

The background of the cover is a photograph of a landscape. In the foreground, there is a dark silhouette of a forest of evergreen trees. Behind the trees, a range of mountains is visible. Two vibrant rainbows are arching across the sky, one slightly higher and further to the left than the other. The sky is a deep, dark blue, with some lighter, wispy clouds. The overall mood is serene and majestic.

Micaiah Profile of an Ordinary Prophet

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Forward

The Bible shows us a God who hates all evil and will one day do away with it completely and forever (Rev. 20:10-15).

We must hate what God hates, and love what God loves.

God does not entice anyone to become evil. Those committed to evil, however, may be used by God to sin even more in order to hurry their deserved judgment (Exodus 11:10).

We don't need to understand every detail of how God works in order to have perfect confidence in his absolute power over evil and his total goodness toward us.

Micaiah was a prophet who lived in the time when all of Israel was in conflict with their enemies.

Because of his godly reputation, he was called to prophecy concerning the proposed battle.

When brought before the kings, Micaiah told them that the enemy would triumph. He declared to speak only what God told him to speak.

He was hated and punished because of his speaking what God had told him to speak.

May you be encouraged to develop such characteristics as those that Micaiah possessed.

Be faithful and receive a crown of life.

Chapter 1



The King seeks advice

1 Kings 22:1-40

For three years there was no war between Aram and Israel. Then during the third year, King Jehoshaphat of Judah went to visit King Ahab of Israel.

During the visit, Ahab said to his officials, "Do you realize that the Arameans are still occupying our city of Ramoth-gilead? And we haven't done a thing about it!"

Then he turned to Jehoshaphat and asked, "Will you join me in fighting against Ramoth-gilead?"

And Jehoshaphat replied to King Ahab, "Why, of course! You and I are brothers, and my troops are yours to command. Even my horses are at your service."

Then Jehoshaphat added, "But first let's find out what the Lord says."

So King Ahab summoned his prophets, about four hundred of them, and asked them, "Should I go to war against Ramoth-gilead or not?"

These 400 prophets may have been the 400 Asherah priests left alive by Elijah at Carmel, although 450 prophets of Baal were killed

They all replied, "Go right ahead! The Lord will give you a glorious victory!"

But Jehoshaphat asked, "Isn't there a prophet of the Lord around, too? I would like to ask him the same question."

King Ahab replied, "There is still one prophet of the Lord, but I hate him. He never prophesies anything but bad news for me! His name is Micaiah son of Imlah."

Jehoshaphat knew there was a difference between these pagan prophets and the "prophet of the LORD," so he asked if one was available. Evidently Jehoshaphat wanted to do what was right although Ahab didn't. However, both kings disregarded God's message and listened only to the pagan prophets.

"You shouldn't talk like that," Jehoshaphat said. "Let's hear what he has to say."

So the king of Israel called one of his officials and said, "Quick! Go and get Micaiah son of Imlah."

King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah, dressed in their royal robes, were sitting on thrones at the threshing floor near the gate of Samaria. All of Ahab's prophets were prophesying there in front of them. One of them, Zedekiah son of Kenaanah, made some iron horns and proclaimed, "This is what the Lord says: With these horns you will gore the Arameans to death!"

All the other prophets agreed. "Yes," they said, "go up to Ramoth-gilead and be victorious, for the Lord will give you victory!"

Meanwhile, the messenger who went to get Micaiah said to him, "Look, all the prophets are promising victory for the king. Be sure that you agree with them and promise success."

But Micaiah replied, "As surely as the Lord lives, I will say only what the Lord tells me to say."

When Micaiah arrived before the king, Ahab asked him, "Micaiah, should we go to war against Ramoth-gilead or not?"

And Micaiah replied, "Go right ahead! The Lord will give the king a glorious victory!"

But the king replied sharply, "How many times must I demand that you speak only the truth when you speak for the Lord?"

So Micaiah told him, "In a vision I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep without a shepherd. And the Lord said, 'Their master has been killed. Send them home in peace.' "

Why did Micaiah tell Ahab to attack when he had previously vowed to speak only what God had told him? Perhaps he was speaking sarcastically, making fun of the messages from the pagan prophets by showing that they were telling the king only what he wanted to hear.

Somehow, Micaiah's tone of voice let everyone know he was mocking the pagan prophets. When confronted, he predicted that the king would die and the battle would be lost. Although Ahab repented temporarily (1 Kings 21:27), he still maintained the system of false prophets.

These false prophets would be instrumental in leading him to his own ruin.

"Didn't I tell you?" the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat. "He does it every time. He never prophesies anything but bad news for me."

Then Micaiah continued, "Listen to what the Lord says! I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the armies of heaven around him, on his right and on his left."

And the Lord said, 'Who can entice Ahab to go into battle against Ramoth-gilead so that he can be killed there?' There were many suggestions, until finally a spirit approached the Lord and said, 'I can do it!'

"How will you do this?' the Lord asked.

"And the spirit replied, 'I will go out and inspire all Ahab's prophets to speak lies.'

"You will succeed,' said the Lord. 'Go ahead and do it.'

"So you see, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of your prophets. For the Lord has determined disaster for you."

Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah walked up to Micaiah and slapped him across the face. "When did the Spirit of the Lord leave me to speak to you?" he demanded.

And Micaiah replied, "You will find out soon enough when you find yourself hiding in some secret room!"

King Ahab of Israel then ordered, "Arrest Micaiah and take him back to Amon, the governor of the city, and to my son Joash. [Give

them this order from the king: 'Put this man in prison, and feed him nothing but bread and water until I return safely from the battle!' "

But Micaiah replied, "If you return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me!" Then he added to those standing around, "Take note of what I have said."

So the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah led their armies against Ramoth-gilead.

Now King Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "As we go into battle, I will disguise myself so no one will recognize me, but you wear your royal robes." So Ahab disguised himself, and they went into battle.

Now the king of Aram had issued these orders to his thirty-two charioteers: "Attack only the king of Israel!" So when the Aramean charioteers saw Jehoshaphat in his royal robes, they went after him. "There is the king of Israel!" they shouted. But when Jehoshaphat cried out, the charioteers realized he was not the king of Israel, and they stopped chasing him.

An Aramean soldier, however, randomly shot an arrow at the Israelite troops, and the arrow hit the king of Israel between the joints of his armor. "Get me out of here!" Ahab groaned to the driver of his chariot. "I have been badly wounded!"

The battle raged all that day, and Ahab was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans. The blood from his wound ran down to the floor of his chariot, and as evening arrived he died.

Just as the sun was setting, the cry ran through his troops: "It's all over—return home!"

So the king died, and his body was taken to Samaria and buried there.

Ahab could not escape God's judgment. The king of Aram sent 32 of his best chariot commanders with the sole purpose of killing Ahab. Thinking he could escape, Ahab tried a disguise, but a random arrow struck him while the chariots chased the wrong king, Jehoshaphat.

It was foolish for Ahab to think he could escape by wearing a disguise. Sometimes people try to escape reality by disguising themselves—changing jobs, moving to a new town, even changing spouses. But God sees and evaluates the motives of each person. Any attempted disguise is futile.

Then his chariot was washed beside the pool of Samaria, where the prostitutes bathed, and dogs came and licked the king's blood, just as the Lord had promised.

The rest of the events in Ahab's reign and the story of the ivory palace and the cities he built are recorded in The Book of the History of the Kings of Israel. When Ahab died, he was buried among his ancestors. Then his son Ahaziah became the next king.

Does God allow angels to entice people to do evil? To understand evil one must first understand God.

(1) God himself is good (Psalm 11:7).

(2) God created a good world that fell because of man's sin (Romans 5:12).

(3) Someday God will recreate the world and it will be good again (Rev. 21:1).

(4) God is stronger than evil (Matthew 13:41-43; Rev. 19:11-21).

(5) God allows evil, and thus he has control over it. God did not create evil, and he offers help to those who wish to overcome it (Matthew 11:28-30).

(6) God uses everything—both good and evil—for his good purposes (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28).

The Bible shows us a God who hates all evil and will one day do away with it completely and forever (Rev. 20:10-15).

God does not entice anyone to become evil. Those committed to evil, however, may be used by God to sin even more in order to hurry their deserved judgment (Exodus 11:10).

We don't need to understand every detail of how God works in order to have perfect confidence in his absolute power over evil and his total goodness toward us.

Chapter 2



Micaiah determined to speak only what the Lord revealed.

1 Kings 22:14

But Micaiah replied, "As surely as the Lord lives, I will say only what the Lord tells me to say."

This determination should be followed today, as carefully as the prophets of old. In the Old Testament, when prophets spoke that that did not come to pass, they were put to death, and known as a false prophet.

In Your Calling, speak only the truth

1 Peter 4:11

Are you called to be a speaker? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Are you called to help others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then God will be given glory in everything through Jesus Christ. All glory and power belong to him forever and ever. Amen.

Some people, well aware of their abilities, believe that they have the right to use their abilities as they please. Others feel that they have no special talents at all. Peter addresses both groups in these verses. Everyone has some gifts; find yours and use them.

All our abilities should be used in serving others; none are for our own exclusive enjoyment. Peter mentions speaking and serving. Paul lists these and other abilities in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-11; Ephes. 4:11.

How is God praised when we use our abilities? When we use them as he directs, to help others, they will see Jesus in us and praise him for the help they have received. Peter may have been thinking of Jesus' words,

“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Many will not listen to the truth of God.

2 Tim. 4:3

For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear.

It was important for Timothy to preach the gospel so that the Christian faith could spread throughout the world.

We believe in Christ today because people like Timothy were faithful to their mission. It is still vitally important for believers to spread the gospel. Half the people who have ever lived are alive today, and most of them do not know Christ.

He is coming soon, and he wants to find his faithful believers ready for him.

It may be inconvenient to take a stand for Christ or to tell others about his love, but preaching the Word of God is the most important responsibility the church and its members have been given. Be prepared for, courageous in, and sensitive to God-given opportunities to tell the Good News.

“Be prepared in season and out of season” means to always be ready to serve God in any situation, whether or not it is convenient. Be sensitive to the opportunities God gives you.

Paul told Timothy to “correct, rebuke and encourage.” It is difficult to accept correction, to be told we have to change. But no matter how much the truth hurts, we must be willing to listen to it so we can more fully obey God.

Open your eyes to God’s truth

Jeremiah 5:21

Listen, you foolish and senseless people—who have eyes but do not see who have ears but do not hear.

People and nations who please God treat the fatherless (orphans) justly and care for the poor. Wicked men in Israel treated the defenseless unjustly, which displeased God greatly. Some defenseless people—orphans, the poor, the homeless, and the lonely—are within your reach. What action can you take to help at least one of them?

Metal is purified by fire. As it is heated, impurities are burned away and only the pure metal remains. As God tested the people of Judah, however, he could find no purity in their lives. They continued in their sinful ways.

Chapter 3



Micaiah had a godly reputation

1 Kings 22:7-8

But Jehoshaphat asked, "Isn't there a prophet of the Lord around, too? I would like to ask him the same question."

King Ahab replied, "There is still one prophet of the Lord, but I hate him. He never prophesies anything but bad news for me! His name is Micaiah son of Imlah."

"You shouldn't talk like that," Jehoshaphat said. "Let's hear what he has to say."

Even kings who did not always follow God knew there was a difference in the prophets of the Lord and false prophets.

Jehoshaphat asked if a prophet of the Lord was available. Evidently Jehoshaphat wanted to do what was right although Ahab didn't. However, both kings disregarded God's message and listened only to the pagan prophets.

It is possible to destroy ones reputation

Philip. 2:15

So that no one can speak a word of blame against you. You are to live clean, innocent lives as children of God in a dark world full of crooked and perverse people. Let your lives shine brightly before them.

Good deeds are to Glorify God

1 Peter 2:12

Be careful how you live among your unbelieving neighbors. Even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will believe and give honor to God when he comes to judge the world.

Why are complaining and arguing so harmful? If all that people know about a church is that its members constantly argue, complain, and gossip, they get a false impression of Christ and the gospel.

Belief in Christ should unite those who trust him. If your church is always complaining and arguing, it lacks the unifying power of Jesus Christ.

Stop arguing with other Christians or complaining about people and conditions within the church and let the world see Christ.

Our lives should be characterized by moral purity, patience, and peacefulness, so that we will “shine like stars” in a dark and depraved world.

A transformed life is an effective witness to the power of God’s Word. Are you shining brightly, or are you clouded by complaining and arguing? Shine out for God.

Choose a good reputation

Proverbs 22:1

Choose a good reputation over great riches, for being held in high esteem is better than having silver or gold.

Eccles. 7:1

A good reputation is more valuable than the most expensive perfume. In the same way, the day you die is better than the day you are born.

This seems to contradict Solomon's previous advice to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in one's work—to enjoy what God has given.

We are to enjoy what we have while we can, but realize that adversity also strikes. Adversity reminds us that life is short, teaches us to live wisely, and refines our character.

Christianity and Judaism see value in suffering and sorrow. The Greeks and Romans despised it; Eastern religions seek to live above it; but Christians and Jews see it as a refining fire.

Most would agree that we learn more about God from difficult times than from happy times. Do you try to avoid sorrow and suffering at all costs? See your struggles as great opportunities to learn from God.

Many people avoid thinking about death, refuse to face it, and are reluctant to attend funerals.

Solomon is not encouraging us to think morbidly, but he knows that it is helpful to think clearly about death. It reminds us that there is still time for change, time to examine the direction of our lives, and time to confess our sins and find forgiveness from God.

Because everyone will eventually die, it makes sense to plan ahead to experience God's mercy rather than his justice.

Church overseers must above reproach

1 Tim. 3:2-7

For an elder must be a man whose life cannot be spoken against. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exhibit self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must enjoy having guests in his home and must be able to teach.

He must not be a heavy drinker or be violent. He must be gentle, peace loving, and not one who loves money. He must manage his own family well, with children who respect and obey him.

For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?

An elder must not be a new Christian, because he might be proud of being chosen so soon, and the Devil will use that pride to make him fall. Also, people outside the church must speak well of him so that he will not fall into the Devil's trap and be disgraced.

When Paul says that each overseer should have only one wife, he is prohibiting both polygamy and promiscuity. This does not prohibit an unmarried person from becoming an elder or a widowed elder from remarrying.

To be a church leader (“overseer”) is a heavy responsibility because the church belongs to the living God. Church leaders should not be elected because they are popular, nor should they be allowed to push their way to the top. Instead they should be chosen by the church because of their respect for the truth, both in what they believe and in how they live.

The word *overseer* can refer to a pastor, church leader, or presiding elder. It is good to want to be a spiritual leader, but the standards are high.

Paul enumerates some of the qualifications here. Do you hold a position of spiritual leadership, or would you like to be a leader some day? Check yourself against Paul’s standard of excellence. Those with great responsibility must meet high expectations.

The lists of qualifications for church office show that living a blameless and pure life requires effort and self-discipline.

All believers, even if they never plan to be church leaders, should strive to follow these guidelines because they are consistent with what God says is true and right. The strength to live according to God’s will comes from Christ.

Chapter 4



Be courageous though in the minority

1 Kings 22:6

So King Ahab summoned his prophets, about four hundred of them, and asked them, "Should I go to war against Ramoth-gilead or not?"

They all replied, "Go right ahead! The Lord will give you a glorious victory!"

These 400 prophets may have been the 400 Asherah priests left alive by Elijah at Carmel, although 450 prophets of Baal were killed (see 1 Kings 18:19-40). Each false prophet spoke with a lying tongue.

Speak truthfully as a witness

Exodus 23:2

"Do not join a crowd that intends to do evil. When you are on the witness stand, do not be swayed in your testimony by the opinion of the majority.

Justice is often perverted in favor of the rich. Here the people are warned against twisting justice in favor of the poor. Justice should be impartial, treating rich and poor alike.

Giving special privileges to either rich or poor only makes justice for everyone more unlikely. Withstand the pressure of the crowd to sway your decision about a person. Let the fairness God shows to each of us guide your judgment.

Keeping the law does not save you.

Romans 9:31

But the Jews, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded.

Sometimes we are like these people, trying to get right with God by keeping his laws. We may think that attending church, doing church work, giving offerings, and being nice will be enough.

After all, we've played by the rules, haven't we? But Paul's words sting—this approach never succeeds.

Paul explains that God's plan is not for those who try to earn his favor by being good; it is for those who realize that they can never be good enough and so must depend on Christ.

We can be saved only by putting our faith in what Jesus Christ has done. If we do that, we will never be "put to shame" or be disappointed.

The Jews had a worthy goal—to honor God. But they tried to achieve it the wrong way—by rigid and painstaking obedience to the law.

Thus some of them became more dedicated to the law than to God. They thought that if they kept the law, God would have to accept them as his people. But God cannot be controlled.

The Jews did not see that their Scriptures, the Old Testament, taught salvation by faith, and not by human effort (see Genesis 15:6).

The “stumbling stone” was Jesus. The Jews did not believe in him, because he didn’t meet their expectations for the Messiah.

Some people still stumble over Christ because salvation by faith doesn’t make sense to them. They would rather try to earn their way to God, or else they expect God simply to overlook their sins.

Others stumble over Christ because his values are the opposite of the world’s values. He asks for humility, and many are unwilling to humble themselves before him. He requires obedience, and many refuse to put their wills at his disposal.

Matthew 10:39

If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give it up for me, you will find it.

Jesus did not come to bring the kind of peace that glosses over deep differences just for the sake of superficial harmony.

Conflict and disagreement will arise between those who choose to follow Christ and those who don’t. Yet we can look forward to the day when all conflict will be resolved.

Christian commitment may separate friends and loved ones. In saying this, Jesus was not encouraging disobedience to parents or conflict at home.

Rather, he was showing that his presence demands a decision. Because some will follow Christ and some won't, conflict will inevitably arise. As we take our cross and follow him, our different values, morals, goals, and purposes will set us apart from others.

Don't neglect your family, but remember that your commitment to God is even more important than they are. God should be your first priority.

Christ calls us to a higher mission than to find comfort and tranquility in this life. Love of family is a law of God, but even this love can be self-serving and used as an excuse not to serve God or do his work.

To take our cross and follow Jesus means to be willing to publicly identify with him, to experience almost certain opposition, and to be committed to face even suffering and death for his sake.

This verse is a positive and negative statement of the same truth: clinging to this life may cause us to forfeit the best from Christ in this world *and* in the next.

The more we love this life's rewards (leisure, power, popularity, financial security), the more we will discover how empty they really are.

The best way to enjoy life, therefore, is to loosen our greedy grasp on earthly rewards so that we can be free to follow Christ. In doing so, we will inherit eternal life and begin at once to experience the benefits of following Christ.

Micaiah, though hated, stood for the truth

1 Kings 22:8

King Ahab replied, "There is still one prophet of the Lord, but I hate him. He never prophesies anything but bad news for me! His name is Micaiah son of Imlah."

"You shouldn't talk like that," Jehoshaphat said. "Let's hear what he has to say."

Jehoshaphat knew there was a difference between these pagan prophets and the “prophet of the LORD,” so he asked if one was available. Evidently Jehoshaphat wanted to do what was right although Ahab didn’t. However, both kings disregarded God’s message and listened only to the pagan prophets.

Truth convicts and condemns the sinner

John 15:18-19

"When the world hates you, remember it hated me before it hated you. The world would love you if you belonged to it, but you don't. I chose you to come out of the world, and so it hates you.

Christians will get plenty of hatred from the world; from each other we need love and support. Do you allow small problems to get in the way of loving other believers? Jesus commands that you love them, and he will give you the strength to do it.

Matthew 5:11-12

"God blesses you when you are mocked and persecuted and lied about because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted, too.

Jesus said to rejoice when we are persecuted.

Persecution can be good because:

(1) It takes our eyes off earthly rewards,

(2) It strips away superficial belief,

(3) It strengthens the faith of those who endure, and

(4) Our attitude through it serves as an example to others who follow.

We can be comforted to know that God's greatest prophets were persecuted (Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel). The fact that we are being persecuted proves that we have been faithful; faithless people would be unnoticed.

In the future God will reward the faithful by receiving them into his eternal kingdom where there is no more persecution.

Truth sometimes makes enemies

Galatians 4:16

Have I now become your enemy because I am telling you the truth?

Paul did not gain great popularity when he rebuked the Galatians for turning away from their first faith in Christ. Human nature hasn't changed much—we still get angry when we're scolded. But don't write off someone who challenges you. There may be truth in what he or she says.

Receive his or her words with humility; carefully think them over. If you discover that you need to change an attitude or action, take steps to do it.

Allegiance to Christ may bring hatred

Mark 13:13

And everyone will hate you because of your allegiance to me. But those who endure to the end will be saved.

The “abomination that causes desolation” is the desecration of the temple by God’s enemies.

This happened repeatedly in Israel’s history: in 597 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar looted the temple and took Judean captives to Babylon (2 Chron. 36); in 168 B.C.

When the Roman general Titus placed an idol on the site of the burned-out temple after the destruction of Jerusalem.

Just a few years after Jesus gave this warning, in A.D. 38, the emperor Caligula made plans to put his own statue in the temple, but he died before this could be carried out.

The world first hated Christ

John 15:18

"When the world hates you, remember it hated me before it hated you.

Christians will get plenty of hatred from the world; from each other we need love and support.

Do you allow small problems to get in the way of loving other believers? Jesus commands that you love them, and he will give you the strength to do it.

Put away falsehood as we belong to Christ

Ephes. 4:25

So put away all falsehood and "tell your neighbor the truth" because we belong to each other.

Lying to each other disrupts unity by creating conflicts and destroying trust. It tears down relationships and leads to open warfare in a church.

Tell the truth to each other

Zech. 8:16

But this is what you must do: Tell the truth to each other. Render verdicts in your courts that are just and that lead to peace.

For more than 15 years, God and his prophets had been urging the people to finish building the temple. Here again, God encouraged them with visions of the future.

We may be tempted to slow down for many reasons: people aren't responding; we feel physically or emotionally drained; the workers are uncooperative; the work is distasteful, too difficult, or not worth the effort.

God's promises about the future should encourage us *now*. He knows what the results of our labors will be, and thus he can give us a perspective that will help us continue in our work for him.

God promised to give his people rich rewards, reassuring them that despite the punishments they had endured, he would not change his mind to bless them.

But he also said they had a job to do—"These are the things you are to do." God will be faithful, but we also have responsibilities: to tell the truth, exercise justice, and live peacefully. If you expect God to do his part, be sure to do yours.

Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us.

This "great cloud of witnesses" is composed of the people described in Hebrews 11. Their faithfulness is a constant encouragement to us. We do not struggle alone, and we are not the first to struggle with the problems we face.

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