



## Second Chronicles - Chapter Eighteen

### III 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23 - The Kingdom of Judah Down to the Exile (continues)

#### III.d 2 Chronicles 17:1-20:37 - Jehoshaphat (continues)

##### Summary of Chapter Eighteen

King Jehoshaphat of Judah joins King Ahab of Israel in his campaign to restore Ramoth-gilead to Israel from the hands of the Aramæans. When Jehoshaphat first asks to hear what the Lord has to say of this campaign, Ahab has four hundred of his prophets prophesy good things about the outcome but Jehoshaphat wants to hear from a true prophet and so Micaiah is called. He reveals the truth that Ahab will not survive the battle and so Ahab has him put in prison.

The scheming Ahab dressed as an ordinary soldier but said that Jehoshaphat should go into battle in his royal robes. Therefore, it was Jehoshaphat that became the initial target for the Aramæans but they soon realised it was not Ahab and stopped pursuing him. Meanwhile, an archer fired his arrow into the midst of battle and managed to hit Ahab who died later that day from his wounds and was taken back to Samaria to be buried.

#### III.d.ii 2 Chronicles 18:1-27 - Micaiah Predicts Failure

Jehoshaphat agreed to help Ahab in his fight against the Aramæans. He realised that the prophets Ahab sought were not the prophets of the Lord and so he requested to hear what a true prophet had to say. Micaiah was summoned against Ahab's wishes as he found that the Lord had nothing good to say to him. Initially, Micaiah's prophecy seemed favourable until Ahab realised he was probably being sarcastic. Then Micaiah prophesied the truth that Ahab would be killed in battle and so Ahab had him arrested and put in prison.

The account of Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab is taken with few changes from 1 Kings 22:1-40, but the additional comments in vv.1-2 and in 2 Chronicles 19:1-3 give it an altogether different significance. Jehoshaphat, rather than Ahab (and the divine punishment he received for spurning the prophetic word), is the focus here. The Chronicler is concerned to show that Jehoshaphat is equally subject to the prophetic word, but that by repentance and a conscientious return to God's way, he may escape divine wrath. As with his father Asa in 2 Chronicles 16:3, Jehoshaphat seeks an alliance with the northern kingdom that is based not on righteous grounds but on political expediency that may draw Judah into destruction. In his account of Hezekiah's reign in Chapters 29-30, the Chronicler will indicate how a true and beneficial unity among the tribes of Israel can be achieved.

<sup>1</sup> Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honour; and he made a marriage alliance with Ahab. <sup>2</sup> After some years he went down to Ahab in Samaria. Ahab slaughtered an abundance of sheep and oxen for him and for the people who were with him, and induced him to go up against Ramoth-gilead.

### 2 Chronicles 18:1-2

He made a marriage alliance with Ahab. The Chronicler's introduction alludes to the marriage of Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram to Ahab's daughter Athaliah (refer to 2 Chronicles 21:6), some years before the battle Ahab initiated against Aram to recapture Ramoth-gilead.

The statement that Jehoshaphat had great riches and honour is an indication of divine blessing on his reign and casts his alliance with Ahab into a yet more reprehensible light. The marriage between the royal houses was intended to seal peace between the kingdoms after 50 years of hostilities. Such an alliance, however, would require Jehoshaphat to <<*help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord*>> (2 Chronicles 19:2). Ahab's great feast for Jehoshaphat and his persuasive words induced, Hebrew *sut*, or enticed him to take part in the battle; refer also to 1 Chronicles 21:1, 2 Chronicles 32:11 and 32:15. The same Hebrew word is found in v.31, <<*God drew them away from him*>>, as the positive counterbalance to the evil into which Ahab draws Jehoshaphat.

<sup>3</sup> King Ahab of Israel said to King Jehoshaphat of Judah, 'Will you go with me to Ramoth-gilead?' He answered him, 'I am with you, my people are your people. We will be with you in the war.'

### 2 Chronicles 18:3

Will you go with me to Ramoth-gilead? King Ahab of Israel asked King Jehoshaphat of Judah to help him in this dispute against the Aramæans. This made some sense, because Ramoth-gilead was only forty miles from Jerusalem.

Ramoth-gilead was southeast of the Sea of Galilee and is probably Tell Ramith, near the modern Jordanian city of Ramtha; refer to Deuteronomy 4:43. The Aramæans captured it during the reign of Ben-hadad in circa 860-843 BC. Jehoshaphat's words indicate his commitment to the treaty with Ahab.

<sup>4</sup> But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, 'Inquire first for the word of the Lord.' <sup>5</sup> Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, four hundred of them, and said to them, 'Shall we go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?' They said, 'Go up; for God will give it into the hand of the king.' <sup>6</sup> But Jehoshaphat said, 'Is there no other prophet of the Lord here of whom we may inquire?' <sup>7</sup> The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, 'There is still one other by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favourable about me, but only disaster.' Jehoshaphat said, 'Let the king not say such a thing.' <sup>8</sup> Then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said, 'Bring quickly Micaiah son of Imlah.'

### 2 Chronicles 18:4-8

Jehoshaphat, in contrast to Ahab, is at least concerned to seek the word of the Lord concerning the advisability of the mission. Considering the generally adversarial relationship between Ahab and the prophets of the Lord, this was a bold request for Jehoshaphat to ask of Ahab. It was not surprising that Ahab picked prophets who would tell the two kings what they wanted to hear.

This is not the only time that Jehoshaphat wanted to inquire of the Lord through one of his prophets. He did so before setting out to fight the Moabites with King Jehoram of Israel: <<But Jehoshaphat said, 'Is there no prophet of the Lord here, through whom we may inquire of the Lord?' Then one of the servants of the king of Israel answered, 'Elisha son of Shaphat, who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah, is here'>> (2 Kings 3:11). David wrote down why it is always important to seek God before doing anything: <<I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you>> (Psalm 32:8).

Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together. The Hebrew expression occurs in the OT only here along with its parallel in 1 Kings 22:6, and also in 1 Kings 18:20, where Ahab had previously gathered prophets together in response to Elijah's demand for the attendance on Mount Carmel of <<the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah>> (1 Kings 18:19). As things turned out, only the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal actually turned up on that occasion according to 1 Kings 18:22-25, leaving the four hundred prophets of Asherah unaccounted for, precisely the number of men

mentioned here. It is already implied, therefore, that these prophets are not truly prophets of the Lord, but in fact prophets committed to the religion of Ahab's wife, Queen Jezebel. This is probably further implied in Jehoshaphat's response to their advice, which indicates his suspicion of these prophets: Is there no other prophet of the Lord here of whom we may inquire? Jehoshaphat has been seeking the word of the Lord. Ahab summons just his prophets, and Jehoshaphat then subtly asks whether there is not a genuine prophet of the Lord who might now be consulted.

Ahab's four hundred men were called prophets, refer also to the comment made on 1 Kings 22:6-7, but they were also government officials, probably connected with the Baal and Asherah worship that Jezebel had introduced into the northern kingdom; refer to 1 Kings 18:19. Their words (v.5 and v.11) and symbolic actions (v.10) are unequivocal and exactly what Ahab wants to hear; refer also to Jeremiah 27:2-7. Jehoshaphat, however, does not recognise them as prophets of the Lord and so persists in his request.

Go up; for God will give it into the hand of the king. When Ahab gathered the prophets they were not faithful prophets of the Lord. These were prophets happy to please their kings, and to tell them what they wanted to hear. Jehoshaphat still wanted to hear from a prophet of Yahweh, the only true God.

Micaiah son of Imlah is one of the authentic prophets of the Lord in a kingdom where they had recently been persecuted; refer to 1 Kings 18:4. His initial words to Ahab (v.14) were apparently spoken in an ironic tone, as Ahab's reaction in v.15 suggests.

I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favourable about me, but only disaster. Ahab hated the messenger because of the message. His real conflict was with God, but he focused his hatred against the prophet Micaiah. Yet he was willing to listen to the king of Judah when he advised that Ahab should listen to the prophet Micaiah. This was for political expediency rather than Ahab having any desire to return to following the Lord himself.

Let the king not say such a thing. A prophet of the Lord should not be marginalised simply because of what has happened in the past. Also, even though they may not say what a person wants to hear, they should always be respected as servants of God and treated with the utmost respect. Above all, they should be listened to for they speak God's words. As the apostle Paul puts it: **<<Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil>>** (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22).

<sup>9</sup> Now the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes; and they were sitting at the threshing-floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the

prophets were prophesying before them. <sup>10</sup> Zedekiah son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron, and he said, 'Thus says the Lord: With these you shall gore the Aramæans until they are destroyed.' <sup>11</sup> All the prophets were prophesying the same and saying, 'Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the king.'

### 2 Chronicles 18:9-11

#### They were sitting at the threshing-floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria.

This illustrates the ancient custom of holding court and making decisions at the gates of the city. There were even thrones for high officials to sit on at the gates of the city of Samaria, although these were most likely brought down from Ahab's palace for the occasion.

The harvesting of cereal crops in Israel was followed by a threshing and winnowing process, in which the threshed material was thrown into the air with a fork or a shovel to allow the breeze to separate the grain, the straw, and the chaff. The grain would then be cleaned and stored in jars, grain pits, or storage houses. The location of this activity was the threshing-floor, an open area sufficiently large for the task, sometimes situated as in this case at the city gate, and useful for large gatherings of people. It is here that all the prophets were prophesying the same before the kings, and here that Zedekiah acted out his play with horns, a reminder once again of the worship of Baal and Asherah; refer to the comments made on 1 Kings 12:27-28 and 16:31-33.

Thus says the Lord. These unfaithful prophets, such as Zedekiah, prophesied in the name of the Lord, but they did not prophesy truthfully. Many commentators believe these prophets were pagan prophets, perhaps representatives of Asherah as already suggested or other pagan gods or goddesses. Yet they clearly prophesied in the name of the Lord. It is best to regard these not as pagan prophets, but unfaithful prophets to the true God. Perhaps these were true followers of the Lord who were seduced by Ahab's sincere but shallow repentance three years before; refer to 1 Kings 21:27-29. After that, they began to align with Ahab uncritically. Three years later they were willing to prophesy lies to Ahab if that was what he wanted to hear.

With these you shall gore the Aramæans until they are destroyed. Zedekiah used a familiar tool of ancient prophets - the object lesson. He used horns of iron to illustrate the thrust of two powerful forces, armies that would rout the Aramæans. Zedekiah had the agreement of four hundred other prophets, i.e. all the prophets were prophesying the same. This must have been a vivid and entertaining presentation. The reader can be certain that every eye was on Zedekiah when he used the horns of iron to powerfully illustrate the point. It was certainly persuasive to have four hundred prophets speak in agreement on one issue. No matter how powerful and persuasive the presentation, their message was

unfaithful to the Lord and, indeed, to their king although it did actually help to fulfil the will of God in getting Ahab killed.

**Those who choose to listen to the words of false prophets pay the price for doing so:** <<*Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen oracles for you that are false and misleading. All who pass along the way clap their hands at you; they hiss and wag their heads at daughter Jerusalem; ‘Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?’>> (Lamentations 2:14-15).*

<sup>12</sup> The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, ‘Look, the words of the prophets with one accord are favourable to the king; let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favourably.’

<sup>13</sup> But Micaiah said, ‘As the Lord lives, whatever my God says, that I will speak.’

### 2 Chronicles 18:12-13

As the Lord lives, whatever my God says, that I will speak. The assistants of King Ahab tried to persuade Micaiah to speak in agreement with the four hundred other prophets. Micaiah assured him that he would simply repeat what God had said to him. This was a dramatic scene. Micaiah was brought out from prison for v.26 indicates that he came from prison. The image is therefore of a prophet in rags and chains standing before two kings, ready to speak faithfully on behalf of the Lord, knowing that his message will not be well received.

**Even Balaam knew he could only say and do as the Lord commanded him:** <<*But Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, ‘Although Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the Lord my God, to do less or more’>> (Numbers 22:18).*

<sup>14</sup> When he had come to the king, the king said to him, ‘Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?’ He answered, ‘Go up and triumph; they will be given into your hand.’ <sup>15</sup> But 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?’ <sup>16</sup> Then Micaiah said, ‘I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep without a shepherd; and the Lord said, “These have no master; let each one go home in peace.”’ <sup>17</sup> The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, ‘Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy anything favourable about me, but only disaster?’

## 2 Chronicles 18:14-17

**Go up and triumph.** Surprisingly, Micaiah's first words to Ahab are exactly those of the other prophets, but Ahab sees that his words are a mere mocking imitation of these court prophets who tell him only what he wants to hear. He said similar words to those of the four hundred unfaithful prophets, but delivered a completely different message.

**How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?** King Ahab recognised the mocking tone of Micaiah's prophecy and knew it contradicted the message of the four hundred prophets. He demanded that Micaiah tell nothing but the truth, which Ahab believed and hoped would be similar to the message of the four hundred other prophets.

**I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep without a shepherd.** Micaiah was challenged to tell the truth, and now he changed his tone from mocking to serious. He said that not only would Israel be defeated, but also that their leader or **shepherd** would perish. Quoting Zechariah 13:7 Jesus perfectly illustrated this concept: *<<And Jesus said to them, 'You will all become deserters; for it is written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered"'>>* (Mark 14:27).

**A similar statement was made to the King of Nineveh after the city was destroyed:** *<<Your shepherds are asleep, O king of Assyria; your nobles slumber. Your people are scattered on the mountains with no one to gather them>>* (Nahum 3:18).

**Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy anything favourable about me, but only disaster?** King Ahab said that he wanted the truth, but he could not handle the truth. What he did not consider was that, although Micaiah prophesied evil towards Ahab, he prophesied the truth. Ahab knew in his heart that Micaiah would not fear or flatter him, but only declare the word of the Lord. This he construed into personal hatred. Hatred of the messenger of God is clear evidence of wilful wickedness and indeed hatred of God himself: *<<If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you>>* (John 15:18).

<sup>18</sup> Then Micaiah said, 'Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing to the right and to the left of him. <sup>19</sup> And the Lord said, "Who will entice King Ahab of Israel, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" Then one said one thing, and another said another, <sup>20</sup> until a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, "I will entice him." The Lord asked him, "How?" <sup>21</sup> 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." <sup>22</sup> So you see, the

Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets; the Lord has decreed disaster for you.’

## 2 Chronicles 18:18-22

I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing to the right and to the left of him. King Ahab and others at the court found it hard to explain how one prophet could be right and four hundred other prophets could be so wrong. Here, Micaiah explained the message of the four hundred false prophets. It is possible that this was just a parable, but it is more likely that Micaiah had an accurate prophetic glimpse into the heavenly drama behind these events. Having seen such a vision gave Micaiah the courage he needed to confront the wicked Ahab in this way. He knew that he was being faithful to the Lord and had nothing to fear from any man, no matter what might be done to him in the body; as Jesus puts it: *<<I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!>>* (Luke 12:4-5).

Generations later, three young Jews in Babylon showed the same courage in the presence of King Nebuchadnezzar when offered the choice of idol worship or certain death: *<<Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defence to you in this matter. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up’>>* (Daniel 3:16-18).

Micaiah was not the only prophet to have such visions of God in heaven: *<<In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory’>>* (Isaiah 6:1-3), *<<And above the dome over their heads there was something like a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like a human form. Upwards from what appeared like the loins I saw something like gleaming amber, something that looked like fire enclosed all round; and downwards from what looked like the loins I saw something that looked like fire, and there was a splendour all round. Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the splendour all round. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of someone speaking>>* (Ezekiel 1:26-28), and: *<<As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne; his*

*clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousand served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgement, and the books were opened>> (Daniel 7:9-10). The apostle John was also granted this privilege: <<At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! And the one seated there looks like jasper and cornelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal>> (Revelation 4:2-6a).*

Standing to the right and to the left of him. Since the right hand was the place of favour, this may indicate that God spoke to the combined host of heaven, both faithful and fallen angelic beings. However, there is favour with God to sit on either side of him: <<And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory'>> (Mark 10:37). The parable separating the nations demonstrates the order of favour: <<All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left>> (Matthew 25:32-33).

Some people forget that Satan and his fellow fallen angels have controlled access to heaven: <<One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them>> (Job 1:6), and: <<Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God'>> (Revelation 12:10). There is a well-intentioned but mistaken teaching that God can allow no evil in his presence, meaning that Satan and other fallen angels could not be in his presence. These passages show that God can allow evil in his presence, although he can have no fellowship with evil and one day all evil will be removed from his presence: <<Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire>> (Revelation 20:14-15).

Who will entice King Ahab of Israel, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? God wanted to bring judgement against Ahab, so he asked this group of the host of heaven for a volunteer to lead Ahab into battle.

A spirit came forward and stood before the Lord. The imagery is that of a council of war, with the heavenly King sitting on his throne surrounded by his army, making plans to defeat Ahab in battle.

It is rather a personified spirit of prophecy: <<On that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more; and also I will remove from the land the prophets and the unclean spirit>> (Zechariah 13:2), and: <<We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognise the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood>> (1 John 4:6 NIVUK), for even the false prophets may be governed by supernatural or spiritual forces rather than merely human reason. It represents the power of a lie in the mouth of someone opposed to the truth and speaking for their own ends.

Ahab's insistence on hearing what Micaiah had really received from the Lord is answered with a report of two visions. The first concerns the outcome of the battle (v.16), while the second makes the remarkable claim that God put a lying spirit in the mouth of all Ahab's prophets; refer to the comments made on 1 Samuel 16:14 and 1 Kings 22:24. The sense here is that, as a follower of false gods (refer to 1 Kings 16:30-33), Ahab is fittingly deceived by their spokesmen, his prophets. God's action has the nature of a test. The irony of the situation is that Ahab is told the truth (vv.16-22) but does not recognise it as such, even though he had insisted that Micaiah tell him the truth (v.15). His repudiation of Micaiah's message and his treatment of the prophet in v.26 indicate his contempt for the truth and for the Lord.

The sense here is that, as a follower of false gods, Ahab is fittingly deceived by their spokesmen, his prophets, although not deliberately: <<For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe what is false>> (2 Thessalonians 2:11). God's action has the nature of a test. The irony of the situation is that Ahab is told the truth but does not recognise it as such, even though he had insisted that Micaiah tell him the truth. His repudiation of Micaiah's message and his treatment of the prophet indicate his contempt for the truth. The teachings of Jesus are the truth and it is this that will lead to spiritual and moral freedom: <<Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free'>> (John 8:31-32), and: <<So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed>> (John 8:36).

<sup>23</sup> Then Zedekiah son of Chenaanah came up to Micaiah, slapped him on the cheek, and said, 'Which way did the spirit of the Lord pass from me to speak to you?' <sup>24</sup> Micaiah replied, 'You will find out on that day when you go in to hide in an inner chamber.' <sup>25</sup> The king of Israel then ordered, 'Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the

city and to Joash the king's son; <sup>26</sup> and say, "Thus says the king: Put this fellow in prison, and feed him on reduced rations of bread and water until I return in peace." <sup>27</sup> Micaiah said, 'If you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me.' And he said, 'Hear, you peoples, all of you!'

### 2 Chronicles 18:23-27

Zedekiah slapped Micaiah on the cheek. Zedekiah had claimed to speak in the name of the Lord (v.10), but he shows by his violent and contemptuous conduct his scant concern for the truth. Ahab's treatment of Micaiah foreshadows Jeremiah's suffering: *<<And Jeremiah said, 'That is a lie; I am not deserting to the Chaldeans.' But Irijah would not listen to him, and arrested Jeremiah and brought him to the officials. The officials were enraged at Jeremiah, and they beat him and imprisoned him in the house of the secretary Jonathan, for it had been made a prison. Thus Jeremiah was put in the cistern house, in the cells, and remained there for many days>>* (Jeremiah 37:14-16). Zedekiah responded the way many do when they are defeated in argument - he responded with violence. Others, too, are recorded as responding in this way: *<<Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?>>* (John 18:23), and: *<<While Paul was looking intently at the council he said, 'Brothers, up to this day I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God.' Then the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near him to strike him on the mouth. At this Paul said to him, 'God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting there to judge me according to the law, and yet in violation of the law you order me to be struck?>>* (Acts 23:1-3).

Which way did the spirit of the Lord pass from me to speak to you? Micaiah's claim in v.23 was that Zedekiah and his colleagues had a lying spirit. Zedekiah's response is that he himself has been influenced by 'the spirit of the Lord' who cannot have been speaking to both him and Micaiah, otherwise the messages would have been the same and not a complete contrast. Job gave a similar answer to Bildad the Shuhite: *<<With whose help have you uttered words, and whose spirit has come forth from you?>>* (Job 26:4).

You will find out on that day when you go in to hide in an inner chamber. All will become clear, Micaiah claims, when the disaster that he is predicting eventually falls and Zedekiah is forced to hide away in the city inside someone's home; the inner chamber was also Ben-hadad's hiding place after the disaster at Aphek: *<<The rest of them escaped to the city of Aphek, where the wall collapsed on twenty-seven thousand of them. And Ben-Hadad fled to the city and hid in an inner room>>* (1 Kings 20:30 NIV).

Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city seems to suggest that they had taken Micaiah from the prison to speak to these kings. Amon is evidently one of Ahab's high officials, entrusted with control of city affairs in Samaria, while Joash the king's son is responsible for the confinement of prisoners; refer also to Jeremiah 36:26 and 38:6. It is not clear whether this office requires that its holder literally be the son of the king.

Put this fellow in prison. King Ahab responded the way many tyrants do when they are confronted with the truth. Ahab wanted Micaiah imprisoned and deprived, i.e. feed him on reduced rations of bread and water until I return in peace.

If you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me. The prophet Micaiah made one final and ultimate appeal. He was willing to be judged by whether his prophecy came to pass or not. He knew that if his prophecy proved false then he might be executed for taking the Lord's name in vain. However, he was clearly confident that the vision and word he had was from the Lord and therefore he spoke boldly into the situation. He even called upon the people to be witnesses to what he said, i.e. Hear, you peoples, all of you! If what he had just said did not come to pass then he would have lost his reputation as a true prophet of the Lord and, as already stated, he would probably lose his life as well.

**The Lord has no place in his kingdom for false prophets:** <<*My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations; they shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel; and you shall know that I am the Lord God*>> (Ezekiel 13:9).

### III.d.iii 2 Chronicles 18:28-19:3 - Defeat and Death of Ahab

The two kings went into battle: Jehoshaphat in his royal robes and Ahab dressed as an ordinary soldier. However, the disguise did not save Ahab and he was hit by an arrow and mortally wounded. Jehoshaphat returned to Jerusalem where he was met by a seer who told him the Lord was displeased that he had sought alliances with an opponent of the Lord rather than focusing on what he should have been doing for the people of God.

<sup>28</sup> So the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. <sup>29</sup> The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, 'I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes.' So the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into battle.

### 2 Chronicles 18:28-29

So the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. It is easy to understand why King Ahab of Israel went into this battle; he did not want to believe that Micaiah's prophecy was true and wanted to courageously oppose it. It is less easy to understand why King Jehoshaphat of Judah went into

this battle with Ahab. He should have believed the prophecy of Micaiah and known that the battle would end in disaster and the death of at least Ahab. It may be that Jehoshaphat had a fatalistic attitude towards the will of God, figuring that if it was all God's will then there was nothing he or anyone else could do about it.

**I will disguise myself and go into battle.** Going into the battle, Ahab did not want to be identified as a king and therefore become a special target. He thought this would help protect him against Micaiah's prophecy of doom. Ahab's disguise is evidence of unclear thinking, for if Micaiah had truly been lying, there was no danger, and if he had been telling the truth, Ahab would die whatever he does. The disguise is also a harbinger of disaster; it recalls the actions of both Saul and Jeroboam just before their deaths; refer to 1 Samuel 28:8 and 1 Kings 14:1-18 respectively. It is foolish to think that a mere disguise will hide someone from the Lord's purposes.

**King Saul once disguised himself although on that occasion he tried to fool a medium whom he wished to consult against his own laws: <<So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothes and went there, he and two men with him. They came to the woman by night. And he said, 'Consult a spirit for me, and bring up for me the one whom I name to you'>> (1 Samuel 28:8).**

**It is more difficult to explain why Jehoshaphat agreed to go into the battle as the only clearly identified king. Perhaps he was either not very smart or he had very great faith. What it did show was great leadership on the part of Jehoshaphat for his men would have expected their king to lead them in this way, unlike the actions of King Ahab. He was following in the traditions of his ancestor David: <<For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The Lord said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel>> (2 Samuel 5:2).**

<sup>30</sup> Now the king of Aram had commanded the captains of his chariots, 'Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel.'

<sup>31</sup> When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, 'It is the king of Israel.' So they turned to fight against him; and Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him. God drew them away from him, <sup>32</sup> for when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. <sup>33</sup> But a certain man drew his bow and unknowingly struck the king of Israel between the scale armour and the breastplate; so he said to the driver of his chariot, 'Turn around, and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded.' <sup>34</sup> The battle grew hot that day, and the king of Israel propped himself up in his chariot facing the Aramæans until evening; then at sunset he died.

## 2 Chronicles 18:30-34

Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel. Ahab's previous mercy to Ben-hadad in 1 Kings 20:23-34 did not win any lasting favour with the rulers of Aram. This strategy of the Aramæan army made Ahab's counter-strategy of disguising himself in battle seem very wise.

Ahab is enticed into battle, as the spirit had promised (v.20). His decision to disguise himself, while rather cynically directing Jehoshaphat to wear his royal robes, indicates his dominant role in the alliance and perhaps also represents a contrived attempt to evade Micaiah's word of doom. However, events turn out the opposite of what Ahab intended: Jehoshaphat is delivered in battle as a consequence of his desperate prayer (v.31b), and the Lord helped him. God drew them away from him is the Chronicler's own addition to the text, (refer to the comment made on vv.1-2), while Ahab dies from an apparently random arrow (v.33), clear evidence of God's sovereign direction of events.

<sup>19:1</sup> King Jehoshaphat of Judah returned in safety to his house in Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> Jehu son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him and said to King Jehoshaphat, 'Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, some good is found in you, for you destroyed the sacred poles out of the land, and have set your heart to seek God.'

## 2 Chronicles 19:1-3

King Jehoshaphat of Judah returned in safety to his house in Jerusalem. This is the Chronicler's own addition to 1 Kings Chapter 22. This was the mercy of God. Jehoshaphat, clothed in the robes of the king targeted for death by the army of Aram, should have been killed in battle. Yet he cried out to the Lord and was preserved, returning safely to his house in Jerusalem. The fact that Jehoshaphat reached home safely is significant. It contrasts his fate with Ahab's, and testifies to God's grace given to a person who was almost destroyed by undiscerning folly.

Jehu the son of Hanani had ministered in the days of Baasha, king of Israel; refer to 1 Kings 16:1-3. His denunciation of Jehoshaphat for his alliance with the ungodly Ahab echoes his criticism of the wicked Baasha: <<**Moreover, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Jehu son of Hanani against Baasha and his house, both because of all the evil that he did in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam, and also because he destroyed it**>> (1 Kings 16:7). His father was also a brave prophet, speaking to king Asa and paying the price for doing so: <<**At that time the seer Hanani came to King Asa of Judah, and said to him, 'Because you relied on the king of Aram, and did not rely on the Lord your God, the army of**

*the king of Aram has escaped you. Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with exceedingly many chariots and cavalry? Yet because you relied on the Lord, he gave them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the entire earth, to strengthen those whose heart is true to him. You have done foolishly in this; for from now on you will have wars.’ Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in the stocks, in prison, for he was in a rage with him because of this. And Asa inflicted cruelties on some of the people at the same time>> (2 Chronicles 16:7-10).*

Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Jehu exposed the sin of too much love in Jehoshaphat. He professed to love God, but he also demonstrated love to those who hate the Lord. He should never have entered his personal and military alliances with Ahab and the kingdom of Israel. Jehoshaphat should perhaps have read and considered: <<**Let those who love the Lord hate evil**>> (Psalm 97:10a NIV). Love here denotes not emotion but the commitment to support a treaty. God’s wrath is a matter of immense seriousness, yet may be averted or mitigated by repentance; refer to 2 Chronicles 12:7 and 32:25-26.

Jehu’s acknowledgment that some good is found in Jehoshaphat recognises his basic commitment to seek God and looks forward to his subsequent actions of repentance and reform; refer to 2 Chronicles 19:4-11. God did not want Jehoshaphat to be crushed by the rebuke through the words of Jehu, so he included a word of encouragement.

For you destroyed the sacred poles out of the land. God knew that Jehoshaphat did not approve of *all* evil, so he encouraged the king in the places where he did hate evil and refuse compromise.