

THE HISTORIAN AND THE BIBLE

Essays in Honour of Lester L. Grabbe

edited by

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and
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A CONTRIBUTION
TO THE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF YEHUD:
THE STORY OF MICAIAH AND ITS FUNCTION WITHIN THE
DISCOURSE OF PERSIAN-PERIOD LITERATI

Ehud Ben Zvi

Stories carry messages. The more salient or memorable a story is in a particular discourse, the more effective it will convey its message; and, conversely, the more a good story reflects and reflects on fundamental concerns and deeply held worldviews within a group, the more likely that the story will become prominent among its members. Stories, and particularly prominent stories, tend to provide a discursive way to relate to “truths” that are explicitly or, more often, implicitly agreed upon within the group, but whose members find difficult to express or to express sharply by other means. As such, these stories are important tools for historians who wish to reconstruct the worldviews of particular groups in the past.¹ The present study focuses on some aspects of the account of Micaiah, for the sake of shedding light into some features of the worldview of ancient Israel.

The story of Micaiah appears both in I Kgs 22 and 2 Chr 18, with very minor textual changes—though, unavoidably, not only within a different *Sitz im Buch*, but within a different *Buch* altogether.² It is the only prophetic story about the prophets of the kingdom of Israel that is shared between Kings and Chronicles, and one of the very few prophetic stories that are really shared between the Deuteronomistic historical collection/history and Chronicles.³ This uncharacteristic pattern of occurrences within ancient Israel’s histories already suggests that this story is simply

1. Jonah is an excellent example of a memorable story serving these purposes admirably (see Ben Zvi 2003). It is my contention that the same can be said of the story of Micaiah, the son of Imlah.

2. For a textual comparison of the text of the story in the MT Kings, MT Chronicles, and the LXX versions, see De Vries 1978, 11–24. On the contextual divergence between Kings and Chronicles, see below.

3. For a discussion of some potential reasons for the inclusion of this story in Chronicles, see below. On this matter, see also Rofé 1988, esp. 205.

not one among many others, but one that played some significant role in the memory and ideological discourse of ancient Israel.

The story is certainly at the core of 1 Kgs 22, which in itself is an important section within Kings as it deals with the fall and death of Ahab.⁴ The latter is, of course, one of the most prominent northern characters in the book of Kings. Ahab and Jeroboam I are in fact the two northern Israelite kings that take the most “real estate” in the social memory of the literati of ancient Israel. Their actions were considered paradigmatic, and their reconstructed reigns and actions served to shape core myths and communicate central ideological positions in Jerusalem-centered historical narratives.

The story may have had a long redactional history, and may have originally been associated with a king other than Ahab; moreover, it might have found its way into a forerunner of the present book of Kings at a relatively late stage in the redactional process that led to the present book. Notwithstanding the importance of these debates, the present study focuses on the story as presented to the primary readers of the (present compositional form of the) book of Kings (and of Chronicles, of course). If the primary readers of the book of Kings were somewhat similar to the intended readers of the book—which in itself is a most reasonable assumption—then they would have read the story as associated with Ahab (and Jehoshaphat), as explicitly stated in the text, and as an integral part of the book of Kings in general and its extended account of Ahab. For the intended readers of Chronicles the story had to do with Jehoshaphat (and Ahab; see below). Whatever previous stories might have existed about Micaiah, by the Persian period these were superseded by the story advanced in both Kings and Chronicles. Moreover, this is the story that became part of the literati’s social memory of, and facts agreed upon, the monarchic past. Studies on the intellectual discourse of and social memory in Yehud, such as this one, must focus on that story, not any possible, though by necessity hypothetical, forerunner.

Within 1 Kgs 22 the story of Micaiah takes more narrative space than the actual report about Ahab’s death.⁵ The story not only leads to, but provides an interpretative frame for, Ahab’s death. It shapes the narrative

4. On these matters, see, among others, De Vries 1978, 4–6, 25–51; Roth 1982; Jones 1984, 2:360–62; Long 1984, 233; Na’aman 1997; Campbell and O’Brien 2000, 25, 405–7, and the bibliography cited in these works. For a less common perspective in these matters, see Auld 2000, 23–24, and for a response to his position, see McKenzie 2004, 305–6.

5. The boundaries of these literary units are porous and can be reconstructed in different ways, but one may say that the story spans from v. 6 (or even v. 3) to 22 and the report of Ahab’s death from vv. 29–38.

account of his death in Kings and its representation in the social memory of ancient Israel. These features, of course, made the story memorable.

The story (in both Kings and Chronicles) contains, in addition, numerous additional features that enhance its memorable character. These include, among others, a set of impressive personages and settings, both in earth and in heaven, and including one scene in the heavenly court and another—which serves as its counterpoint—in a major open court meeting on earth. These scenes evoke, among others, images of two great kings on earth, of YHWH, the divine council, hundreds of prophets. The story, in both versions, contains a number of sharp twists and reversals in the plot that accentuate suspense and irony, and keep the attention of the readers by running often against their basic expectations.⁶ It carries also numerous visual details meant to engage the imagination of the readers and maintain a hold in their memory, from royal robes to symbolic iron horns. Common popular motifs such as inquiring the deity before battle, reversal of fortunes, the one versus the many, the face-off between the seemingly powerless but pious person and the powerful and sinful man figure prominently in the story. Moreover, the story deals not only with the eventual success of the pious who may observe the heavenly court (see the contrast between Micaiah and Ahab), but also and perhaps far more importantly from the perspective of the readers, with the fate of the struggling pious, who although essentially good, may be temporarily mistaken and misguided (see Jehoshaphat).

The presence of familiar or familiarizing features such as those mentioned above is constantly put in proportion in the story by the presence of de-familiarizing motifs. For instance, rather than bringing forward the image of the lone prophet of YHWH confronting prophets or worshipers of other deities (see Elijah in 1 Kgs 18, which is also set in the reign of Ahab), it brings forward the image of the single godly prophet of YHWH confronting the very same deity's many prophets. Instead of simply narrating a case in which a prophet reveals divine knowledge, it breaks too easy boundaries around what is actually revealed by the deity by projecting a world in which the hidden partially stands for what is actually revealed and what is revealed ends up being partially hidden, at least from the perspective of the characters in the story.

6. "We expect Jehoshaphat to follow the advice of Micaiah; he does not. We expect Micaiah to tell the truth; he does not, at least not at first. We expect Ahab not to press for the truth; he does. We expect Yahweh to tell the truth; he does not" (Robertson 1982, 146; cf. Sternberg 1987, 406–7). To which we may add, among other things, that in the world of this text the secret divine council carries no secrets, whereas the public meeting of the war council does bear them.

Features like those mentioned above substantially contribute to the continuous revisiting of the story and the associated site of memory by the intended and primary readerships of Kings and Chronicles. But there is more. As if there were not enough markers to substantiate the point that the story was written and set to be memorable and, most likely, well remembered, many aspects of this story were strongly connected to other stories within the world of knowledge of the relevant literati. For instance, it partially echoes aspects of (1) the story about Elijah and his confrontation with the prophets of Baal in 1 Kgs 18,⁷ (2) the confrontation between Jeremiah and Hananiah in Jer 28, and (3) other instances of images of meetings at heavenly court (e.g. Isa 6 and Job 1–2, which may be later than Kings, but not necessarily than Chronicles).⁸ As the story of Micaiah evoked aspects of other stories and vice versa, attention was drawn to both similarities and dissimilarities, and a web of texts informing each other emerged (see Ben Zvi 2009b). This connective character of the story of Micaiah further contributed to its place within the memory of ancient Israel and its repertoire of stories.

Since all the features mentioned above, except the role of the story within Kings, and specifically 1 Kgs 22, apply equally to the story in Chronicles, for the present purposes suffices to note that within Chronicles it is part and parcel of the regnal account of Jehoshaphat's reign (not Ahab's).⁹ Thus it is not surprising that it contributes to the characterization of this king who is particularly important in Chronicles, though significantly it makes also a very substantial contribution to the shaping of an underlying, connoted characterization of the House of Ahab in Chronicles as one that exerted some irrational attraction for the Davides,

7. Note the motif of the public prophetic confrontation, of the lone genuine prophet vs. the many (even the numbers given to the many echo each other), and of the endangered life of the prophet which raises the issue of potential martyrology, as well as the obvious association of both prophets (Elijah and Micaiah) with the memory of Ahab. To some extent, one may even consider the presence of Micaiah in this story/memory as a replacement for absence/expected presence of Elijah in the central prophetic story about the death of Ahab. The text, however, is "normalized" as the attention of the readers is brought back to Elijah's words in 1 Kgs 22:38, as the story of Ahab comes to a close (cf. 2 Kgs 21:19). At that time, Elijah's presence in the form of his words comes to the forefront, and, as it does, the figure of Micaiah disappears. There are, of course, additional reasons for the reference to Elijah's words (see 1 Kgs 21:23; 2 Kgs 9:36).

8. Among recent works on the heavenly court (and its secrecy) within an ancient Near Eastern context, see Lenzi 2008 and Kee 2007.

9. For a study of the story in Chronicles that pays close attention to its language and context, see Bergman 2004, 181–98. For studies of the account of Jehoshaphat in Chronicles as a whole, see Dillard 1986; Knoppers 1991; McKenzie 2004.

even among the best of them, as demonstrated by our very story. Since, according to Chronicles, the Davidic kings were never supposed to become allies or partners of the northern kingdom, the very existence of the House of Ahab and its allure brought incommensurable danger to the House of David. From a more general perspective that takes into account the situation of the intended and primary readers, the House of Ahab becomes as a quasi-mythical symbol of the potentially fatal allure of evildoers for true followers of YHWH.¹⁰ Thus the story of Micaiah plays a prominent role in Chronicles as well.

Since the story of story of Micaiah was repeatedly marked to be so salient, and most likely was so salient within the discourse of Yehud, it is reasonable to assume that it served as a very effective conduit for messages to the community/ies of primary readers of Kings and Chronicles. As other highly connected stories that took much “real estate” in the memory of the past held, at least, among the literati in Yehud, it stands to reason that this story was substantially aligned with fundamental concerns and deeply held worldviews within these literati. But if this is so, which “truths” explicitly or implicitly agreed upon among them were effectively touched on and effectively communicated by this popular story? Or, in other words, what may have these literati dealt with and learned about as they imaginatively visited the imagined, socially shared site of memory created by the story and as they observed Micaiah, Jehoshaphat, Ahab and all the other characters in the story, including, of course, YHWH and the divine council?

To be sure, visits to (mental or “real”) sites of memory activate and engender social memory, and social memory is about constructing a shared past. Thus the literati could not but learn about the personages that populate their story and their (construed) past, as well as their circumstances. Yet neither Kings nor Chronicles were simply antiquarian; nor were their intended and primary rereaders interested in simply learning and sharing images of the past, for their own sake as it were. Instead, both Kings and Chronicles were didactic histories aimed at teaching ideological/theological lessons, instilling a certain attitude of the mind and socializing the literati and those influenced by them into a particular worldview. Thus the central question returns: What did such a central and significantly remembered story convey to the literati in terms of “truths”?¹¹

10. See Ben Zvi 2007. The position of Chronicles on these matters is influenced by the image of the House of Ahab in Kings, on which see Ben Zvi 2009a.

11. These questions, far from being marginal to the task of reconstructing the historical events during the reigns of Ahab and Jehoshaphat, are central not only to studies of the books of Kings and Chronicles, of ancient Israelite historiography and

A good starting point for approaching this matter is the plain observation that Micaiah is characterized by Ahab (and, in fact, presented to the reader for the first time) as a prophet of YHWH who never prophesies anything for Ahab but disaster (1 Kgs 22:8//2 Chr 18:17). This first, salient, and basic presentation of the prophet serves narrative goals: it sets the scene for the central confrontation between two central pairs of characters in the story (Ahab and Micaiah; and Micaiah and the other prophets) and provides the necessary ground for the motif of reversal of fortunes. But this is not all, or even the main issue for the present analysis. Readers were supposed to learn from the experiences of agents populating their historical memory, both their successes and their failures. This didactic aspect is certainly one of the main (systemic or underlying) reasons for asking them to mentally re-visit these sites of memory, and to a large extent for history writing and learning in antiquity. This aspect requires that the reader be aware not only of the eventual decisions of (construed) historical agents, but also the circumstances in which these agents reached their decisions.¹²

This being so, the primary readers of the story cannot but note that Micaiah never prophesied anything for Ahab but disaster, and that at the time of the events Ahab was at the height of his power. Thus, obviously, Micaiah's previous and consistent prophecies of misfortune have not come to pass at that time. If the test for true prophets is that their prophecies come to pass, then from the perspective of Ahab (and Jehoshaphat's as well) Micaiah should have been considered a false prophet at the time when they summoned him, whereas those who prophesied good for Ahab up to this moment should have been considered by them true prophets (cf. Deut 18:22; 1 Sam 3:19; 1 Kgs 8:56; Jer 28:9; Ezek 33:33). Of course, the story clearly shows to the readers, who are all too aware of the eventual fate of Ahab, that fulfillment criteria for truthfulness in prophecy were not only unreliable, but also actually misleading at the time.

But the issue is not left to rest there. Significantly, but not surprisingly in a story full of inversions, the readers were asked to pay attention to the fact that the very same Ahab, and most importantly Micaiah (and likely Jehoshaphat as well), are explicitly described as accepting the very validity of the fulfillment test for prophecy in 1 Kgs 22:27–28//2 Chr 18:26–27, even if they (and Jehoshaphat) seemed to have (correctly)

its social roles in Achaemenid Yehud, but also for the study of the intellectual discourse in Yehud, without which one cannot advance any intellectual history of Yehud.

12. This is at the core of the widespread approach to past events which uses them as a guide for how to behave (or not to behave) in the present.

rejected it up to that point. This sudden shift plays a communicative role in the narrative as it serves to characterize the protagonists in the story as believing, correctly again from the perspective of the readers, that this time a final confrontation is about to take place. But whereas the implied author's knowledge of the end of the story may shape the characterization of its literary personages, it is necessarily hidden from historical agents, including the readers as they run their own lives.¹³ This being so, the logic of the story suggests that historical agents cannot know when the principle of fulfillment of prophecy is reliable or dangerously misleading. The principle is thus presented to the readers as both valid and invalid, with no clear way of for them in real life to decide which is which, or more precisely, when which is to be held true or untrue.¹⁴

One may argue that the story of Micaiah suggests that in such circumstances it is wise for agents to hedge their bets and in any case to exercise caution when opposite prophecies are announced. This is what the narrative seems to suggest. Both Ahab and Jehoshaphat are depicted as having kept Micaiah's prophecy well in their minds, as the story about the disguise during battle indicates. Yet hedging bets is a behavior that implies awareness and knowledge of the impossibility of knowledge on these matters.¹⁵ Moreover, the issue at stake does not actually require multiple or conflicting prophecies. The readers know that no matter what Micaiah would have pronounced, and even without his presence altogether, the prophecies of the 400 would have failed to come true. Whether prophecies are one or many, whether similar or not, the matter raised by the logic of the text concerns the very understanding of prophecy.

13. Historical agents can never know "the end(s)" of the narrative(s) their lives create.

14. One may argue that the intended and primary readers may have imagined that Ahab (and Jehoshaphat) considered that Micaiah's (earlier) prophecies have not come to pass *yet*, but may come true at some point in the future (cf. Isa 30:8), whereas those of other prophets who prophesied success, although they already came true, might end up "untrue," because of some reversal of fate to take place in the future. But of what use for historical agents are prophecies whose value may shift from one extreme to another in a fully unknown temporal scale? To be sure, such prophecies may fulfill rhetorical purposes in stories about the past and may contribute to the shaping of narratives, but are of no use to historical agents in the "real" world. They are of no use to the primary readers of this story either in Chronicles or Kings in terms of their own formation as (historical) agents and as teachers of (historical) agents in their "real" world.

15. Cf. J. L. Crenshaw, who concludes that due to the contradictions associated with prophetic conflict, "the public...found prophecy lacking and turned elsewhere for spiritual direction, namely to apocalyptic and wisdom..." (1971, 111).

But the text does not stop there. The question of prophecy is approached from a second, vivid, attention-getting, complementary and, to a large extent, converging perspective in Micaiah's story. The readers were explicitly asked to construe prophecy as a manifestation of the/a "Empowering Spirit" serving YHWH and therefore as an officer of and in YHWH's heavenly court. The text advances a personification and individualization of that Empowering Spirit (note הַרוּחַ in 1 Kgs 22:21/2 Chr 18:20¹⁶) that makes it comparable to the divinely appointed commissar for examining the loyalty of YHWH's servants referred to as הַשֹּׁמֵן in Job 1–2, while at the same time balancing these features by stressing its ability to morph into (though it would never be fully contained in) a truthful or a misleading spirit in the mouth of prophets, that is, to be manifested among humans as prophecy. Thus the text emphasizes that prophecy truly originating from the divine court may provide both true and false knowledge. Human agents, of course, do not have a clear way to discern, at least in real time, which is which. (Micaiah's reply to Zedekiah [see 1 Kgs 22:24–25//2 Chr 18:23–24] only emphasizes that such is the case by resorting to the principle of future fulfillment).

The text does not stop there either. The readers were also told in the story that the mentioned un-knowability is not grounded in the abilities of the Empowering Spirit who produces prophecy among human prophets, but in YHWH's character. Not only does the deity fully control this Spirit, as well as any of the deity's officers in the divine court, but YHWH can decide and at times actually comes to an operative decision to provide deceitful knowledge to human beings through prophecy for purposes that YHWH might find appropriate.

This image of YHWH was influenced by notions about the power of and the resources lawfully available to the earthly kings, whose courts helped people imagine the heavenly one. Strategic misinformation was an acceptable resort used by kings to achieve their goals. Thus, as one would expect, YHWH—the ultimate king—was imagined as actually commanding or incurring in the use of misinformation not only in Micaiah's story, but also in other texts, such as Gen 18:12–13; Exod 3:22; 1 Sam 16:2 (see Shemesh 2002, esp. 85–87, and bibliography cited there).

Strategic misinformation could be and was often used to cause harm to opponents. Of course, within a non-dualistic worldview such as the one that existed during the Persian period, this is not a real problem since

16. To be sure, the use of the article הַ does not necessarily mean that the following noun has to refer to a noun/referent specifically defined in the context (see, for instance, *IBHS* §13.5.1.e). However, if the referent is an officer in the court, then the metaphor leads to individualization. For another position, see Chisholm 1998, 15.

YHWH must be conceived of as the creator of good *and* evil (cf. Isa 45:7), and thus able to create knowledge and mis-knowledge among humans, as well as different impediments to their ability to discern between the two as the deity deems appropriate (Exod 9:12; Isa 6:9–10).¹⁷

At the same time the image of YHWH creating mis-knowledge is likely to cause some underlying anxieties within the discourse of the literati.¹⁸ Divinely ordained mis-knowledge, or one may say mis-teachings, may take the form of prophetic announcements. Yet there is no reason to stop there. They can certainly take the form of divinely ordained חקִים וְנִשְׁפָּטִים (see Ezek 20:25).

The most damaging potential discursive and ideological anxieties that such an understanding could have caused were easily fenced off by the association of past mis-teachings to either unworthy messengers or, and most importantly, by assuming that strategic mis-information was aimed only at harming the enemies of the king/YHWH. Thus, even if Moses was also construed as a prophet and divine ordained חקִים וְנִשְׁפָּטִים were central to YHWH's *torah*, there was no real danger within the discourse of the text-centered community in Yehud that the *torah* would be considered "mis-information" or bad teachings meant to hurt Israel.

However, concerns about human inability to discern between divine messages or teachings that carried information and those that carried mis-information were more difficult to be fully dismissed when they concerned less foundational matters and characters. Moreover, any easy way of solving matters by simply associating mis-information exclusively with sinful individuals is explicitly undermined by the very story

17. Cf. Crenshaw 1971, 77–90. Crenshaw's characterization of this aspect of YHWH as "demonic" and of הַרוּחַ in the story as associated (at that time) with notions of an evil spirit or demon, are problematic within the discourse of Persian period Yehud. The same does not hold true, of course, within other discourses. Indeed, although the text clearly refers to this רוּחַ יְהוָה (see v. 24 and the general context of the divine court), later exegetes working within very different theological discourses and attentive to the latter's logic concluded that הַרוּחַ is either Satan (Mayhue 1993 and previous works mentioned there) or a demon (e.g. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Question 172, article 6; Aquinas attempts to explain away some of the implications of the text than are mentioned above). It is worth noting, however, that a contrary position, namely that הַרוּחַ stands for none other than the Angel Michael was also advanced in antiquity (see Isho'dad of Merv [ca. 850], *Books of Sessions* in 1 Kgs 22:20; ET in Conti 2008, 136). R. Y. Kara maintains that he does not know what this רוּחַ is; Rashi associates it with the spirit of Naboth, following *b. Sanh.* 102b, and see also Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, *Nezakim* 4.13. Again, the reasons for this identification are theological.

18. And, of course, in discourses of later times as well. Already Josephus drops the entire court scene in *Ant.* 8 (see esp. § 406).

of Micaiah, which involved (a) the many prophets who are not characterized as sinful, (b) Jehoshaphat—perhaps a temporally misguided, but not a sinful leader—and in which and not incidentally, (c) Ahab was portrayed much better than his usual image in other texts and in the memory of the literati. The matter is further compounded by the presence and importance in Yehudite ideological discourse of the idea that good characters may be, or even are, likely to be tested by the deity.¹⁹ When does a test become harm, and when is harm a test? How can historical agents go beyond the veil of “unknowability” that may surround divine messages and teachings, whether in the form of oral prophecies or grounded in a “reading” of worldly events as communicative expressions of a divine will and mind?²⁰ How to deal with these concerns and anxieties?

One way of dealing with these was to explore them from the safe perspective of a very memorable story that comforts its readers by relating, among other things, the fall of the evil king, the triumph of the one over the many, the safe return of a pious, but for once misguided, character (Jehoshaphat), and perhaps even at least a connoted sense of divine willingness to give even a sinner like Ahab one more chance (see Moberley 2003; Hamilton 1994). This story is about YHWH’s power, probably YHWH’s goodness and about “happy endings.” It reinforces traditional beliefs about YHWH’s ability to punish evil, destroy villains and overthrow their machinations, just as it unequivocally emphasizes the deity’s ability to easily overcome human-made substitutions meant to confuse or derail YHWH’s plans.²¹

Yet, at the same time, as in the case of Gen 18 or Jonah,²² it is precisely because it provided a safe harbor that it allowed the literati to explore

19. I have expanded on this issue in Ben Zvi forthcoming. This image is particularly important in Chronicles, but present in or informing numerous texts as well, including those in the Deuteronomistic History.

20. That is, the basic approach according to which the world and historical (and personal) events/developments/trajectories are a “book” that can be “read” to learn about the deity and the deity’s ways. This approach has a very long history in the ancient Near East, including ancient Israel, and beyond.

21. The story about the perceived replacement of Ahab with Jehoshaphat may be (a polemic) play on the theme of a substitute king who takes upon himself the misfortune announced for the king. The story tells the reader that YHWH can easily frustrate any “crafty” design meant to derail YHWH’s actions.

22. On Gen 18, see Ben Zvi 1992. The memorable story of Jonah also communicates, at one level, a sense of comfort and “happy endings”—no one dies in this prophetic book, everyone can repent, and Jonah is educated by YHWH. Jonah also provides “safe harbour” that allows its readers to explore “dangerous waters,” including those associated with limits to human knowledge and prophecy. Cf. the Micaiah story. (On Jonah, see Ben Zvi 2003.)

such dangerous waters as what is “true” in divine communication, how an historical agent can know, and, perhaps, above all, what “true” may mean in this context. Significantly, the literati, as they reread the story and re-visited this virtual site of memory, encountered again and again a truthful revelation of the events in the heavenly court that can be dismissed on seemingly unassailable logic—given the circumstances—by YHWH’s prophets and Jehoshaphat. Moreover, the divinely planned dismissal of such a true image of the events at the council substantially contributes to the achievement of the goal for which a deceitful divine prophecy was created and sent. Thus, as they read the story and visit this site of memory, they noticed that precisely the word of YHWH that carries mis-information does *not* return to the deity empty, but accomplishes that which YHWH has decided, to paraphrase Isa 55:11, and thus fulfills at least one of the tests for truthful prophecy accepted in the discourse of the literati of Yehud.²³ Of course, to stress that test is tantamount to stress the inability of human agents to distinguish in real time between divine mis-information and information, and to underscore the gap between the divine and the human realm and the ability of those in the latter to evaluate the messages that may originate from divine (see Isa 55:8–11).²⁴

But how do they know or are even able to explore these matters? By reading authoritative books (such as Kings, Chronicles) and revisiting (virtual) sites of memory both shaped by and reflected in these texts. Of course, books need readers and interpreters, and then comes a book such as Jonah that not only involves itself in meta-prophetic considerations,

23. These considerations along with the characterization of the 400 prophets in the story and the explicit divine origin of their prophecy undermine attempts to frame the story of Micaiah as a confrontation between true and false prophets. Although, as mentioned above, the story evokes other confrontations, it clearly breaks from that model. There are no false prophets/pseudo-prophets in the story. All the prophets here are false to a degree and truthful to a degree—or better, they are true and divinely inspired (and controlled) in their own way. This point contributes much to the very core of the story and its role in ancient Israel. Of course, it is troublesome to decide which of these options is precisely the point (see below). It is possible that the LXX already began to neutralize the issue by moving in the direction of disassociating the 400 from YHWH (see Lenzi 2008, 262 n. 184), a trajectory followed later by Josephus. Compare and contrast the positions advanced concerning this matter with, for instance, Crenshaw 1971; Dafni 2000.

24. Isa 55:8–11 is an important meta-prophetic comment. Rofé notes in relation to the ideology conveyed by this text that “Rather than the Word being fulfilled, it *fulfills*... The true purpose of the Word of God can never be known, as His thoughts are beyond human comprehension, just as the heavens are beyond the earth” (1988, 170 [original emphasis]).

as in the Micaiah story, but also stresses that the limitations on true knowledge that may affect those who "know scripture," that is, the literati. This may lead us away from, but not necessarily beyond the lessons that the literati could have learned from the story of Micaiah, though we have to keep in mind that the primary readers of Chronicles, at least, most likely read Jonah and were aware of Kings, and that late Persian-period readers of Kings were most likely aware of Chronicles and Jonah.

In a nutshell, the position I advance here is that unsolvable issues/problems within a particular worldview often call for narratives that allow those who uphold such a worldview to explore these matters safely and to express and communicate "truths" that are difficult for them to express. Historians whose aim is to understand the worldview held by a particular group may find these (often memorable and popular) stories to be an excellent source for reconstructing which "truths" were difficult to express in that historical discourse, and which unsolvable matters troubled people at the time, as well as their discourse and particularly its inner logic and cohesion, be these matters at the overt or underlying level. The story of Micaiah, along with Jonah and Gen 18, provides a good example. As in the case of the other stories, the point of the Micaiah story was not to provide a definitive, unequivocal answer, but to allow an exploration of matters that troubled the literati and reflected their awareness of systemic limitations to their knowledge. In these cases, stories served simultaneously both to underlie and undermine the shared discourse of a community. Moreover, and most significantly for studies of intellectual history, these stories and particularly Micaiah's deeply and intricately had interwoven underlying with undermining and vice versa. When they seem to underlie this shared discourse, they carry messages that seem to undermine it; and, conversely, as they seem to undermine this discourse, they carry messages that buttress it. Just as in Micaiah's story, the hidden may be revealed, the revealed may be hidden, truth may be deception, deception may be truth, multiple tests for true prophecy are both right and wrong at the same time, reliable and misleading, and the readers, the actual historical agents, remain with no sure anchor, except for an awareness about these matters through their continuous reading of communally shared texts and revisiting of communally shared memories.

It is my pleasure to dedicate this essay to Lester, who has contributed so much to the topic of the Historian and the Bible in general, and to the history of Yehud in particular.

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