

## Standing for what is right

**Reading: Matthew 7:13-14** “...*narrow is the gate.....which leads to life.....*”

### **Introduction:**

In a lot of areas of our society, we have a policy of “*majority rules*”<sup>1</sup>. What this means is that what most people want or say is what we go with. For example;

- politicians are elected to governments and local councils based on who gains the most votes.
- if we all wish to go on a picnic, we will generally decide on a place that best suits most people.

But for the Christian, when it comes to matters regarding the truth; when it comes to matters of religion and moral issues, such things are not to be decided by the majority (consider **Proverbs 16:25**) – they are to be decided by God’s Word (**Psalms 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16-17**). As a result of this, we can sometimes find ourselves in situations where what the majority wants or says is contrary to what God wants or says. We are then confronted with the choice;

- do we just go along with everybody else and do what most others say or want to do? or,
- do we resist the temptation to “*fit in with others*”; to “*not rock the boat*”, and instead, commit ourselves to do what is right by God’s Word?

This is not a new scenario. It is one that God’s people have faced throughout the ages<sup>2</sup>. In this lesson, I want us to look at the example of Micaiah, a man of God from the Old Testament (**1 Kings 22:1-28**) who was faced with exactly this kind of scenario, and then draw some practical application for us (**Romans 15:4**).

## **LESSON**

### **1) Micaiah, the prophet of God**

#### a) Historical background.

The timeframe is around 853BC. It has been about 80 years since the Hebrew nation had split into the two kingdoms – Israel in the north, Judah in the south.

- the southern kingdom (Judah) was being ruled by King Jehoshaphat, a man who (mostly) did “...*what was right in the eyes of the Lord.....*” (**1 Kings 22:42-43**).
- in the northern kingdom was King Ahab, the husband of Jezebel. He “...*did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him.....*” (**1 Kings 16:30-31**). Rather than worship the true God, he served and worshiped the false god, Baal.

In spite of the moral differences between these two kings, they were related by marriage. Jehoshaphat’s son, Jehoram, was married to Athalia, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (**2 Chronicles 18:1; 2 Kings 8:16-18, 25-26**).

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<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that there are times when we have to take into account the legitimate concerns of a minority.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Noah (**Genesis 6:5-9**), Joshua (**Joshua 24:15**), Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego (**Daniel 3:1-18**)

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During Ahab's reign, Ben-Hadad, the King of Syria, had attacked Israel – initially at Samaria (**1 Kings 20:1-22**), then at Aphek<sup>3</sup> (**1 Kings 20:23-30**). He lost both battles, and so a treaty was drawn up between Syria and Israel (**1 Kings 20:31-34; 22:1**).

### b) The false prophets.

After 3 years of peace, Jehoshaphat visits Ahab, and while there, Ahab asks him (Jehoshaphat) if he would help drive Syria out of Ramoth-Gilead<sup>4</sup>, a town previously part of Israel (**1 Kings 22:1-4a**). Jehoshaphat agrees to help, but wants to ask God about it first (vs. **4b-5**). Verses **6-14** takes up the account;

- The King asks 400 prophets whether he should go to war or not.
- The prophets tell him “yes” (adding the Lord's name to their words in order to add “legitimacy”).
- Jehoshaphat then asks “*Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here?*”
  - he could obviously see that the 400 prophets were false prophets.
- The King reluctantly sends for Micaiah, a prophet who always brought Ahab “bad news”.
- The two Kings gather everyone together in a public place.
  - Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah, puts on a display with horns.
  - all the prophets continue to tell the King that he will be victorious.
- Micaiah is asked to say positive things for the King – just like all the other prophets.
- Micaiah states that he will say whatever the Lord tells him to say<sup>5</sup>.

### c) Micaiah's prophecy and imprisonment.

When Micaiah came and spoke, he initially humoured Ahab by telling him that he (Ahab) would be victorious. But Ahab knew that he was not telling the truth<sup>6</sup> (**1 Kings 22:15-16**). So Micaiah then tells him what would really happen (vs. **17-23**).

- Israel will be scattered.
- God allowed a spirit to use the false prophets to encourage Ahab to go to battle.
  - the intention being for Ahab to fall in the battle.
- God has declared disaster on Ahab.

Finally, in vs. **26-27** we see that Ahab sends Micaiah to prison. He is to remain there until Ahab returns from the battle<sup>7</sup>, and is to be fed just bread and water.

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<sup>3</sup> Aphek is located about 5KM east of the Sea of Galilee.

<sup>4</sup> Ramoth-Gilead is located about 50KM east-south-east of the Sea of Galilee. It was also one of the original cities of refuge (**Deuteronomy 4:41-43**).

<sup>5</sup> He would speak “*as the oracles of God*” (**1 Peter 4:11**).

<sup>6</sup> Probably based on the fact that he had never said anything encouraging to Ahab before – **2 Kings 22:8**.

<sup>7</sup> Ahab dies in battle (**1 Kings 22:29-37**), so Micaiah may well have stayed in prison for a very long time.

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### 2) Lessons from Micaiah's prophecy

There are three lessons I want us to draw from this account;

a) Micaiah spoke what he knew was right – to please God, not man.

The 400 prophets had told the King what they thought he wanted to hear, *i.e.* that he would be victorious in battle. They wanted to be pleasing to the King.

- one even resorted to theatrics with a set of horns (**1 Kings 22:11**).

Micaiah himself was asked to “toe the line”, “don’t be different”, “say words of encouragement” (vs.13). In other words, just go along with all the other prophets – don’t be a “spoil-sport”.

But after initially playing along with what the others had said, Micaiah told Ahab the truth; he said what God had said (vs.17-23). Micaiah’s aim was to please God, not man (**Galatians 1:10**).

#### Lesson for us – do what God wants, not what the “crowd” wants or does.

The ways of the world are not the ways of God (**Isaiah 55:8; 1 Corinthians 1:25-28**). As a result, there will be times when the people around us will say or do things that are contrary to the teachings and principles of God’s Word. For example;

- using course language (**Ephesians 4:29**)
- engaging in gossip or slander of others (**Romans 1:29; 1 Peter 2:1**).
- accepting or condoning immoral lifestyles, *e.g.* homosexuality and homosexual marriage (**Romans 1:26-27**).
- putting forward various religious beliefs that are false (**John 17:17**).
- jumping on “band wagons<sup>8</sup>” to unjustly ridicule either a person or an idea (**Matthew 12:36**).
- engaging in drunken or rebellious behaviour (**1 Peter 4:3**).

So what should our response be in such circumstances?

*Firstly*, we need to display godly attitudes and actions. Without the right attitudes (**Philippians 4:8**), it will be hard for us to display the right actions (**Ephesians 5:8-11<sup>9</sup>**).

*Secondly*, The situation may require that we simply refuse to join in and take part in an activity that is not wholesome – whether the activity be words that are being spoken or deeds that are being done (**1 Thessalonians 5:22; 1 Peter 2:11-12**).

*Thirdly*, the circumstance may be such that we do need to say something<sup>10</sup> to set things right (*e.g.* **Galatians 2:11-14**). Such times can be a good teaching moment. But we must do our best to ensure that what we say and the way we say it is not deliberately designed to insult or offend<sup>11</sup> (**1 Corinthians 10:32; 2 Corinthians 6:3**).

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<sup>8</sup> When people jump on a “band wagon”, they usually do so without having first thought the issue through for themselves. Also, people sometimes do it in an attempt to take the focus off their own failings. Consider **Romans 12:3; Philippians 2:3**.

<sup>9</sup> Verse 11 – one way to “expose” or “show up” bad conduct is to display good conduct.

<sup>10</sup> There can be times when silence or doing nothing is the best course of action (**Ecclesiastes 3:7b**). In fact, there were times when Jesus chose to say nothing as a response to intimidation (**Matthew 26:63a; 27:12-14**).

<sup>11</sup> However, there are times when people will be offended by the Truth (**Matthew 13:54-57**).

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- b) Ahab recognised the truth, but didn't want to follow it if it didn't suit him.

It is interesting to note that Ahab wanted Micaiah to speak the truth (**1 Kings 22:16**). However, it is quite clear from his lifestyle that he didn't really want to follow the truth (**1 Kings 16:29-33**). He had already decided that he wanted to go out and fight the Syrians (**1 Kings 22:4a**). He even tried to "foil" God's plan (**1 Kings 22:20**) by disguising himself (**1 Kings 22:30**). However, as "fate" (or the workings of God) would have it, he did not escape – he was struck by an arrow and was killed (**1 Kings 22:34-35**).

### Lesson for us – desire the truth, but also desire to follow it.

We need to have a desire to know the Truth (**1 Peter 2:2**). We need to spend time with God's Word, increasing our knowledge and understanding of what He requires of us (**Colossians 1:10; Ephesians 5:10**). But we must make sure that our approach to the Word is not simply about trying to justify that which we have already decided we want to do (based on our own will)<sup>12</sup>.

*i.e.* situations where we have already made up our minds on what we want to do based on our own desires, and we look to the scriptures simply for justification (or checking to see that there are no scriptures that explicitly say we can't do it). People who take this approach to the scriptures run the risk of putting their own will before the Father's Will.

Rather, we are to surrender our own will (**Matthew 16:24**), and approach the Word with the aim of identifying what type of person God wants us to be; what He wants us to do; and how we can please Him. In other words, we study the Word to learn about Jesus (**John 5:39**). We study the Word so that it can teach and equip us for the work of ministry (**Ephesians 4:11-16**); to correct us and instruct us in the ways of righteousness (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**); and to change (or "transform") us into the type of people God wants us to be (**Romans 12:1-2**).

- c) Micaiah paid a price for being truthful.

Micaiah told Ahab the truth, but it came with a cost – his imprisonment. We don't know how long he remained in prison, but it was unjust treatment, nevertheless.

### Lesson for us – we may pay a price (here on earth) for living a godly life.

Not everybody responds favourably to the truth (**Matthew 26:63-68**), and while some may simply "shrug it off" and leave it (**John 6:66**), others may respond in a manner that is intended to cause harm (**Luke 4:28-29**).

Therefore, taking a stand for God does not guarantee that we will be warmly received by the world (**John 15:18; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 John 3:13**) – often a price will be paid. Some people may avoid us; some may think we are a bit strange; some may choose to argue the point with us; and some may scoff at

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<sup>12</sup> It is acknowledged that there are times when the things that we have already decided we want to do are in accordance with the Word of God, e.g. a pre-disposition or desire to visit the sick in hospital (**Matthew 25:36**). But those type of scenarios are not what I am referring to in this context.

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us, or ridicule us or misrepresent us to others (**1 Peter 4:4**). These negative responses can be discouraging, disappointing, even upsetting to us. But these things aren't new. Many righteous people in times past have experienced such things (**Hebrews 11:35b-38**). Therefore, consider the words of encouragement and exhortation from Paul in **1 Corinthians 16:13**;

*“.....stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong...”*<sup>13</sup>

and in **2 Timothy 4:7-8**;

*“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”*

The Lord rewards those who are his.

### **To sum up:**

Generally, most human beings are sociable creatures, *i.e.* for most of us, we want to “fit in” with our neighbours and our peers. It gives us a sense of belonging and acceptance - we don't particularly want to be “*on the outside*”, or shunned.

In fact, **Romans 12:18** says that “*If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*” In other words, as much as we can (without violating the principles and teachings of God - **Acts 4:19**), we should try to get along with people and encourage a peaceful environment.

- we are not to be antagonistic or offensive towards others just for the sake of annoying them (**1 Corinthians 10:32-33**).

However, at the same time, this world is not our real home. Our citizenship is in Heaven (**Philippians 3:20**), and our minds need to be set “*....on things above, not on things on the earth....*” (**Colossians 3:1-2**). First and foremost, our allegiance is to God and His Word (**Matthew 6:33a**), not to the world and its standards (**1 John 2:15**). As a result, there will be times when doing what is right means that we will be “at odds” with the world, and we will have to make a choice as to what we will do - either;

- blend in with the world, or,
- do what we know is right by God's Word.

Doing what is right may mean that we are “sticking our necks out”, but we don't do it to bring attention to ourselves. We do it because it is right. We do it to honour God, and to give glory to Him (**Matthew 5:16**).

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<sup>13</sup> Biblical quotes are from the New King James Version (NKJV) Bible.