

God's throne rules

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[0:00] Please, if you've got a Bible, can you turn to 1 Kings 22. Perhaps you might be able to look across at your next door neighbour's Bible. If this is your first time here, let me explain what we do on, not every Sunday, but quite often, is go through the Bible chapter at a time or a section at a time, and that includes the Old Testament.

We don't always do the Old Testament, we don't always do the New Testament, but we've been doing the Old Testament, and we've been going through this historical book, it's called 1 Kings, it's about the kings, it's the first of two books on that subject, hence it's called 1 Kings.

And we're going to do the same today, we pray that God will speak to us, and we believe that God's word is living and active, it's not just a boring old book, it's actually an exciting, challenging, real, immediate word to us today, and we put that to the test as we come to look at this chapter.

Here are some difficult questions that this chapter touches on, about good and evil. I take it that you believe that there is such a thing as good and evil.

Not everybody does, I think, and not everybody knows why they believe there is such a thing, but in a Christian assembly, we believe that there is good and evil, and we believe that God is in control of such things.

[1:39] Is everything under God's control? Is everything under God's control? Or is it the way that we have an evil side, and a good side, and they're sort of more or less balanced, a sort of yin and yang, constantly in balance, and no side wins over the other?

Is that what we believe? Is everything under God's control? Actually, yes, it is. He isn't neck and neck with the adversary. And is the God of the Bible, does he have a sure plan?

Because some branches of the Christian church have said that he has a plan, but it's not that sure, because even he doesn't know how it's going to turn out.

Because part of that plan involves human agents, human beings. And if they're not clever enough to do God's will, well, God's will, they say, doesn't get done.

And this whole thing of free will, which is a big sort of philosophical issue, and some Christian theologians have said, they've said this, that human free will is so free that even God doesn't know what we're going to decide, and therefore can't really make a sure plan as to what the outcome will be.

[3:05] Now, I think that's incorrect. He does work out his plan, which includes and embraces even evil people's evil decisions.

And when evil people disregard God's revelation, has God lost out?

Do we say, oh, poor God? So when we think of our nation, for example, in which Christian churches are, many of them, emptying rather than filling up, so fewer people are believing God's revelation, do we say, oh, God must be wringing his hands in frustration, because he's missed out.

It's actually all gone wrong for him. Is that really the way to look at it? Or is there a sense in which his will is done, even by disobedient people who are heading for judgment?

Is there a sense that even this, in some mysterious way, is not him missing out, but his will being done? And I want to say, actually, that strange and mysterious truth is a truth.

[4:28] There's a sentence that's used in various places in the Bible, which says, our God reigns. There's even a song which says, our God reigns. That over this world, with all its confusion, there is a throne, and God has a will, and nobody can cheat him on this.

His will gets done. Our God reigns. So, those are the sorts of things that this chapter is to do with, and I want to try and explain that to you as we go through.

So, this part of the Bible is Old Testament history, and it's about the way that people reject God and turn to sin. It's sad, but true. We see a decline taking place in this bit of history.

It's true for them. It's true for everyone else. It's not that they're particularly bad people as such, but it just shows what human beings are like. We've been looking at the northern kingdom.

The kingdom split into two. It had moved from the glory of Solomon's days to worshipping the Lord via golden calves, the sort of images, which is the opposite of commandment number two.

[5:42] And they'd moved to the worship of Baal, who is not the Lord, the worship of an idol, which is in opposition to commandment number one. You shall not have any other gods but me.

And so, it's really a sad story of turning away, of exchanging glory for shame. And Romans 1.22 says that that's actually not just the history of Israel.

It's the analysis of what happens across the world in all societies. There is this turning from God. So, let's look at the context of this. We've been looking at chapter 20. No? Yes? 20 and 21.

And now we're in 22. And in these three chapters, Ahab is given three chances. In the first one, he went wrong because he protected the enemy he should have killed.

[6:41] And you might remember the name Herem, which was devoted to God. And then in the chapter we looked at last time, so he incurred judgment because of that.

In the chapter we looked at last time with Naboth, he killed the good man he should have protected. And that was Kerem. And Kerem was... Vineyard.

Do you remember? There's a little pun there. So, Ray would spot that. And in that chapter, again, there was judgment.

But there was mercy because Ahab, do you remember that he took it to heart and went around looking sorry? And God noticed that and said, oh, that's... You know, it might not be a huge reaction, but at least it's right and God valued that.

So, that's an encouragement for us. And in this third chapter, he goes to his death with his eyes wide open despite being warned by God.

[7:45] And this is his final judgment. And it shows us that God takes three chapters to do this, three quite big chapters. It shows us how patient God is because if you and I had done that, we probably would have said, okay, Ahab just finished with you.

And, you know, I've got no more time for you. But God was so patient with him. And the New Testament tells us that God is a patient God.

He's not patient forever, but he is patient. And it says he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but that everyone come to repentance. So, if you've come along this morning thinking, quite, I'd just like to find out what this God thing is about.

That's a good thing to be doing. And God will give you time to do that. He'll be patient with you. You keep on thinking about him, trying to draw near to him.

We've got an encouragement that God's patient. It might take a while to learn lessons. But God's patient. Story of a school teacher with a very difficult class.

[8:59] And the head teacher said, here they are. They're a right lot. You're going to have to be really patient with them. And maybe God says the same about us.

But he's a patient God, so that's good. So let's look at the chapter. 1 Kings 22. For three years, there was no war between Aram and Israel.

But in the third year, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went down to see the king of Israel. So you need a map. And there's the map. So that's the Mediterranean.

And here's the southern kingdom, Judah. Here's the northern kingdom, Israel. And here's the king of the northern kingdom, Ahab. And it's got little bits of border that stick out and probably came and went at different times.

And that bit of border sticks out there. And this is Aram, which nowadays you'd say was Syria. They are not friends with Israel.

[10:03] There's always war across here. And up here, going all the way around there, is Assyria, which is a big, big power. And they're going to come into the story later as their power increases.

But at the moment, we're thinking of Aram there and Israel and Judah. And it says that for three years, there was no war between Aram and Israel.

But in the third year, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went down to see the king of Israel. Well, this is, let's see, no war and he goes down. And here he is going down. And you're thinking he's going north, he's going up.

But of course, Jerusalem is the highest place in the Bible, if you think of it. And any direction from Jerusalem in any other direction is going down.

So he went down to, if you see what I mean, Jerusalem's the most important place in the Old Testament. So you think of it as being higher. So any direction you go away from Jerusalem is going down.

[11:08] So he went down to see the king of Israel. And the king of Israel had said to his servants, don't you know that Ramoth Gilead belongs to us and we're doing nothing to retake it from the king of Aram.

Now Ramoth Gilead, I just put RG, is somewhere around here, sort of in that border area. And Aram had captured it and they wanted to take it back.

And I'm told, I don't, I have no way of telling you this independently, it was on a trade route. So there's good reasons to capture Ramoth Gilead because you could tax the people who were going to and fro and make a bit of money.

So it's a good idea from a number of points of view. Don't you know that Ramoth Gilead belongs to us yet we're doing nothing to retake it from the king of Aram.

So he says to Jehoshaphat, will you go with me? So let me just remind you who these people are. Ahab is the king of the northern kingdom. Jehoshaphat is the king of the southern kingdom. And there was a split between these two kingdoms for reasons that I won't go into now.

[12:17] But Ahab says to Jehoshaphat, will you go with me to fight against Ramoth Gilead? Verse four. And Jehoshaphat says to the king of Israel, as I am, I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses.

So he's saying yes. Okay, let's work together on this. Now if you look carefully, you'll see the Bible takes a rather, a rather dim view of this because there were real theological differences, spiritual differences between the southern and the northern kingdom.

So making that very close agreement, the Bible is rather dubious about it. But anyway, Jehoshaphat says yes. But, he says, but, verse five, Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, first, seek the counsel of the Lord.

First, please now, let's resort to the word of the Lord. So, at least Jehoshaphat has got his head on correctly for that.

It's a big thing going to war. It's a big thing joining together like this. Let's ask the Lord whether that's his will. Now, if you're a Christian, you'd instinctively say, ah, I'm pleased with that because that's what I'd like to do.

[13:48] It's a good principle for the Christian life. We don't do anything without asking God about it.

Obviously, we can't ask God, shall I put on my right shoe before my left shoe this morning? Which color socks shall I wear? Those aren't particularly significant in God's kingdom and God's purposes. But, there are things that are significant and we would very definitely, what does God say about this? I hope you'd agree with me on that. Would you agree with me on that?

There are things that we definitely not want to take a step without saying, what does God think? We would pray, we would ask God what he says about it. And, Jesus quotes this text that I put up there. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. And, maybe that's a thought you've never had. But, Jesus, it was very instinctive to Jesus and he says it should be instinctive to his followers.

[14:53] We don't live at a distance from God, just doing our own thing and making contact with God, you know, every couple of years. We want, the Bible says, we want to walk with God.

And, it puts it in that sort of walking. Walking is a very nice way to have a relationship. You can be quiet or you can chat or you can open your heart or you can just go, hmm, and you can enjoy things as you walk together.

And, walking with the Lord, praying, listening to what he says, having his word sort of, as we might say, the background to everything in our lives.

Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

Can't live the Christian life without the word of the Lord.

Now, in this story, there are two throne scenes and let's, two throne scenes, two thrones, two lots of kings.

[15:52] And, here is the first one in verse six. So, the king of Israel brought together the prophets, about 400 of them.

So, here are the prophets. There's loads of them. I didn't draw 400 of them. That's quite a lot. You wouldn't fit them all in here. It's a lot of prophets.

And, maybe there are people standing around watching as well. It's a bit like a rally, almost. So, there's the kings and all these prophets and the king of Israel brings them together and says to them, all right, shush, shush.

Okay, this is what I want to know. Shush. I want to know, shall I go to war against Ramoth Gilead or shall I refrain? And, the prophets all get going.

They seem to be quite lively prophets. They're all getting going, probably all shouting at once. But, the answer is these particular words. Arise, or go, for the Lord will give it into the king's hand.

[17:01] I would even ask you to say that together with me. Can you say it from the screen? Arise, the Lord will give into the king's hand. Okay, that's what they say.

It seems to have, I don't know whether they're all saying that or whether that's what it all boils down to. So, it's sort of all 400 of them. I mean, if you did it by a referendum, that would be settled, wouldn't it?

All 400 of them. But, Jehoshaphat, and congratulations to Jehoshaphat for this. He says, is there not a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?

And you might say, well, he just heard from the Lord. I would draw your attention to the capitalization of your translation in front of you because you, when Jehoshaphat says, is there a prophet of the Lord, what can you tell us about the capitalization of it?

It's all capital letters. And when the prophets replied, the Lord will give it into the king's hand, verse 6. What can you tell me about the capitalization of that?

[18:10] Lowercase, small case, apart from the L at the beginning. And that's actually quite important because, in English translations, L-O-R-D, all capitals, is God's own, the personal name of the God of the Bible, Yahweh, is what you might say if you did it in Hebrew, Yahweh.

And Lord, just lowercase, is Master, Adonai. So what the prophets have said so far is Adonai will give it into the king's hand.

Now who's Adonai? Who's the master? Is it Baal? Is it the Lord? Which God are we talking about?

So Jehoshaphat says, I'd like to be more specific about this. I want a prophet of Yahweh, the God of the Bible, to tell me.

Ah, okay. So, Jehoshaphat asks this and in verse 8, in verse 8, the king of Israel says, okay, we've got one.

We've got 400 already. So we've just got one, one man through whom we can inquire of the Lord.

[19:28] My personal opinion is that this word hate, which we're going to look at, would be better translated reject. But, I'll leave this to your judgment.

I think he's saying, I reject him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. We've tried him in the past, we've had him as a consultant, but every time we go to him, he always brings up bad stuff and we don't use him anymore.

He's not on our list of approved consultants anymore. more. You know, it's a little bit like a government department that says, you know, whenever we go to that particular consultancy, they always say climate change is going to ruin it.

So we just don't go there anymore. And I think that's probably what he's saying here. we don't use him. I hate him. I reject him because he never prophesies good about me, but always bad. His name is Micaiah, son of Imla. And Jehoshaphat says, Jehoshaphat, did I put this that his name meant God judges? I think I might have put that on an earlier screen, but I didn't mention it. [20:40] Jehoshaphat, God judges, Yahweh judges. And he says at this point, don't say that. I'm not actually going to be convinced until I hear a prophet of the Lord.

400 of the other prophets doesn't cut the mustard with me. I want a prophet of the Lord. I want to hear what God is actually saying. I don't know whether that thought has ever struck you. I mean, you can get hundreds and hundreds of religions, hundreds and hundreds of assemblies of spiritual people, but I would recommend to you don't be satisfied until you have heard from God himself, the living God, the real God, not a made-up God.

So on the positive side, for Jehoshaphat, he has asked for the word of the Lord. On the negative side, and in the Bible there's often pluses and minuses about people, is it really wise to be allied with this non-believing, God-insulting kingdom?

Is it wise to make this alliance? We're sort of faced with those choices, aren't we? What sort of people shall I link up with?

[22:05] So, and the Bible has different answers to that depending on the sort of commitment and involvement it makes. So, of this chapter you might say, well, my employers are not Christians, they don't believe in God, should I leave my job?

And the Bible generally says, no, don't be silly, you have to earn a living, you can't possibly insist on a little Christian bubble that you live in for your employment, go with your employer and try and be a Christian in that situation and that's what you're called to do.

What about my family? If I'm the only believer in my family, should I sort of have nothing to do with the rest of my family? And the Bible would, generally speaking, will say, no, that's a bit silly too. There may be some tensions that arise and there probably will be, but generally speaking, your duty is to be a witness to your family, to be a Christian witness, try and persuade them, show them how good it is to be a Christian, talk to them about Christian things and things like that.

What about getting married? Now the Bible is more specific about this. It says that being married is such an intimate commitment that a believer should not marry somebody who is not a believer, at least I'm saying not as a deliberate choice to do so.

[23:37] It's not a wise policy and you will not have to go too far to hear people's testimony that when they did marry somebody who was not a Christian, that it's really coloured the whole of their subsequent lives and not always in a good way.

It's not the same thing as saying I'm married, I've become a Christian, should I leave my husband or wife who's not a Christian?

The Bible says no, don't do that. But what about Christian gospel work? Should Christian churches link up with Buddhists to do spiritual work?

The Bible says no, it's like light and darkness, chalk and cheese, you just can't do that. Oh, what a strange thing. I've got something come up on my screen.

What about church? Does it matter which church I go to, as long as it says church, does it matter? And the Bible says you really want a church? That's a very important Christian commitment and involvement and you really do want to be in a church where people are believers, where you hear the word of God, where you know that you're on the same page with one.

[24:56] It doesn't mean you have to agree on absolutely everything, but you need a real degree of unity to be together. So, anyway, this is a few comments on Jehoshaphat's alliance with the northern kingdom.

Let's carry on. So, verse 9, the king of Israel called one of his officials and said, bring Micaiah the son of Imla at once.

So, off he goes. I'm going to put an arrow which is going to get him and he'll come back in a little while. But in the meantime, the two kings, picture this if you would, dressed in their royal robes, on their thrones, seated on their thrones, come let us adore them, on the threshing floor by the entrance of the gates of Samaria with all the prophets, going mad in front of them, prophesying all

over the place.

And Zedekiah is obviously a chief prophet. Now, his name, if you were to do everything by names, you'd say, okay, this guy's on the money, because Zedekiah means God is the Lord, is righteous, Zedek is righteousness and the Yabit at the end is the Lord.

So, he's got a good name, you know, 10 out of 10 for his name, son of Ka'anah, which I think means trader, not sure about that.

[26:32] He's got an answer to this question. It's obviously been thinking about it because he's got some iron horns. Now, I dare say very few of you have brought iron horns along this morning.

It just shows how unprepared you were. He was prepared. He must have had these made earlier, so he didn't just put them together in a moment.

He has these iron horns and he says, this is what the Lord says, with these horns you will gore the Arameans like a bull.

Those are the horns. Okay, so he's telling us something very definite. He's saying, you know, go for it with this. you will gore the Arameans.

Now, we did a little study on this the other day, and one school of thought was that this is a Baal thing. Another school of thought would be that this is a Yahweh thing, because there is a text in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 33, verse 17, which says of one of the tribes of Israel, in him majesty is like a firstborn bull, his horns are the horns of a wild ox, with them he will gore, he will attack the nations.

[28:16] Now, I don't know whether this is the text that Zedekiah had in mind, but if he had been inclined to, he could have said, there you are, it's in the Bible. So, he's sort of adapted a little bit, so, Jehoshaphat is saying, well, I want Bible stuff, I want Yahweh stuff, and Zedekiah says, well, I can do that, I've got a name for that, I've got a text for it, so, here we are.

It's very positive, and very non-judgmental. Ahab, God is with you, you'll be successful.

Naboth and the vineyard thing from last chapter, we just don't go there. Ben Hadad, when you should have killed Ben Hadad and you didn't, well, we don't go there either.

Where we go is positive, positive. You'll be successful, God will bless you. Now then, is that the word of the Lord? It's easy to be deceived, and just seeming to be Christian in this day and age isn't always a guarantee that what is said is really Christian.

I'm sorry to say that, but I've got to be truthful about it. And there's a text in 2 Corinthians, which you can't quite read because of the arrow, but it says, Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

[29:58] And if you're not discerning, you might not notice that where the message is going is not something from God, it's something from somewhere else.

We have to be discerning. And, well, Jehoshaphat was, but Ahab wasn't. Let's bring Micaiah back. Verse 13, the messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, look, as one man, the other prophets are predicting success for the king, let your word agree with theirs and speak good. Do you remember he was criticized because he only spoke bad, but he said, speak good. If you know what's good for you, Micaiah, when you get out there in front of those 400 people, say something that they'll be pleased with.

Don't tell them something they're not going to like. Say something good. So here he comes and the messenger says, speak good stuff.

[31:09] And there's the prophet Micaiah and he says to his credit, as surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord says. This is a true prophet. I'm not going to say just what pleases people.

I'm going to say what the Lord says. And people won't always be pleased with that. I hope they'll be pleased, but they won't always. But I'm going to say what the Lord says.

No full marks to Micaiah for that. God's servants always have to say that. There they are on their thrones. And when he arrived, verse 18, the king asked him, Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?

Shall we go, or shall I refrain? The word refrain is almost like the word back down. Sort of a bit of a loaded question really, isn't it? Shall I go, or are you going to tell me to back down?

Who's going to tell a king to back down? What shall we do? And Micaiah says, do you want to read this out with me?

[32:17] End of verse 15, it says, attack and be victorious. Shall we read that out together? Attack and be victorious, he answered, for the Lord will give it into the king's hand.

You just read that a little while before, didn't you? It's the party line, it's what they're all saying. You'll be victorious, the Lord will give it into the king's hand. I don't know what voice he said it in.

He might have said, attack and be victorious, the Lord will give it into the king's hand. man. But something gives the king the idea that now we've got Micah, let's get the proper Micah, that's what he said.

And he says, and I think it's Ahab saying this, how many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord? It's a little bit of an odd thing to say because he hasn't been that bothered to hear the Lord, but now he's saying, we've gone to the trouble of getting you, you're a prophet of the Lord, so don't give me that funny voice, tell me what you're going to tell me. And he makes it quite serious, I put you on oath to give me the real McCoy, tell me what, you know, tell me. And there is a real difference, there is a real difference between what is not the word of the Lord, and what is the word of the Lord.

[33:46] The whole chapter on this in Jeremiah, where there's false prophets who are willing to say sort of anything and everything as long as it's popular, and through the prophet, the Lord says, let the one who has my word speak it faithfully.

What has my word got in common with false prophecy? What has straw got in common with grain? Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks rock in pieces?

You know, God insists on this quality to his word. It is not like the words of men. The message is not like the message that human beings dream up.

It is radically, qualitatively different. moment. It is like fire. It is like a hammer that breaks rock in pieces.

I don't know whether you've ever encountered God's word in this powerful way, but if you have not, pray that you would. If you've been coming along and you just think, well, it's sort of fairly amusing and I like looking at the stick men, and I usually forget it, but it's always usually interesting.

[35:06] But you haven't actually found that God's word sometimes has this huge power to impact our lives. You haven't yet heard God's word. My word is a hammer, says God.

Don't mix it up with anything else. My word is like a hammer that breaks rock in pieces. So, where did we get to? The king says, speak truth in the name of the Lord.

So, Micaiah does, and this is what he says. Verse 17, I saw all Israel. This is the truth of it. I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd.

And the Lord said, these people have no master, let each one go home in peace. He said, this is what the outcome of this battle will be. They've all said, the Lord will give your enemies into the king's hand.

Actually, what's going to happen is it'll be a disaster. It'll be a wipeout. It'll be a disaster. And all Israel will be scattered. They'll be like sheep without a shepherd.

[36:14] And they'll go home. And only then will they have peace. That's what it's going to be. That's not very cheerful, is it? Ahab says, I've told you so.

Bad news. I knew that would happen. Didn't I tell you he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad. Let's stop on the sheep without a shepherd.

Because this phrase is actually a very significant one. It sounds like it's to do with farming, but really it's to do with politics.

It's to do with not having a king. And the king is killed. They're like sheep without a shepherd. And they're scattered. Jesus saw 5,000 people feeding the 5,000.

He looked at them and he said, look at these people. They are harassed and helpless. They've got no one to lead them. They've got no one to turn to.

[37:16] They've got no one to protect them. They've got no one to inform them. They are like sheep without a shepherd. And it says of Jesus that

he looked on people and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

So interestingly, he began teaching them many things. It's interesting that his response was the best way to deal with this lostness is to begin to teach them.

To teach them about God, to teach them about how to relate to him, to teach them about their need, to teach them who God is, and he taught them. And there's another interesting link.

But at his death, Jesus quoted this, strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. That's what he said about his death. And I don't think I'm capable of drawing the link completely out, but I'll just pull that little bit of thread because there is a thread there.

when Jesus died, it was the same effect. Strike the shepherd and the sheep were all over the place because they so depended on the shepherd.

[38:29] Jesus' death was the death of the king and the flock was all unraveled. However, I can tell you this is good news. It didn't stay that way because Jesus returned from death and to gather all the sheep together.

That's another John's gospel thing, to gather sheep. I have sheep that are not of this fold, says Jesus. Now I am the king, the living king.

The sheep are not scattered, they're gathered. It's a great encouragement to us that he's not just going to gather the sheep of Israel, but the sheep, meaning all sorts of different ethnicities.

So he's interested in gathering Russian people and Singaporean people and American people and Thai people and Welsh people and even, oh I was going to say Scottish, Italian, and even English people.

It's wonderful isn't it? The scattering is undone. It's a gathering through Jesus. And so let's go on in verse 20, in verse 19.

[39:48] Micaiah says this is what's really going on behind the scenes. Let me give you an insight into this. Let me give you an insight into this. And here's the second throne scene.

So we've got these two kings in their splendid robes on their thrones and now we've got the king on his throne. And which is the better picture? I'll tell you by far the second.

But it's a very solemn picture. Therefore hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne. So we're going to have heaven and earth. Earth is the bit below the line.

Heaven is the bit above the line. We're inclined to think that the earth bit is the real bit and the heaven is the wafty rather dubious bit. The Bible is the other way round.

Heaven is the strong certain definite place. Earth is the place where it's all confused. But the two are linked. And I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the hosts of heaven around him.

[40:46] So I've just done six of them. On his right and his left. Now then, this I think is akin to a parable. It's not, I don't think we should take this as being a literal truth in every sense, but it's designed to teach us some very profound theology in the form of a story.

So just think as we go through this what's actually being said. So the Lord asked, verse 20, who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?

So this is the Lord and it's put as it were a question. the answer is Ahab will go to his death, that's the certain bit, that's what God has said in previous chapters, he will die.

Now how will that occur? That's the question really. And one suggested this and another that, verse 20, verse 21, finally a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, I will entice him.

By what means the Lord asked? Verse 23, no, verse 22, by what means the Lord asked? I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets, he said.

[42:16] So I will do this and I will do it by lying, says this spirit. And the Lord says, go and do it, you will succeed in this enticement and the word enticing comes up, deceiving, luring, trapping.

So we've got this interface between heaven and earth. The things here on earth and the interface is that from heaven comes this deceitful spirit.

And this has all been arranged before the throne of the Lord. You begin to see how complex this actually is. It seems just like a sort of rather primitive story, but actually there's a huge complexity to this.

So now verse 23, the Lord, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets. The Lord has decreed disaster for you.

That's what Micaiah says. Now we'll come back and look at that in a moment. Just keep that on the back burner a minute. What's that actually saying is going on? Just keep that on the back burner.

[43:34] I can tell you what Zedekiah thought about it. Verse 24, Zedekiah son of Kena went up, he's the one with the horns, he went up to come on, there's a little, ah, well, somewhere in there there was supposed to be a slap, but it doesn't, no, it comes next time, I think.

Let's, let's just think about what is happening. This is God's judgment, and it is happening through people believing a lie willingly.

It's all been made clear to Ahab, the prophets are lying to you, but Ahab is actually going to say, well, I prefer their lie to your truth. truth. I prefer their lie to your truth.

They sent a lie which they willingly believe. In the New Testament it says, for this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

This is happening now. Why do people believe a lie? Why are people so convinced that the ultimate answer to everything is Richard Dawkins, that's all there is to it, that's the world, it's all to do with science as it's described in that sense.

[45:02] Why do people willingly believe that? Well, it's a lie. Where does it come from? God has allowed that in some sense. it's not as though Ahab is an innocent person who's saying, I really want to know what God says, and then God tricks him, it isn't like that.

It's somebody who says, I've heard God loads of times, I don't like it, it's always bad, I'd much prefer to believe a lie, and God says, okay, I'll provide you with one, there you are, and he believes it.

It's a very serious thing, isn't it? They willingly believe a lie, and God says, yeah, well, there you are, there's a lie for you to believe. Let's go to Zedekiah, the son of Kenaah.

He goes up and he gives, there's the slap. The idea of slapping somebody whose word you don't like crops up a number of times in the Bible. And he says this rather strange thing, which way did the spirit from the Lord go when he went from me to speak to you?

He says, don't be ridiculous, Micaiah, you know, I've got the spirit of the Lord, and by what strange thing did the spirit manage to get to you to say such a ridiculous opposing thing?

[46:23] I mean, how stupid is that? I think that's the sort of thing he's saying. And Micaiah says, well, you'll know the answer to that.

You will find out that you were wrong, wrong. But by the time you find out, it will be too late. You'll be in a bunker hiding away.

You'll find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room. Does that mean that Zedekiah has another chance? Don't know. The king says, I don't like what he says, never have, this time he's gone too far, take him off to prison, and feed him the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, so put him on minimum rations, until I come safely back.

And of course, Micaiah said, well, that's not going to happen. If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me. Mark my words, everybody.

You, Ahab, will know that what I said is true, but you'll only know it when you don't come back. It'll be too late then. It's rather sober, isn't it?

[47:47] All the people who have heard Christian truth and said, no, I don't believe that, that's not right, they will know that it's true, one day, they will know that it's true, but on that day it'll be too late.

It'll be on the day when Jesus comes back and is exalted and is the judge of everybody and he said, you've had all your chances, it's too late now, you will know, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, every knee will bow to him, but it'll be too late to ask for forgiveness on that day.

Isn't that solemn? Let's go to the battle then, let's see what happens. Verse 29, so the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, went up to Ramoth Gilead.

The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, I will enter the battle in disguise. So there they are on their chariots and I will go, he says, I'm going to be in a chariot but I will take off my kingly robes.

So I just look like an ordinary chariot soldier. So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into the battle. Now the king of Aram had ordered his 32 chariot commanders, don't fight with anyone small or great except with the king of Israel.

[49:10] Go for the jugular. go for the jugular. That's what I want you to go for. Don't fight with anyone small or great except the king of Israel.

When the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they said, he's the one, sort of bling, he's the king, and he turns out and cries, perhaps cries out in prayer, or maybe he cries out in a southern accent.

He says, oh, don't do that rather, and they say, he's not from up north. It's the wrong one. So they turn from following him, they turn to attack him, but Jehoshaphat cried out, the chariot commander saw that he was not the king of Israel and stopped pursuing him.

So now we don't know where the king of Israel is, he's the target, and they've been told he's the jugular, thank you for that, Jack. And some guy draws his bow, and it says, in innocence, that's the word that's used.

So not really knowing who he's aiming for, where his target is, he just does a go, like that, and bang, hits the king of Israel in this absolutely minute target area between the two, between joints of the armour, and that's it.

[50:40] Someone drew his bow in innocence, and hit the king of Israel. Now then, if you were a statistician, you could calculate the odds of that, it would be a wonderful thing for my favourite radio programme, more or less.

So you have the 360 degrees, and you've got how far it might have gone, and how wide the chink would be in the armour, you'd probably work out the probabilities of that happening, as it were, by accident.

I don't know what it would be, I'm going to say it's one in a million, or something like that. God, but God uses this one in a million chance, and Ahab cannot escape the word of God.

He bled, it says, till he died. The king told the chariot driver, wheel round, get me out of the fighting, I've been wounded. All day long, the battle raged, the king was propped up in the chariot facing the Arameans, the blood from his wound ran onto the floor, and in the evening he died.

And as the sun was setting, a cry spread through the army, go home everybody, give up, go home. Everybody go back. And they did. That's sort of getting towards the end of the story.

[51:50] The king died. He was brought to Samaria, and they washed the chariot in a pool. It was a pool where the prostitutes bathed, presumably it was outside the city.

And the dogs, do you remember this from last time? That's what happened to his, to the innocent man that he had killed.

And it said the same will happen to you. The dogs licked up his blood as the word of the Lord had declared. It's not without a puzzle, because I think Naboth died in Jezreel, and I think this takes place in Samaria, so is it, I mean, it says it's what the word of the Lord said.

You can't escape God's word. Despite everything, God's word was fulfilled. quite remarkable, isn't it?

Let's go back to this parable. It's about the judgment which is the destiny of Ahab. He had made many deliberate choices, not least who he married.

[53:09] He married somebody who was a Baal worshiper, Jezebel, that's her name. He got involved with the worship of Baal, he didn't want to be involved with the worship of the Lord. Remember, he didn't kill Ben-Hadad, he did kill Naboth, sort of second-hand.

He had many blessings and many warnings. Aram was defeated, you remember, that you may know that I am the Lord. The Lord spoke to him many times. And he ends up getting the judgment that God had said.

But look at the layers of connection and causation that are going on here. Ahab's deliberate choice is at one end of the chain and God's judgment is at the other end.

But look at the things that are in there. Ahab rejected the word of the Lord, but still the word of the Lord caught up with him. He tried to cheat God's plan.

God had said, are you going to die in that battle? He said, no, not if I disguise myself. Ha, ha, ha, what are the chances of me being killed if I disguise myself?

[54:21] One in a million. But God can still do it. These false prophets, this lie, they strongly declared a lie.

Ahab went along with it. And that was part of the chain that led to his death. And think of this spiritual dimension, this ill-intentioned, I think ill-intentioned spiritual forces, who told a lie and yet in fact served God's purposes down to the letter.

And then above it all, the mysterious will of the sovereign God. And those are linked. The human sin, the judgment of God, and through all sorts of strange connections, inputs, choices, influences, God's will gets done.

So let's have a little think how that might work out today. There is a verse which says, to the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, to the crooked you show yourself shrewd.

I never really quite understood what that meant, but I think it does shed light on this chapter. Ahab is tricky, rebellious, and God says, okay, I can play that game.

[55:58] I can send you a lie, and you'll believe it. And you think you're going to cheat me, but I'm going to cheat you. You think you can work your way around me, I'll work my way around you.

You're still going to die. Quite something, isn't it? There are words of judgment hanging over this world. He who does not believe is condemned already is one of them.

It's a strong, strong word. That word will be fulfilled. Mercifully, there are words of salvation hanging over this world. Jesus says, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

That word will be fulfilled. By hook or by crook through whatever means are necessary. Jesus says, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Here's another word where Jesus says, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden. Come to me, hear my voice, and you will live. Come and live. Like Jesus said to Lazarus, come out.

[57:05] Jesus is speaking that word into this world. Come, believe me, trust me. It's a call to turn to the Lord, a call to repent.

And here's another word of the Lord, all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. May that word be fulfilled too. We're going to close by singing number 506.

506. 506. 506. 506.