

DOES GOD ENDORSE LYING?

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INTRODUCTION

There is perhaps no narrative in the Old Testament that is the focus of more infidel criticism than 1 Kings 22. In that account, Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, and Ahab, King of Israel, united against the Syrians in order to recover the territory of Ramoth-gilead. They sought the endorsement of false prophets who promised them success. Micaiah, who was a true prophet, predicted defeat for the untoward confederation. But a lying spirit in the mouths of Ahab's prophets persuaded the king to enter the fray anyway. True to the divine prophecy, the forces of Judah and Israel were beaten, and Ahab was killed.

THE "PROBLEM"

The problem with the passage has to do with that lying spirit. The text reads as follows:

And Jehovah said, "Who shall entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" And one said on this manner; and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before Jehovah, and said, "I will entice him." And Jehovah said to him, "Wherewith?" And he said, "I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." And he said, "Thou shalt entice him, and shalt prevail also: go forth, and do so." Now therefore, behold, Jehovah hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets; and Jehovah hath spoken evil concerning thee (22:20-23).

How is this difficulty to be solved?

SOLUTIONS

First, since it can be established on the basis of solid evidence that the Scriptures are inspired of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and since it is true that the Scriptures testify that Jehovah is holy (Isaiah 6:3) and does not lie (Titus 1:2), it must be concluded that there is some explanation for this context that is in harmony with the lofty character of our Creator. The diligent Bible student must search for it.

Second, one must observe that the narrative involves a **vision** that is highly **symbolic**; it is folly to press it as though it were a literal circumstance. Thomas Horne commented (somewhat bluntly) that any attempt to literalize the story, in an effort to implicate God in wrong-doing, is "as false as it is malignant" (1841, 1:412). Adam Clarke wisely noted that this account is an illustration, and "only tells, in figurative language, what was in the womb of providence, the events which were shortly to take place, the agents employed in them, and the permission on the part of God for these agents to act" (n.d., 2:476). Another writer observed:

Visions of the invisible world can only be a sort of parables; revelation, not of the truth as it actually is, but of so

much of the truth as can be shown through such a medium. The details of a vision, therefore, cannot safely be pressed, any more than the details of a parable (Cook, 1981, 2:619).

Third, there is a common idiom in the sacred literature of antiquity by which the **permissive** will of God is expressed in forceful, active jargon. The Lord sometimes is said to have "deceived" His people (Jeremiah 4:10), or to have given them "statutes that were not good" (Ezekiel 20:25). In the New Testament, God is characterized as sending a strong delusion that some might believe a lie and be condemned (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12). All of these passages simply indicate that when men are determined to disobey their Maker, He will allow them to follow the base inclination of their own hearts.

CONCLUSION

In these verses, therefore, and numerous other verses of a similar import, the Bible merely is expressing what Jehovah **allows**, not what He **initiates**. Walter Kaiser observed that "many biblical writers dismiss secondary causes and attribute all that happens directly to God, since He is over all things. Therefore, statements expressed in the imperative form of the verb often represent only what is **permitted** to happen" (1988, p. 119, *emp. added*). This account, therefore, does not represent an inexplicable problem.

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