

1 Kings 22 — The Throne Above the Thrones — Four Hundred Prophets, One Micaiah, the Lying Spirit, and the Arrow That Kept the Word

1 Kings 22: After three years of peace Jehoshaphat of Judah joins Ahab against Ramoth-gilead; four hundred court prophets promise victory, but Micaiah the son of Imlah sees Israel scattered as sheep without a shepherd and the LORD enthroned amid the host of heaven, a lying spirit in the mouths of the flatterers; Micaiah is struck and imprisoned on the bread of affliction, Ahab rides to battle in disguise, and a bow drawn at a venture fulfills the word of the LORD at the pool of Samaria; c. 853 BC (secular chronologies agree almost to the year).

Three years of quiet sit between the last chapter and this one — "And they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel" (v. 1). But quiet is not the same as settled. Chapter 21 ended with a sentence hanging over Ahab's head: dogs would lick his blood where they licked Naboth's, and only his surprising moment of sackcloth pushed the full reckoning onto his son's days (1 Kgs. 21:19, 27–29). The sentence was deferred, not dismissed. So when Jehoshaphat, the good king of Judah, comes north on a state visit and Ahab proposes a war to retake Ramoth in Gilead, we already know something the kings do not: there is unfinished word from the LORD in the air, and Ahab is about to walk into it.

Hebrew Word Studies

***darash* (H1875) (דָּרַשׁ / שׁוּרָה) — to seek, inquire, search out; to resort to, frequent vv. 5, 7, 8.** Jehoshaphat's verb — "Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD" — is *darash*, and it is stronger than polite asking. Its root sense is to tread a place so often you wear a path to it: to resort to, to frequent, to seek with care. It is the verb of Deuteronomy's promise, "thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart" (Deut. 4:29), and of the LORD's own pledge through Jeremiah: "ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). The word appears three times in four verses here (vv. 5, 7, 8), and each use exposes someone. Jehoshaphat *darash*-es after he has already promised his horses — seeking as an afterthought. Ahab *darash*-es by gathering four hundred men on his payroll — seeking an echo, not an answer. The chapter's diagnosis is that most of what we call inquiring of the Lord is actually auditioning him: we have decided, and now we are casting about for a voice that will say our decision back to us in his name. Laman and Lemuel are the Book of Mormon's mirror of this: "Have ye inquired of the Lord?" Nephi asks, and the answer is exact — "We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us" (1 Ne. 15:8–9). They had not worn any path to his door, and then testified that the door does not open. Real *darash* goes before the commitment, and is willing to be told no.

***ruach* (H7307) / *sheqer* (H8267) (רוּחַ / שֶׁקֶר) — spirit, wind, breath / lie, falsehood, deception vv. 21–24.** *Ruach* is wind, breath, spirit — invisible force known only by what it moves. That ambiguity is the chapter's whole crisis: four hundred men and one man are all visibly moved, all speaking with force and conviction, and conviction is precisely the thing that cannot certify itself. Zedekiah has *ruach*; his iron horns and his slap have plenty of breath behind them. What he does not have is truth, and the text names his wind with the bluntest word Hebrew owns: *sheqer* — lie, fraud, the word the ninth commandment uses for false witness (Ex. 20:16) and Jeremiah hurls at the comfortable prophets of his own day, "they prophesy falsely" — *sheqer* (Jer. 5:31). So the chapter forces the question every believer eventually faces: since spirit as such can lie, how do you test it? Scripture's answers converge here. By origin: has the speaker stood in the council, or only in the court (Jer. 23:18, 22)? By fruit and by content: "every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the... power of Christ," while whatever "persuadeth men to do evil" — including the evil of comfortable rebellion — "is of the devil" (Moro. 7:16–17, condensed). By cost: the *sheqer* spirit always tells power what power pays to hear; the Spirit of the LORD keeps sending unprofitable men like Micaiah to say unprofitable things at their own expense. And by the event: "if the thing follow not... the LORD hath not spoken it" (Deut. 18:22). Micaiah passes all four tests in a single chapter; the four hundred fail all four before sundown of the battle.

***shalom* (H7965) (שָׁלוֹם) — peace, wholeness, well-being, safety vv. 17, 27, 28.** *Shalom* is the chapter's ironic thread, and tracing it is like following a fuse. The LORD speaks it first, over the sheep: "let them return every man to his house in peace" (v. 17). Ahab then claims it for himself as if it could be commandeered — feed the prophet affliction "until I come in peace" (v. 27) — and Micaiah bets his office against that word ever arriving: "If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me" (v. 28). By sundown the ledger is settled: the soldiers go home; the king comes home washed off a chariot floor. *Shalom* is not a mood but a verdict — wholeness granted by the God who defines it, which is why it cannot be

prophesied into existence by men paid to promise it. Jeremiah met the same merchants a generation later: "they have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14). Isaiah closed the case: "There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked" (Isa. 48:22) — a verse the Book of Mormon preserves in its own Isaiah record (1 Ne. 20:22), and whose counterfeit Nephi saw coming in the last days: "All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well" (2 Ne. 28:21). False prophecy in every era is recognizable by this signature: it retails *shalom* to people under judgment, peace as a product rather than a covenant state. The true word sounded harsher at the gate of Samaria — and it was the only voice that day offering anyone real peace, to every man who would simply go to his house.

tom (H8537) (תָּוֶם) — completeness, integrity, innocence, simplicity v. 34. The strangest Hebrew in the chapter hides under the KJV's "at a venture." The archer drew his bow *l'tummo* — literally "in his innocence," "in his simplicity" — from the root meaning whole, complete, blameless. Elsewhere the word is a moral term of honor: Abimelech pleads "in the integrity (*tom*) of my heart" (Gen. 20:5–6); David shepherds Israel "according to the integrity (*tom*) of his heart" (Ps. 78:72). Here it means the man had no design at all — he was not aiming at a king; he loosed into the melee and thought no more of it. And that innocence is exactly the narrator's theology: subtract every trace of human intention from the shot, and what remains is the intention of God. Ahab schemed — the disguise, the decoy robes, the armor; heaven answered scheme with simplicity, and simplicity won. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD" (Prov. 16:33). "By small and simple things are great things brought to pass... and small means in many instances doth confound the wise" (Alma 37:6). Between the joints of the harness — the one gap in the plate — flies a *tom* arrow, artless as a coin toss, and lands the most precisely aimed shot in the Old Testament. There is deep comfort and deep warning in the same image: no random thing that strikes your life is beyond the disposing of the LORD — and no armor of your own contriving has a seam he does not know.

From the Chapter's Architecture

The other structural engine is dramatic irony running on disguises. Zedekiah wears the costume of a prophet; the four hundred wear the LORD's name over a borrowed letterhead; Ahab wears a common soldier's gear; Jehoshaphat wears the target. Every costume fails on contact with the word — and the one man who never pretended anything, Micaiah in his cell, is the only speaker whose words are all still standing when the dogs gather at the pool. In a chapter full of theater, reality belongs to the voice from the room above.