

✠ *In the Name of Jesus* ✠

You've got to feel for Jehoshaphat. No, not because he's got a funny-sounding name. It sounds funny only to us. In those days and in that culture, names were chosen for what they mean. "Jehoshaphat" means "Yahweh judges." What a great name for anyone who needs to remember that the Lord has already determined what's right and what's wrong, and he passes judgment on those who do the opposite. Jehoshaphat was definitely a king who cared about what the Lord wants, especially early in his reign.

But you have to feel for Jehoshaphat. He was in a situation like what we often find ourselves in. We're Christians. We believe Jesus redeemed everyone by his death on the cross, and that every single person who is brought to believe this truth has eternal life. Since we are redeemed, we want to live for Jesus. We want to know what the Lord approves of so we can do it. We want to know what the Lord disapproves of so we can avoid it. This outlook sometimes puts us at odds with people we care about.

The conversation inside your head may sound like this. "I know the Lord doesn't want me to compromise the truths of the Bible. He doesn't even want me to look like I'm compromising the truth. I love the Lord. But I also want to get along with so-n-so, who sometimes wants me to participate in an activity that takes me too close to the line between right and wrong. In fact, I have sometimes gone over the line. As a forgiven follower of Jesus, I try to stay a safe distance from that line. But I also want to get along with this person. I don't want them to think poorly of me, and they will, if they get even a

whiff of disapproval from me. They'll think that I think I'm better than they are. I don't. But when someone feels disapproved of, they aren't happy with any explanation for why I won't cross a line. The only thing they want to hear is that I'm going along with them. It's like a loyalty test. They want me to be loyal to them. But I know that my first loyalty is to my Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior from sin. So this is not a comfortable situation."

Jehoshaphat found himself in just such a situation. After years of following the Lord with all his heart, he made the mistake of allying himself with the king of Israel. "Wait. I thought Jehoshaphat is the king." Yes, he is, but he's king of Judah, to the south. And he has allied himself with Ahab, king of Israel, to the north. "Wait. Isn't Ahab a wicked king?" Yes, that's why it was a mistake for Jehoshaphat to ally himself with Ahab.

Then Jehoshaphat visited Ahab. Ahab threw a huge feast for Jehoshaphat. After all that hospitality Ahab asked Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to retake Ramoth Gilead from the foreign king who is occupying it?" (see v. 3-4). What could Jehoshaphat say? He was in an alliance with Ahab, and Ahab had just lavished him with a feast. And it would be good to get an important city like Ramoth Gilead back into Israelite hands. "Sure, I'll go with you. But let's consult the LORD YAHWEH first."

That was fine with Ahab. He assembled all 400 of his prophets and put the question to them: "Shall I go to war and retake Ramoth Gilead, or shall I stay home?" "Go," they answered, "for the Lord, Adonai, will give it into your hands."

You can almost see Ahab turning to Jehoshaphat and saying, “Well, there you have it. The Lord says go.” But Jehoshaphat wasn’t satisfied. So can you hear Ahab ask, “What’s the matter, my ally?”

Jehoshaphat replied with something like: “Your prophets used the wrong name for God. When they call him ‘adonai,’ they could mean any of the false gods worshiped in the nearby nations. That’s not good enough for me. I said I wanted to consult the one true God. ⁷*Is there not a prophet of the LORD, YAHWEH, here whom we can inquire of?*”

“Well, sure,” Ahab said with a sigh. ⁸*“There’s still one prophet in my kingdom through whom we can inquire of YAHWEH, but I hate the guy because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah.”*

I suspect that Jehoshaphat wanted to say to Ahab, “Yeah, buddy, well maybe that’s because there’s never been a king like you who sells himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD. You married that wicked woman Jezebel. You vacillate between the Lord and your false gods” (see 1 Kings 21:25-26). Perhaps Jehoshaphat wanted to say all this, but instead he replied, “Friend, you shouldn’t say that about a prophet who represents the one true God” (v.8)

So Micaiah was summoned. And that’s where our Old Testament lesson picks up the story. The two kings, ¹⁰*dressed in their royal robes*, and the 400 false prophets continued with their pep rally. “Ahab, Ahab, he’s our man. If he can’t recapture Ramoth Gilead, no one can.” Then one particular false prophet named Zedekiah stepped forward

with a prop. He had made some horns out of iron and was keeping them in reserve for just the right time. This was it. Listen to him appeal to the pride of the two kings: ¹¹*“This is what the LORD, YAHWEH, says: ‘With these horns you will gore your enemies until they are destroyed.’”* What a performance! He told Ahab what he wanted to hear, just like false teachers do: “success, victory, glory to you, my king.” And did you hear Zedekiah adjust his message slightly to please Jehoshaphat? Instead of using the more generic name for God, Adonai, like he did before, this time he used the Lord’s proper name, Yahweh. On cue, ¹²*all the other prophets were prophesying the same thing. “Attack Ramoth Gilead and be victorious,” they said, “for the LORD, YAHWEH, will give it into the king’s hand.”*

Meanwhile the deputy who had gone to summon Micaiah, the only one of Yahweh’s prophets left in the land, was twisting his arm to fall in line and prophesy the same message. ¹³*“Look, as one man the other prophets are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably.”* Would Micaiah succumb to such peer pressure?

“I can’t do that, ¹³*Micaiah said, “As surely as YAHWEH lives, I can tell the king only what YAHWEH tells me.”*

¹⁵*When Micaiah arrived, king Ahab asked him, “Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?”*

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

I'm not sure if Micaiah's words were laced with sarcasm or nonchalance or a mocking tone, but something in the way Micaiah spoke led Ahab to say ¹⁶to him, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of YAHWEH?"

"You want the truth, O King? Here it is. ¹⁷I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and YAHWEH said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'"

Ahab ¹⁸said to Jehoshaphat, "Didn't I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad? He's saying that we're going to lose, and I'm going to die in battle at Ramoth Gilead."

But Micaiah wasn't done. ¹⁹"Hear the word of YAHWEH: I saw YAHWEH sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left. ²⁰And YAHWEH said, 'Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?' One suggested this, and another that. ²¹Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before YAHWEH and said, 'I will entice him.' ²²'By what means?' YAHWEH 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 YAHWEH. 'Go and do it.' ²³So now YAHWEH has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. YAHWEH has decreed disaster for you."

²⁴Then Zedekiah...went up and slapped Micaiah in the face, because that's what they did to liars in that culture. "Which way did the spirit from YAHWEH go when he went from me to speak to you?" he asked. "You're the one who's lying, not I."

²⁵Micaiah replied, "Look, I can't prove what I'm saying right now. If I could, the lying spirit would not succeed in enticing Ahab to his death in battle. But you, Zedekiah, you will find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room."

Ahab ²⁶ then ordered, "Take Micaiah and send him back to...the city... ²⁷Put him in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely."

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

You've got to feel for Jehoshaphat. The 400 prophets, now using the proper name of the Lord, were foretelling success. Micaiah prophesied success and then prophesied failure. So how could Jehoshaphat know who was telling him the truth? Sometimes it's not easy.

Micaiah insisted that if King Ahab returned from Ramoth Gilead safely, everyone would know Micaiah had been lying (see Deuteronomy 18:21-22). But if Ahab died... The only problem was that Jehoshaphat would have to wait until he went into battle with Ahab to find out whether Micaiah was telling him the truth. And frankly, that would be a little late.

Well, was there anything in the Bible that could have helped Jehoshaphat? Actually, yes. In Deuteronomy 13, Moses gave the Israelites a test they could apply to prophets. Moses wrote: ¹If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, ²and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let

us follow other gods” (gods you have not known) “and let us worship them,”³ you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. Jehoshaphat could have applied this test to the 400 prophets before him. Were any of them known to advocate false gods? Since Ahab sometimes worshiped false gods and these were his hired prophets, it was reasonable to assume that they were unreliable sources for the truth, and that Micaiah was telling the truth. But still this was not an easy situation for Jehoshaphat to navigate.

We’ve been in situations like this in our day. Maybe not where lives are hanging in the balance, but where something far more important is—the Lord’s honor as the one true God. HOW CAN YOU TELL WHO’S TELLING THE TRUTH? Do we listen to the world’s prophets telling us it’s okay to **dream** about getting rich? Or do we listen to the Lord who promises to provide all that we need, and urges us to practice contentment? The world’s prophets tell us that it’s good to dress immodestly and that it’s perfectly normal to say “O my God” as a mere expression. They say it’s fine to lie, cheat, steal, do your job haphazardly, to scheme, mislead, and then cover it all up, since practically everyone else is doing it too. They say it’s good not to spend too much time in the Bible: “You don’t want to be unpopular with everyone.” Do we let the world’s prophets drown out the voice of God’s Word which says, “Repenting of sin and turning to the Lord is a God-pleasing way to live”? That’s basically what Micaiah was saying to Ahab. “If you don’t repent and believe the Word of the Lord, you’re going to die.”

HOW CAN YOU TELL WHO’S TELLING THE TRUTH? Focus on repentance. With false teachers the message is almost never about repentance, whereas a true messenger of God will urge you to have godly sorrow over your sins [contrition] and to turn away from them [repentance]. A true messenger of God will want you to know you have God’s full forgiveness through Jesus. A true messenger of God will urge you to use the phrase “O my God” only in prayer. A true messenger of God will urge you to reconcile with those you’ve hurt and to forgive those who have hurt you, just like God for Jesus’ sake has forgiven us for all the ways we have grieved him. A true messenger of God will encourage you to do the right thing for the glory of God who redeemed us from all sin, and not primarily because it is good for you (although it is).

In other words, be like a tea bag. Steep yourself in God’s Word as often as you can. Let the warm waters of God’s truth fill you up. Or as the Apostle Paul puts it: “*Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will* (Romans 12:2). With much time spent in God’s Word you can tell who’s telling you the truth and who’s pointing you away from the one true God. When you’re faced with real-life situations similar to what Jehoshaphat was in, the Holy Spirit can guide your mind through all of the Bible passages you have poured in. With his help you’ll navigate to God’s side of the line. And that’s a very good place to live, right next to our Savior Jesus.