

The
Master's Perspective
on
**DIFFICULT
PASSAGES**

ROBERT L. THOMAS

general editor

The Master's

Perspective

Series

Volume 1

Foreword by

John F. MacArthur Jr.

The Master's Perspective Series

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The Master's Perspective on Difficult Passages

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Foreword

Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. (Prov. 3:13–15 NKJV)

One of the most astonishing achievements of design, building, and decoration in the world is the famous Taj Mahal in Agra, India. The massive white stone tomb built for the wife of its designer and builder is a sight permanently etched in my mind.

As I stood at a distance looking across the long pool of water between me and the majestic edifice, it glistened a dazzling white with an almost pearlescent sheen in the bright sunlight like a perfectly symmetrical star against the blue sky and green grass. The full view was magnificent.

But it was only when I approached it closely that I saw the true and startling beauty—the entire structure, every square inch, had been inlaid with multicolored, semiprecious stones that had been placed into its surface one stone at a time. Millions of jewels unseen from the distance were revealed by a close look.

I am struck by how that experience with the Taj Mahal illustrates the majesty of Scripture. From a distance, viewing it as a whole, one can see its awesome grandeur, symmetry, and coherence. But the true magnificence of Scripture is only yielded to the one who comes close enough to see how every precious jewel of divine truth embedded in it by God sparkles with beauty only to those who examine it closely.

In this volume, some samples of the beautiful jewels of truth in Scripture are examined carefully for your joy and blessing.

John F. MacArthur Jr.

Introduction

Throughout the Bible are passages that Christians find difficult to handle. The difficulty may stem from how hard a passage is to interpret. Scripture contains many passages for which interpreters have differing explanations of the meaning. Modeling one's Christian walk to comply with standards of behavior commanded or implied in a passage may also create difficulty. It is one thing to know what is right, but it is often a major challenge to implement right conduct in one's Christian life.

The Master's Perspective on Difficult Passages—a collection of articles that appeared in the first six volumes of *The Master's Seminary Journal*—includes treatments of Scriptures dealing with both types of difficulty. Chapters 1, 3, 5, 6, 10, and 12 focus primarily on interpretive difficulties and a resolving of problems of that nature. Chapters 2, 4, and 11 issue challenges that relate primarily to Christian conduct, with chapters 7, 8, and 9 handling both interpretive difficulties and issues of Christian behavior.

Yet segregating the two types of difficulty may be artificial, because interpretive issues are in reality inseparable from how Christians should live. And conversely, how believers conduct themselves must be in response to sound interpretation of the Bible. Sound doctrine and wholesome practice always go together. The church must beware of ever thinking that either one can successfully exist without the other.

Chapter 1 delves into the identity of the "deceiving spirit" of 1 Kings 22:22. A close examination of Psalm 113 and how it combines the doctrine of God's transcendence with that of His immanence follows in the next chapter. Then comes a full discussion of whether Isaiah 53:4–5 supports physical healing in the atonement of Christ. The fourth chapter shows—through Daniel's example from Daniel 9—the importance of conforming prayer to God's prophetic program. Chapters 5 and 6 probe some highly important issues raised in Romans 11.

Chapter 7 discusses lessons about rewards derived from the six building materials named in 1 Corinthians 3:12. Church discipline comes to the

forefront in chapter 8's treatment of 1 Corinthians 5:5. New Testament teaching about homosexuality is the subject in chapter 9's analysis of an important Greek word in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. Chapter 10 deals in depth with the often overlooked contribution of 1 Corinthians 13:11 in determining the time of cessation for the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. The next chapter emphasizes the all-important role of prayer in Ephesians, particularly Ephesians 6:10–20. Lastly, the meaning of "the sin unto death" in 1 John 5:16–17 comes under scrutiny.

The viewpoint represented in each chapter does not necessarily represent that of The Master's Seminary, its administration, or its faculty, but in each case represents a perspective that merits consideration in resolving problems raised in the selected passage.

For those unfamiliar with the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages, an English transliteration and/or translation accompanies each word or expression in the original languages.

English translations used in this volume are those of the authors of individual chapters unless otherwise indicated.

I want to express my thanks to Mr. Dennis Swanson for his help in compiling the indexes for this volume.

Robert L. Thomas
Editor

About *The Master's Seminary Journal*

For those unfamiliar with *The Master's Seminary Journal*, a word of introduction is in order. *TMSJ* began publication in 1990 with the following statement of purpose:

With this issue, *The Master's Seminary Journal* launches its career as a medium for the publication of scholarly articles dealing with the biblical text, Christian theology, and pastoral concerns. As you have noted, or will note, it also contains reviews of current and significant books, and occasionally of articles, relating to these issues. With these emphases in mind, technical articles dealing with such issues as the philosophy of religion, linguistics, or archaeology will not be included unless they clearly, directly, and significantly contribute to the understanding or application of God's written revelation—the Holy Bible. The editors desire that all articles be understandable, not only by seminary professors and other professional scholars, but also by pastors, and, indeed, by any serious students of Scripture.

While most of the articles will be contributed by the faculty members of The Master's Seminary, the editors will solicit articles and reviews from recognized evangelical scholars, will evaluate voluntary contributions for possible inclusion, and will occasionally include outstanding historical selections from the public domain.

It is our fervent prayer that our Lord Jesus Christ will be honored and exalted, either directly or indirectly, on every page of this publication, and that every article and review will contribute to the understanding or application of the Holy Scriptures as we await His return. (Excerpted from "Editorial," *TMSJ* 1/1 [1990]: 1–2)

The *Journal* has continued without interruption since that time, endeavoring to fulfil the purpose established at its beginning. Those interested in a subscription to *TMSJ* may contact Professor James F. Stitzinger, *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 13248 Roscoe Blvd., Sun Valley, CA 91352, or by e-mail at the address jstitzinger@mastersem.edu.

To the following pages of *The Master's Perspective on Difficult Passages*, volume 1 (1990) of *TMSJ* has contributed three chapters (chaps. 2, 7, and 12), volume 3 (1992) has provided four chapters (chaps. 4, 6, 8, and 9), volume 4 (1993) has been the source of two chapters (chaps. 1 and 10), and volume 6 (1995) has furnished three chapters (chaps. 3, 5, and 11).

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Abbreviations

This volume employs abbreviations sparingly, but has retained the following few:

- BAGD—W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
- BDB —F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
- BDF —F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*
- ICC —International Critical Commentary
- MT —Massoretic Text
- NICNT—New International Commentary on the New Testament
- Str-B —[H. Strack and] P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*
- TDNT —G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
- TDOT —G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*
- TLG —*Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*
- TWOT —R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

1 Kings 22:19–23

False Prophets and the Deceiving Spirit

Richard L. Mayhue

First Kings 22:19–23 occasions the herculean challenge of identifying “the spirit” in a way that best accounts for the reality of false prophecy in 1 Kings 22:6. From six suggested possibilities, a personified spirit of prophecy, a demon, and Satan are initially deemed the most reasonable identifications and thus merit further inquiry. Considering the philological, hermeneutical, and theological factors of the three interpretations, Satan best fits “the spirit” in 1 Kings 22:21. Demonic activity, initiated and superintended by Satan, is the most probable and immediate dynamic responsible for the false prophecy in 1 Kings 22:6 and explained by 1 Kings 22:19–23. Finally, God did not ordain this event; however, He did permit it.

* * * * *

R. A. Torrey realistically recognized that one of the most puzzling passages in the Bible is 1 Kings 22 and its parallel account in 2 Chronicles 18.¹ Nearly everyone acknowledges that no conclusive agreement regarding the meaning of “the spirit” in 1 Kings 22:21 has surfaced. The interpretation of this passage is tantalizing for students of Scripture.

Even scholars of the same tradition differ over solutions to this enigma of how a holy God apparently collaborates with deceiving spirits. The central question is how to harmonize “the spirit” in 1 Kings 22:21 with the false prophecy of 1 Kings 22:6. How can the immediate text, the holiness of God, and the inerrancy of Scripture yield a satisfactory identification of “the spirit”?

The dilemma is how a holy and true God can associate Himself with the apparent instigation of lies among false prophets? A proposed solution to this ultimate conundrum will address three significant questions:

1. Does 1 Kings 22:1–40 represent sane factual history, or is it fictionalized drama with a spiritual message?
2. Is Micaiah's vision in 22:19–23 one of reality or merely symbolic?
3. What reality or dynamic force best accounts for the false prophecy of 22:6—human, angelic, or divine?

Several secondary inquiries also provoke curiosity, even though they are not the primary objective of this study. Who is Micaiah—possibly the prophet of 1 Kings 20:35ff.? Why did Ahab call for Micaiah and not Elijah in 22:8? What caused Jehoshaphat to question Ahab's prophets at 22:7? How did Ahab recognize Micaiah's initially barbed answer in 22:15?

First Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18, arguably, rank as the foremost example of prophetic conflict between kings and prophets, between God and false prophets, and between true and false prophets. Other memorable encounters from the OT include Balaam (Numbers 22–24), Elijah's contest with the four hundred prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:16–40), and Jeremiah's confrontation of Hananiah (Jeremiah 28). In the NT, Jesus (Matt. 7:15; 24:11, 24), Peter (2 Peter 2), and John (1 John 4:1–6) warned about prophetic conflict. Paul contended with Elymas (Acts 13:6–12) and Revelation records the last foray with "the false prophet" (16:13; 19:20; 20:10). However, no passage in Scripture warns as distinctly as 1 Kings 22 that (1) kings have more to fear from true prophets than true prophets from kings and (2) false prophets have more to fear from God than from kings.²

BIOGRAPHICAL LINEUP

Since the focal point of this investigation is to identify "the spirit" in 1 Kings 22:21, a biographical and historical sketch is foundational. Ahab, Jehoshaphat, and Micaiah are the chief personages encountered in 1 Kings 22, where Ahab faces the decision of whether to engage Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, in a military confrontation.

Ahab

The eighth king of Israel during the Divided Kingdom phase of Jewish history, Ahab was the son of Omri. His reign began in the thirty-eighth year of Asa, king of Judah, and continued for twenty-two years (1 Kings 16:29). Thiele fixed Ahab's rule from 874/73 to 853 B.C.³

Ahab's wife Jezebel worshiped the Tyrian god Melqart and introduced, through Ahab, the cult of Baal-Melqart to Israel.⁴ She vividly demonstrated

her intolerance for anything related to the LORD by her attempted annihilation of the prophets of God (1 Kings 18:13).

Because of Ahab's "religious" activities, which abundantly and absurdly violated the Mosaic standards, he had an ominous reputation. He was the ruler who did more to provoke the Lord, God of Israel, than all the kings of Israel before him (1 Kings 16:30–33).

Premature death is often the fate of those who forsake the Lord, so Ahab died from an arrow-wound (1 Kings 22:34–37) and Jezebel fell before Jehu (2 Kings 9:30–37). In fact, their whole pagan family perished, again at the hands of Jehu (cf. 2 Kings 9:8 with 2 Kings 10:1–28).

Obviously neither of the royal couple was a man or woman of God. Their religion was pagan and their activities ruthless (1 Kings 18:4; 19:2; 21:1–16). Athaliah, a daughter of Jezebel, even attempted to kill Joash, who was the only legal heir to the messianic promise through David (2 Kings 11:1–3).

Jehoshaphat

The reign of Jehoshaphat obviously contrasts with that of Ahab. The son of Asa, he reigned as the fourth king of Judah twenty-five years (1 Kings 15:24; 2 Chron. 20:31).

This righteous ruler sought the God of his fathers, followed God's commandments, and did not act as evil Israel did (2 Chron. 17:4). He removed high places and the Asherah (2 Chron. 17:6; 19:3), and did right in the sight of the Lord (2 Chron. 20:32). The writer of Chronicles characterizes Jehoshaphat as a man who sought the Lord with all of his heart (2 Chron. 22:9).

Yet Jehoshaphat's reign was not blameless. Due to military pressures from Ben-Hadad of Syria and Shalmaneser III of Assyria, Jehoshaphat allied himself to Ahab by the marriage of his son Jehoram to Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (2 Chron. 18:1; 21:6). This marital bond paved the way for joint military operations (1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18), which resulted in a rebuke from the Lord by Jehu, the seer (2 Chron. 19:2).

Jehoshaphat, a God-fearing ruler, allowed governmental pressures to supersede his relationship with the Creator. The Jewish nation did the same in demanding a king like all the other nations (cp. 1 Sam. 8:19–20 with 1 Sam. 12:12). In each case, God permitted sinful activities; but, as with Joseph (Gen. 50:20), He used them to fulfil His ultimate divine plan (Isa. 46:10).

Micaiah

The Bible does not speak about Micaiah, son of Imlah, except in 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18. Apparently Micaiah was not the

The Master's Perspective on **DIFFICULT PASSAGES**

Have spiritual gifts ceased? What does the New Testament truly teach about homosexuality? Is there a sin for which no forgiveness is possible? How does one put on the armor of Ephesians 6?

Such problems are not just interesting conundrums. What Scripture means in each text affects life and faith. So the leading scholars who tackle these difficult passages navigate obstacles cautiously. Their technically astute but clear reasoning teaches interpretive strategies.

Texts interpreted include:

- 1 Kings 22:19–23 —“False Prophets and the Deceiving Spirit”
- Isaiah 53:4–5—“For What Did Christ Atone?”
- Romans 11:25–27—“The Future of Israel in Paul's Thought”
- 1 John 5:16–17—“The Sin Unto Death”
- 1 Corinthians 5:5—“Deliver This Man to Satan: A Case Study in Church Discipline”

Contributors include such notable scholars as Richard L. Mayhue, George J. Zemek, James E. Rosscup, Michael G. Vanlaningham, Simon J. Kistemaker, James B. DeYoung, and Irvin A. Busenitz.

“From a distance, viewing [Scripture] as a whole, one can see its grandeur, symmetry, and coherence. But the true magnificance of Scripture is only yielded to the one who comes close to see how each precious jewel of divine truth embedded in it by God sparkles with beauty. . . . In this volume, some samples of the beautiful jewels of truth in Scripture are examined carefully for your joy and blessing.”

—John F. MacArthur Jr.
from the Foreword

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