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**Micaiah:
Mark My Words,
All You People**

#1245-A

Series: Little Known Legends



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Maybe you've been there. Perhaps you were on a board or committee. An issue came up that seemed to have a simple solution. But when decision time came, you realized that God's Word would be violated if you made the decision the majority wanted to make. To speak up would brand you as "uncooperative" or "divisive". To keep quiet would grieve the heart of God. Maybe God placed you there for just such a moment. And yet, you knew in your heart that those whose job it was to listen, were not going to listen to you.

Nevertheless, God's Spirit kept gnawing at your heart, urging you to just "tell it like it is". You rationalized that you would lose your platform from which to effectively minister to these people in the future. And yet, God's word would not leave you alone. The moment of truth came nearer and nearer. With every passing moment, your choices seemed more clearly defined. Finally, you had no option but to simply speak the truth in love. The results? They were up to God. The responsibility to speak? That was up to you.

Today's story is about a man who is little-known to most of us, yet the choice he faced—a choice much like the one we've just described—was, in his case, a matter of life or death. He stood before two kings and dozens of heathen priests, and his only options were to ignore the truth and become popular or tell the truth and face either certain banishment at best, or perhaps even execution. His name? Micaiah. His story? It is found both in I Kings 22, and II Chronicles 18. In all likelihood, you've never heard of him. Just spelling his name is a challenge. But in God's eyes, he is well known indeed. The story begins in an era of peace. I Kings 22 opens with this statement:

For three years there was no war between Aram and Israel.

But in the third year Jehoshaphat king of Judah went down

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to see the king of Israel.

The king of Israel had said to his officials, “Don’t you know that Ramoth Gilead belongs to us and yet we are doing nothing to retake it from the king of Aram?”

So he asked Jehoshaphat, “Will you go with me to fight against Ramoth Gilead?” Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, “I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses.”

But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, “First seek the counsel of the Lord.”
(I Kings 22:1-5 NIV)

FIRST SEEK COUNSEL

We have a picture of two kings forming an alliance to destroy their mutual enemy. It had been quiet for some time in the Mid-East, something that can rarely be said. For Ahab, king of Israel, it was a sign that it was time to call out the troops and try to recover Ramoth Gilead, territory lost to the king of Syria. It almost sounds as though this story could have come from a newspaper in our generation.

For three years, the sound of trumpets calling the Jews into battle had been silent. For three years, the Israeli generals had been awaiting the next attack from without, but it had not come. Now it was time to go on the offensive. The decision began to take shape at another of those “summit” conferences between the king of Israel and the king of Judah. Ahab, of course, made the initial overture. He approaches Jehoshaphat and asks, “Will you go with me?” Jehoshaphat nobly replies, “My people are yours; my horses are yours. Of course, I’ll go.” But there was one stipulation. And a good one, it was. He said, “Shouldn’t we first ask the Lord about it?” Oh, the wrong decisions in the church and out that could be avoided if we would but ask ourselves that one question before proceeding. It’s incredible how many of us who talk daily about being “led by the Lord” fail to stop and simply ask for direction before making some of the biggest decisions of our lives.

Jehoshaphat knew that to go into battle without being sent into battle by God would be a tragic mistake. Ahab, on the other hand, had the more typical attitude towards God’s will. Let’s read on:

So the king of Israel brought together the prophets—about four hundred men—and asked them, “Shall I go to

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war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?” “Go,” they answered, “for the Lord will give it into the king’s hand.”

But Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there not a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?”

The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, “There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah.” “The king should not say that,” Jehoshaphat replied.

So the king of Israel called one of his officials and said, “Bring Micaiah son of Imlah at once.” (I Kings 22:6-9 NIV)

IS THERE NOT A PROPHET?

Ahab did what we all like to do. He surrounded himself with “yes” men to whom he could go for counsel, knowing that they would tell him exactly what he wanted to hear. And when he wanted encouragement that he was on the right track, he would call in these hypocritical helpers and ask them if what he was doing was right, much as he would say to his own likeness, “Mirror, mirror on the wall, whose the greatest king of all?” Now they had the right to tell him what was contrary to his wishes, but they wouldn’t be around long if they did.

Ahab was not short on these prophets. He had 400 resident gurus who would enter his chamber and manufacture “prophecies” designed to make for a merry monarch. This occasion was no exception. What Ahab wanted was to go to war, capture Ramoth Gilead, and have God be pleased with his day’s endeavors. So he called in his tribe of prevaricating prognosticators and said, “Shall I go to war against Ramoth Gilead? or shall I refrain?”

Easy question. In unison his 400 puppets sang out, “Go, the Lord will give it into the king’s hand.” I trust these 400 chanting cowards were not eligible for the draft. They no doubt had some kind of theological exemptions, and they were not about to tell Ahab what he didn’t want to hear. Jehoshaphat saw through it all immediately. “Isn’t there a prophet of the Lord whom we can inquire of?” he asked.

You can almost see Ahab’s face turn sour. “If you look in the yellow pages under ‘Prophets of God’ you’ll only find one listing,” the cantankerous king responded, “His name is Micaiah, the son of Imlah. But I can’t stand the guy. No matter what I ask him,

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he tells me what I don't want to hear." Jehoshaphat rebuked his counterpart directly. "Don't say that," he responded. "Okay, okay," Ahab consented. If it took listening to Micaiah's derogatory dialogue one more time to get Jehoshaphat to go, he'd do it. So he called in the pessimistic prophet, and you guessed it.

Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor by the entrance of the gate of Samaria, with all the prophets prophesying before them.

Now Zedekiah son of Kenaanah had made iron horns and he declared, "This is what the Lord says: 'With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.'"

All the other prophets were prophesying the same thing. "Attack Ramoth Gilead and be victorious," they said, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand."

The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, as one man the other prophets are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably."

But Micaiah said, "As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me."

When he arrived, the king asked him, "Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?" "Attack and be victorious," he answered, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand."

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?"

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.'"

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

(1 Kings 22:10-18 NIV)

THIS IS WHAT THE LORD SAYS

Picture the scenario. Zoom the lens of your heart for a close-up just outside the gate of Samaria. Two portable thrones had been set up in a makeshift amphitheater just outside the city gate. It would be comical if so much were not at stake. Four hundred "tell you what you want to hear" comics posing as

prophets were chanting aloud “Go, Ahab go! Victory’s yours, this we know! Fight, fight, fight!” (or something similar).

The head cheerleader was a guy named Zedekiah. He was a particularly melodramatic fellow who had a flair for theatrics. He held a set of iron horns above his head, and danced around shouting, “This is what the Lord says: with these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.” What a dangerous game to play. To pose as prophets was bad enough. To look a man in the eye and say, “Thus saith the Lord,” when the Lord was not thus saying, now that’s blasphemy. Preachers and teachers who knowingly bend the truth and pretend it to be a word from God are asking for judgment.

Believing there is safety in numbers, the other 399 prancing prophets were shouting in unison, “Amen, Zedekiah, preach it! We agree.” And, Beloved, pretending to subscribe to false teaching is as dangerous as teaching it.

Meanwhile, Micaiah was on his way for his command performance with kings I and II. His guide, who had “fetched” him for the ranting ruler warned him, “All you have to do is agree with the other prophets and you’ll be okay. They’re all telling Ahab it’s God’s will to go to war.” Micaiah’s words echo down through the corridors of time with such an impact that I believe every teacher and preacher who holds forth the Word of Life ought to meditate on this passage before every message. He said this, “As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me. All I can do is speak the truth,” Micaiah responds. “I’m not here to tickle their ears but to speak for God.”

Just how this next incident transpired, we don’t know for sure. The king asked the prophet if it was God’s will for the two nations to attack Ramoth Gilead. Mike must have used a good bit of sarcasm, but he answered, “Sure, Ahab, that’s what you should do.” I say he must have been sarcastic, because even though that’s the answer Ahab wanted, he knew Micaiah was just making fun of his make-believe counterparts, who by now had worked up quite a lather with their chanting and preaching.

“How many times do I have to tell you not to joke around with me?” King Ahab replied. “I want the truth!” Of course, he didn’t, but in his frustration, he asked for it, and he got it. Micaiah proceed to paint a word picture for the king of the vision he had received from God. “I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like

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sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'" In other words, Mike saw Ahab's army lost in the desert without a commander-in-chief.

Like a whining toddler, King Ahab screamed, "I told you so, I told you so, all he ever does is say bad things about me. Boo-hoo!" Loose paraphrase.

Micaiah continued, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left.

And the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?' "One suggested this, and another that.

Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, 'I will entice him.'

"By what means?' the Lord asked. "I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,' he said. "You will succeed in enticing him,' said the Lord. 'Go and do it.'

"So now the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you."

Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. "Which way did the spirit from the Lord go when he went from me to speak to you?" he asked.

(1 Kings 22:19-24 NIV)

MARK MY WORDS...

Wow! What a tense moment this is. Micaiah concludes his prophecy of doom by explaining that God had been pondering how to best deceive Ahab into rushing to his own death, when He decided the best way was to blind his 400 lying prophets into prophesying that it was God's will for them to plunge into battle, certain of imminent victory. He looked 400 wild-eyed soothsayers in the eye and called them liars.

Zedekiah didn't take it lying down, either. He walked up to God's man, slapped him in the face, and said, "So what way did God's Spirit go when he left my life and ran to yours?" The truth was, God's Spirit wasn't inhabiting Zedekiah and his 399 cohorts, but these men had ranted for so long about representing God, they had actually deceived themselves! Micaiah didn't back down. Here is his answer:

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Micaiah replied, "You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room."

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

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 declared, "If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me." Then he added, "Mark my words, all you people!"
(I Kings 22:25-28 NIV)

If you don't admire this man by now, you've missed the thrust of the story. Here he is, standing before the two most powerful men in the world, surrounded by 400 wild-eyed prophets, all of whom he had just branded as liars, and when slapped in the face by the chief of the false prophets, simply replied, "You'll have your answer when you find yourself hiding for your very life, as the enemy pursues and destroys our soldiers."

King Ahab, needless to say, didn't respond well at all to the words of our fearless representative of truth. Micaiah's sentence was that he was to be banished to prison and left to live on bread and water until the monarch returned triumphantly from his military excursion. Mike's response was,

If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me.
(I Kings 22:28 NIV)

And then this amazing man turns to this crowd of chanting enemies and adds...

Mark my words, all you people...
(I Kings 22:28 NIV)

And we, too, should mark his words. Here was a man drawn into a difficult situation with impossible odds, and all he had to do to save his life and his reputation was to agree with the majority. But the majority was not in harmony with the Word of God. That left him only two choices: He could compromise and live with himself and God as a silent witness in the midst of life's great trials, or he could take a stand for righteousness and leave the results in the hands of a sovereign God.

Micaiah chose to do the latter. His name is hardly a household word. In fact, references to his life in Bible dictionaries are usually limited to a paragraph at best. But I do not believe that in God's

sight, this man has gone unnoticed. I believe that his life stands out in God's heart as a man of integrity who lived in an era when integrity was virtually unknown. He will go down as well, as a man of courage, because it is one thing to have convictions. It is still another to risk your life for those convictions. His was integrity coupled with courage—a rare, but beautiful balance, indeed.

By now you have probably guessed that this is not the end of the story. God's reputation was at stake, and God's word had gone forth. Two powerful men were now going into battle without God's consent and they were doing it "in the Lord's name."

So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead.

The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will enter the battle in disguise, but you wear your royal robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle.

Now the king of Aram had ordered his thirty-two chariot commanders, "Do not fight with anyone, small or great, except the king of Israel."

When the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought, "Surely this is the king of Israel." So they turned to attack him, but when Jehoshaphat cried out,

The chariot commanders saw that he was not the king of Israel and stopped pursuing him.

But someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor. The king told his chariot driver, "Wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I've been wounded."

All day long the battle raged, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans. The blood from his wound ran onto the floor of the chariot, and that evening he died.

As the sun was setting, a cry spread through the army: "Every man to his town; everyone to his land!"

So the king died and was brought to Samaria, and they buried him there.

They washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria (where the prostitutes bathed), and the dogs licked up his blood, as the word of the Lord had declared. (I Kings 22:29-38 NIV)

AS THE WORD OF THE LORD HAD DECLARED

Once again, God vindicates His Word. Always it is so. King Ahab and King Jehoshaphat saddled up their trusty steeds, called out their crack cavalry units and headed for their Persian Gulf Crisis. Ahab decided to play CIA agent and wear a disguise, but he advised his counterpart to go to the party dressed as himself. What his military strategy was, I don't know, but it could have been his supreme act of cowardice, so that his friend rather than him would be a sitting duck if they were looking for a king to kill. In any case, off into the battle they went.

The king of Aram had ordered his 32 best commanders to find King Ahab and kill him. Seeing Jehoshaphat in his royal robes, they naturally assumed that he was the object of their witch-hunt, and they proceeded to pursue him. Jehoshaphat must have finally protested, and seeing that this was not Ahab, they stopped chasing him. But a few yards away, a random shot from the bow of one of Aram's soldiers just happened to find its way to the body of a disguised King Ahab, and it just happened to find its way through a crease in his armor. What a coincidence. No, what an amazing God. Crying out that he was wounded, Ahab had his soldiers prop him up in his chariot so he could have a front row seat as his mighty men of valor went on to victory. As evening arrived, Ahab died, and his blood ran down onto the floorboard of the chariot in which he was riding. The armies fled, just as Micaiah had prophesied, and they buried Ahab in Samaria, washing his chariot in the pool where the prostitutes bathed, the dogs licking up his blood, even as the Lord had declared.

So another chapter ends in the history of God's people. Another wicked king is led to his death by acting out of rebellion to the will of God. And quietly in the background of life's history books we read only a passing mention of this man named Micaiah. But what a mention it is. For here was a man who would not compromise what God had said. He would not avoid the confrontation, would not soften the message, and would not back down when challenged because truth was involved. And truth cannot change.

We don't really hear anything more about Micaiah in Scripture. Did he rot in prison? Was he released and made a hero? Did he steal quietly into the background once again and just serve as he was called on? We don't know for sure. It was Josephus' contention

that Micaiah was the unknown prophet of I Kings 20:35-43, who confronted Ahab and condemned him because of his failure to obey the word of the Lord. We don't know for sure. Some believe that Micaiah was already in prison for this act of bravery, when he was called out by Ahab and Jehoshaphat for the moment of truth we just read. That would make his boldness in condemning the king even more incredible.

One thing we know for sure. Here was a man who considered the Word of God more important than his own life. Here was a man who stood for truth, even when no one else around him agreed or understood. Here was a man who looked powerful men straight in the eye and proclaimed, "Thus saith the Lord!" Interestingly enough, Christian history has most of its chapters of glory written about such men. The men who turned history upside down were those who, knowing that truth was being violated, would not remain silent.

In today's world, such men and women are at a premium, but then such men and women have always been at a premium. All about us, compromises are being made, and many times they are being justified in the name of progress. The "God must not have meant that" crowd has capitalized on the humanistic flavor of our society and listened to the devil's lies, just as clearly as Eve did in the garden.

"Has God said that?" is just as common a question as it was then. And as Eve's sons and daughters our response is often no better than hers. Maybe you are struggling with a decision where you work, or at your school or in your home. Everyone around you is saying the best thing to do is what everybody else is doing. I mean, it's acceptable now. Oh, it's not really right. You know that, but everybody does it. And if you speak out, they'll think you are some kind of fanatic, and you don't want that reputation. What do you do, close your eyes and pretend it is okay? Oh sure, you can affect the final decision if you want to, but it will make you unpopular. Who do you go to for counsel in a situation like that? Do you find those who will tell you what you want to hear, like Ahab, or do you go to a Micaiah who will tell it like it is? Maybe it's a family crisis and as a father or a mother, you are tending to listen to your children and make decisions based on what they say everybody does, but deep in your heart you know that even if everybody does it, God says, "Don't". What do you do? You want to be a popular parent or do you want to be a

spokesman for the Word of God?

You are on a committee or governing board at your church or school. A decision has to be made concerning an issue that has been divisive in the past. If you go along with the majority and say nothing, you'll win some friends and keep from having to be the odd one who disagrees. But something inside of you keeps gnawing at you, and certain Scriptures keep popping into your mind that make it clear that God's way is not the way they're going. You don't want to be known as the "ultra-conservative" in the group, so you rationalize that maybe you misunderstood the Scriptures. "Has God said?" begins to flood your mind. Oh, Beloved, the author of that line is the same one who penned Eve's demise so many thousands of years ago. Why not consider Micaiah? Listen as his peers whispered in his ear, "Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably." And listen to his response, "I can tell you only what the Lord tells me."

Even as they marched him off to prison to live on bread and water, and face possible execution, Micaiah said "Mark my words all you people!" And his words were words that cut to the heart of those who listened and ran totally at odds with what they were planning to do.

Had Ahab listened to Micaiah, he would not have faced the fate he endured. But Micaiah's job was finished when he simply shared the truth. Ezekiel 33:3-6 paraphrased says,

When you see the enemy coming and blow not the trumpet, their blood is on your hands. But if you see the enemy coming, and blow the trumpet, and they heed it not, their blood is on their hands.

So the outcome is not our responsibility. God takes care of that. But our responsibility is to take the stand we are called to take, regardless of the consequences. Are you willing to do that in today's world?

Micaiah was a living legend. No, his name does not ring out through the courts of history like Elijah and Moses and Paul. But tucked away in the heart of God is a special place for the likes of him, and for the likes of you, as well. When in your own little world you are willing to look those around you in the eye and simply say, "I can only say what the Lord has said. I can only do what the Lord allows."

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The results on this earth may not be spectacular. But oh, Beloved, when God wraps His loving arms about you in Glory and says, "Well done, my good and faithful servant," it will be worth it all.

Let us pray.

Our Father,

Make us men and women, gentle in spirit, loving in nature, but strong in faith, men and women who are not afraid when the odds are against us and the majority chooses to disobey the Word of God. May we become men and women who are not afraid to quietly and simply say, "I can only speak what the Lord has said".

Some of us in this room even today, Father, are being faced with or will be shortly, decisions that they will be in the minority, decisions where the people around them are going to want to do and say and be other than what God desires. The choice is so delicate, the temptation so great to go with the crowd. But, Father, we know what is lacking in our generation are men and women, young men and women, older men and women alike, who are willing to gently look the crowd in the eye and say, "No. Whatever God says is still good enough for me. Mark my words all you people, mark my words." May we become those men and women.

In Jesus Name,

Amen.

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A Challenge to Further Study

1- Do a study of Ahab's reign as King. What characteristics in his life surfaced again and again?

2- Read I Kings 22 and II Chronicles 18. What additional information do you get about Micaiah by combining the two passages?

3- When did the Syrians take Ramoth Gilead? Why was this so important to Ahab?

4- Why do you think God allowed Jehoshaphat to be present at the exact time of Ahab's confrontation with Micaiah?

5- Can you relate to Ahab's problem of wanting counsel only from those who would tell him what he wanted to hear? How can you avoid that pitfall?

6- Is there an area in your life where you are being tested as Micaiah was? Are you going to speak "only God's words"?

7- Ask God to burden your heart that you not compromise His Word in order to be "popular."

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(02.17.17)