

Column

If you asked the man on the street to name some of his favourite Bible characters, you would get a variety of answers. If the question was narrowed to the New Testament, Jesus no doubt would top the list. After all, even those who were not His followers were reported saying, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46). Jesus still commands the respect of a great many today, including a number of those who don't consider themselves particularly religious.

Further down the list would appear such names as: Peter, Jesus' plain-speaking disciple; Paul, the great missionary traveller; John, the apostle of love; and Mary, the mother of Jesus.

This list of favourites would grow longer still if Old Testament characters were admitted. Whom would you pick? Would it be Abraham, the great man of faith who left his kin in Ur and heeded God's call to go into a land he had not seen?

Or, would it be Moses, the great lawgiver and deliverer of God's people; David, the king after God's own heart; or Daniel, the fearless man of God in Babylon? All of these are good answers, but I think I would choose a lesser known character, Micaiah, son of Imlah.

Who was Micaiah? He was a prophet in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of wicked King Ahab. According to 1 Kings 22, when Ahab called him in to see if the Northern Kingdom, in confederacy with the Southern Kingdom of Judah, should go to war against Syria, Micaiah gave the unpopular and politically inexpedient answer of no. "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd," he told Ahab.

What made his prophecy so remarkable was he was going against the word of 400 other prophets who had given King Ahab the green light to go to war. As a result they 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 armies of Israel 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 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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