

Project Runway

Designer Clothes For Disciples

Ahab: Part 9

Written By
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General Mark Wayne Clark gave leadership, guidance and counsel to thousands of soldiers he commanded as head of US forces in Europe during WWII. When asked once what was the best advice he'd ever been given, the wise leader replied, "To marry the girl I did."

The interviewer followed this answer up with another logical question: "And who gave you that advice?"

"She did," said the General.

We laugh, but anyone who has lived life knows the intrinsic importance of receiving good, sound advice. Really, who you listen to at various junctures of your life determines whether you live a productive or an unproductive life, a full or an empty life, a life with few mistakes and missteps or one fraught with blunder after blunder. Acquiring wise counsel is so important to a maximized life, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Germany's greatest writer (1749-1832), once remarked, "To accept good advice is but to increase one's own ability" (*Forbes Business Quotations*: 37). How true.

Is your life a living illustration of one who has sought after and implemented the guidance of wise confidants? Can you look back right now and see definite times you were spared certain ruin because of a timely word from a godly friend? If so, thank God you were willing to listen and learn. Your life is the better because of it, isn't it?

Others might be sweating right now because you know your track record: you've tended to go your own way, even when trusted family members and friends cautioned you. Like the donkeys we rode on in Israel back in 2003, which constantly wandered off the "trail," you just can't seem to ever go in the right direction ... and your life shows the results of your proclivity, your lifestyle.

- You tend to pick the wrong people to date, refusing to pay strict attention to warning signs.
- You are too prideful, too self-contained to go to counseling with your mate, despite the fact your marriage is disintegrating.
- You place too much importance on the words of your carnal, godless friends because they tell you what you want to hear.
- You won't return to talk to a certain individual because you didn't like what they had to say, even though in your heart of hearts you know they were right in their assessment.
- You left a relationship you should have never left.
- You deserted a friend you should have never deserted.
- You're engaged in a behavior which has sin written all over it, regardless of your personal rationalizations.

Yeah. You know the track record and it's not pretty.

King Ahab's life is a flesh and blood example of what happens when someone willfully chooses to shun rock solid, godly advice. His life could have been so rich, so full; yet it was one giant gnarly (I think that's a Greek word ... ☺) mess because he wore a tie I'd call bad advice. Yes, he did seek counsel; however, it was counsel he should have never listened to.

If your life is a reflection of his, then I think a timely study of this facet of his life is just what the Tailor (God) ordered. So, take a look at your "tie" right now. Go ahead. Look down at your chest and see if it's a designer tie called bad advice. If you're wearing it right now, don't worry because spiritual help is on the way, and that help all starts with a question and some timely answers:

How Do You Know If You're Wearing A Tie Called Bad Advice? (1 Kings 22)

You Listen To All The Wrong People (1 Kings 22:1-6)

Tucked away in 1 Kings Chapter 22 is a living illustration of this point.

¹Three years passed without war between Aram and Israel. ²In the third year Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel. ³Now the king of Israel said to his servants, 'Do you know that Ramoth-gilead belongs to us, and we are still doing nothing to take it out of the hand of the king of Aram?

Picture the complex geo-political situation.

In 895 B.C., the first year of the reign of Shalmaneser III, the Assyrian warlord, crossed the Euphrates River and attacked the western Semitic people, starting with Syria. Realizing



they didn't have the power to individually thwart the bold move of this powerful king and well-equipped and highly trained army, the leaders of these northern countries formed a coalition. Northern Israel, contrary to God's counsel, joined the military alliance with their old enemy, the Arameans, a country located east of the Sea of Galilee, along with the Cilicians (people south of Ammon), Hadadezer (Ben-hada II of Syria), and Irhuleni of Hammath.¹ Militarily this seemed like a prudent move to counter the brutal expansionist program of the Assyrian Shalmaneser III (859-825 B.C.). They repelled Shalmaneser III; however, six years later he attacked again (sound familiar?). At the Battle of Qarqar on the Orontes River (853 B.C.), the coalition stopped his advance, and now that there was relative peace, King Ahab thought it was time to reclaim this strategic town east of the northern tip of the Jordan River. So, turning to King

Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, he said:

“4 Will you go with me to battle at Ramoth-gilead?”

Without hesitation, Jehoshaphat replied,

“I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses” (v. 4).

But, then, since he was a godly king he added this bit of advice:

“Please inquire first for the word of the LORD” (v. 5).

The NAS translation here isn't the most precise in my grammatical estimation. The Hebrew word used here is *darash* (דָּרַשׁ) and it lexically speaks of purposefully seeking God (2

¹ John Bright, *A History Of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981): 243.

Chronicles 18:4; 2 Chronicles 34:26; 1 Kings 14:5; 1 Chronicles 10:14; Jeremiah 21:2).² As used here in the Qal imperative, we clearly see this was no suggestion, but a definitive statement: “Ahab, seek first the word of the LORD.” This is tantamount to you telling a spiritually wayward, self-absorbed friend who’s about to make a critical decision, “Larry, you need to seek God’s thinking on this before you do anything else.”

Oh yeah seek the LORD. Sinful ol’ Ahab wasn’t used to asking God for any life directions, so it’s no wonder he made a decision to go to war all on his own, after all, he was his own man and this was his kingdom to manage. But if it would please his coalition partner, he’d get at least some type of spiritual guidance. So, he immediately called for his trusted counselors, the “prophets.”

“⁶ Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, ‘Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle or shall I refrain?’”

Please, don’t be fooled by the title “prophet.” Israel historically had many false prophets, men disguised as true prophets so they could rule and rip off the unsuspecting people. Ahab’s so-called religious leaders in touch with God merely represented the first of a long line of erroneous, but quite pleasant voices in the nation (Jeremiah 23:16, 21, 25, 26, 30, 31; 26:8; Ezekiel 13:2-16; Micah 5:3).

Remember the prophets Elijah encountered in God’s behalf on top of Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). Some 450 pagan prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the goddess Asherah challenged Elijah and his God to a prophetic duel of sorts (1 Kings 18:19) Many of them were slain after God sent fire from heaven to consume Elijah’s water-logged sacrifice (1 Kings 18:40); however, either some of them survived the slaughter, or there were more than 850 prophets. The presence of these additional prophets buttresses this point.

The prophets Ahab appealed to were godless prophets, not godly. These prophets rejected the living God, opting to worship before a plethora of gods. These prophets rejected God’s Word, choosing to give credence to their prophetic word as the word of the gods. These prophets told the people and political leaders what they wanted to hear. These prophets spoke soft words so everyone liked them and no one was offended. These were the prophets he chose to listen to.

I have a timely, logical observation followed by one question.

One, as I’ve indicated, King Ahab had seen one lone prophet, Elijah, literally bring the fire of God down upon the water-logged sacrifice on Carmel (1 Kings 18:20ff), thereby substantiating the veracity of this individual prophet. Additionally, he had seen how his 850 “prophets” were, in fact, no prophets at all, but were scheming, selfish, money-hungry, power-hungry pseudo religious men. God wasn’t with them but with the austere looking Elijah. Think about this. He had all this empirical, first hand data and proof that the living God stood with and spoke through Elijah, and now sometime later he reverted right back to listening to the majority of his religious men. What does this tell you about the human condition, or your condition? Makes you want to ask yourself: Am I, in my current complex situation, going back to all the wrong people again? Some sinful, unwise traits die a slow death. It just might be time for you to choose some different friends.

² S. R. Driver and Charles A Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon*, ed. Francis Brown (Lafayette, Indiana: Associated Publishers and Authors, INC, 1981): 205.

Second, why did King Ahab listen to these men? Answer? Because he knew from past history they'd tell him exactly what he wanted to hear. And they didn't let him down either.

“And they said, ‘Go up, for the Lord will give *it* into the hand of the king.’”

Must have been comforting to know that 400 prophets gave you the go ahead to make war. Surely, all of them couldn't be misled and misinformed (I say this sarcastically. He should have thought twice because they were about to cost him his life, plus this group had been dead wrong before).

Can you relate to this at all? Who's the false prophet, the false counselor in your life right now? Who is an outright obstacle to you following God for a change? Do you typically seek advice from people you know will only tell you what you want to hear? Do you seek counsel from people you know will only be positive and uplifting? Do you get angry at those believers in Christ who'd dare speak against cultural concepts you hold dear, or who will lovingly level with you when you seek their insights into a given problem you are facing? Do you seek counsel from people who will always tell you what you want to hear, who will always say things to you like, “You know, the most important thing is your happiness.” No, the most important thing in your life is your practical holiness (2 Corinthians 7:1, “*Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh and the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*”). Charles Colson has a word for you any of these questions represent the testy tie you are wearing:

“Never confuse the will of the majority with the will of God” (Charles Colson, *Leadership*, Vol. 4).

What a wise, astute life observation.

Just because twenty friends tell you it's all right to move in with your boyfriend, doesn't mean it's the moral thing to do. Just because twenty friends tell you it's your right to leave your husband because you simply don't have anything in common anymore, doesn't mean God sanctions such activity. Just because twenty friends tell you it's your right to get your pound of flesh from someone who hurt you doesn't mean God smiles on such activity. Just because your godless buddies tell you to go ahead and date because your marriage is, for all intents and purposes, over, isn't a sign God will approve of you signing onto eHarmony. Remember: *Your counsel can be no better than the source of your counsel*. If that source is godless, carnal, or spiritually shallow, then it's no better than getting a green light from 400 so-called prophets.

So what about it, who *are* you listening to? Who's giving your life direction and guidance? The wise person will make sure their counselor walks closely and intimately with God. The fool will only desire to listen to those who will support whatever it is they desire to do, no matter how dangerous or costly it may be. If you happen to have this ugly designer tie on right now, I think you probably need to reach down and start loosening it up a bit so you can take it off.

Additionally, from the ensuing verses of this instructive passage, we learn this second earmark to see if you are embracing weak and wicked counsel:

You Have A Strong Aversion To The Right People (1 Kings 22:7-28)

Plug the in following concepts:

- A true prophet is few and far between. Look at how many false prophets there were in relation to the true prophet. Can you relate?
- The role and function of a true prophet was diametrically opposed to that of the false prophets. In some sense, we are God's prophets to this day and age.

Watch how this point develops.

Being a godly man and knowing that 400 prophets of Asherah could hardly know the mind and will of the living God, King Jehoshaphat makes a request of his regal counterpart:

⁷ But Jehoshaphat said, 'Is there not yet a prophet of the LORD here that we may inquire of him?'"

Translated, "Isn't there one man in all the territory of northern Israel who is a prophet of God?" There was, and interestingly enough, King Ahab knew him quite well:

⁸ The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, 'There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. *He is Micaiah son of Imlah.*"

Wow. He not only knew the prophet's name, he knew who his father was. But, he hated this particular prophet, and Hebrew construction of the sentence makes his hatred most emphatic by placing emphasis upon the word "I," "I, the king, hate this man."

וְאֲנִי שֹׂנְאֵתוֹ כִּי לֹא־יִתְּנֵבָא עָלַי טוֹב

By placing the first person personal pronoun at the head of the sentence, King Ahab emphatically underscored his utter hatred of the prophet in question. What a strong word to use of a prophet of God. He didn't respect him. He hated him, detested him, and couldn't stand to hear a thing the man had to say ever. Why? Eugene Peterson's paraphrase *The Message* puts the answer in language we can relate to, "He never preaches anything good to me, only doom, doom, doom." Or put differently, "He never tells me anything positive, and he's always opposing what I want to do."

Jehoshaphat's reply to Ahab's childish, self-centered rant shows he had a deeper respect for a prophet of God:

"But Jehoshaphat said, 'Let not the king say so'" (v. 8).

With that small rebuke, King Ahab broke his tradition and summoned the dreaded prophet called Micaiah. Before he arrived, the false prophets continued telling the King what he wanted to hear:

¹⁰ Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were sitting each on his throne, arrayed in *their* robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them. ¹¹ Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made horns of iron for himself and said, "Thus says the LORD,

‘With these you will gore the Arameans until they are consumed.’¹² All the prophets were prophesying thus, saying, ‘Go up to Ramoth-gilead and prosper, for the LORD will give *it* into the hand of the king.’”

Must have been some spectacle with 400 prophets running around chanting rhythmically, “Go up to Ramoth-gilead, go up to Ramoth-gilead, go up to Ramoth-gilead.” Having Zedekiah prancing around with iron horns protruding from his prophetic head also underscored that victory was assured by Israel’s forces. Right.

While all the prophets partied on in front of the two Kings, a messenger arrived at the humble home of Micaiah. Before he took the prophet to King Ahab, he gave him some unsolicited, hopefully motivational advice.

“¹³ Then the messenger who went to summon Micaiah spoke to him saying, ‘Behold now, the words of the prophets are uniformly favorable to the king. Please let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably.’”

In other words, “Look buddy, all the prophets have voted in favor of a battle for Ramoth-gilead, so for the first time in your prophetic career, don’t rock the boat, don’t swim against the current, don’t throw a monkey wrench in the works, simply affirm what they’ve already said. Go with the flow for a change.”

Godly people don’t listen to godless people. Did you hear me? Godly people listen to and speak up and out for God. Godly people are intimidated by the voice of the cultural flow. Godly people don’t base truth upon what everyone else thinks or feels is truth. Godly people say what needs saying, whether it will bring them into favor or disfavor. Micaiah was no exception. His reply was biting and blistering:

¹⁴But Micaiah said, “As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I shall speak.”

He told him, didn’t he?

Pragmatically, I must stop and ask a couple of additional questions of the Micaiah-types: If you are one who gives counsel to others, are you willing to go against the word of the majority? Are you willing to courageously stand up for God’s Word and not man’s word? Are you willing to be called names for standing for spiritual truth and biblical morality? Are you willing to rock the boat for the sake of righteousness and holiness? Godly counselors know this is the high road they must take every time. Oh, for more godly men and women who know God well and will only ever give advice which reflects His mind and heart as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

Now back to the story.

As all the prophets pranced around and offered up their positive prophetic words before the two kings, Micaiah entered stage left.

“¹⁵ When he came to the king, the king said to him, ‘Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?’ And he answered him, ‘Go up and succeed, and the LORD will give *it* into the hand of the king.’”

Don't be misled. Micaiah's words were full of biting sarcasm. "Oh yeah, go ahead and fight for Ramoth-gilead and God will be sure to give you victory." E.W. Bullinger's *Figures of Speech Used In The Bible* classifies this response as *ironic sarcasmos*, from the Greek *sarkazo* meaning to "tear the flesh as dogs do."³ The prophet's words were clearly designed to verbally decimate, obliterate, and annihilate the tenuous notion of impending military victory promised by the large, influential group of prophets. It's a rhetorical method Ahab had heard of before from Elijah (1 Kings 18:27). It would be a polemical method Elisha would use later (2 Kings 8:10). Wouldn't our calm, collected, we've-got-to-be-nice-to-everybody culture have had issues with Micaiah's condescending technique? I can hear it now, "He's so rude, so uncaring, so insensitive, and so utterly disrespectful." You know, sometimes *ironic sarcasmos* is the only tool which might wake up a spiritually sleeping person.

Knowing this prophet NEVER said anything favorable to him, wicked King Ahab angrily blurted out:

"¹⁶ Then the king said to him, 'How many times must I adjure you to speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?'"

With the sarcastic grin off his face, Micaiah courageously said what needed saying':

"¹⁷ So he said, 'I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep which have no shepherd. And the LORD said, these have no master. Let each of them return to his house in peace.'"

What is the job description of a prophet?

The prophet of God boldly and courageously speaks God's truth, even if it runs counter to culture, to progressive thinking, even if it will not be received well, or liked, or embraced, or even if will not win the favor and support of the majority of the people. His main goal in life is "to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin (Micah 3:8), to inform the people of God how evil and bitter it is to openly forsake God (Jeremiah 2:19), and to address national and individual sin year and year out regardless if people embraced the divine message of repentance (Jeremiah 25:3-7). From the beginning of his ministry, God counseled prophets like Ezekiel that he must speak His timeless truth even though the people would openly oppose him in a hostile, hateful fashion (Ezekiel 2:6; 3:8-9).

The prophet of God is an iconoclast, challenging the supposedly sacred views and rituals, the false and watered down form of morality, and the political structures which moved people away from God (Jeremiah 6:20, "To what purpose does frankincense come to Me from Sheba, or sweet can from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing to Me). To the prophet, the nation is well-neigh unto divine wrath if its leaders wantonly embrace fraudulent and fake dogma, be it spiritual or political, while rejecting God's true dogma. Yes, to the prophet, the nation is near internal collapse when the holy place, the Temple, and the political place is awash in evil acts, unholy deeds, and outright lies (Jeremiah 7:9-15).

The prophet is a lonely, obscure, sometimes strange man because he speaks for God to a godless culture; however, even though the battle wears him down, causing him to consider

³ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures Of Speech Used In The Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981):807, 813.

stepping out of the role, the Word of God, the truths of God burn in his soul and cannot help but be spoken:

If I say, I will not mention Him, or speak any more in His name, there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot (Jeremiah 20:9).

Micaiah was such a man. He had to speak God's truth to the King. The response he received, I'm sure, didn't catch him off guard. But before we consider the response, I must ask you, "Are you willing to be a prophet voice to those around you? As lives slip into darkness around you, as people embrace concepts which mock God and water down His truths, as folks embrace darkness while calling it light, will you be the minority voice focused on saying what needs saying in love?"

Should you step into this worthy, much needed role, expect the response King Ahab evidenced toward Micaiah. Instead of thanking the prophet for his timely word, King Ahab, being a selfish, self-centered, spoiled politician turned quickly to Jehoshaphat and said whining:

"18 Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?"

Can't you just see and hear him stomping his feet on the ground and hitting the arms of his throne when he made this statement? I can.

Micaiah didn't miss a beat. Like any godly person, he boldly gave additional theological insight to the errant leader:

19 Micaiah said, 'Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. 20 The LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said this while another said that. 21 Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, 'I will entice him.' 22 The LORD said to him, 'How?' And he said, 'I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice *him* and also prevail. Go and do so.' 23 Now therefore, behold, the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the LORD has proclaimed disaster against you."

The false prophets, who knowingly gave a false word, gave no indication they had received any kind of vision or special heavenly insight from God. But Micaiah had. In fact, God had let him see how the 400 pagan prophets came to collectively tell King Ahab to run to battle at Ramoth-gilead. God had sovereignly permitted a demonic spirit to specifically lead all of them astray so the king would be ultimately led to his death as prophesied (1 Kings 21:19). Shocking, isn't it? When a nation slips into darkness, God judges it with darkness. Using enemies, be they demonic or earthly soldiers, to judge His willfully wayward people is a place God isn't afraid to go to (Isaiah 10:5; 13:5; Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6; 43:10). To those who said they spoke for God, who said they had a word from God, God, in a poetically just fashion judged them with a demonically inspired false word. Sobering.

Kind of makes you swallow hard, doesn't it? Naturally, this causes you to ask, "Could a force of darkness be speaking in and through my so-called friends? Could my pursuit of sub-par

spiritual advice and rejection of spiritual truths which unnerve and bother me, have moved God to allow my counselors to be engulfed in dark, erroneous insight masquerading as vibrant, rock solid truth? Quite possibly if their words are diametrically opposed to the clear revealed Word of God.

Think King Ahab listened? Think this negative, but truthful word arrested his attention for a change? Not a chance. Why? It didn't break his sinful stride because he only ever wanted to get advice supporting what he wanted to do with his life. He then did what people typically do toward those who speak up and out for God. He actively supported the move to silence the prophet:

²⁴ Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, 'How did the Spirit of the LORD pass from me to speak to you?' ²⁵Micaiah said, 'Behold, you shall see on that day when you enter an inner room to hide yourself.' ²⁶ Then the king of Israel said, 'Take Micaiah and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son; ²⁷ and say, 'Thus says the king, 'Put this man in prison and feed him sparingly with bread and water until I return safely.' ²⁸ Micaiah said, 'If you indeed return safely the LORD has not spoken by me.' And he said, 'Listen, all you people.'"

Ahab should have listened but his pride kept his spiritual ears shut tight.

How about you? How do you typically respond to godly counsel, to counsel which runs counter to what you are doing or propose to do? Do you argue with Micaiah? Do you belittle him? Demean him? Cuss at him? Mock him? Poke fun at him? If your Micaiah is a pastor, do you leave him and the church as you shake the dust off your holy feet? Remember when Moses was overburdened with all of the needs of the Israelites in the wilderness and his father-in-law, Jethro, counseled him to divide up his duties, to delegate his spiritual responsibilities so he could survive (Exodus 18:17-23). Do you remember how Moses, the humble leader responded? Verse 24 is a snapshot of a godly, teachable man:

"So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said."

I'd like to suggest to you to go and do likewise. Moses didn't say, "Do you know who I am? Are you out of your mind suggesting I divvy up some of my God-given leadership authority and power?" No, he took the sagacious advice and ran with it, and it positively impacted, and probably lengthened his life as Israel's premier leader.

In the 1800s, Pastor Charles Spurgeon offered up some advice we'd all do well to adhere to:

"Get a friend to tell you your faults, or better still, welcome an enemy who will watch you keenly and sting you savagely. What a blessing such an irritating critic will be to a wise man, what an intolerable nuisance to a fool!" (Charles Spurgeon, *Leadership*, Vol. 3, no. 2).

What a gutsy move! Are you willing to head down this righteous road? I hope so for it will benefit your life in more ways than you can imagine. Think about the decisions looming on your horizon right now. Got them in mind? I'm sure you do. Now ask yourself, "In light of what I've learned from the Word of God today, am I willing to seek out, listen to, and embrace godly

counsel?" They day you do this you move from being foolish to being wise, as Solomon reminds us:

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel (Proverbs 12:15).