

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Jehoshaphat King of Judah, and Ahab King of Israel, unite against the Syrians, in order to recover Ramoth-gilead, 1 Kings 22:1-4. They inquire of false prophets, who promise them success. Micaiah, a true prophet, foretells the disasters of the war, 1 Kings 22:5-17. A lying spirit in the mouths of Ahab's prophets persuades Ahab to go up against Ramoth, 1 Kings 22:18-29. The confederate armies are routed, and the king of Israel slain, 1 Kings 22:30-36. Death and burial of Ahab, 1 Kings 22:37-40. Character of Jehoshaphat, 1 Kings 22:41-47. He makes a fleet in order to go to Ophir for gold, which is wrecked at Ezion-geber, 1 Kings 22:48. His death, 1 Kings 22:49. He is succeeded by his son Jehoram, 1 Kings 22:50. Ahaziah succeeds his father Ahab, and reigns wickedly, 1 Kings 22:51, 1 Kings 22:52.

Verse 1

Three years without war - That is, from the time that Ahab made the covenant with Ben-hadad, mentioned 1 Kings 20:34. And probably in that treaty it was stipulated that Ramoth-gilead should be restored to Israel; which not being done, Ahab formed a confederacy with Judah, and determined to take it by force.

Verse 4

Wilt thou go with me - We find that there was a good understanding between Jehoshaphat and Ahab, which no doubt was the consequence of a matrimonial alliance between the son of the former, Jehoram, and the daughter of the latter, Athaliah; see 2 Chronicles 18:1; 2 Kings 8:18. This coalition did not please God, and Jehoshaphat is severely reprov'd for it by Jehu the seer, 2 Chronicles 19:1-3.

Verse 6

About four hundred men - These were probably the prophets of Asherah or Venus, maintained by Jezebel, who were not present at the contention on Mount Carmel. See 1 Kings 18:19, etc.

Verse 8

Micaiah the son of Imlah - The Jews suppose that it was this prophet who reprov'd Ahab for dismissing Ben-hadad, 1 Kings 20:35, etc. And that it was because of the judgments with which he had threatened him, that Ahab hated him: I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.

Verse 9

The king of Israel called an officer - שָׂרִיס (sarīs), literally a eunuch; probably a foreigner, for it was not lawful to disgrace an Israelite by reducing him to such a state.

Verse 11

Zedekiah - made him horns of iron - This was in imitation of that sort of prophecy which instructed by significative actions. This was frequent among the prophets of the Lord.

Verse 13

The words of the prophets declare good - What notion could these men have of prophecy, when they supposed it was in the power of the prophet to model the prediction as he pleased, and have the result accordingly?

Verse 15

Go, and prosper - This was a strong irony; as if he had said, All your prophets have predicted success; you wish me to speak as they speak: Go, and prosper; for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king. These were the precise words of the false prophets, (see 1 Kings 22:6, 1 Kings 22:12), and were spoken by Micaiah in such a tone and manner as at once showed to Ahab that he did not believe them; hence the king adjures him, 1 Kings 22:16, that he would speak to him nothing but truth; and on this the prophet immediately relates to him the prophetic vision which pointed out the disasters which ensued.

It is worthy of remark that this prophecy of the king's prophets is couched in the same ambiguous terms by which the false prophets in the heathen world endeavored to maintain their credit, while they deluded their votaries. The reader will observe that the word it is not in the original: The Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king; and the words are so artfully constructed that they may be interpreted for or against; so that, be the event whatever it might, the juggling prophet could save his credit by saying he meant what had happened. Thus then the prophecy might have been understood: The Lord will deliver (Ramoth-gilead) into the king's (Ahab's) hand; or, The Lord will deliver (Israel) into the king's hand; i.e., into the hand of the king of Syria. And Micaiah repeats these words of uncertainty in order to ridicule them and expose their fallacy.

The following oracles among the heathens were of this same dubious nature, in order that the priests' credit

might be saved, let the event turn out as it might. Thus the Delphic oracle spoke to Croesus words which are capable of a double meaning, and which he understood to his own destruction: -
Croesus, Halym penetrans, magnam subvertet opum vim,

Which says, in effect: -

“If you march against Cyrus, he will either overthrow you, or you will overthrow him.”

He trusted in the latter, the former took place. He was deluded, and yet the oracle maintained its credit. So in the following: -

Aio te, Aeacida, Romanos vincere posse

Ibis redibis nunquam in bello peribis.

Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, understood by this that he should conquer the Romans, against whom he was then making war; but the oracle could be thus translated: “The Romans shall overcome thee.” He trusted in the former, made unsuccessful war, and was overcome; and yet the juggling priest saved his credit. The latter line is capable of two opposite meanings: -

“Thou shalt go, thou shalt return, thou shalt never perish in war.”

Or,

“Thou shalt go, thou shalt never return, thou shalt perish in war.”

When prophecies and oracles were not delivered in this dubious way, they were generally couched in such intricate and dark terms that the assistance of the oracle was necessary to explain the oracle, and then it was ignotum per ignotius, a dark saying paraphrased by one yet more obscure.

Verse 17

These have no master - Here the prophet foretells the defeat of Israel, and the death of the king; they were as sheep that had not a shepherd, people that had no master, the political shepherd and master (Ahab) shall fall in battle.

Verse 19

I saw the Lord sitting on his throne - This is a mere parable, and only tells in figurative language, what was in the womb of providence, the events which were shortly to take place, the agents employed in them, and the permission on the part of God for these agents to act. Micaiah did not choose to say before this angry and impious king, “Thy prophets are all liars; and the devil, the father of lies, dwells in them;” but he represents the whole by this parable, and says the same truths in language as forcible, but less offensive.

Verse 22

Go forth, and do so - This is no more than, “God has permitted the spirit of lying to influence the whole of thy prophets; and he now, by my mouth, apprises thee of this, that thou mayest not go and fall at Ramoth-gilead.” Never was a man more circumstantially and fairly warned; he had counsels from the God of truth, and counsels from the spirit of falsity; he obstinately forsook the former and followed the latter. He was shown by this parable how every thing was going on, and that all was under the control and direction of God, and that still it was possible for him to make that God his friend whom by his continual transgressions he had made his enemy; but he would not: his blood was therefore upon his own head.

Verse 23

The Lord hath put a lying spirit - He hath permitted or suffered a lying spirit to influence thy prophets. Is it requisite again to remind the reader that the Scriptures repeatedly represent God as doing what, in the course of his providence, he only permits or suffers to be done? Nothing can be done in heaven, in earth, or hell, but either by his immediate energy or permission. This is the reason why the Scripture speaks as above.

Verse 24

Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me - This is an expression of as great insolence as the act was of brutal aggression. “Did the Spirit of the Lord, who rests solely upon me, condescend to inspire thee? Was it at this ear [where he smote him] that it entered, in order to hold communion with thee?” Josephus tells an idle rabbinical tale about this business, which is as unworthy of repetition as it is of credit. See his Antiq. of the Jews, book viii., c. 10.

Verse 25

When thou shalt go into an inner chamber - It is probable that this refers to some Divine judgment which fell

Verse 35

The king was stayed up - He did not wish his misfortune should be known, lest his troops should be discouraged.

Verse 36

Every man to his city - It appears that the Israelites and Jews maintained the fight the whole of the day; but when at evening the king died, and this was known, there was a proclamation made, probably with the consent of both Syrians and Israelites, that the war was over. Ahab being dead, his subjects did not choose to contend for Ramoth-gilead; so the Israelites went to their own cities, and the Syrians to their own country.

Verse 38

The dogs licked up his blood - Some of the rabbins think that this was in the very place where Naboth was stoned; see on 1 Kings 21:19 (note). The Septuagint translates this verse strangely: "And the swine and the dogs licked his blood, and the whores bathed themselves in his blood, according to the word of the Lord." It is certain that the Hebrew words, *חֲזֹנוֹת רָחַצְתָּ* (hazzonoth rachatsu), "washed his armor," might be translated as the Septuagint have done; "and the whores (or public women) washed," etc. And so the rabbins seem to have understood the words; but then they suppose that Jezebel had made him two images of prostitutes, which he had with him in the chariot. It is not worth inquiring into the use for which they say these images were made. See Kimchi and Jarchi.

Verse 39

Ivory house - A royal palace which he built in Samaria, decorated with ivory, and hence called the ivory house. Amos the prophet speaks against this luxury, Amos 3:15.

Verse 43

The high places were not taken away - In 2 Chronicles 17:6, it is expressly said, that he did take away the high places. Allowing that the text is right in 2 Chron., the two places may be easily reconciled. There were two kinds of high places in the land:

1. Those used for idolatrous purposes.

2. Those that were consecrated to God, and were used before the temple was built. The former he did take away; the latter he did not.

But some think the parallel place in 2 Chronicles 17:6 is corrupted, and that, instead of *וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁרָאֵל* (veod hesir), "and moreover he took away," we should read, *וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁרָאֵל* (velo hesir), "and he did Not take away."

Verse 46

The remnant of the sodomites - *וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁרָאֵל* of the consecrated persons; or it may rather apply here to the system of pollution, effeminacy, and debauch. He destroyed the thing itself; the abominations of Priapus, and the rites of Venus, Baal, and Ashtaroth. No more of that impure worship was to be found in Judea.

Verse 47

There was no king in Edom - It is plain that the compiler of this book lived after the days of Jehoshaphat, in whose time the Edomites revolted; see 2 Kings 8:22. David had conquered the Edomites, and they continued to be governed by deputies, appointed by the kings of Judah, till they recovered their liberty, as above. This note is introduced by the writer to account for Jehoshaphat's building ships at Ezion-geber, which was in the territory of the Edomites, and which showed them to be at that time under the Jewish yoke.

Verse 48

Ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold - In the parallel place (2 Chronicles 20:36) it is said that Jehoshaphat joined himself to Ahaziah, to make ships to go to Tharshish; and they made the ships in Ezion-geber. Concerning these places, and the voyage thither, see the notes on 1 Kings 9:26-28 (note); 1 Kings 10:11 (note), 1 Kings 10:22 (note). Some translate, instead of ships of Tharshish, ships of burden. See Houbigant, who expresses himself doubtful as to the meaning of the word.

Verse 49

But Jehoshaphat would not - It appears from the above cited place in Chronicles that Jehoshaphat did join in making and sending ships to Tharshish, and it is possible that what is here said is spoken of a second

expedition, in which Jehoshaphat would not join Ahaziah. But instead of **וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל וְיִזְבִּי** (*velo abah*), **וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל וְיִזְבִּי** he would not, **וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל וְיִזְבִּי** perhaps we should read **וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל וְיִזְבִּי** (*velo abah*), **וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל וְיִזְבִּי** he consented to him; **וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל וְיִזְבִּי** two words pronounced exactly in the same way, and differing but in one letter, viz., an **א** (*aleph*) for a **ו** (*vau*). This reading, however, is not supported by any MS. or version; but the emendation seems just; for there are several places in these historical books in which there are mistakes of transcribers which nothing but violent criticism can restore, and to this it is dangerous to resort, but in cases of the last necessity. Critics have recommended the 48th and 49th verses to be read thus: **וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל וְיִזְבִּי** Jehoshaphat had built ships of burden at Ezion-geber, to go to Ophir for gold. 49. And Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, had said to Jehoshaphat, Let my servants, I pray thee, go with thy servants in the ships: to which Jehoshaphat consented. But the ships went not thither; for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber. **וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל וְיִזְבִּי** This is Houbigant's translation, who contends that **וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל וְיִזְבִּי** the words of the 48th verse, but they went not, should be placed at the end of the 49th verse, for who can believe that the sacred writer should first relate that the ships were broken, and then that Ahaziah requested of Jehoshaphat that his servants might embark with the servants of Jehoshaphat? **וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל וְיִזְבִּי** This bold critic, who understood the Hebrew language better than any man in Europe, has, by happy conjectures, since verified by the testimony of MSS., removed the blots of many careless transcribers from the sacred volume.