transjordan. It was an all-important city on the Transjordanian highway that connected Arabia and Aram. From this site a convenient ridge descended to the Jordan Valley and over to Jezreel and Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley. The Aramean conquest of the city represents yet another volley in their trade war with Israel and shows that the treaty of Aphek did not last very long at all." (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 6, likely that these false prophets based their prophecies on Ahab's past victories (see 1Kings 20.13,28).
- Vs. 8
 - » Micaiah means "who is like Yahweh?"
 - » Possible that he was the prophet who rebuked Ahab in 1Kings 20.42.
- Vss. 11-12, note that Zedekiah and the other prophets claimed to speak for Jehovah (the LORD).
- Vs. 17, "like sheep which have no shepherd" depicts a lack of leadership that results in ruin (see Numbers 27.16-17; Zech. 13.7; Matthew 9.36; 26.31). It could be argued that Israel was already without a shepherd in that they were not following their true Shepherd (cf. Psalm 23).
- Vss. 19-23, this passage is admittedly difficult as on the surface it would seem to contradict such passages as James 1.13.
 - » These considerations from the New American Commentary may be helpful:
 - * First, Micaiah clearly shapes his account of the lying spirit as a denunciation of the four hundred prophets. These are not faithful and sincere prophets of the Lord but court prophets on the king's payroll who live to please him. They are in striking contrast to the prophets of the Lord mentioned in 1 Kgs 18:1-15 who must be hidden to survive. Israel has "no master," and Ahab has only lying prophets. Micaiah's words are certainly taken as an insult by Zedekiah and Ahab.
 - * Second, it is difficult to call the Lord a liar in the story when he announces before Ahab goes to battle that a lying spirit has been placed in the prophets' mouths. God warns the king through Micaiah not to listen to these prophets, but "he let himself be deceived to fight against Ramoth, he was killed in action in spite of the precautions he took, and lost the city to the Arameans." Ahab should have known from past experience that the solitary prophet may well speak for God.
 - * Third, as in earlier difficult passages in the former prophets (e.g., 1 Sam 16:13-14;

2 Sam 24:1–17) this text focuses on God's sovereignty. Nothing escapes the Lord's notice, and no one operates outside of the Lord's jurisdiction.

- » Also, it may be that this imagery is chosen as it fits the religious traditions that Ahab favored: "These images fit comfortably within the religious traditions of the Egypt, Syrian, and Mesopotamia, where the gods are seen as sitting in their heavenly council before the throne of El." (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary).
 - » Finally, consider this from James Smith: "Prophetic visions are anthropomorphic. They do not always correspond to reality. Such visions are the vehicle used to convey a cardinal truth to the mind of the prophet. In this case the truth is that Ahab's death in battle had been foreordained in the counsels of God, and that divine wisdom had devised a means for accomplishing this goal... Ahab wished to be guided by false prophets. The justice of God permitted him to be so guided.
 - » My conclusion: As James Smith points out, not everything from a vision is to be taken as concrete reality. Consider the visions of the Lord in heaven found in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4-5. Are we to conclude this is actually what heaven is like, or are we to understand fundamental truths of God's glory and majesty? I believe it is the former. In the prophecy here, the point is that the Lord had already determined that Ahab and his house would be destroyed (see 1 Kings 21:21-24). God was going to bring that to pass and allowed Ahab to be deceived by his own prophets, something Ahab was more than complicit in! Even upon hearing Micaiah's vision, Ahab is still unwilling to relent! He has chosen his path and his counselors; he will believe a lie and not Jehovah.
- Vs. 34, note again that the Lord had judged Ahab, there was no escaping His justice!
 - Vs. 38, a partial fulfillment of 1 Kings 21:21-24.

TAKEAWAYS:

1. **God will give us over.** We've already spent some time considering Micaiah's vision in vss. 19-23. Consider now some of Ahab's actions as they relate to this vision. First, he consulted numerous prophets, but excluded Micaiah because "I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." (vs. 8). Second, he refused to believe the vision and even punished Micaiah for his prophecy (vss. 26-27). Finally, Ahab tried to insure that the vision would not come true by disguising himself (vs. 30). But it was all for naught, Ahab would die and the Lord's judgment would come to pass! I cannot help but think that what Paul said was true of the Gentile world, that God gave them over (Romans 1:24,26,28) was also true of Ahab and can be true of us. His truths are plain and are available for us to understand and follow. However, we can believe the lies of this world and tragically, He will give us over.
2. **Free will and the Lord's will.** Finally, I think vs. 34 makes an interesting point about free will and the Lord's will. None of the participants in this story are forced to take any of the actions they take (in fact, the Lord tries to discourage Ahab from taking these disastrous actions), but they happen nonetheless and ultimately bring about the Lord's will. A soldier fires an arrow at random and Ahab dies, bringing about God's justice. That is the greatness of our God, not that He forbids free will, but that He accomplishes His purposes regardless of the actions of men.