

## Week 23 – Tough Questions – Does God Deceive People?

Hey, Tim Perry here, pastor of Spiritual Discovery at Christ Community Church coming at you with Week 23 of Tough Questions.

Well, as we're reading our Project 4:4 material this week on June 5<sup>th</sup> – that's today's reading, we come across the story of Ahab, the King Ahab of the northern tribes that they called Israel. This was after the period of the divided kingdom – so there's King Ahab in the north and there's King Jehoshaphat in the south.

There's an interesting story here about the closing chapter of Ahab's life that raises a troubling question for us. The question we're going to ask this week is, "Does God actually deceive people?" You know in the Old Testament as we read – the theme came up once before – remember - when we talked about pharaoh. "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." We've got to deal with that somehow. Well, we're going to answer that question – does God ever use deception or does God ever use evil on people in any kind of unprovoked or ungodly kind of way?

Well, let me first get you into the story a little bit. I'll read you a little bit of what's happening and then take you over to the whiteboard and we'll spend a little bit of time analyzing it.

Listen along here as I read some of the story. Here's a conversation that King Ahab is having with a prophet named Micaiah. Listen to what Micaiah is telling Ahab about the situation. Micaiah continued:

*<sup>19</sup> Micaiah continued, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the multitudes of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left. <sup>20</sup> And the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?'*

Sounds like God is actually prepared to do some dirty work here with Ahab.

*"One suggested this, and another that. <sup>21</sup> Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the LORD and said, 'I will entice him.'*

*<sup>22</sup> "By what means?" the LORD asked.*

*"I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets," he said.*

*"You will succeed in enticing him," said the LORD. "Go and do it."*

*<sup>23</sup> "So now the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The LORD has decreed disaster for you."*

Wow! Micaiah is prophesying to Ahab saying, "Ahab, you may be getting a message from all of these prophets that actually a lie that God has inspired them to tell you. Be careful"

So it looks like an obvious case of deception on God's part. Well, let's back away from the picture a little bit further and get a little more of an idea of the context of what's happening here. This hovers between judgment and antagonism. Is God here being an antagonist? Is he antagonizing Ahab for being a bad king? Or is God bringing judgment on Ahab through this lying spirit that he's hearing from his prophets?

Let me take you over the whiteboard and let's look at this for a quick minute. So what's happening in this scenario? Ahab, if you might recall, is the king of the north, which is now called Israel. There's another kingdom in the south that's called Judah. The whole thing used to be Israel, but it split apart. The king in the north is Ahab, the king in the south is Jehoshaphat. What we want to determine is – is God's treatment of Ahab some random act of antagonism on his part -sending lying spirits to possibly even deceive Ahab – or could this be something deeper taking place?

Well, Ahab calls up Jehoshaphat and says, "Hey, we need to go to this territory called Ramoth-Gilead. The Arameans took it from us and we want it back. So I want to go back in there and reclaim it – will you help me militarily?" So he invites Jehoshaphat to come up to where he is. So when Jehoshaphat arrives, he asks a very important question: "Well, what does God say about this?" Well, right away Ahab has a ready answer. He says, "All of my prophets up here in Israel agree with me that this is a terrific plan – right guys?" He looks over at all of his prophets and they say, "Right, boss – great plan – let's go for it."

Now Ahab is convinced that is God's will, but Jehoshaphat isn't. So Jehoshaphat presses a little bit further. He says, "Do you have a man of God who we could bring right here right now and ask him what's going on?" Ahab reluctantly says, "Well, I have one more guy left. His name is Micaiah, but you don't want to hear what Micaiah has to say. Micaiah never gives me the kind of prophecy that I want to hear." Right way you can begin to see what's going on. Ahab only wants to hear what he wants from God. He only wants his own opinion, his own plan, his own way and he wants God to somehow bless it so he calls in all of his prophets and says, "Tell me what God's will is?" Micaiah understands what's going on. Micaiah reveals to Ahab and Jehoshaphat standing right there the passage that I just read to you. He says, "Ahab, you know what's going on. You always want me to say yes to you, but here this is what's happening in reality as an act of judgment – not antagonism – God is saying to you all of these prophets you have who are your yes man are really just filled with lies." So Ahab says, "See that's what I told you – lock him up!" And they haul Micaiah off of the scene right in front of Jehoshaphat,

Now here's an interesting fact about Jehoshaphat's name and Jehoshaphat's character which sets him apart from Ahab. Look at his name for a minute.

Jehoshaphat's name is a composite of "Jeho" and "Shaphat". Jeho is short for "Jehovah" or "God" and Shaphat is the word for "judge". God is the judge. That's literally what his name means, and it's his instinct when he comes on the scene to help Ahab. He says, "Ahab, what does God think about this? Let's let God be the judge." And Ahab's character is so independent – so proud – so self-centered – that he says, "No, I don't want to go there. I already have my mind made up."

Well, let me read a little bit more of the story so we see what happens as things go forward. Micaiah gets swept off of the scene – Ahab locks him up and Ahab and Jehoshaphat go into battle at Ramoth Gilead. Let me read you the conclusion of the story. Here's the rest of the story:

*The king of Israel then ordered, "Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king's son<sup>27</sup> and say, 'This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.'"*

<sup>28</sup> *Micaiah declared, "If you ever return safely, the LORD has not spoken through me." Then he added, "Mark my words, all you people!"*

Well, then Ahab and Jehoshaphat go into battle and kind of randomly an arrow flies through the air and strikes Ahab and he dies. Ahab blew off all of the warnings that God was trying to give him. Ahab didn't care that through Micaiah – he was even trying to give him one last opportunity to set aside his proud plans and to heed God's warning in his life. So what happened is that Micaiah's word actually becomes a prophecy that comes true. Ahab is killed in battle, his chariot comes back with him bleeding to death in it. It says that they took his chariot over to the pool where the prostitutes bathed and they rinsed it out and the dogs licked up his blood from the chariot.

Well, the same thing is relevant to us today even though this example seems a little grotesque to us. God is not up there as some celestial meanie trying to give us all this grief and trouble in our life. He's not randomly trying to antagonize us, but he is holy and he is a judge. And we can't be like Ahab just collecting the people around us who are our yes men to tell us what we want to hear all the time.

Later on in the New Testament, Timothy is told by Paul, "Timothy, be bold, preach God's word, correct people, rebuke people, encourage people." Then he adds this, "A time is coming, Timothy, when people are not going to put up with sound teaching. Instead to suit their own desires, Paul says, they will gather around them a great number of teachers who say to them what their itching ears want to hear." That's the real danger of the story of Ahab. God is a holy God. When He does use wickedness and evil, He's turning it back upon itself. God doesn't just randomly try to mow people down with this power, but He is God of holiness. He is a God of judgment, and that's so we will not relate to him out of presumption or pride, but that we'll take heed and we'll follow Him with caution.

So, if you've got any comments about today's video, give me a shout –hit on the comment tab down there and let's talk.

This has been Tim Perry, Pastor of Spiritual Discovery at Christ Community Church. Thanks for watching.