

## Introduction

Over the summer when I was visiting some family in Miami, and the presidential candidates had already been campaigning for sometime, we came across a channel that was going back and forth with each candidate making promises about what they were going to change if they became president.

When I asked my uncle which candidate he liked, he said something to the effect, “Well, it doesn’t matter who you pick, they’re all liars. They all promise a bunch of things when they’re campaigning, but when they become president, nothing changes.”

Granted, that may be an overstatement, but my uncle was voicing his discontent with politicians who do not keep their promises. Of course, it is not just politicians who fail to keep their promises; we also are guilty of this.

In complete contrast to the behavior of sinful humanity, what God says comes to pass. And the portion of Scripture we read today highlights this very fact.

First Kings 22 is set within the larger context of chapters 20 and 21.

Verse 1 says, Three years passed without war between Aram and Israel. This first verse is critical to understanding this section of Scripture. You’ll need to turn back to First Kings 20 to grasp the situation.

In First Kings 20 Ben-Hadad, king of Aram/Syria, comes to Samaria and demands that Israel surrender to him. If you read the first six verses in chapter 20 you see that his demands are excessive. Indeed, “they were designed to provoke all-out war” (Smith 520). Not only does Ben-Hadad want gold and silver, but he demands Ahab’s harem (v. 3, 5). Smith says, “Surrender of the harem would be tantamount to surrendering the throne itself . . . not to mention all manhood and self-respect (20:2)” (Smith 520).

To make a long story short, Ahab refuses to surrender to Ben-Hadad's demands, and this provokes war. Yet God sends an unnamed prophet to assure Ahab of victory over Ben-Hadad. God tells Ahab to begin the war and how to go about securing victory.

After the successful defeat, the unnamed prophet returns and warns Ahab that Ben-Hadad will return in a year. Therefore, Ahab would need to strengthen his military. Just as the prophet had said, in one year the Arameans returned. Notice verse 26 of chapter 20: At the turn of the year, Ben-hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. So they're back just as God said. Why? Because what God says comes to pass.

So the Arameans are back for more, and this time with at least 100,000 foot soldiers (v. 29). In v.27 the writer compares Israel's army to "two little flocks of goats," while the Arameans "filled the country."

Again, the unnamed prophet returns and assures Ahab of victory. And since what God says comes to pass (note verse 29) the sons of Israel killed of the Arameans 100,000 foot soldiers in one day. 27,000 who fled were killed by a wall falling on them (v. 30).

Despite the defeat, Ben-hadad escapes unharmed. He and others have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful. In light of this fact, they decide to cover themselves in sackcloth and ropes, which is the sign of surrender.

Now get this, even though Ben-hadad has attacked them twice, Ahab makes a covenant with him. Note verse 34: Ben-hadad said to [Ahab], "The cities which my father took from your father I will restore, and you shall make streets for yourself in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria." Ahab said, "I will let you go with this covenant."

Question: Why, even though Ben-hadad had attacked them twice, would Ahab let him go? Most likely it was because Ahab wanted an ally against the rising power of Assyria.

In fact, historical Assyrian documents indicate “that both Ahab and Ben-hadad contributed troops to a coalition army which successfully withstood the Assyrian advances in the famous battle of Qarqar in 853 BC.” (Smith 524). James Smith says, “In the face of the rising power of Assyria, Ahab probably thought it would be better to have a friend and ally to the north than a belligerent” (Smith 524). If this is the case, then it means that Ahab was not being led by God in this covenant. Rather, he is trusting in military might and strength: an action which God denounces in Scripture. What’s worse, he does this after God has just provided for him twice!

In order to show Ahab his sin, God sends a prophet to illustrate this to his face. This is in verses 35-43.

One prophet comes to another prophet and tells him, “Please strike me.” The prophet refuses. Because he was not obedient to the Lord, the prophet is told that as he leaves a lion would kill him. This happens in 1 Kings 13 as well. The point God is making here is that He requires absolute obedience to His commands. We’ll see how this ties into to the situation with Ahab as well.

That same prophet finds another prophet and asks him, “Please strike me,” and this one complies. Then he disguises himself and waits for King Ahab. Picking up the story in verse 39 the text says, As the king passed by, he cried to the king and said, “Your servant went out into battle; and behold, a man turned aside and brought a man to me and said, ‘Guard this man; if for any reason he is missing, then your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.’ While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone.” And the king of Israel said to him, “So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it.”

The prophet gives this illustration: If I am a soldier and I lose a prisoner, I pay with my life. While Ahab thinks this man has just condemned himself, in reality Ahab is the one condemning himself. Look at verse 42: He said to him, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.’”

So God says in 20:42 that because Ahab was disobedient, he was going to pay with his life. And since what God says comes to pass, we will see how this plays out, and how God is faithful to His word in bringing this about.

But, this is not it. Just as an unnamed prophet was unleashed to announce God's condemnation on Ahab, so also was the well known prophet Elijah. 1 Kings 21 tells this story.

There is man by the name of Naboth who has a vineyard. For completely selfish reasons Ahab decides he wants this vineyard. Naboth refused to sell this vineyard to anyone outside his family as Scripture commanded (LV. 25:23-25). So Naboth's desire not to sell his land was out of obedience to the Lord. Still, Ahab is upset.

In fact, v.4 records his response: Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and ate no food.

Faced with this unfavorable response, Ahab's wife Jezebel manipulates the situation and has "two worthless men" (21:13) charge Naboth with cursing God and the king. Naboth is unjustly given the death penalty and is stoned to death (v.13). After this, Ahab takes possession of the vineyard.

God then sends the prophet Elijah. Elijah prophesies in v. 19, Thus says the LORD, "In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth the dogs will lick up your blood, even yours."

The condemnation was more elaborate, but because of Ahab's repentance God deferred the judgment to the time of his sons.

Nevertheless, v. 19 is God's second condemnation on Ahab, and He will be faithful to His word.

With that as our background we are now better able to understand chapter 22.

The Identification of the True Prophet (V. 1-12)

So it had been three years since the war between Aram and Israel. Within that three year period Ahab and Ben-hadad (or some other king)[1], along with 10 other kings had formed that coalition to keep Assyria from attacking them.

However, it appears that in the covenant made between Ahab and Ben-hadad, either Ben-hadad, or some other king at that time had not yet given Ramoth-gilead back to Ahab. So Ahab decides he wants to attack Aram and take possession of this piece of land. But he doesn't want to go it alone, so he sends word to the King of Judah, Jehoshaphat and says, Do you know that Ramoth-gilead belongs to us, and we are doing nothing to take it out of the hand of the king of Aram?"

Jehoshaphat agrees to help Ahab, but wants Ahab to inquire first for the word of the LORD.

All of the false prophets tell them, Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king.

Verse 12 summarizes this section: All the prophets were prophesying thus, saying, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and prosper, for the LORD will give it into the hand of the king."

But Jehoshaphat recognizes that a true prophet is not to be found among those present. And he wants to hear from a prophet of the LORD.

Ahab knows that there is a difference among the prophets because he says, There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. He is Micaiah son of Imlah.

Micaiah is the true prophet in this narrative. He is set in contrast with the other supposed prophets in this story.

Ahab's "prophets" are no prophets, they simply exist to agree with whatever Ahab says.[2]

The fact that Micaiah had to be summoned suggests that he was already in prison for not giving favorable prophecies to the king.[3]

### Micaiah's Message (V. 13-23)

Micaiah is then urged to give a favorable word to the king as did the other four hundred prophets (v. 6). This messenger obviously did not know Micaiah very well. Micaiah was a man of God, and therefore a man of integrity. He could not be bribed or intimidated. Micaiah was willing to stand alone even if it caused him to be an outcast. Thus, he says in v. 14: As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I shall speak.

However, you'll notice at first Micaiah agrees with the false prophets. He says, Go up and succeed, and the LORD will give it into the hand of the king. It's hard for us to know exactly the tone or sarcasm in his voice, but obviously Ahab knew something wasn't right because he says to him, How many times must I adjure you to speak nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?

Then, beginning in v. 17 Micaiah gives his prophecy/vision. He says he sees Israel as a sheep without a shepherd. They have no master, and they will be scattered because of this defeat and they should return home (v.17). God is saying here that Ahab will die, and Israel will be left without a king.

Rather than receiving this as a message from God, Ahab thinks that Micaiah is biased and doesn't like him. Nevertheless Micaiah continues: He speaks of another vision he had received.

He says he saw God sitting on His heavenly throne, surrounded by the hosts of heaven (most likely speaking of angels here). God asks, Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? (V.20). It appears that different angels said different things. Then, one angel (most commentators believe this is Satan)[4] says it has the answer. This angel says it will put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets (v.22).

The Lord grants that this be done. I am aware that this raises serious theological questions. First of all, if this is Satan (as most commentators suggest) what is Satan doing near the heavenly throne? Secondly, if God is all knowing, why does He appear to be asking for suggestions? And thirdly, how can a holy God give sanction to lying?

Let's try to answer some of these questions: If this is Satan, the fact that he has access to the heavenly council actually isn't anything new. The opening chapters of Job describe this as well (Job 1:6-12). As to exactly how Satan got there is somewhat more difficult to answer.

Why does God appear to be asking questions? This is because prophetic visions are anthropomorphic.[5] Smith says, "They do not always correspond to reality. Such visions are the vehicle used to convey a cardinal truth to the mind of the prophet. In this case the truth is that Ahab's death in battle had been foreordained in the counsels of God . . ."[6]

Does God give sanction to lying here? Well, He certainly is allowing it. Without allowing this get to the level of a theology class, what is happening here belongs under the theological category of concurrence.[7] Wayne Grudem defines concurrence this way: "God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do." [8] While God has decreed/allowed this evil spirit to go into Ahab's prophets, God himself is not lying. This is what the Reformed Confessions refer to as God's providence ordering things to "fall out according to the nature of second causes." [9] Also, what cannot be forgotten here is that God is bringing destruction on Ahab because of his sin. Ahab is the one who is being guided by the false prophets, and God, according to His just will, permits Ahab to be deceived.

### The Reaction to the Message

Moving on. It's at this point that Zedekiah strikes Micaiah in the face. Micaiah in essence, tells Zedekiah that one day he would see who is right. Then Ahab has Micaiah put in prison and orders that he be fed sparingly. As he leaves, Micaiah says, "Look, if after this battle, you're still alive, then the LORD has not spoken through me."

### The Battle

Remembering the prophecy given by Micaiah, Ahab tries his best to stop it from coming to pass. But as one commentator says, "it is a futile enterprise to try to outwit the word of a true prophet." [10] As he goes out to the battle, he thinks he can divert the attention of the Arameans by not wearing his royal robes. But Ben-hadad instructs his troops to focus the battle solely on killing Ahab. And in v. 34 we read, Now a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel in a joint of the armor.

Verses 37-38 tell us that Ahab died and that his blood was licked up by the dogs as Elijah had prophesied in v. 19 of Ch. 21.

So, to recap, God said that Ahab would be killed by the unnamed prophet in 20:42, by Elijah in 21:19 and by Micaiah in Ch. 22. And we find that fulfilled in 22:37. This confirms that what God says comes to pass.

Why have I done this?

In speaking about the precious truth of God's faithfulness, you may wonder why I have chosen to do this through 1 Kings where the text highlights the faithfulness of God by way of a threat made good.

So why have I done this? Well, first, because it's in the Bible and secondly because it too shows us that God means what He says, and what He says, He will do. What God says comes to pass.

Throughout Scripture the positive and the negative always balance each other out. So the beauty of God's promises and the severity of His judgments must be taken together.

First of all, because Scripture does this. In 2 Peter 2:4-10, Peter does this exact thing. He says that God's faithfulness is seen in sparing Noah during the flood (positive). On the other hand he says that God is seen as being faithful to His word in bringing judgment on Sodom and Gommorah (negative). He says that God is seen as faithful is rescuing Lot (positive). But notice how Peter closes out this section of Scripture.

He says, if God is faithful to do all of that, "Then (v.9) the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation[positive example] and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, V. 10—and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority."

Speaking on this issue A.W. Pink said, "Not only does His Word abound in illustrations of His fidelity in fulfilling His promises, but it also records numerous examples of His faithfulness in making good His threatenings."

This means today that if you have not trusted in Christ as your savior, you are urged to do so. Christ commands that you repent and trust Him. Make no mistake about it, Christ commands that you believe in Him. It is not just an invitation. It is a command.

In John 3:36 Jesus says, He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

That is a promise of Jesus: he who does not obey the Son will not see life. If this is not true then God is a liar.

Continuing with the quote mentioned before by A.W. Pink, he says, "unless you have fled or do flee to Christ for refuge, the everlasting burning of the Lake of Fire will be your sure and certain portion. God is faithful."[1]

What God says will come to pass; of that we can be sure.

God is faithful to keep His promises and threats.

2 points of application

Now the question must be asked, What does God's faithfulness mean for me?

1. God is faithful to keep His promises and threats.

There are many, many beautiful promises made to us in the Bible. And God's people through out history have taken solace in His promises.

It was said during the time of the Reformation that every time Luther faced a difficult trial or situation, he would say to his friend Philip Melancthon, "Sing the 46th." He was speaking about his hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" based on Psalm 46. It's in those difficult times that God's promises become so sweet to us. We sing this hymn at this church. The next time you hear that hymn remember that it was penned by a man who was suffering under extreme duress. Put yourself in that situation: Can you imagine all the people that hated Luther and were literally chasing him wanting him dead.

And then he opens his Bible to Psalm 46 and reads:

God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High. . . . The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our stronghold.

That's how Luther was able to say in the last part of his song.

Let goods and kindred go

This mortal life also

The body they may kill

God's truth abideth still

His kingdom is forever

Friends, this is God's faithfulness. Luther is just one example. It's what moved the early church father Polycarp, who studied under the apostle John, who was

martyred by being burned at the stake. When the officers who were to kill him came to arrest him, he fed them a meal and prayed with his friends.

The governor told Polycarp to deny Jesus and swear allegiance to Caesar. Polycarp told the governor that he had served the Lord for 86 years and that God had been faithful to him throughout his life. He said that because of God's faithfulness to him, he could not be unfaithful to him now. One church historian describes the end of Polycarp's life with these few words: "The soldiers lit the fire, and he passed into the presence of his Lord." [11]

What are some of these promises?

DT. 7:9— Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God.

2 Tim. 2:13—If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

David says, in his wonderfully poetic way in Ps. 36:5—Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.

And finally, one of my favorite, Num. 23:19—God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

## 2. We must be faithful

This relates to our message this way: What God says comes to pass. So likewise, what we say should come to pass. In other words, our word should be our bond.

In our culture, our signature binds us to a contract. In a friendly way, sometimes we shake hands. All of that is fine and good, but God says if we make a promise verbally, we must keep it.

God takes this very seriously. In fact, the ninth commandment is, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16). To see how serious God is about this, in Dt. 19:16-19, God says that if a false witness is found in a criminal case, the penalty which he sought to inflict upon the criminal, would be imposed upon him.

Let us not forget that according to Dt. 13: 1-5 false prophets were stoned to death.

God desires faithfulness, truthfulness, and no lying. Because this is who He is, He requires the same of us. And God says if this is not found among His people, then He is not truly known.

As I hope you are aware, in the minor prophets God often brings charges against His people. He sends out His covenant prosecutors to show His people how they are being unfaithful to the covenant, calls on them to repent, and begin living an obedient life.

I ask you to notice what God says in the book of Hosea to the people of Israel. In Hosea 4:1-2 God accuses Israel of a number of sins, but listen to the first thing He says:

Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of Israel. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed (emphasis mine).

God is not a liar. However, as Jesus says in John 8:44, Satan is a liar and the father of lies. Throughout Scripture we see that lying is a characteristic of the unregenerate.

We should be faithful to our brothers and sisters out of a genuine desire to serve God. This relates to our personal day-to-day relationships because human beings are made in the image God. So out of respect for the fact that all human beings are made in the image God, we too must see them as valuable. And because of this we should be faithful to our commitments. This is why Jesus warns us in the beatitudes to never call another human being a "good for nothing" (Matt. 5:22). Jesus is saying

that when we are disrespectful to other human beings, we are also disrespectful to God because we are attacking His creation.

So in the verses we've covered we've seen what God requires. But as Augustine has wisely pointed out in his famous work the Confessions, God doesn't just give commands, but rather He gives what He commands. Augustine prayed to the Lord, "Lord, command what you will, but give what you command." [13]

And God does this even in the area of faithfulness. Galatians tells us that one of the fruits of the Spirit is faithfulness (Gal. 5:22). God is the one working in us causing us to be faithful to Him and to other believers. Paul says in Phil. 2:12-13, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

It is only by God's grace that you are able to be obedient to Him. And God also assures us that He will be faithful to continue this work in our lives, to preserve us and finally bring us to Himself.

I'd like to close reading a verse to you. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Read verses 4-9.

A.W. Pink: "When we trustfully resign ourselves, and all our affairs into God's hands, fully persuaded of His love and faithfulness, the sooner shall we be satisfied with His providences and realize that 'He doeth all things well.'" [14]

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[1] [1] It may not have been Ben-hadad. Another king may have been reigning at this time. Gene Rice, *1 Kings: Nations Under God*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1990. 183.

[2] Paul R. House. *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, 1, 2 Kings*. Broadman, 2003.

[3] Arno J. Wolfgramm. *Kings: People's Bible Commentary*. Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 1994., 152.

[4] Smith, James. *The Books of History*. 532. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. Study note on pg. 505.

[5] Smith, James. *Books of History*. 532.

[6] *Ibid*.

[7] Wayne Grudem. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. 317-354.

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] *Second London Baptist Confession* Ch. 6:2; *Westminster Confession* Ch. 5:2.

[10] Gene Rice, *1 Kings: Nations Under God*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1990. 188.

[11] Cornish, Rick. *5 Minute Church Historian*. Navpress: CO, 2005. Pg. 32.

[12] Pink, A.W. *The Attributes of God*. Baker: Grand Rapids, 1975. pgs. 54-55.

[13] Augustine. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Translated by John K. Ryan. Doubleday: NY, 1960.

[14] Pink, A.W. *ibid*, pg. 56