

INTRODUCTION

“Well done, good and faithful servant”

“WELL DONE, GOOD and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21). Those words have echoed down the hopes and fears of two thousand years. How many of us have thought to ourselves, *If I can just hear these words spoken to me from the lips of the Lord Jesus at the end of time, how wonderful that will be!*

I write this book because it seems to me that many disciples of Jesus are discouraged, at least in the Western world. This is especially true of pastors and those who seek to lead churches. It has probably always been a tough time to be a pastor, as it is constantly challenging to be a Christian. But it seems that, as I write, the numbers coming forward for pastoral leadership and other Christian ministry are low and getting lower. Numbers in churches have been falling and, even with some recent hopeful signs, they are still small relative to whole

populations. Even if you belong to a thriving and growing church, you will be aware that some of the growth comes from people who have migrated from other churches, for a variety of reasons. Some so-called “growth” is really just rearranging the pieces on the board. In addition, many of us are discouraged by what feels like an avalanche of ministry scandals in just about every country and each denomination or association of churches. These cause us great grief and generate much disillusion. Things are difficult. Perhaps they have always been and always will be until Jesus returns.

In this short book I want to introduce you to a man who was faithful in difficult days. He will surely hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” He lived more than 850 years before Jesus Christ. He appears only once in the Bible story. And then he disappears forever. Unless you have been a zealous Bible reader for some years, you will not even know the name of Micaiah, the son of Imlah.

Micaiah’s story is full of high drama—a gripping short story of danger, courage, and faithfulness. He is one of those characters whom I would like to nominate for the award of Best Supporting Actor in the Bible story. (I have some other favorites for the “Best Supporting” category, such as Simeon and Anna in Luke 2.) Micaiah appears, is faithful, and then disappears. And that is the best you and I can hope for—that we appear on the scene of Christian history, are faithful to our Master, and then disappear from the scene. If we think we can do more than that, we need a reality check. But if we fear we do not have the gifts or talents to do this, we need to be encouraged: every single man, woman, or child who is a

disciple of Jesus can have that word “faithful” written over their story. Every pastor can aim to have the word “faithful” written on their gravestone.

MICAHIAH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Much of Old Testament history is told in two overlapping narratives. The earlier narrative is in the books of Samuel and Kings, the later one in Chronicles. Micaiah’s episode is told in 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18. We will walk through the story mainly as it is told in 2 Chronicles, although with some glances back at 1 Kings because, like the twin lenses of a pair of binoculars, the two storytellers together will help us see the episode better. You may like to read through them both before you come with me as we walk slowly through the story together. You will notice that much is the same between the two accounts, often word for word. But there are a few intriguing differences that show the particular “camera angle” of each historian. First Kings 22 is mostly interested in the northern kingdom of Israel and its king, Ahab. The historian has told us much about Ahab in the run-up to this episode (1 Kings 16:29–21:29), and concludes the story with an account of Ahab’s squalid death (1 Kings 22:37-40), after which there is just a brief account of Jehoshaphat’s reign in the south (1 Kings 22:41-50). Chronicles tends to focus more on the line of David in the southern kingdom of Judah with its capital, Jerusalem. Thus 2 Chronicles 18 focuses particularly on King Jehoshaphat of Judah, who dominates all of 2 Chronicles 17–20. The writer of Chronicles no doubt assumes that readers are familiar with the earlier account in the books of Samuel and Kings.

Micaiah's episode comes partway through the two centuries during which God's people lived in a divided kingdom. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom split. The majority (ten tribes) formed a breakaway northern kingdom called Israel. The northern capital at this stage was a town called Samaria. The tribe of Judah remained loyal to the king in David's dynasty and formed the kingdom of Judah with Jerusalem as its capital. We join the story when Jehoshaphat is king of Judah (c. 873-849 B.C.) and Ahab king of Israel (c. 869-850 B.C.).

A CAMEO OF FAITHFULNESS ANTICIPATING CHRIST

Micaiah can encourage us because he is a faithful prophet who prefigures and foreshadows another and greater prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ. His short story pictures for us what it means to be faithful, and especially to be a faithful pastor.

This little episode is like one of those iconic photographs that encapsulate a scene, such as the famous black and white photograph *St. Paul's Survives*. Taken by Herbert Mason in the closing days of 1940 during The Blitz, as London was bombed night after night, the great dome and cross of St. Paul's Cathedral were brightly lit in the night, surrounded by the smoke and fires of the bombing. That one photograph sums up the survival of hope and light in the midst of chaos and darkness and, in a similar way, Micaiah's short story sums up faithfulness in a troubled time of kings and a culture that is hostile and unfaithful to the covenant God.



St. Paul's Survives (December 1940)

By way of orientation before we begin, it is worth noting how we will walk through the story of Micaiah. We can split the story into four scenes. In the first, Micaiah is mentioned but does not appear. In the second, we see him offstage, as it were. In the third, he—to change metaphors—walks through the tunnel, onto the field of play. And in the fourth, although he leaves the field, we will see the word of the Lord fulfilled.