

Introduction: Though the actual event of Ahab's death in 1 Kings 22 takes merely one day on the battlefield to be accomplished. The Divine planning for such a death is done painstakingly over years. Yes, it is true, as Psalm 37:35-36 says, the life of the wicked man is quickly taken away leaving no trace of his glory and pride, just like a tree rapidly felled. But how patiently God works laying the groundwork of such a sudden judgment, as we will see this week.

Let us therefore learn these four introductory lessons:

- 1) Let us learn to soberly and thankfully recognize the impeccability of God's judgment of evil men. He gives such men enough rope to hang themselves, to the glory of His patient and wise justice.
- 2) Let us be reminded also of the profound danger of the sin of covetousness. What a danger human lust and covetousness is! It condemns the heart of mighty rulers such as Ahab in 1 Kings 21, and even lays low proud Pharisees like Paul at his conversion in Romans 7:7-12.
- 3) Let us especially fear the terrible sin of causing others to stumble. This leading of others into sin is what most grieves the shepherding heart of the LORD and exacerbates the sin of Ahab, as God says to the king in 1 Kings 21:22: "... for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have *made Israel to sin.*"
- 4) Finally, let us learn that God only permits evil rulers and evil powers to do what in the end He can use for His holy purposes and for the good of His people. Yes, Satan afflicted Job, but it was for the sake of producing the precious fruit of patience in that saint (James 5:11). In the same way, God powerfully restricted Ahab's wickedness by giving that king over to a deadly deception from a lying spirit (1 Kings 22:22). But in this way, we can thank God that Ahab was prevented from doing even more spiritual harm among the people of Israel. The godly were preserved when Ahab's wicked plans were thwarted by his death.

Monday: read 1 Kings 21:17-22:1. We see God's patience in laying the groundwork of Ahab's destruction as He sends Elijah to expose the bloodshed which Ahab's covetousness caused in 1 Kings 21:17-25. Yet behold the amazing grace of God in the face of the king's inexcusable theft and murder of Naboth's vineyard and life: God relents bringing instant destruction down upon Ahab's head (1 Kings 21:25-29) when Ahab humbles himself under God's sentence for a time (1 Kings 21:29).

Alas, Ahab's repentance is only skin-deep. Though God relents, and though Ahab has three years' reprieve under God's kindly rule (giving him no excuse for not repenting under such Divine kindness - Romans 2:4) Ahab does not take any action signifying a real change of heart. He does *not* return Naboth's land to the dead man's widow; he does not seek to make any kind of restitution. By his stubborn wickedness, he continues to lead Israel astray.

Tuesday: read 1 Kings 22:1-18. The ultimate proof that Ahab's repentance is only skin-deep and not sincere or long-lasting, is his hatred of God's Word sent through God's true prophet. When king Jehoshaphat wants to seek out a real word from the LORD as to how the battle to retake Ramoth-Gilead will unfold, (1 Kings 22:4-8), Ahab expresses his hatred of Micaiah (one true prophet against Ahab's four-hundred false), because the Word from the LORD through him is always against Ahab's evil character and rule. Sure enough, when this single

prophet with a true heart for God speaks, he prophesies death for Ahab if he goes out to fight in 1 Kings 22:17ff.

But instead of this giving the king of Israel pause, he simply returns Micaiah to his prison cell in 1 Kings 22:27 with the implication that he will punish him later when he returns victorious.

Weds/Thurs: read 1 Kings 22:18-20. There truly is no rest for the wicked. Micaiah's prophecy speaks about Ahab's evil end. Yet, why didn't Ahab pause to consider why God always spoke judgment against him – whether by this minor prophet Micaiah or through the mighty Elijah? Ahab's heart is hardened beyond saving. He simply gets angry with Micaiah's words of warning and accuses Elijah of being his enemy (1 Kings 21:20).

By contrast, look at the calm courage and assurance which characterizes Micaiah's prophecy! Though Ahab does imprison him, yet I am sure that this true prophet of God had real peace and rest even in jail. The Word of God, when we receive and respect it in our lives, has that calming effect, even when we are in deep waters of trial. Here are some further clues as to Micaiah's calm assurance contrasted with Ahab's panicked efforts to extend his life in 1 Kings 22:29-33:

- 1) Consider the amazing vision which Micaiah has in 1 Kings 22:19-23. This vision speaks of this true prophet's real access into God's presence as a justified and redeemed sinner. Only people who were "touched by coals from God's altar" (Isaiah 6) could endure such a vision. Only those who served the LORD and were accepted by Him were given such visions. We will see further how only the godly are given these glimpses of Heaven when we study 2 Kings 2 (Elijah's ascension) and 2 Kings 6:17 (Elisha's army). Such a vision of Heaven shows that Micaiah is safe with God and enabled to stand by the courage which these visions gave him as God's servant.
- 2) But while Micaiah is safe, the vision in 1 Kings 22:19-23 is a terrible picture proving that Ahab's life hangs in the balance! God is able to sinlessly employ a lying spirit to deceive Ahab's prophets into luring him onto the battlefield to his death. How sober. How deadly is Ahab's last battle! His soldiers may prop him up, mortally wounded in his chariot (1 Kings 22:35), but his doom is sealed in the courts of heaven.
- 3) In this way Micaiah's confidence in the Word of God is vindicated. Surely there is nothing more important for any of us than to know the Word of God is true, and to see that Word vindicated in the salvation of the justified and the condemnation of the damned. What a refuge we have in the Word of God. As Isaac Watts' hymn says:

3 I should have perished in my woe
had not I loved thy law divine;
that law I never can forget;
O save me, Lord, for I am thine.

4 The wicked would destroy my
soul, *but in thy truth is refuge sure;*
exceeding broad is thy command,
and in perfection shall endure

Friday: read 1 Kings 22:23-28. For any who have qualms about God, “sending a lying spirit in the mouth of all Ahab’s prophets,” consider that God clearly tells Ahab the truth in 1 Kings 22:20 that “he will fall” in battle. God identifies the spirit animating those false prophets who claim he will win. It is a “false, lying” spirit. Thus Ahab is meant by the words of the LORD to see the gravity of the situation and to stay away from the battlefield. God does not hide anything from Ahab. He tells him the only way he will be able to live to fight another day. He gives him one prophet named Micaiah to urge the king not to go into battle.

But Ahab falls into his own default mode of self-deception. When the Word from the LORD would actually save his life if he listened to its warnings, Ahab refuses by habit to heed that Word. Thus, it was his own choice that caused him to foolishly go into battle and lose his life.

Saturday: read 1 Kings 22:23-25; John 18:19-24 & Matthew 26:68. Not to be out-done when it came to dramatic words and actions, the leader of the false prophets named Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah, strikes Micaiah in the face (1 Kings 22:24) in contemptuous rejection of the true prophet’s word from the LORD.

Beyond Micaiah’s response that one day soon Zedekiah would try to hide from the wrath of Ahab’s house (and wife) when his false prediction of victory causes the death of the king (1 Kings 22:25), the most important lesson to learn is that the world *always in the end violently rejects the Word of God. Zedekiah truly believed he was in the right and possessed by the Spirit of God.* Yet, how easily his self-confidence is shaken by the true and simple words of Micaiah. So he erupts in anger, as men hostile to God always do when confronted with the truth. They did the same thing to Jesus in John 18:19-24 and in Matthew 26:68.

Meditate and Pray: It is a terrible judgment and condemnation for Micaiah to be struck in the face in the very presence of the mighty king of Judah (Jehoshaphat) and of King Ahab. In the ancient world such a blow on the face usually meant instant death (compare Esther 7:8 when the face of Haman is covered in disgrace). How much worse is it for the servants of the High Priest of the one true God to join in striking the very face of God!

Sing about how our sins rained down blows upon our Savior, using the words of hymn # 553:

1 My sins, my sins, my Savior!
They take such hold on me,
I am not able to look up,
save only, Christ, to thee;
in thee is all forgiveness,
in thee abundant grace,
my shadow and my sunshine
the brightness of thy face.

2 My sins, my sins, my Savior!
Their guilt I never knew
till with thee in the desert
I near thy passion drew;
till with thee in the garden
I heard thy pleading pray'r,
and saw the sweat-drops bloody
that told thy sorrow there.

3 Therefore my songs, my Savior,
e'en in this time of woe,
shall tell of all thy goodness
to suffering man below;
thy goodness and thy favor,
whose presence from above
rejoice those hearts, my Savior,
that live in thee and love.