

COURAGEOUS INTEGRITY

Is it easier to tell the truth or to tell a lie? More importantly, is it easier to believe the truth or to believe a lie? The truth brings righteous judgment but a lie gives flattery.

Have you ever found yourself in the minority in an opinion poll? If you have, then there is a tendency to wonder if your opinion is wrong since most everyone else thinks something else. I read about a teacher of a group of high school students who did an experiment that went something like this: she assigned a fairly simple math problem to the class and then asked for a show of hands of how many got this or that answer. All of the kids but one was told to hold up their hand in response to the wrong answer to check the reaction of the one that was not in on the test. Almost without exception, the kid with the right answer would change his mind and go along with the majority. It is very difficult to stand for what is right and against what is wrong if you must stand alone. It takes integrity and it takes courage. Many times the prophets of God found themselves in the position of being the minority voice and there was pressure applied to them to get them to go along with the majority rather than speak the truth.

I KINGS 22:1-7 The situation that is going on now in the Middle East is a continuation of what has been happening for thousands of years in that part of the world. There have been squabbles over who own what land and alliances with neighbors and wars and threats of war throughout most of recorded history. During Ahab's reign as king of Israel he was force to fight the Syrian army under king Benhadad. Israel was given victory and was instructed to totally destroy the Syrians. Ahab disobey the word of the Lord and let Benhadad live in exchange for his returning some of the cities that the Syrians had previously taken from Israel. Ahab and Benhadad even fought together against the Assyrians. There were deals and treaties going on between the nations. Benhadad failed to live up to his part of the deal and had not returned all the cities to Israel. One in particular was Ramoth-gilead. After the Assyrian battle quieted down, Ahab decided he wanted to take back Ramoth-gilead from Benhadad and he enlisted the help of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. Jehoshaphat was in an awkward situation. How do you refuse such a request? Sometimes it is easier to do something you really don't want to do than to refuse. In an attempt to graciously extract himself from this predicament, he agreed on the condition that Ahab first seek the council of the Lord as to whether or not they really start this war. Ahab called his prophets, some 400 of them and posed the question to them as to what they should do. All 400 said that the king should immediately go into battle and take Ramoth-gilead. All the prophets that Ahab called were associated with the pagan religious practices that were going on in Israel at the time and Jehoshaphat was aware of this. The answers of the 400 prophets sounded too "pat" and perhaps even programmed. He asked if there were any real prophets of the Lord in Israel.

I KINGS 22:8-14 Ahab reluctantly admitted that Micaiah was a prophet, but he always had nothing good to say about the king of Israel. Jehoshaphat wanted to hear Micaiah.

In the business world, there is an overwhelming tendency to tell the boss what he wants to hear. If the boss want to go a particular way in a business decision, then only that evidence that supports that decision is presented. Anything that is contrary is interpreted as "negative thinking" and one may find his career short circuited if he is guilty of being negative. Ahab had a low opinion of Micaiah because Micaiah did not agree with him. I have experienced people that were blatant in such opinion formation. Ahab was a small person in a big position. I have also experience people that were blatant in trying to influence what someone might say when asked for an opinion in much the same way that Micaiah was pressured by the king's messenger. Micaiah was not going to be pressured since he was not ultimately answerable to the king but to God. We

need to be that way. Personally, Micaiah probably did not care if Ahab went to war or not. His primary and only concern was what God said about the matter. In matters of morality and things spiritual, none of us are experts and really have no basis for an opinion other than what the word of God says about the matter.

I KINGS 22:15-16 Micaiah was taken to the king and he told the king the same thing that the other prophets had said. Evidently, his tone of voice was such that Ahab knew that he was just parroting what the others had said. Ahab demanded that Micaiah tell him the truth. Ironically, Ahab knew the truth but was willing to believe a lie when it came from the false prophets; however, he would not accept the same message from a person who was a true prophet. In our society, we will believe (accept) an explanation from a bias news media since we know they have an agenda. We will allow politicians to make outrageous claims that we know have no basis in fact and yet we become indignant if a religious leader bends the truth even a little bit. As it was, God wanted Ahab to believe the lie because it was the means that God's judgement was to come upon Ahab for his wickedness.

I KINGS 22:17-18 The outcome of the confrontation of the battle for Ramoth-gilead was that Ahab was going to die in the battle but that the people of Israel would be able to return to their homes. Ahab's response was not that he believed the prophecy but was one of "See, I told you he never says anything good about me."

I KINGS 22:19-23 God was willing to let Ahab know what had happened in the courts of Heaven where the judgement against Ahab had been pronounced and how it was to be carried out. Yet Ahab was so much into believing lies and doing his own thing that he was blind to the truth. God had, in effect, used the false prophets against Ahab to bring his reign to an end.

I KINGS 22:24-25 Micaiah had the courage and integrity to speak the truth though it was unpopular and though there was certain risks involved in doing so. Integrity has a price and in Micaiah case it was quite high.

I KINGS 22:26-28 Ahab saw Micaiah as a disruptive influence and perhaps a threat to national unity and thought that it was better to control any damage that Micaiah might cause if he were allowed to tell his story to the common people. He was put under arrest. Micaiah could have apologized and changed his story to avoid going to prison; however, he was willing to pay the price for integrity. He would not change what he knew to be the truth.

Eventually, Micaiah was vindicated. Ahab was killed in the battle and the truth of God was made evident. We must be like Micaiah and not be willing to yield to the pressures of society to give up the truth for our safety or for money or for position. We must remember that our ultimate responsibility is to God and we will answer to Him.