

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 John 3:23–4:3a;

Deuteronomy 18:19–22

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 22:1–40

1 KINGS 22:15–23, 26–28

¹⁵ When he arrived, the king asked him, “Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or not?”

“Attack and be victorious,” he answered, “for the LORD will give it into the king’s hand.”

¹⁶ 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?”

¹⁷ Then Micaiah answered, “I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the LORD said, ‘These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.’”

¹⁸ The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Didn’t I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?”

¹⁹ Micaiah continued, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the multitudes of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left. ²⁰ And the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?’

“One suggested this, and another that. ²¹ Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the LORD and said, ‘I will entice him.’

²² “‘By what means?’ the LORD asked.

“‘I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,’ he said.

“‘You will succeed in enticing him,’ said the LORD. ‘Go and do it.’

²³ “So now the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The LORD has decreed disaster for you.”

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²⁶ The king of Israel then ordered, “Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king’s son ²⁷ and say, ‘This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.’”

²⁸ Micaiah declared, “If you ever return safely, the LORD has not spoken through me.” Then he added, “Mark my words, all you people!”



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KEY VERSE

Micaiah said, “As surely as the LORD lives, I can tell him only what the LORD tells me.” —1 Kings 22:14

PROPHETS FAITHFUL TO GOD’S COVENANT

Unit 3: Courageous Prophets of Change

LESSONS 9–13

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the roles of Ahab, Jehoshaphat, and Micaiah.
2. Compare and contrast how each of those three related to God’s truth.
3. Create a plan to pursue and apply God’s knowledge in the week ahead.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Truth Distorted
- B. Lesson Context

- I. A Sarcastic Prophecy (1 Kings 22:15–16)
 - A. Leading Question (v. 15)
“What Do You Want to Hear?”
 - C. Frustrated Retort (v. 16)
- II. A Sincere Prophecy (1 Kings 22:17–23)
 - A. God’s Truth, Part 1 (v. 17)
 - B. King’s Irritation (v. 18)

C. God’s Truth, Part 2 (vv. 19–23)

- III. A Sure Prophecy (1 Kings 22:26–28)
 - A. King’s Fury (vv. 26–27)
Quantity over Quality
 - B. Prophet’s Promise (v. 28)

Conclusion

- A. Truth Displayed
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Ahab	<i>Ay-hab.</i>
Ai	<i>Ay-eye.</i>
Amon	<i>Ay-mun.</i>
Arameans	<i>Ar-uh-me-uns.</i>
Athaliah	<i>Ath-uh-lye-uh.</i>
Israel	<i>Iz-ray-el.</i>
Jehoram	<i>Jeh-ho-rum.</i>
Jehoshaphat	<i>Jeh-hosh-uh-fat.</i>
Joash	<i>Jo-ash.</i>
Josephus	<i>Jo-see-fus.</i>
Micaiah	<i>My-kay-uh.</i>
Naboth	<i>Nay-bawth.</i>
Ramoth Gilead	<i>Ray-muth Gil-ee-ud.</i>

Introduction

A. Truth Distorted

Have you ever sought out counsel that would tell you what you want to hear, rather than truth, so that you could press forward with your own agenda? Herein is an important lesson we can learn from George Washington.

As the first president of the United States, Washington had no precedent to follow when choosing the men who would shape his thinking and the new government. Wisely, Washington chose an eclectic group of people to fill cabinet positions and be his closest advisers. They were from different parts of the country, and they had different views on how the government should operate. Instead of choosing advisers exclusively from his state of Virginia, Washington chose to surround himself with people who had the same ultimate goals in mind. The varied opinions about how to achieve common goals helped President Washington make choices that were more informed and wiser.

Unfortunately, Ahab did not make similar decisions. He surrounded himself with false prophets who told him whatever he wanted to hear. But this lesson focuses on the one prophet who refused to compromise the truth.

B. Lesson Context

The role of the books 1 & 2 Kings is often misunderstood by the modern reader. Because they cover much of the same times and events as 1 & 2 Chronicles, we often read them as retelling the same story, slightly differently. (In fact, today's text has a parallel in [2 Chronicles 18](#).) While there is truth to this, the original readers of 1 & 2 Kings actually associated them with 1 & 2 Samuel; in the Greek version translated before Christ, these four books are known as 1, 2, 3, and 4 Kingdoms. And although it's natural to cate-

gorize these as books of history, we do well to remember that no book of the Bible seeks merely to give us a history lesson. Every book in the Bible intends to tell us something about God.

The Old Testament narratives, 1 & 2 Kings included, were passed down with the intention of revealing truth about the relationship between God and his people. These books were read by the Babylonian exiles, who had many deep and painful questions regarding the benefits of being chosen by God. Jerusalem's destruction and the exile of its people raised questions about God's sovereignty and love.

The books we think of as history address these issues by telling the story of God's people, picking up with the conquest of the promised land in Joshua and ending with the exile in 2 Kings. Collectively, the books tell the story of Israel's persistent rebellions against the terms of the covenant, divine judgment in the form of the curses prescribed in [Deuteronomy 27–28](#), Israel's returns to God, and God's resulting mercy.

[First Kings 22](#) opens by describing a conversation between two kings: Ahab of northern Israel (reigned 874–853 BC) and Jehoshaphat of southern Judah (reigned 873–849 BC). Before launching a joint military initiative, Ahab decided to consult his prophets to learn whether God would give him victory ([1 Kings 22:10](#)). Consulting God (or false gods) before battle was customary (examples: [Judges 20:18](#); [1 Samuel 23:2](#); [Ezekiel 21:21](#)).

Ahab followed this practice, but he

sought divine guidance from about 400 false prophets. These men were charged with discerning God’s will while having no access to him! Their counsel was united: God would grant victory in the expected battle (1 Kings 22:1–6). A favorable

report, delivered from a unified front, would certainly convince the two kings of the veracity of their message!

But King Jehoshaphat was unimpressed by the verdict of the false prophets. Jehoshaphat’s reign was characterized by religious reform and the suppression of idolatry (2 Chronicles 17:3–6). But he found himself in a compromised position because he had entered into a political alliance with the spiritually lapsed northern kingdom. In an attempt to do right, Jehoshaphat asked Ahab if he didn’t have a prophet of the true God who could be consulted. Ahab admitted that Micaiah was such a prophet.

I. A Sarcastic Prophecy (1 KINGS 22:15–16)

A. Leading Question (v. 15)

15. When he arrived, the king asked him, “Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or not?” “Attack and be victorious,” he answered, “for the LORD will give it into the king’s hand.”

Ahab despised *Micaiah* because of the series of negative reports that the prophet had made against the king. The unnamed prophet in 1 Kings 20:35–43 was suggested by both the Talmud and the first-century

Jewish historian Josephus to have been Micaiah. Little else is known about this prophet.

Ramoth Gilead was a city of refuge within the tribe of Gad (Deuteronomy 4:43). It was located on a large plain, making chariot warfare possible (see 1 Kings 22:31–38, not in our printed text). In Ahab’s day, the Arameans held the city (22:3, not in our printed text). In the days of Rome, this people group came to be known as Syrians. Israel had some ethnic relationship to Arameans (see Deuteronomy 26:5), including Bethuel who was Rebekah’s father (Genesis 22:20–23). Despite these ancestral links, the Arameans were often opposed to Israel, either instigating or experiencing warfare with the nation (examples: Judges 3:8, 10; 2 Samuel 8:5–6).

Micaiah surprised *the king*, Ahab, by telling him exactly what he wanted to hear and what the other prophets had already told him. Based on Ahab’s prior characterization of Micaiah (1 Kings 22:8, not in our printed text), we might also be surprised that Micaiah has immediately agreed with the majority of prophets affirming Ahab’s future success (22:13–15).

What Do You Think?

What guardrails can we erect to avoid giving to others counsel that is actually in our own best interests?

Digging Deeper

What should you do if you see this problem in another person?

“WHAT DO YOU WANT TO HEAR?”

I like to ask my mom for her opinion. Generally, I ask her about something small, like which shoes look better. I hear my mom’s opinion and her reasons, but I am very quick to choose the other option. I do this because I already know what I want to hear; I just want someone else to agree with me.

At this point, Mom essentially refuses to give me a real answer. She knows that I will disregard it and do what I want. Can you blame her? After my asking year after year what shoes look best and almost always choosing the other ones, why would she bother giving me her real opinion?

It’s hard to blame Micaiah for his response to Ahab. Much like my mom, Micaiah was exhausted from telling Ahab God’s sovereign truth just to have it ignored in the face of what Ahab wanted to do all along. How often do we ask God for his truth, find it, and promptly choose what we wanted to hear instead of what he said? It’s time to start following God’s truth instead of merely asking for it.

—L. G.

B. Frustrated Retort (v. 16)

16. 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?”

King Ahab interpreted Micaiah’s affirming response as a bald-faced lie, not even

meant to be believed. Ahab’s asking *how many times* implies that Micaiah had fallen into the pattern of sardonically telling the king whatever it was he wanted to hear.

The king ironically demanded that Micaiah fulfill his prophetic duty and only relay God’s word ([Deuteronomy 18:18](#)). But Ahab wasn’t interested in hearing God’s actual will. He only used his prophets to legitimize the plans that were already in his heart (see [1 Kings 22:22](#), below).

II. A Sincere Prophecy

([1 KINGS 22:17–23](#))

A. God’s Truth, Part 1 (v. 17)

17. Then Micaiah answered, “I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the LORD said, ‘These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.’”

Micaiah dropped his act, causing the atmosphere in the room to immediately darken. *Israel* would be thrown into as much disarray as *sheep without a shepherd* (see [1 Kings 22:28](#), below). When they realized they had *no master*, the army would scatter—not haphazardly but *each one* to his *home*. Returning *in peace* might mean that, though leaderless, the army would be better off without their previous master. Or it might simply mean that the fighting would be over for a time.

B. King’s Irritation (v. 18)

18. The king of Israel said to

Jehoshaphat, “Didn’t I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?”

Ahab’s response to Micaiah’s prophecy suggests that the prophet was brought to court more as a jester or curiosity than as a legitimate adviser. Ahab’s heart was so hardened against God that he was able to dismiss Micaiah’s warning as just one more *bad* thing the prophet said about *the king of Israel*.

King Jehoshaphat’s nonreaction is equally disturbing. Jehoshaphat worshipped the God of Israel and took measures to suppress idolatry in his nation (see [Lesson Context](#)). But here he failed to advise the other king to heed the word of the Lord. The northern kingdom enjoyed military prowess during this period of their combined histories. With their allies, Israel held off the encroaching Assyrian Empire. The alliance between Israel and Judah was secured by the marriage of Ahab’s daughter Athaliah to Jehoshaphat’s son Jehoram ([2 Kings 8:16–18](#)). So we see two kings, one idolatrous and one godly, who witnessed the testimony of God’s true prophet and for their own reasons refused to alter their foolhardy plans.

What Do You Think?

What are some proper ways to react to those who expect us to tell them what they *want* to hear rather than what they *need* to hear?

Digging Deeper

How would your response differ, if at all, to someone who is in authority over you rather than the other way

C. God’s Truth, Part 2 (vv. 19–23)

19. Micaiah continued, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the multitudes of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left.

Unlike verse [15](#), here Micaiah uses the *word of the Lord* formula to reveal that what followed came from God, not the prophet’s own mind. *All the multitudes of heaven* may refer to angels (see [Psalms 103:20–21](#); [148:2](#); [Luke 2:13](#)); another possibility is that the phrase refers to the heavenly bodies worshipped as gods by pagan nations (see [Deuteronomy 4:19](#); [2 Kings 17:16](#); [21:3](#); [Jeremiah 19:13](#)). Whether real angels or fictitious deities, the image is that God is the only one *sitting on a throne*. This is a visual image of God’s sovereignty over everything, real or imagined.

20. “And the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?’ “One suggested this, and another that.

This verse makes explicit what was implied in [1 Kings 22:17](#), above: *Ahab* would die on the battlefield. Such a sentence was just since Ahab had followed the ways of his evil queen, Jezebel, and led the northern kingdom into the idolatrous worship of Baal ([1 Kings 16:31–33](#)). Unlike Ahab’s prophets, who all answered the king in unison, God’s court was filled with lots of ideas, giving various plans for how to lure Ahab to his

various plans for how to lure Ahab to his death.

21. “Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the LORD and said, ‘I will entice him.’

From among the council, a volunteer stepped forward and expressed willingness to take up the task of luring King Ahab into battle, and, by extension, to his death. Keeping in mind that court members might be composed of fictitious deities, the exact identity of the *spirit* is less significant than is his depicted role in the unfolding spiritual drama (compare and contrast [Job 1:6–12; 2:1–7](#)).

22. “‘By what means?’ the LORD asked. ‘I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,’ he said. ‘You will succeed in enticing him,’ said the LORD. ‘Go and do it.’

Psychologists today might say that the spirit enticed Ahab with the king’s own confirmation bias. This false belief arises from choosing only to consider evidence that confirms what a person already wanted to believe. In this case, the *deceiving spirit* unified *all* the king’s *prophets* in order to strengthen the evidence that favored Ahab’s false hope: that he would have victory over his enemies.

The Lord giving approval to this plan is one example of God’s sovereign right to judge evildoers. Although Ahab had humbled himself following the theft of Naboth’s vineyard (see [1 Kings 21](#)), old habits apparently die hard. Ahab did not want to listen to the prophet of the Lord, preferring the pleas-

ant prophecies of his old prophets. Ironically, if Ahab chose to listen to Micaiah now, the prophecy would not have come true! But the man’s character was known not only to the prophet but also to God (see [22:29–38](#)).

23. “So now the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The LORD has decreed disaster for you.”

Micaiah presented Ahab with a message of judgment. But implicit in that message was the opportunity for repentance (compare [Jonah 3](#)). Mercifully, Ahab was given the opportunity to admit his sinful state, repent, and break off his doomed campaign.



Visual for Lesson 9. Point to this visual as you ask how its imperative informs your learners’ responses to the question associated with verse 18.

The Lord used Ahab’s character and the deference of the king’s prophets to deceive the man. God never lies, but he does work through humans to accomplish his purposes, whether they do good or ill. God also never does moral evil, but he can put events into motion that from a human perspective

are catastrophic. In this case, the *deceiving spirit* intensified human dynamics already in play to ensure that Ahab would be fooled.

III. A Sure Prophecy (1 KINGS 22:26–28)

A. King's Fury (vv. 26–27)

26. The king of Israel then ordered, “Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king’s son

Ahab’s response was anything but one of repentance. Referencing *the ruler of the city* and *the king’s son* lets the reader know that Ahab was so determined to silence Micaiah that he evoked both local and national authorities to ensure the prophet’s secure incarceration.

27. “and say, ‘This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.’”

Micaiah was to remain in his cell and be given grim rations until Ahab returned *safely* from battle. Ahab’s sentence assumed that his triumphant return would expose the jailed prophet as a charlatan. Though Ahab expected to *return safely*, the prophecy had revealed that only his men would do so (1 Kings 22:17, 28).

Ahab’s command had the effect of silencing the prophet. The king knew that if word got out that he himself was under divine judgment, it could lead to poor troop morale on the eve of battle or even embolden a rival

to attempt a coup. Plus, the king just didn’t like the prophet.

What Do You Think?

What can you do, if anything, to prepare in advance for times of affliction?

Digging Deeper

Which part of [Matthew 24:9–13](#) is most helpful in answering this?

QUANTITY OVER QUALITY

When I was younger, I stayed with my grandparents for a week. My grandma was not feeling very well, and a confidante convinced her that I was a very disrespectful child. My grandma reported this to my parents. I was in a lot of trouble, but I continued to defend what I knew to be true. I was innocent of these charges!

Due largely to my grandparents’ position of authority, they were initially believed. However, my aunt had also spent time with me that week. She advocated for me and presented the truth to my parents. I was released from my punishment.

Micaiah was the small, lone voice of truth. Since that truth did not align with the majority of authoritative voices, he was placed in prison. In the world today, voices tell us lies every day. But truth is still truth, and we can heed its voice if we desire. What crowds are preventing you from heeding God’s truth?

—L. G.

B. Prophet’s Promise (v. 28)

28. Micaiah declared, “If you ever return safely, the LORD has not spoken through me.” Then he added, “Mark my words, all you people!”

The question of whether *Micaiah* spoke the truth would be determined on the battlefield. If Micaiah truly spoke for God, then Ahab would die, never returning home *safely* as the king assumed. Micaiah was so confident in what he’d heard from God that he challenged those present to be witnesses. Ahab’s death would not only vindicate Micaiah, but God as well.

Ahab died, just as Micaiah said ([1 Kings 22:29–38](#)). Micaiah’s fate in prison is unknown.

What Do You Think?

How should you go about testing the statements of one who claims to speak for the Lord?

Digging Deeper

What texts in addition to [Deuteronomy 13:1–3](#); [18:21–22](#); [Matthew 7:15–20](#); [Mark 13:21–23](#); [2 Peter 1:19–2:3](#); and [1 John 4:1–3](#) help you frame your answer?

Conclusion

A. Truth Displayed

Today’s passage illustrates the timeless struggle to relate to the truth properly. The individuals in today’s lesson provide us with three stances that people exposed to God’s truth can take.

King Ahab is easily vilified due to his idolatry, miscarriages of justice, and antipathy toward God’s prophets. However, whenever we find ourselves willfully in rebellion to the truth, we see shades of Ahab within our own spirits. When we find ourselves in this precarious state and are then admonished by concerned friends, we should realize that this is a form of God’s mercy, even when their words challenge and inconvenience us ([Proverbs 27:5–6](#)). Yet we need to be alert to possible Ahab-like tendencies in others and be prepared to admonish those who clearly ignore God in their choosing of unholy paths.

In Jehoshaphat, we have a case study of a person who desired to please God but lacked consistent, faithful follow-through. All believers, from senior ministers to occasional pew-fillers, can find themselves walking in this king’s shoes. That happens when we are hesitant, for whatever reason, to execute a God-given plan. Any of us can find ourselves tempted as Jehoshaphat was. So when we encounter a fellow believer in a similar situation, the correct response is to offer encouragement and wise counsel.

As a prophet, Micaiah was bound by the simple adage that he was only to preach the word that God gave him and not add or subtract from that word (compare [Deuteronomy 4:2](#)). We see Micaiah’s ability to think and speak independently in the face of a hostile crowd of 400 false prophets, two powerful leaders, and a prevailing climate of wickedness. The prophet’s outspokenness reminds us that speaking truth can result in

very negative consequences. Micaiah was aware of this, but was still obedient to God. We can build a life centered on truth through the regular study of God’s Word. That’s how we discipline ourselves to hear the voice of the Lord and to obey that voice—one opportunity at a time.

Many people today, as in Micaiah’s day, prefer to question God’s truth rather than their own sinful patterns. This isn’t to say that doubt and confusion are never legitimate. But we must be aware of the possibility that sometimes our “confusion” over truth has the function of legitimizing ungodly behavior. We must echo apostle Paul’s words, “Let God be true, but every man a liar” ([Romans 3:4](#)).

What Do You Think?

Which thought in today’s text do you have the hardest time coming to grips with? Why?

Digging Deeper

Considering [Romans 15:4](#); [1 Corinthians 10:1–4](#); and [2 Timothy 3:16–17](#), what extra effort will you expend to resolve this uncertainty?

B. Prayer

God, we thank you for revealing your truth. Now we ask that your truth be revealed in our words and actions. Help us not only to be people knowledgeable of your Word, but also be people who make decisions that are consistent with your Word. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Our commitment to truth is measured in our actions.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](#) or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

As class members arrive, jot the following mixed sentence on the board:

have along along to to go get you

Begin by asking class members to arrange the words into a sentence silently and to raise hands when they know the answer. After a volunteer shares the correct sentence, “You have to go along to get along,” encourage discussion regarding contexts where class members have heard or used this expression. (*Option.* If you prefer a shorter version of the saying, reduce it from eight words to five to end up with “go along to get along.”)

Tell the class, “Today’s text will help us see the outlook of this saying in a biblical light.”

Into the Word

To set the context for the lesson, give

each of six learners one of the tasks below, which you have written on six slips of paper (one task per slip, numbered as shown):

- 1—Summarize 1 Kings 16:29–33
- 2—Summarize 2 Chronicles 17:1–6
- 3—Summarize 2 Chronicles 18:1
- 4—Summarize 1 Kings 21:25–29
- 5—Summarize 1 Kings 22:1–5
- 6—Summarize 1 Kings 22:6–14

Ask those holding the slips to each read the assigned passage to the class, in order, adding any summary observations they deem appropriate. Use the Lesson Context and personal research to fill in gaps. (*Option.* Have a Bible time line on display that you can point to as the summaries proceed.)

Next, give each participant a handout (you prepare) on which is printed the following brief matching exercise:

- ? Ahabin rebellion against the truth?
- ? Jehoshaphataligned with the truth?
- ? Micaiahuncommitted to the truth?

Learners should quickly recognize these to be the *answers*:

- ✓Ahabin rebellion against the truth.
- ✓Jehoshaphatuncommitted to the truth.
- ✓Micaiahaligned with the truth.

Group learners into study pairs or triads to look for further evidence of three truths (thus far they have been looking only at context passages). After several minutes, ask pairs or triads to report findings. Discuss and resolve differences as a class. (*Option.*

Depending on time available, assign only one of the three names to each pair or triad instead of all three to each.)

Into Life

Remind class members of the scrambled sentence from the beginning of the class period. Send students back to their pairs or triads with this question and task:

- 1—How does that sentence relate to today’s lesson?
- 2—Make a list of how people in general today might be like the character they studied—that is, how and why people rebel against truth, compromise truth, or stand up for truth in spite of pressure to do otherwise.

After a few minutes, allow class members to report items from their list. Follow by asking which character in today’s story challenges them most, and why. (*Option.* If your class can tolerate a more personal inquiry, ask them to rate themselves from 1—*totally uncommitted* to 10—*totally committed* in regard to truth in daily life.) Ask volunteers to share steps Christians could take to move themselves higher on this scale.

Options. Distribute copies of one or both of the exercises on the activity page, which you can download, for learners to complete. Give careful thought to the sizes and constituencies of the groups you use for discussion, given the nature of each scenario—you want the discussion to shed “light,” not “heat”!