

Column

I grew up in a time and in a home where Bible stories were a staple part of the fare of life. Before I knew the alphabet, I knew Noah, Abraham, and Joseph. They were just as real to me as Popeye, Captain Kangaroo and Kingfish Stevens on television.

If you ask me today who my favourite Bible character is, I would be hard pressed to give an answer. After all, each has his place in redemptive history.

Jesus, of course, would have to top the list, as He was the one to whom the aforementioned characters witnessed. "Never man spake like this man," observed His contemporaries (John 7:46). He was the God-Man.

After Him, on my list, would appear such giants as Peter, Jesus' plain-spoken disciple; Paul, the great missionary traveller; John, the Gospel writer and apostle of love; and Mary, the mother of Jesus.

This list of favourites would grow longer still if Old Testament characters were admitted. Abraham would have to be near the top of the list. After all, he is the fountain-head of the people of God and the great biblical exemplar of faith.

Other choices would include: Moses, the great lawgiver and deliverer of God's people; David, the king after God's own heart; and Daniel the fearless follower of God when God's people were in exile in Babylon.

In the end, though, I might settle on a lesser-known character, one I can't say I heard very much about as a child. I am thinking of Micaiah, son Imlah.

Who was Micaiah? He was a prophet in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of wicked King Ahab. His story is recorded in 1 Kings 22. Ahab called him to enquire if the Northern Kingdom, in confederacy with the Southern Kingdom of Judah, should go to war against their common enemy Syria. Micaiah's answer was, No! "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd," he told Ahab.

More than that, his answer went against the advice of 400 other prophets who had given King Ahab the green light to go to war. What followed was that these yes-men received honour in the king's court, while hapless Micaiah got cast

into prison. In the end, however, Micaiah was vindicated. King Ahab did not return from battle, and the combined armies of the two kingdoms suffered defeat.

What attracts me to this little-known Bible character is his relevance for today. In the words of Bishop N.T. Wright: Micaiah “sat humbly in the counsel of the Almighty in order that he might stand boldly in the counsel of men,” and that is the type of people we need today in both church and nation.

The American author Josiah Gilbert Holland (1819-1881) spoke of that need when he wrote:

"God give us men! A time like this demands strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands; / men whom the lust of office does not kill: / Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy; / Men who possess opinions and a will; Men who have honour -- men who will not lie; / Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog / In public duty and in private thinking!"

Or, I suppose we could say, God give us more Micaiahs.

ALMIGHTY God, whose kingdom is everlasting and power infinite; Have mercy upon this whole land; and so rule the hearts of those in authority, that they, knowing whose ministers they are, may above all things seek thy honour and glory; and that we and all the People, duly considering whose authority they bear, may faithfully and obediently honour them, according to thy blessed Word and ordinance; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

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