

“Jehovah will give it into the hand of the king.” (1 Kings 22:15)

How do we see truth in the Word? Often the Word shows us truth right there on the page, as in the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount. Other parts of the Word are veiled over, the literal sense covering and containing the internal sense of the Lord’s living truth. (SS 55) These passages might describe the Lord as capricious, they might appear to justify mistreating the neighbor, or they just seem silly or nonsensical. We know they hold deep and rewarding truths, but how do we know what those truths are? We don’t even all agree on which passages are clear and which are thickly veiled.

When we try to understand this internal sense, we might find answers we like, but how can we be sure? How do we investigate the Word, avoid merely confirming or justifying what we already think and want, and instead discover truths that can change us for the better? The answer is to keep searching and enquiring until the Word shows us our own falsities.

The story of Micaiah in 1 Kings revolves around four prophesies which show us the four steps in our efforts to understand the Word. These four prophesies can be summarized as: justification of self; confusion and doubt; falsity to reject; freedom and obedience. Understanding the internal sense of the Word requires enlightenment, which the Heavenly Doctrine defines as “to acknowledge the truth from an interior perception, and afterwards to see it in one’s own thought.” (SS 58) Enlightenment is one of three ingredients needed to reveal the internal sense along with genuine truths, (which are those truths that shine right on the surface of the pages of Word), and a knowledge of correspondences (which show us the correspondences of people and places to ideas).



Enlightenment is a quality of the will, not the intellect, and is determined by our willingness to be shaped by the truth more than by our own advantage or preconceptions. Enlightenment comes when we reject evil and the Lord inspires us with a new will that can see truths properly arranged by good. (SS 41) We cannot know how enlightened we are. The priesthood especially is tasked by the Lord to seek “enlightenment” and “instruction” from the Holy Spirit (TCR 146) in order to find and share the inner truths contained in the literal sense. Everyone can read the Word and see truths in it, but a priesthood that is not bringing a deeper understanding of the Word to the church is not fulfilling its role. We cannot know, however, whether our insights are governed more by our proprium and prudence, or by the Lord.

Our story opens with Israel and Judah planning to take a place called Ramoth-Gilead from Syria. The two kings meeting represents our initial decision to try out a new idea we think we see in the Word. Ramoth Gilead is bringing thought and affection into our normal, sensory lives. (AC 4117). Taking it from Syria

symbolizes our desire to take our plan from merely theoretical to actually happening. We might win the battle, which means our idea helps us be happy in our active normal lives. We might lose the battle, which means our idea was foolish or destructive, making a mess of our lives.

Before the two kings can begin their conquest, however, they decide to inquire of Jehovah, through prophets, if their endeavor is blessed. We want assurances that we have the right idea of what the Word says, so we read and think from the Word – we consult the prophets. Do our ideas agree with the internal sense of the Word, and can we make them our plan for Tuesday afternoon or the month of

March. Will the Lord bless our efforts to discover the internal sense of the Word and bring it into our lives?

Four hundred prophets assure the king of Israel that “Jehovah will give it into the hand of the king.” Pause and consider how convincing and powerful this would be: hundreds of experts, in person, conferring and agreeing that a course of action is the right one. Of course the king knows they want to please him, but hundreds of people insisting your plan is great and just would tempt anybody to believe.

And “tempt” is the correct word. There are four hundred of these prophets, a number corresponding to temptation, a crisis. (AC 1847). We’ve opened the Word or called to mind what the Word says, and we find...unwavering support? We suspect justification. How often do we read the Word and assume it agrees with us? How often do we remember moral and theological truths and ideas because they support our point? We look out at all those prophets telling us exactly what we want to hear, and we realize that does not make our conclusion doctrine from the Word, but what we want the doctrine of the Word to be. Our first attempt to listen to the Word has revealed the danger of justification: “Jehovah will give it into the hand of the king.”

In this moment of justification, while two kings sit on thrones in the gate of the city, surrounded by adoring prophets, we need to pause and identify what is going on in our minds. The assurance that we are right is symbolized by the prophet Zedekiah, the only named prophet of the four hundred, perhaps their leader. He is holding iron horns showing the kings how they will gore their enemies. His name means literally “Jehovah is righteous.” Of course He is! Shouldn’t we listen to someone named “Jehovah-is-righteous”? However, he is an image of our false assurances, just like the other 399 prophets. Note also his father is Chenaanah, “one who buys and sells.” Zedekiah is the personification of our hope and desire that the Lord is on our side, but the way we might hire a

contractor or a servant. Imagine deciding on a course of action and then inviting the Lord along as a sidekick or helper. We do this all the time when we ask the Lord to bless our actions or outcomes without wondering whether those actions and outcomes bless the Lord. We need a second opinion.

Having heard the four hundred, the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat (which means “Jehovah judges”), asks for a second opinion, and the king of Israel summons Micaiah, a prophet whose name means “Who is like Jehovah?” Whereas Zedekiah is a picture of justification and hubris, Micaiah by his name and nature are humility. Nobody wise asks “Who is like the Lord?” and answers “I am!” Micaiah’s father “Imlah” means “One whom Jehovah fills up”, which is what happens if we seek the Lord in humility. The contrast could not be more pronounced. Do we think the Lord already agrees with us and will help us, or do we realize we need to follow the Lord and become a vessel filled with His love and wisdom? These two prophets stand before the kings and offer us the same stark choice: are you going to stick with your existing justification, or are you going to question it and try to follow the Lord?

Micaiah’s first answer to the kings might perplex us. He repeats the prophesy of the four hundred exactly, word-for-word in the Hebrew: “Jehovah will give it into the hand of the king.” This appears to confirm the prophesy of the four hundred, but the king of Israel suspects Micaiah is not telling the truth, and he challenges Micaiah.

This second prophesy, the first from Micaiah, shows our second attempt to understand the internal sense of the Word, and it shows our confusion. Is Micaiah lying? Are we reading about a good prophet spreading falsity? Micaiah’s first prophesy may mirror the 400 prophets, but the king of Israel is not pleased.

Our first step of seeking the truth yielded justification, and our second step, with more humility, shows us we don’t know what the truth is saying. The literal sense of the Word is described as

“an ever-turning sword” guarding the Garden of Eden in Genesis because it can be arranged to say anything we want. (TCR 260) By repeating the words of the four hundred, Micaiah shows the kings that the truth does simply reveal itself when we demand it. Think about Micaiah’s answer; into which king’s hand will Jehovah deliver the battle? The king of Israel, or Judah, or Syria, or the Lord Himself? We can read passages of the Word over and over again, the words never changing, but we realize we can interpret those words in many ways. Which is the right way? We keep reading and thinking and searching.

When pressed, Micaiah then offers our third prophesy. He describes Israel scattered on a mountain, a flock without a shepherd, encouraged to go home. This is our third step to discover the truth in the internal sense. If our first experience of studying the Word was comfortably agreeable, and our second experience prompted confusion and suspicion, our third experience reveals a falsity to reject. Going to battle against Syria will mean Israel’s king will be killed. Micaiah is no longer evading or toying with the king – he is pronouncing the king’s doom.

Could this be good news? How is this third step productive and loving? It will show us a false idea that should perish. We realize that we have a false notion organizing our ideas, and if we were to bring it into our conscious life and examine it sincerely, we would reject it.

This third step in seeking doctrine is about seeing our own falsity. Only now can we see what falsity we have to surrender. Perhaps we realize that the Word does not support the idea of punishing the other drivers on the road “for their own good,” or condemns pining after the success and accomplishments others share online. We all have false kings, false shepherds watching our flock. We start to see doctrine from the Word in this third step, not when we first see what we want, but when it shows us something we don’t want to be true. This is what Micaiah is showing the king of Israel – the



Rev. Scott Frazier
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difference between our priorities and the truth. We don’t know when we begin to study what that falsity may be, and it likely won’t be the one we thought we saw at the beginning.

We imagine ourselves without this governing false idea, and feel vulnerable and adrift, like those sheep left alone on a mountain. (AC 4809) We think we need to punish other drivers because then we control them. We think we need to covet others’ lives because we are avoiding responsibility for our own choices. We might even wish we had not so deeply investigated the Word, but we have. And yet the flock is fine without this false shepherd; we will have good motives and valuable ideas the Lord will preserve in mercy. (AC 4769) And we are not done yet.

Micaiah’s fourth and final prophesy concludes our search for the internal sense. He describes

Jehovah on His own throne seeking an agent to bring Ahab to his doom. Yes, Ahab. Only now does the story reveal the king of Israel, the shepherd, the part of us seeking the internal sense, to be the evil king Ahab. Two chapters before Elijah pronounced a doom upon Ahab for the murder of Naboth for his vineyard, and now Micaiah is telling Ahab openly: going to battle and dying is the Lord’s plan. A spirit of lying, a “ruach sheker” has entered the four hundred prophets encouraging Ahab to attack Syria. Picture Ahab sitting there as Micaiah accuses Zedekiah and the other prophets of being lied to by a spirit from Jehovah so that Ahab will be killed in battle.

Is this good news? Ahab, our king, our prudence, our sense that we are in charge, faces an impossible choice: back down in front of the people and call off the conquest because of Micaiah’s prophesy, or proceed and risk prophesied death. This is the fourth and final step in seeking the internal sense. Having passed through justification, then confusion, and then awareness of our own falsities, we see in step four freedom, obedience, and resolve. The Lord is showing us that we have a choice, we can choose to follow Him, and may not

feel good. We admit that our prudence, our evil insistence that we are right, must perish. Hear the Lord's tender and loving message to us: "Evil is your king. I desire your salvation, and yet I value your freedom like the apple of my eye. I will not violate your freedom by forcing you to see truth. Choose either to retreat into your own prudence and justification or go out and test your idea in your life of religion." (AC 5215, 8289, cf. DP 97).

This is a state of intense freedom and self-compulsion. The appearance that Jehovah is using a spirit of lying to trick Ahab is a picture of the Lord's loving insistence that He won't violate our freedom. He tells us that we are following falsity, but we can always believe that falsity. We all fall into thinking that happiness and peace come from getting our way, from choosing our own path and our own rules of happiness, and an enormous amount of human misery flows from these very ideas. Instead, the Lord asks us to seek humility and His will, unrelated to our own sensation or desire or perspective. Our false idea, if it is false, will disagree and conflict with the clear and genuine teachings of the Word that already sustain us.

Remember: the Lord wanted Ahab to go into combat. It isn't certain or easy – it is a battle – but our fourth step is to test the falsity we discover against the clear teachings of the Word we follow in obedience, accepting the judgment of the Lord, not our own. This is why Ahab marches to battle with "Jehoshaphat", which means "Jehovah judges".

Ahab responds by going into battle but disguising himself as a regular soldier in an attempt to foil the prophesy. We also are tempted to keep the false idea AND obey the clear truths of the Word. We want to use our prudence to govern our day-to-day life but disguise our prudence as obedience to the Lord. How often do we disguise our pettiness with a few complimentary sentiments about the object of our envy? How many times do we cover the small and cowardly anger in our minds by an empty cheerful laugh or carefree expression? However, once we have identified and admitted to an falsity in our lives, we should see it rejected. The

king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, "Jehovah judges" survives the battle.

What are we to make of this story of four prophesies on the eve of war? They are a picture of our mind as we seek the inner truths of the Word. We start with the false prophesy of justification, hearing what we want to hear. Then we hear the ever-turning truth, challenging us to admit to our confusion and ignorance. Then the Word shows us a falsity we must remove as shepherd. Finally, we are challenged to freely choose obedience to the truths we already see and live. If we follow Micaiah, we will be granted enlightenment, asking "Who is like Jehovah?"

Good and upright is Jehovah; therefore He instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble His way. (Psalms 25:8-9)

Amen

Lessons:

1 Kings 22:3-23, Matt 7:21-23, TCR 231-2

1 Kings 22:3-23

The king of Israel said to his servants, "Do you know that Ramoth-Gilead belongs to us, yet we are doing nothing to take it out of the hand of the king of Aram?" He said to Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to battle at Ramoth-Gilead?" Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, "I am as you are; my people are your people, my horses are your horses." But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, "Inquire first for the word of the Lord."

Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred of them, and said to them, "Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?" They said, "Go up; for Jehovah will give it into the hand of the king." But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there no other prophet of the Lord here of whom we may inquire?" The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is still one other by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favorable about me, but only disaster." ...

Now the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them. Zedekiah son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron, and he said, "Thus says the Lord: With these you shall gore the Arameans until they are destroyed." All the prophets were prophesying the same and saying, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the king."

... When Micaiah had come to the king, the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?" He answered him, "Go up and triumph; Jehovah will give it into the hand of the king." But the king said to him, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of Jehovah?" Then Micaiah said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd; and Jehovah said, "These have no master; let each one go home in peace.'" The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he would not

prophesy anything favorable about me, but only disaster?"

Then Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of Jehovah: I saw Jehovah sitting on His throne, with all the army of heaven standing beside Him to the right and to the left of Him. And Jehovah said, "Who will entice Ahab, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?" Then one said one thing, and another said another, until a spirit came forward... and replied, "I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." Then Jehovah said, "You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do it." So you see, Jehovah has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; Jehovah has decreed disaster for you."

Matthew 7:21-23: "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'

TCR 231-2. The genuine truth in the Word's literal meaning, the truth that is needed for doctrine, becomes manifest only to those who have enlightenment from the Lord. Enlightenment comes from the Lord alone and changes people who love truths because they are true and who make them useful in their lives.... Something opposite to this happens to people who read the Word in false doctrine, especially if they use the Word to support their doctrine and are pursuing their own glory or the wealth of the world. Under these circumstances the truths in the Word seem to be in the shadows of night and things that are false seem to be in the light of day.