**Sunday, May 2, 2021**

 **“SPEAKING TRUTH BOLDLY”**

**Lesson 9:**  I Kings 22:15-23, 26-28; **Time of Action:** 853 B.C.; **Place of Action:** Samaria

**Golden Text:** **“And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak”** **(I Kings 22:14).**

 **I. INTRODUCTION.** There comes a time when we as Christians are faced with having to speak the truth to those who are in power.  Of course, this should be done by every human being, but especially for Christians.  As the ones to whom God has entrusted His Word, it behooves us to oppose lies regardless of who tells them.  To stand by and say nothing indicates that we agree with the lies.  In this week’s lesson, we are introduced to Micaiah a prophet of God who had the courage to tell King Ahab of Israel, who was as evil as they come, what God wanted him to know.  He spoke God’s truth to power just as he was told.

 **II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND.** Some years before our lesson takes place, Ahab, king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah formed an alliance as a result of a marriage between the two families. During this time, Ahab and Israel had fought against Syria on two different occasions, winning both battles (see I Kings 20:1-30). Sometime after this, Ahab and his wife Jezebel conspired against Naboth to steal his vineyard which was close to Ahab’s palace (see I Kings 21:1-7).  Jezebel sent letters in Ahab’s name to the elders and nobles in Samaria demanding that they call a feast and have two men present to falsely accuse Naboth of blasphemy and then have him stoned to death (see I Kings 21:8-10).  They did as the letters demanded and stoned Naboth clearing the way for Ahab to take possession of his vineyard (see I Kings 21:11-16).  As a result, the prophet Elijah prophesied that dogs would lick the blood of Ahab in the same place that they licked Naboth’s blood, and dogs would eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.  God also said that He would cut off all Ahab’s male descendants.  But because Ahab mourned over this prophecy and “humbled himself” before God, the LORD had mercy and said that He would not cut off Ahab’s male descendants until after he was dead.  For the next three years there was no war between Israel and Syria (see I Kings 22:1).  Then during the third year, King Jehoshaphat of Judah went to visit King Ahab of Israel (see I Kings 22:2) who said to his officials, “Remember when the king of Syria took Ramath Gilead from us?  That city is ours, so why have we done nothing to get it back?” So Ahab asked King Jehoshaphat, “Will you join with us to fight the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead?” Jehoshaphat answered, “We will be as one; my men and my horses will be as yours.  But first let’s ask the Lord for advice” (see I Kings 22:3-5).  So, Ahab called a meeting of the prophets of which there were about 400 at that time (see II Chronicles 22:5).  Ahab asked the prophets if he should attack the Syrians or not.  They told him that he should because the LORD would let him defeat Ramoth Gilead (see I Kings 22:6).  But Jehoshaphat wasn’t convinced, so he asked Ahab if the LORD had another prophet they could consult.  King Ahab said that there was another prophet and his name was Micaiah.  He also told Jehoshaphat that he hated Micaiah because he never said anything good about Ahab when he spoke for the LORD (see I Kings 22:7-8). So King Ahab told one of his officers to go and find Micaiah.  At that time, the two kings were sitting near the gates of Samaria and all 400 prophets were standing before them, prophesying (see I Kings 22:9-10). One of the prophets named Zedekiah made some iron horns and said to Ahab, “The LORD says, ‘You will use these iron horns to fight against the Syrian army.  You will defeat them and destroy them.’”  All the other prophets agreed with Zedekiah and told Ahab to go fight against the Syrians at Ramoth Gilead, and he would win the battle because the LORD will let him defeat them (see I Kings 22:11-12).  While this was happening, Ahab’s official went to find Micaiah.  When the official found him, he said to Micaiah, “All the other prophets have said that the king will succeed, so you should say the same thing.” But Micaiah answered, “As surely as the LORD lives, I can say only what the LORD says” (see I Kings 22:13-14).  This is where our lesson begins.

 **III. MICAIAH’S SARCASTIC PROPHECY** (**I Kings 22:15-16)**

 **A. Ahab’s question and Micaiah’s answer (I Kings 22:15).**Our first verse says **“So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramothgilead 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.”**After Ahab’s official found **“Micaiah”** and told him that he needed to repeat the same good words to the king as the other prophets had (see I Kings 22:13).  In response, **“Micaiah”** declared that he could only speak the words that God gave him.  Following that meeting, this verse says that Micaiah, the prophet **“came to the king”**as he was ordered.  Then **“the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramothgilead to battle, or shall we forbear?”**Ahab’s question for **“Micaiah”**was “shall we attack Ramoth-gilead, or not?” which is the meaning of the term **“forbear.”**This was the same question that Ahab had asked of his own prophets (see I Kings 22:6) as if he really wanted to know God’s will.  Earlier, the city of **“Ramothgilead”**(or Ramoth in Gilead) was one of three cities of refuge located east of the Jordan River (see Deuteronomy 4:41-43).  The cities of refuge were cities of safety for those who had killed someone.  The law of the cities of refuge is recorded in detail in Deuteronomy 19:1-13 and also alluded to in Exodus 21:13).By the time of our lesson, **“Ramothgilead”** was in the hands of the Syrians, but King Ahab wanted it back (see I Kings 22:3-4).  In response to Ahab’s question **“Micaiah”**said to him, **“Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king.”**If Ahab thought that he was fooling **“Micaiah”**into thinking that he really cared about what God’s will was, he was wrong.  The prophet was well aware that Ahab was going to do whatever he wanted to do (see I Kings 22:13).  So **“Micaiah”** sarcastically said to the king **“Go and prosper.”**The prophet was not serious.  He was really saying to Ahab “Why, of course! Go right ahead and be successful!”    But **“Micaiah”**knew what the real truth was as we shall see later in the text.  Still speaking sarcastically to Ahab, **“Micaiah”** also said **“for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king.”**When the prophet told Ahab this, he was telling him what he wanted to hear (see I Kings 22:13).  **“Micaiah”** knew that no matter what he told **“the king”** he wasn’t going to accept it anyway (see I Kings 22:8).  So, the prophet didn’t see why he should waste his time telling the king the truth; a truth that he would learn real soon (see verse 22-23, 29-35).

**B. Ahab’s accusatory response (I Kings 22:16).**This verse says, **“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?”**After hearing Micaiah give him the same answer as his other prophets, **“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?”**The word **“adjure”** can mean “to have someone swear to something.”  Ahab’s question itself reveals that he doubted anything the prophet had to say.  He was actually saying to Micaiah, “How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?”  How ironic!  This king, who wouldn’t know the truth if it hit him in the face, was now accusing the only prophet who was telling the truth to be lying.  But one thing is for sure, whether Ahab knew it or not. Micaiah was only telling the king what he wanted to hear when he told him to do as his other prophets had said and go fight the Syrians (see verse 15).  He only agreed with them because he knew that Ahab really didn’t want to hear the truth.

 **IV. MICAIAH’S TRUE PROPHECY (I Kings 22:17-23)**

**A. Micaiah’s first vision (I Kings 22:17).**This verse says, **“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.”**  After Ahab accused Micaiah of lying, the prophet in essence said, “Okay, if you really want the truth, here it is.”  So Micaiah**“said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd.”**  Micaiah said that he **“saw all Israel,”**either in a vision, or in a dream, **“scattered”** or dispersed upon the mountains, like **“sheep”** that didn’t have **“a shepherd”** or no one to guide them.  This statement indicates that **“Israel”** would lose their king in battle (see I Kings 22:29, 31, 34-35), who was their **“shepherd.”**  The term **“shepherd”** can also refer to a king and Zechariah 13:7 says, “Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.”  The **“LORD”** also described Israel in this prophecy as **“These have no master.”**In the last part of this verse, the **“LORD”** said **“let them return every man to his house in peace.”**  After the people lost their king in battle, there would be a national call for them to retreat without accomplishing their goal—taking back Ramothgilead.  Their king would fall in war, but the people will go home **“in peace.”**  Therefore, Micaiah prophesied what he had seen and heard from God (see Jeremiah 23:28), while the prophets of King Ahab prophesied “out of their own hearts and followed their own spirit” (see Ezekiel 13:1-3).  Micaiah’s prophecy here described the defeated and leaderless armies of Israel in a state of confusion and disarray.

**B. Ahab refuses Micaiah’s message (I Kings 22:18).**This verse says, **“And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?”**After hearing Micaiah’s prophecy, Ahab must have felt vindicated for his earlier words telling King **“Jehoshaphat”**that Micaiah never had anything good to prophesy about him (see verse 8).  So he turns to **“Jehoshaphat”** and said, **“Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?”**His words indicate that he wanted **“Jehoshaphat”**to think that the prophet had something against him.  But it was Ahab who admitted that he hated Micaiah (see verse 8).  It’s true that those who hate or dislike others generally believe that those same persons hate or dislike them even though they have no reason to believe it.  But think about it; what **“evil”** did Micaiah **“prophesy”** to Ahab by telling him that if he went ahead with this attack it would be fatal to him?  The truth is the prophet was not prophesying any **“evil”** on the king.  He was simply telling him what would happen if he attacked the Syrians.  Ahab was free to choose to go to battle or not.  One of the best kindnesses we can show to someone who is following a dangerous path is to warn him or her about the dangers involved.

**C. Micaiah’s second vision (I Kings 22:19-23).**

**1. (vs. 19).** This verse says, **“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.”**Micaiah went on to tell King Ahab what was revealed to him in what seems to be his vision (see verse 17).  He began by saying **“Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD.”**This statement was intended to assure both King Ahab and King Jehoshaphat that this message came directly from God and not from Micaiah.  First, the prophet said, **“I saw the LORD sitting on his throne.”**The fact that only God was **“sitting on His throne”** indicated that God has sovereignty over every part of creation.  Micaiah also said,**“and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.”**  The words **“host of heaven”**most likely refers to angels (see Psalms 103:20-21; 148:2; Luke 2:13) that stood next to God on His **“right hand”** and His **“left** **hand.”**

**2. (vs. 20).**This verse says **“And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.”**  In his vision, the prophet declared that **“the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead?”**We can’t be sure if what the prophet saw really took place in heaven or not.  It seems more likely that this was God’s way of using what was actually taking place at that time (see I Kings 22:6) to reveal to **“Ahab”** that he would be convinced by his own false prophets to attack Syria and **“fall”**or die**“at Ramothgilead.”**The statement **“And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner”**indicates that this heavenly scene of God’s court was filled with spirits (see verse 21) who were offering different ways to **“persuade”** or convince Ahab to attack the Syrians which would end in his death.

**3. (vs. 21).**This verse says, **“And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him.”**As those present in God’s court offered ways to **“persuade”** Ahab to attack the Syrians, Micaiah said **“And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him.”**At some point, **“a spirit”** came before **“the LORD”** and expressed his desire to **“persuade”**or convince the king to go into battle.  We are not told who this **“spirit”** was, but if this scene was simply parabolic (see verse 20), the **“spirit”** may not have been real, but seemed to be real for the sake of this vision.

**4. (vs. 22).** This verse says **“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.”**In response to the **“spirit’s”** willingness to persuade Ahab, **“the LORD said unto him, Wherewith?”** With the word **“Wherewith,”** God was asking the **“spirit”** how was he going to convince the king?Then the **“spirit”** said**“I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.”**The**“spirit’s”** plan was to unify the words of all the king’s **“prophets”** so that they all told the same lie that God would deliver the Syrian king into Ahab’s hands (see I Kings 22:6).At this point, **“the LORD”** said **“Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.”**God approved the plan of the **“spirit”** and told him that he would **“prevail also”**meaning that his plan would accomplish its purpose, to have Ahab believe a lie that would result in his death (see I Kings 22:34-35).  So **“the LORD”** told the **“spirit”** to **“go forth and do so”**or go ahead and do as you have said.  **Note:  It may seem in this vision that God was giving the okay to this “spirit” to use a lie to convince King Ahab to attack the Syrians.  But that’s not the case.  Man has the freedom of choice and what he or she chooses to do or believe is on them, as in the case of Ahab.  However, God can use man’s wrong decisions for His good and the good of those who love Him and are called to His purposes (see Romans 8:28).  God has many ways of accomplishing His will, particularly concerning the fall of sinners when they are headed for disaster.  According to the Bible, there are malicious and lying spirits which go about continually seeking to devour (see I Peter 5:8), seeking to deceive (see Ephesians 4:14), and especially to put lies into the mouths of prophets as we see in this text.  The whole purpose of those malicious and lying spirits is to persuade or entice people into their own destruction.  The devil can deceive (see Genesis 3:1-6) and inflict harm on people, but not without divine permission (see Job 1:6-12; 12:16).  And even then, God allows it for His own purposes.  If it serves God’s purposes, when it comes to punishing those who refuse to receive the truth, He not only allows Satan to deceive them, but He will also “send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie”** **(see II Thessalonians 2:11-12).  But even knowing this we still have free will to make our own choices.  So, Micaiah gave Ahab fair warning, not only of the danger of proceeding in this war, but also the danger of believing those who encouraged him to do so.  We too, are warned to “beware of false prophets” (see Matthew 7:15) and to “try the spirits” (see I John 4:1).  Ahab would soon find out that the deception of lying spirits is never more deadly than when it comes “in the mouth of all his prophets.”**

**5. (vs. 23).**This verse says, **“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.”**If Ahab didn’t understand the meaning of Micaiah’s vision, the prophet clearly explained it here.  He said, **“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.”**  The **“spirit”** in the prophet’s vision had carried out God’s wishes by using Ahab’s four hundred prophets to give the king a false sense of security.  He would believe that everything would go his way if he attacked.  The **“spirit”** sent by God (see verse 22) did this as Micaiah said, when he **“put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets.”**Notice that Micaiah is speaking in the past tense which indicates that this had already been done before Micaiah saw it in his vision (see I Kings 22:6).  The term **“evil”** here can refer to any kind of disaster (see Joshua 23:15; II Samuel 12:11; 15:14; I Kings 9:9; 14:10; 21:21; Nehemiah 13:18); Esther 8:6).  So, the phrase **“and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee”**means that **“the LORD”** had declared disaster upon King Ahab.

 **V. MICAIAH’S PROPHECY INFURIATES THE KING (I Kings 22:26-28).**Verses 24-25 are not part of our printed text, but in those verses we learn what can happen when people speak truth to power. One of two things will happen.  The person in power will repent and change their minds, or they will continue on their path to destruction.  In this case, it began with violence toward Micaiah.  Verse 24 says that Zedekiah, a wicked prophet, insulted Micaiah by slapping him in the presence of everyone at the gate of the city (see II Chronicles 18:9).  He did it to both silence Micaiah and express his indignation at him.  To further humiliate Micaiah, after Zedekiah slapped him he also said, “Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee?”  In other words, Zedekiah was saying “When did the Spirit of the LORD leave me and speak to you?”  Then in verse 25, Micaiah answered Zedekiah saying “Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself.”  Micaiah was telling Zedekiah that if you really want an answer to your question, “you’ll have it on the day that the king is defeated when you enter an inner room looking for a place to hide yourself.”  Thank God for holy boldness!  Our printed text continues with verse 26.  **Note:**  **It’s interesting that even though this wicked prophet Zedekiah abused a prophet of the LORD, he was not reprimanded nor arrested for his behavior.  Instead, Ahab was pleased, and Jehoshaphat didn’t have the courage to stand up for God’s abused prophet, probably pretending that this was out of his jurisdiction.  As believers, we should always oppose wrong regardless of where we are or in whose company we are in.  Jesus would!**

**A. Ahab’s anger on display (I Kings 22:26-27).**

**1. (vs. 26).**This verse says, **“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.”**Evidently, Ahab was furious with **“Micaiah”** because of his prophecy concerning him.  As a result, Ahab told his officials to **“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.”**Ahab issued an order for **“Micaiah”**to be arrested and taken to **“Amon, the governor”**or ruler**“of the city”**of Samaria as well as to **“Joash the king’s son.”**Ahab probably mentioned both of these leaders in order to make sure that **“Micaiah”**was securely placed in jail.

**2. (vs. 27).**This verse says, **“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.”**Ahab then directed those who he assigned to arrest Micaiah to say to Amon and Joash **“Thus saith the king, put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction.”**Once Micaiah was in the custody of Amon and Joash, they were commanded to put him in jail and **“feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction.”**The word **“affliction”**here refers to only enough food and water to keep the prophet alive as in during the siege of a city.  Ahab said that they were to give Micaiah meager helpings of **“bread and water…until I come in peace.”**King Ahab was confident that he would be successful in his attack on the Syrians, so much so that he had no doubts that he would return **“in peace”** or return safely.  Knowing how evil Ahab was (see I Kings 16:30), it’s quite possible that he wanted Micaiah kept alive so that when he returned as a conqueror, he would put him to death for being a false prophet.  Little did Ahab know that this would be the last time he saw Micaiah.

**B. Micaiah’s final proclamation concerning Ahab (I Kings 22:28).**  Our final verse says **“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.”**King Ahab was certain that he would return from the battle victorious because the false prophets had confirmed it.  But **“Micaiah,”** God’s true prophet, knew better which prompted him to say to the king**“If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me.”**In other words, **“Micaiah”** was saying that if the king returned from the battle **“in peace”** that would prove that **“the LORD”** had not **“spoken”** through him.  It would prove that **“Micaiah”** was a false prophet.  **“Micaiah”** was so sure that God’s word was true and that Ahab would not return alive, that **“he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.”**The prophet was calling on those who were present at the gate to be witnesses to what he had prophesied concerning King Ahab.  If the king returned safely, that would confirm that Micaiah was a false prophet; but if he didn’t return safely, that would prove that Micaiah was a true prophet of God (see Deuteronomy 18:21-22). Of course, just as God prophesied by Micaiah, Ahab didn’t return to Samaria alive or in peace which confirmed that Micaiah was God’s true prophet (see I Kings 22:34-37).

**VI. Conclusion.** Unfortunately today, like in Micaiah’s time, too often people seem to want to question the Word of God instead of questioning their own sinful behavior. We must be careful not to question God’s Word because it could cause us to believe that our sinful behavior is acceptable.  When our sinful behavior becomes acceptable to us and others, we will find it very difficult to speak God’s Word, which is truth (see John 17:17), to anyone especially those in power.  But when we accept the fact that God’s Word is the only truth, then we will have no problem speaking it and leaving the results up to Him.