

## FALSE PROPHETS AND THE DECEIVING SPIRIT

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*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 Kgs 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 Kgs 22:21. Demonic activity, initiated and superintended by Satan, is the most probable and immediate dynamic responsible for the false prophecy in 1 Kgs 22:6 and explained by 1 Kgs 22:19-23. Finally, God did not ordain this event; however, He did permit it.*

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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.<sup>1</sup> Nearly everyone acknowledges that no conclusive agreement regarding the meaning of "the spirit" in 1 Kgs 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 Kgs 22:21 with the false prophecy of 1 Kgs 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

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<sup>1</sup>R. A. Torrey, *Difficulties in the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, n.d.) 73. See Ray Dillard, "The Chronicler's Jehoshaphat," *TrinJ* NS (1986):20, for a discussion of why the Chronicles' account is unique to Chronicles and also differs from 1 Kings 22.

proposed solution to this ultimate conundrum will address three significant questions.

1. Does 1 Kgs 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 Kgs 20:35 ff.? 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 Kgs 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.<sup>2</sup>

## BIOGRAPHICAL LINEUP

Since the focal point of this investigation is to identify "the spirit" in 1 Kgs 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.

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<sup>2</sup>Patrick Miller, Jr., "The Prophetic Critique of Kings," *Ex Auditu* II (1986):82.

*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 Kgs 16:29). Thiele fixed Ahab's rule from 874/73 to 853 B.C.<sup>3</sup>

Ahab's wife Jezebel worshipped the Tyrian god Melqart and introduced, through Ahab, the cult of Baal-Melqart to Israel.<sup>4</sup> She vividly demonstrated her intolerance for anything related to the LORD by her attempted annihilation of the prophets of God (1 Kgs 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 Kgs 16:30-33).

Premature death is often the fate of those who forsake the LORD, so Ahab died from an arrow-wound (1 Kgs 22:34-37) and Jezebel fell before Jehu (2 Kgs 9:30-37). In fact, their whole pagan family perished, again at the hands of Jehu (cf. 2 Kgs 9:8 with 2 Kgs 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 Kgs 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 Kgs 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 Kgs 15:24; 2 Chr 20:31).

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

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<sup>3</sup>Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 66.

<sup>4</sup>William F. Albright, *From The Stone Age To Christianity* (2nd ed.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957) 234-35.

to Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (2 Chr 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 Chr 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 fulfill 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 only true prophet of God in Israel (cf. 1 Kgs 17:1; 18:4), but he probably was the only one immediately available. The Scriptures are silent and provide no basis for conjecture on why Ahab summoned Micaiah and not Elijah. It seems that Micaiah returned to the custody of Amon and Joash from whom he had been released to appear before the royal court (1 Kgs 22:26; cf. "quickly" in 1 Kgs 22:9).

Ahab's reaction (1 Kgs 22:8) suggests that Micaiah could be the prophet who declared Ahab's death for not killing Ben-Hadad as God commanded (1 Kgs 20:35-43).<sup>5</sup>

From the narrative of 1 Kings 22 and from the fulfillment of Micaiah's dream (cp. Deut 18:22 and 1 Kgs 22:28 with 1 Kgs 22:17 and 1 Kgs 22:37), it is conclusive that Micaiah was truly a prophet of the LORD. None other than Ahab himself attests this (1 Kgs 22:8, 16) along with Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah (1 Kgs 22:24).

In the face of severe pressure (1 Kgs 22:13, 16), Micaiah was faithful to God. In spite of overwhelming unpopularity, he delivered perfectly the divine message. Zedekiah rewarded him with a humiliating facial blow (1 Kgs 22:24) and a return to prison, where the soup de jour was water and the entree was bread (1 Kgs 22:27). Whether Micaiah obtained a release when Ahab's lifeless body came back to Samaria (1 Kgs 22:37) is unknown. However, it is a certainty that God did not leave Himself without a true witness in Israel!

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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<sup>5</sup>C. F. Keil, *The Books of the Kings* (trans. by James Martin, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 3; 1970 rpt., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) 274.

The military lineup in the ancient Near East during the 10th and 9th centuries B.C. included Shishak of Egypt (945-924 B.C.), Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.) and Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.) of Assyria, Ben-Hadad of Syria (890-841 B.C.), and the numerous kings of Israel and Judah.<sup>6</sup> About 879 B.C., Asa, king of Judah, called upon Ben-Hadad I of Syria to attack Baasha and the kingdom of Israel, who were threatening Jerusalem (1 Kgs 15:16-22). In 855 B.C., Ben-Hadad I struck Israel with a coalition of thirty-two kings (1 Kgs 20:1). As he was getting himself drunk, the LORD delivered him into the hands of Ahab (1 Kgs 20:13-21).

Again in 854 B.C. Ben-Hadad I attacked Ahab at Amphek and was soundly defeated (1 Kgs 20:26-30), as the LORD prevailed for Ahab (1 Kgs 20:28). The LORD indicated His displeasure at Ahab for not killing Ben-Hadad I (1 Kgs 20:31-34) through a prophet of God (1 Kgs 20:35-43).

In the meantime, however, Shalmaneser III of Assyria was threatening both Syria and Palestine from the east. Ahab and Ben-Hadad I formed a military alliance with neighboring kings to meet Shalmaneser and stop his southern thrust. The combatants met at Qarqar (modern Khirbet Qarqur) on the Orontes River in a decisive battle unmentioned in the Bible but recorded on the Monolith Inscription of Shalmaneser.<sup>7</sup> Though Shalmaneser was probably the victor, the encounter prevented further southern penetration.

After thwarting the Assyrian threat, Ahab and Ben-Hadad I renewed their mutual hostilities because of Ahab's desire to retake Ramoth-Gilead (1 Kgs 22:1-3). It was this military prospect that occasioned Jehoshaphat's quest for the LORD's approval. Although the LORD caused Ahab's previous victories, the king demonstrated no interest in the things of God (1 Kgs 22:3-5). The LORD delivered Israel from defeat by Ben-Hadad I not because of Ahab, but in spite of him.

This is the immediate situation of the interpretive problem of this essay. A godless pagan Ahab sought to involve the God-fearing Jehoshaphat in a military operation to regain previously lost territory. Without seeking the LORD's leading or help, he plunged forward, little realizing that God had delivered him twice before, but would seal his

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<sup>6</sup>See John C. Whitcomb Jr., *Chart of Old Testament Kings and Prophets* (Chicago: Moody, 1968).

<sup>7</sup>James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958) 188-92.

doom in this third engagement with Syrian forces.

### INTERPRETIVE HISTORY

#### *Aetiological View*

Of thirteen theologically liberal scholars consulted, over half suggest this rationalistic view. They are not all fully agreed in their explanations, but are united in denying the literality of Scripture and the supernaturalness of God.

Heaton described "the spirit" as the Hebrew way of accounting for evil. He writes,

The sequel is worth pausing over, because it indicated how the existence of false prophecy was accounted for. Obviously it posed a problem. Had God lost control? Couldn't he stop it? . . . The Hebrews . . . preferred even to attribute calamity to God and so with astounding daring they also explained evil things like false prophecy as instruments used by God for his own purposes. . . . This naive explanation of evil may not satisfy us, but at least it enabled the Hebrew to maintain his faith in God's supreme sovereignty, despite what we should call "intellectual difficulties."<sup>8</sup>

Burney<sup>9</sup> and Eissfeldt<sup>10</sup> identify "the spirit" as an "imaginary" and "legendary" character, respectively. Eissfeldt observes,

For the vision accounts of Balaam and Micaiah ben Imlah are likely also to have been imitations by the narrators from what they could observe in the prophets of their own time. Thus we cannot go

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<sup>8</sup>Eric William Heaton, *His Servants The Prophets* (London: SCM, 1949) 25. Matheney (M. Pierce Matheney and Roy L. Honeycutt, Jr., *1-2 Kings* [in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, ed. by C. J. Allen; Nashville: Broadman, 1970] 223), Oesterly (W. O. E. Oesterly and T. H. Robinson, *Hebrew Religion: Its Origin and Development* [1944 rpt.; London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, n.d.] 222), Seigman (Edward F. Siegman, *The False Prophets of the Old Testament* [Washington: The Catholic University of America, 1939] 3-4), and Wellhausen (Julius Wellhausen, *History of Israel* [trans. by J. S. Black and A. Menzies; Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1885] 403) also take this basic position.

<sup>9</sup>C. F. Burney, *Notes On The Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings* (in *The Library of Biblical Studies*, ed. by Harry M. Orlinsky; New York: KTAV, 1970) 255.

<sup>10</sup>Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. by P. R. Ackroyd; New York: Harper and Row, 1965) 148.

further than saying that we have only biographical narratives, some of them of a legendary character. . . .<sup>11</sup>

A third variation of the aetiological position is explained by Eichrodt<sup>12</sup> as the development of the Hebrew concept of *ur* (*ra*, "spirit"). Von Rad considers "the spirit" to be the "spirit of Yahweh," which is a well-defined concept in the progressive development of the OT prophetic office.<sup>13</sup> They both see it as a developing concept with possible Canaanite and Ugaritic backgrounds.

The common element in each proponent is the interpreter's rationalistic explanation of a vision given to the prophet Micaiah, supposedly from God. Their positions are not well supported by biblical data.

### *Self-deluded View*

F. W. Farrar describes the subject passage as a "daringly anthropomorphic apologue." He writes, "The prophets were self-deceived, but this would be expressed by saying that Jehovah deceived them."<sup>14</sup> Typical of many older expositors, Farrar treats this enigmatic passage with little more than personal opinion expressed in somewhat elaborate and nebulous language.

More recently, this view has attracted wider support. Advocates include Dillard,<sup>15</sup> Kaiser,<sup>16</sup> and Vannoy<sup>17</sup>. Kaiser succinctly

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (2 vols., trans. by J. A. Baker; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) 2:52.

<sup>13</sup>Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. by D. M. G. Stalker; New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 2:56-57.

<sup>14</sup>F. W. Farrar, *The First Book of Kings* (in *The Expositor's Bible*, ed. by W. R. Nicoll; New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1903) 492-93. Also see Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible* (New York: Eaton and Mains, n.d.) 476; W. A. L. Elmslie *The Book of Chronicles* (in *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, 2nd ed., A. F. Kirkpatrick, ed.; Cambridge: University Press, 1916) 243-44.

<sup>15</sup>Raymond B. Dillard, "2 Chronicles," in *WBC* (ed. by David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. A. Barker; Waco: Word, 1987) 15:142.

<sup>16</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 256. Also idem, *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988) 120-21.

<sup>17</sup>J. Robert Vannoy, *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985) 520.

notes, "These prophets spoke `out of their open minds.'"<sup>18</sup> In this writer's analysis, the "self-deluded" approach does not do adequate justice to the immediate text or to similar texts such as Job 1`2, Zechariah 3, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation 12, because it does not allow for the reality of a heavenly encounter between God and "the spirit."

### *Demonic View*

A popular choice among conservatives, the demonic identification, also has early patristic support from Augustine (354-430 A.D.).<sup>19</sup> Recent advocates of this position are mostly conservatives.<sup>20</sup>

Though each of these scholars may have convincing arguments for his position, they usually offer sparse support. The following features have been used to identify "the spirit" as demonic:

1. The identification of  $\epsilon\psi\chi$  (*mal@k r#m*, "messengers of evil") in

<sup>18</sup>Kaiser, *Hard Sayings* 120.

<sup>19</sup>Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* (in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VIII, ed. by A. Cleveland Coxe and P. Schaff; New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1888) 376.

<sup>20</sup>These include Chafer (L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* [Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948] 4:294), Dickason (C. Fred Dickason, *Angels, Elect and Evil* [Chicago: Moody, 1975] 180, who seems to identify "the spirit" with demons, but does not rule out Satan), Feinberg (Charles Lee Feinberg, personal correspondence dated October 11, 1973, a view never formally published apparently), Gates (John T. Gates, "1 Kings," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* [ed. by C. F. Pfeiffer and E. F. Harrison; Chicago: Moody, 1962] 339), Hoyt (Herman Hoyt, "Biblical Eschatology" [unpublished class notes; Winona Lake: Grace Theological Seminary, 1966] 158), Jacob (Edmond Jacob, *Contemporary Old Testament Theologians* [ed. by R. B. Laurin; Valley Forge: Judson, 1970] 154), Kleinknecht (Hermann Kleinknecht, "pnema, pneumatikw," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [ed. by Gerhard Friedrich and trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromily; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968] 4:363), McClain (Alva J. McClain, John C. Whitcomb Jr., and Charles R. Smith, "Christian Theology`God and the World" (unpublished class notes; Winona Lake: Grace Theological Seminary, n.d.] 119-20), Merrill (Eugene H. Merrill, "1 and 2 Chronicles." in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* [John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds.; Wheaton: Victor, 1985] 633), Scott (Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible* [Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, and Crocker, and Brewster, 1831] 2:288), Strong (Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* [1970 rpt.; Old Tappan: Revell, n.d.] 457), and Wood (Leon J. Wood, personal correspondence dated October 3, 1973, a view never formally published apparently, but commented upon briefly in *The Holy Spirit In The Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976] 131).

- Psalm 78:49 as demons.<sup>21</sup>
2. The identification of *h ur* (*ra r#h*, "evil spirit") in Judg 9:23; 1 Sam 16:14-16; 18:10; 19:9 as demonic.<sup>22</sup>
  3. The numerous NT references to demons as spirits. Examples include Mark 1:23; Acts 8:7; 1 Tim 4:1; Rev 16:13-14.
  4. The article with "spirit" in 1 Kgs 22:21 is used in its generic sense.<sup>23</sup>
  5. The activity of "the spirit" in 1 Kgs 22:19-23 is representative of demonic activity.<sup>24</sup>

Against this view, however, there are some serious objections:

1. Nowhere in Scripture do demons appear before the throne of God.
2. The generic explanation of the article with "spirit" is only one of several grammatical possibilities.
3. Since demons are not omnipresent, one demon could not affect four hundred prophets simultaneously (1 Kgs 22:6, 22-23).

It appears that the majority of confusion and misunderstanding in this passage has resulted from a failure to identify the cause and effect relationship between 1 Kgs 22:1-7 and 22:19-23. Whoever or whatever "the spirit" in 22:21 is, it must also account for the reality of the prophets of Ahab prophesying falsely (cp. 1 Kgs 22:6 with 22:34-36). The demonic view can adequately explain the false prophecy, but is weak as an identification of "the spirit."

### *Personified View*

A majority of interpreters have adopted this, a position presented by all traditions of interpreters except Patristic.<sup>25</sup> Edersheim

<sup>21</sup>Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 376.

<sup>22</sup>Note the article is lacking in each instance.

<sup>23</sup>John Gray, *I and II Kings* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970) 452. Leon Wood reasons differently: "The article is only to designate a definite spirit . . . rather than merely spirits in general . . ." (personal correspondence).

<sup>24</sup>A. J. McClain, et al., "Christian Theology`God and the World" 119-20. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* 457.

<sup>25</sup>Included are Alden (Robert L. Alden, personal correspondence dates Sept 28, 1973), Barry (Alfred Barry, *1 Kings* [C. J. Ellicott, ed.; *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, rpt., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.] 2:95), Brown (R. E. Brown et al., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* [Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968] 197), Burrows (W. O. Burrows, *The First Book of Kings* [London: Rivingtons, 1899] 95), DeVries (Simon J. DeVries, *Prophet against Prophet* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978] 45; also idem, *1 Kings* [in WBC; Waco,

represents this view which has been variously explained:

It must not be understood as declaring what really took place in heaven, but as a vision in which the prophet saw before him, as in a parable, the explanation and the higher Divine meaning of the scene that had just been enacted before the two kings. . . . It was a real external vision, God directed, which the prophet describes; not a vision of what really occurred, the seduction of Ahab by his false prophets as the result of Divine judgment, was thus presented in a parable, as it were, from the heavenly point of view.<sup>26</sup>

As to specific identification of "the spirit," Keil comments,

The spirit (**ur** [*hra*, "the spirit"]) which inspired these prophets as a lying spirit is neither Satan, nor any evil spirit whatever, but, as the definite article and the whole of the context shows, the personified

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TX: Word, 1985] 268 and "The Three Comparisons in 1 Kings XXII 4B and Its Parallel and 2 Kings III 7B," *VT* 39/3 [1985]:283-306), Cook (F. C. Cook, ed., "1 Samuel Esther," in *The Bible Commentary* [1970 rpt., Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.] 222), Edersheim (Alfred Edersheim, *The History of Israel and Judah* [New York: James Pott and Company, n.d.] 69), Eichrodt (Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* 2:52; Eichrodt terms this the demonic aspect of the developing doctrine of the spirit), J. C. Gray (James C. Gray, *The Biblical Encyclopedia and Museum* [Hardford: S. S. Scranton, 1900] 3:102), J. Gray (John Gray, *I and II Kings* 452), Hammond (J. Hammond, *1 Kings* [H. D. M. Spence and J. S. Excell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary*; New York: Funk and Wagnalls, n.d.] 535), Honor (Leo L. Honor, *Book of Kings 1* [New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1955] 319), Keil (C. F. Keil, *The Books of the Kings* 276), Lumby (J. R. Lumby, *The First Book of the Kings* [Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, J. J. S. Perowne, ed.; Cambridge: University Press, 1894] 233), Montgomery (J. A. Montgomery and H. S. Gehman, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Kings* [ICC, C. A. Briggs, et al., eds.; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1930] 339), Nichol (F. D. Nichol, *The Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary* [Washington: Review and Herald, 1954] 840), Patterson and Austel (R. D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel, "1 & 2 Kings," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* [Frank E. Gaebel, gen. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988] 4:165), Rawlinson (George Rawlinson, *Kings' Books I and II* [*The Holy Bible*, F. C. Cook, ed.; New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1875] 619), Torrey (R. A. Torrey, *Difficulties in the Bible* 73-75), Whitcomb (J. C. Whitcomb, Jr., *Solomon to the Exile* [Winona Lake: BMH, 1971] 46), and Young (E. J. Young, *My Servants the Prophets* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952] 136-42).

<sup>26</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The History of Israel and Judah* 69.

spirit of prophecy. . . .<sup>27</sup> [transliteration and translation added]

Unfortunately, this view creates more problems than it solves. It provides a possible interpretation, but it does not explain the cause of the false prophecy in 1 Kgs 22:6. Moreover, it leaves the interpreter with the even larger problem of explaining what or who the personified spirit of prophecy is. Keil would respond,

But the false prophets as well as the true were governed by a supernatural spiritual principle, and, according to divine appointment, were under this influence of the evil spirit in the service of falsehood, just as the true prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit in the service of the Lord.<sup>28</sup>

However, if the Holy Spirit is God's dynamic force for true prophecy, then what reality accounts for the numerous accounts of false prophecy in the OT? The view does not explain this satisfactorily.

One possible explanation has been suggested by Whitcomb, "In the vision, the spirit who volunteered to entice Ahab's prophets may have been a personification of the spirit of false prophecy as in Zechariah 13:2."<sup>29</sup> But if this be true, what reality is the spirit personifying and how does this relate to the false prophecy in 1 Kgs 22:6? Who or what is the false spirit of prophecy? Both 1 Kgs 22:21 and Zechariah 13:2 demand that the energizing force behind the false prophecy be identified by something more than a biblical term; it must identify the actual cause! Commentators either briefly pass over 1 Kgs 22:21 with a quick identification or labor unconvincingly to find a token touch of causal meaning in the passage.<sup>30</sup>

Supporting arguments for this view include,

1. Grammatically **ר** **ur** (*ra eger*) is in the construct state and must be translated "spirit of deceit" rather than "deceiving spirit."
2. **ur** (*ra*) is used in a similar sense elsewhere in Scripture.
 

Exod 28:3	spirit of wisdom
Num 5:14	spirit of jealousy
Deut 34:9	spirit of wisdom
Judg 9:23	spirit of evil

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<sup>27</sup>C. F. Keil, *The Books of the Kings* 276.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>29</sup>J. C. Whitcomb Jr., *Solomon To The Exile* 46.

<sup>30</sup>E. J. Young, *My Servants The Prophets* 136-42.

Isa 11:2	spirit of wisdom and understanding spirit of counsel and strength spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord
Isa 19:14	spirit of distortion
Isa 28:6	spirit of justice
Isa 29:10	spirit of deep sleep
Jer 51:1	spirit of a destroyer
Hos 4:12; 5:4	spirit of harlotry
Zech 12:10	spirit of grace
Zech 13:2	spirit of uncleanness

Heinisch explains, "The hagiographer simply wished to emphasize the fact that every event, whatever the circumstances, has been willed by God and must be traced back to God as its final cause."<sup>31</sup>

By far the most serious objection to this view is its implications for interpreting similar passages. If this is a parabolic personification, how than are Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; Isa 6:1-13; Zech 3:1-10 to be understood? The normal conservative interpretation of each is that they were actual encounters in heaven. As a matter of fact, this was John's explanation of Isaiah 6 (cf. John 12:36-41.) He declares that Isaiah actually saw the glory of Christ on the throne.

### *Satanic View*

Although this view does not have the strongest numerical support, it is the majority choice of the early scholars who wrote concerning this passage.<sup>32</sup> In support of this position, the following proofs

<sup>31</sup>Paul Heinisch, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. by William Heidt; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1955) 122.

<sup>32</sup>Advocates of identifying "the spirit" as Satan are Cassian (John Cassian, *The Conferences of John Cassian* [E. C. S. Gibson, trans., in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, ed. by P. Schaff and Henry Ware; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted, 1955] 11:304), Chrysostom (John Chrysostom, *Epistles of Paul To The Corinthians* [T. W. Chambers, ed., in *Nicene Fathers*, First Series, ed. by P. Schaff; New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1888] 12:169), Davidson (A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* [S. D. F. Salmond; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1904] 302-3), Gill (John Gill, *An Exposition`The Old Testament* [London: W. H. Collinridge, 1853] 393), Heinisch (Paul Heinisch, *Theology of the Old Testament* 138), Kittel and Noth (R. Kittel and M. Noth, *Liber Regum* [Stuttgart: Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt, 1966] 554; see critical note on 1 Kings 22:21); John MacArthur, *God, Satan, and Angels* [Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace, 1987] 75), Oehler (G. F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* [trans. by G. F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. by G. E. Day; New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883] 449), Origen (Origen,

have been suggested:

1. The parallel situations of Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Zech 3:1-10; Rev 12:10, where Satan appeared before God in heaven, suggest "the spirit" in 1 Kgs 22:21 be identified as Satan. Merrill Unger notes, "This is an extremely attractive thesis since Satan is King and head over the demonic powers."<sup>33</sup>
2. The use of the article with "spirit" to indicate a particular, well known spirit suggests Satan.<sup>34</sup>
3. The title of "the father of lies" given to Satan by Christ in John 8:44, characterizes "the spirit" of 1 Kgs 22:21.
4. Paul's description of Satan as a disguised angel of light in 2 Cor 11:14 describes "the spirit" of 1 Kgs 22:21.
5. Satan's activity in Genesis 3 of deceiving Eve and in 1 Chr 21:1 of deceiving David suggest an identification of Satan. Also compare the influence of Satan upon Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit in Acts 5:3.
6. The deceiving activity of Satan in Revelation parallels that of "the spirit" in 1 Kgs 22:21. Cf. Rev 12:9; 20:3, 8, 10.
7. Ephesians 6:12 suggests that Satan is a spirit being. This is supported by Satan's entry into Judas. Cf. Luke 22:3 and John 13:27.
8. Second Thess 2:11-12 presents a clearly different but similar situation and uses almost identical language to describe God sending a deluding influence upon the world.

The most formidable argument against this view is that Satan is not omnipresent and could not possibly have entered the mouth of all four hundred prophets (1 Kgs 22:6, 22-23). Additionally, it has been suggested that *ruwr* (*ra eger*) (1 Kgs 22:22-23) is in the construct state and should be translated "spirit of deceit" rather than "deceiving spirit."

### *Angelic View*

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*Origen De Principiis* [trans. by F. Crombie, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951] 4:329), Payne (J. Barton Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962] 294; personal correspondence dated October 2, 1973 agrees as does "1 & 2 Chronicles" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* [Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988] 4:499), Wordsworth (Charles Wordsworth, *The Holy Bible* [London: Rivington's, 1868] 84).

<sup>33</sup>Merrill F. Unger, personal correspondence dated September 25, 1973.

<sup>34</sup>J. Barton Payne, *Theology* 294.

This view is an extreme possibility although it was not advocated by any scholar consulted. Though not supporting this idea, F. C. Cook suggests it as a possibility.<sup>35</sup> Because no indication is in the immediate text or anywhere else in the Bible that good angels are involved in deceiving activities, this view cannot receive serious consideration.

### *Non-committal View*

Several commentators, both liberal and conservative, conveniently chose to avoid dealing with the identity in question.<sup>36</sup>

## PHILOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### *Text*

The OT Massoretic Text has no textual variations within or between 1 Kgs 22:21 and 2 Chr 18:20. A comparison of 1 Kgs 22:21 with 2 Chr 18:20 in the LXX reveals a significant variation, however. The 1 Kings passage presents "*spirit*" as an anarthrous noun while in 2 Chronicles the noun is articulated. This is also at variance with the Massoretic Text.

The Aramaic Targum of Jonathon renders both verses 'iur (*r@*, "the spirit"). This original spelling indeed agrees with the MT because of its use of the postpositive article ' (@).<sup>37</sup> The Latin Vulgate is noteworthy because the definite article is absent from both passages. Since Latin has no word for either the definite or indefinite article,<sup>38</sup> the Vulgate witness is inconclusive.

In view of the MT and Aramaic Targum evidence for the article,

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<sup>35</sup>F. C. Cook *1 Samuel-Esther* 222.

<sup>36</sup>These included Benson (Joseph Benson, *The Holy Bible* [New York: T. Carlton and J. Porter, n.d.] 114), Dentan (R. D. Dentan, *The First and Second Books of the Kings* [in *The Laymen's Bible Commentary*, ed. by B. H. Kelly; Richmond: John Knox, 1964] 68-70), Josephus (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* [VIII:15, trans. by W. Whiston; Philadelphia: John E. Potter, n.d.] 224-25), Myers (Jacob M. Myers, *II Chronicles* [in *The Anchor Bible*, Wm. F. Albright and David N. Freedman, gen. eds.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965] 104-5), and Poole (Matthew Poole, *Annotations Upon The Holy Bible* [New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853] 713).

<sup>37</sup>Franz Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1961) 23.

<sup>38</sup>N. J. DeWitt, J. F. Gummere, and A. Horn, *College Latin* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1954) 12.

which is supported by the LXX reading in 2 Chronicles, the conclusion is that the article in 1 Kgs 22:21 is the correct rendering. Kittel considered the LXX reading of 1 Kings insignificant and did not include this variation in the critical apparatus of *Biblia Hebraica*.<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, no Dead Sea Scroll manuscript has 1 Kgs 22:21. However, there are fragments from 1 Kgs which include 1 Kgs 22:28-31. Examples of the Former Prophets have been located in several Qumrn caves. Milik observes, "They seem to be derived from the same Hebrew tradition as is represented in the LXX!"<sup>40</sup> Brownlee<sup>41</sup> and Baillet<sup>42</sup> concur with this analysis.

Several fragments of 1 Kings are included in *Les 'Petites Grottes' De Qumrn*. They are 1 Regum 3:12-14 (fragment 1), 1 Regum 12:28-31 (fragments 2, 3, and 4), and 1 Regum 22:28-31 (fragment 5).<sup>43</sup> These fragments are dated in the last half of the second century B.C. as verified by the antiquated orthography. In these five fragments, sixty-seven consonantal characters, all of which are in agreement with the Massoretic Text, occur. This in no way verifies that the MT is totally substantiated or validated by the DSS, but it does serve as an empirical demonstration of the MT's reliability after 1000 years of transmission through hand-lettered copies.

If LXX readings are more often reliable in the Dead Sea Scroll fragments of the Former Prophets than anywhere else in the OT, how does this affect the above conclusion that the article in 1 Kgs 22:21 is correct in light of its absence in the LXX? In view of the strong supporting evidence for the Massoretic reading, it appears that the LXX rendering could possibly be marred by a scribal error of omission although there is no absolute explanation for this mistake from the evidence at hand. Therefore, the remainder of this investigation assumes the validity of the articulated reading.

### *Syntax*

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<sup>39</sup>R. Kittel and M. Noth, *Liber Regum* 554.

<sup>40</sup>J. T. Milik, *Ten Years Discovery In The Wilderness of Judaea* (trans. by J. Strugnell; Naperville, ILL.: Alex R. Allenson, 1959) 25.

<sup>41</sup>W. H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumrn Scrolls for the Bible* (New York: Oxford, 1964) 12.

<sup>42</sup>M. Baillet, J. T. Milik, and R. deVaux, *Les 'Petites Grottes' De Qumrn* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962) 107.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 107-8.

The Article (**ur** [*hira*, "the spirit"])

Because of the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture, it can be ascertained that the articulated noun *hira* was used by the Holy Spirit for a specific reason. In Hebrew grammar the article is always omitted when a person or thing is represented as undetermined or unknown.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, it is conversely true that the article is used almost exclusively when the person or thing is determinable.

Of the numerous uses of the article in Hebrew, three possibilities are applicable to this problem.

1. The article is used to limit ideas of species to definite individuals or things.<sup>45</sup>
2. The article may be employed in a *generic* sense to indicate the totality of the individuals in the genus so that the union of a singular noun with the article includes every individual under the species.<sup>46</sup> This same effect can be equally well accomplished by the plural.
3. A peculiarity in Hebrew is the use of the article to designate a single unknown which is to be later determined or identified.<sup>47</sup>

Because "the spirit" is not later identified, alternative 3 can be dismissed from consideration. Either option 1 or 2 is valid. The first alternative seems to be the natural use in its simplest sense and is preferred in light of further supporting evidence. The generic use (alt. 2) is legitimate grammatically, but it is the more difficult use and is not necessary to identify "the spirit."

Construct State or Attributive Adjective? (**ur** [*ra eger*, "deceiving spirit"])

The expression *ra eger* occurs in vv. 22 and 23. Those who argue for the personified view, understanding "the spirit" to be the spirit of prophecy, interpret this form as the construct state, which would best be translated "spirit of deceit." The satanic and demonic positions demand that *eger* function as an attributive adjective and have the

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<sup>44</sup>E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (2nd ed., ed. by A. E. Cowley; Oxford: Clarendon, 1910) 377.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 376, and A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax* (3rd ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901) 25.

<sup>46</sup>E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* 377. Also see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction To Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 114.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 378.

meaning "*deceiving* spirit."

The form *ra* is used as both absolute and construct, which makes this determination difficult since the spelling is correct for either.<sup>48</sup> Obviously positive identification of the form is impossible, but the possibility that "the spirit" does not have to have a personified meaning is evident. It is absolutely essential to the demonic or satanic view that the attributive understanding (i.e., construct state) is legitimate. Those who use the construct state to support a personified position must recognize that the construct offers another attractive alternative.

#### Singular or Collective Use? (*ra eger*)

Almost any word may be used in the singular as a collective, especially words that name classes of persons or things.<sup>49</sup> The force of this observation is somewhat diminished in this particular instance by the normal plural form of "spirit" which is /*oiur* (*rt*). In context, however, vv. 22 and 23 speak of the effect upon the four hundred prophets of Ahab for which "the spirit" of v. 21 was to be responsible. Since one spirit (regardless of the identification) cannot be omnipresent in 400 men simultaneously, a collective understanding of *ra eger* is necessary.

Syntactically, it may be understood then that "the spirit" of v. 21 was responsible for a multiple deceiving effect upon the prophets. As theological considerations will show, the only alternative which can be naturally explained is that "the spirit" is none other than Satan.

#### *Semantics*

##### Spirit (*ra*)

The Ugaritic *rw*, meaning "wind, spirit, or breath,"<sup>50</sup> has four basic meanings:<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup>F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (1972 rpt, Oxford: Clarendon, n.d.) 924.

<sup>49</sup>A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax* 19.

<sup>50</sup>Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Handbook* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1947) 323, and Stanislaw Segert, *A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984) 201.

<sup>51</sup>David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967) 206-15; Hermann Kleinknecht, "pnema, pneumatikw," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, and trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromily; Grand Rapids:

1. breath/wind
2. a principle which gives life to the body
3. seat of emotions, intellectual functions, and attitude of will
4. supernatural influences acting upon men.

As expected, alternative 4 is the use in 1 Kgs 22:21-23.

Those who espouse the Personified View have identified "the spirit" with "the spirit of prophecy" as if this spirit of prophecy was a well-known concept. On the contrary, the phrase "spirit of prophecy" appears only once in the Bible. In Rev 19:10 the testimony of Jesus is equated with "the spirit of prophecy." This use associated with Christ could in no sense account for "the spirit" in 1 Kgs 22:21, much less for the false prophecy in 22:6.

The concept of a "spirit of prophecy" is surely derived from the familiar OT phrase, "the Spirit of the LORD came upon him and he prophesied. . . ." This is strengthened by 2 Pet 1:21 which directly testifies that the Holy Spirit is God's agent for the revelation of true prophecy. However, this does not account for a "spirit of false prophecy."

*Ra* in the OT and *pnema* (*pneuma*, "spirit") in the NT are used in reference to demons. Such OT passages as 1 Sam 16:23; 18:10; 19:9 possibly use "evil spirit" in reference to demonic activity. Far more conclusive is the NT use, especially in the gospels. Examples include Mark 1:23; Acts 8:7; 1 Tim 4:1; Rev 16:13-14.

Neither Testament calls Satan a spirit, but this does not make the identification impossible. Because Satan entered into Judas (cf. Luke 22:3; John 13:27), he must be a spirit being. Further, Paul's description of a Christian's battle against the forces of evil equates Satan (Eph 6:11) with a force not of flesh and blood but with "spiritual" (*pneumatikw* [*pneumatikos*]) forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12).

Semantically, a good case can be made for either a Satanic or demonic identification of *ra* in 1 Kgs 22, but a "spirit of prophecy" responsible for false prophecy finds no support.

Entice (**h** [*pth*]) and Deceive (*ra eger*)

*Pth*, which can be translated "deceive, entice, persuade, seduce, or prevail upon," has the basic idea of overcoming or prevailing.<sup>52</sup>

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Eerdmans, 1968) 4:359-67; Paul Younger, "A New Start Towards A Doctrine of the Spirit," in *CJT* 13:2 (1967):123-33.

<sup>52</sup>F. Brown et al., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon* 834; Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 786; also see

This victorious result is obtainable either legitimately or dishonestly. In Jer 20:7-9; Ezek 14:9, this activity is credited to God. In Exod 22:16, it has the sense of a man seducing a virgin sexually, and in Deut 11:16, it involves deception which results in turning away from truth. Only context can determine the legitimacy of the action whereby one prevails over another.

+*Seqer* involves deception by words through falsehoods and lies.<sup>53</sup> It speaks in Jer 14:14; 23:25-26; 29:21 of prophets prophesying falsely, in Ps 101:7 of a lie, and in Prov 17:4 of a liar.

The interchange of these two terms in 1 Kgs 22:23 is interesting in that it highlights the difference between two almost synonymous words. In 22:20 God asks for a volunteer to entice (*pth*), and in 22:21 "the spirit" volunteers to entice or, better yet, prevail. When God asks "the spirit" in 22:22 what activity would be used, "the spirit" replies he would be a deceiving spirit (*ra eger*). In 22:22-23 God approved of the deceiving activity (*eger*) which resulted in overcoming (*pth*) Ahab in the sense that God allowed it to occur, not that He planned or approved of the dishonest means to a legitimate end.

Jer 20:7-9 and Ezek 14:9 prove that God prevails and overcomes. The direct statement in Tit 1:2 and the fact that God is never associated with the word *eger* in the OT confirms that He never lies. However, overcoming by falsehoods is an activity characteristic of Satan and his demonic agents.

## HERMENEUTICAL CONSIDERATIONS<sup>54</sup>

### *Figurative Language In Prophecy*

#### Symbolic Speech

More than one interpreter has erred by failing to understand the purpose of symbols used prophetically. A basic maxim which provides guidance and stability is, "Prophecy arises out of a historical

R. Laird Harris et. al., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980) 2:742-43.

<sup>53</sup>Brown et al., *Lexicon* 1010, 1055.

<sup>54</sup>Two recent volumes can be consulted for key aspects of the hermeneutical process. See Elliot E. Johnson, "Hermeneutical Considerations of the Goal of Interpretation," in *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 31-53. Also William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction To Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993) 87-116, discuss presuppositions and preunderstanding.

situation."<sup>55</sup> This leads logically to a normal interpretation of prophecy, recognizing the legitimate use of speech figures. Symbols in prophetic passages represent the reality of a literal person or object about which the author writes.

Mickelsen suggests three characteristics for symbols:<sup>56</sup>

1. The symbol is itself a literal object.
2. The symbol is used to convey some lesson or truth.
3. The connection between the literal object and the truth it teaches becomes clearer in light of the intention of the one who used the symbol

Once a figure has definitely been pinpointed, it is then the interpreter's responsibility to seek diligently the literal idea the author intended. For example, four beasts in Dan 7:3-7 are used symbolically, but the interpreter finds help at 7:17 where Daniel explains that these four beasts are four literal kingdoms. John describes Jesus in Rev 1:12-16 with symbols and then furnishes the literal meaning of several of these symbols in v. 20.

What symbols did Micaiah see in his vision of 1 Kgs 22:19-23, and what are their interpretations? First, it must be recognized that this vision is symbolic in terms of self-interpreting anthropomorphisms. First, the expressions "the LORD sitting on His throne" and "all the host of heaven standing by Him" are anthropomorphically communicating the setting for Micaiah's vision. Instead of requiring a separate interpretation such as in Daniel or Revelation, these phrases are self-explanatory. Second, although the surroundings have an anthropomorphic description, the main personages are not also necessarily symbolic.

In the demonic view, "the spirit" is symbolic of demonic agents, and their appearance before the LORD symbolically represents God's permissive will with respect to demonic activity. "The spirit" then symbolically pictures that real dynamic or energizing power which caused the prophets to prophesy falsely in 1 Kgs 22:6. Inherent in this understanding also is the generic use of the article as discussed above. This explanation, however, ignores Satan's reign over demons and creates a bigger problem—why is Satan bypassed in this process?

While this possible interpretation is legitimate, it does require a unique happening never repeated before or after in Scripture. It is more natural to recognize the anthropomorphic background of the

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<sup>55</sup>A. J. McClain, *The Greatness of The Kingdom* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959) 135.

<sup>56</sup>A. B. Mickelsen, *Interpreting The Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 265-66.

vision, but to interpret "the LORD" and "the spirit" literally. With this approach, "the spirit" seems certain to correspond with Satan's other literal appearances before God in Job 1; 2; Zech 3:1; Rev 12:10.

### Parables

Those interpreters who advocate the Personified View identify "the spirit" as the personified spirit of false prophecy in a parabolic vision that approximates the setting of 1 Kgs 22:3-6. This connection between heaven and earth must be made to introduce the parable into the context. Does the vision in 1 Kgs 22:19-23 qualify as parabolic, though?

According to all definitions of parables, 1 Kgs 22:19-23 can legitimately be termed a parable. It is like other OT parables, e.g., 2 Sam 12:1-4. Yet this is the only feature that qualifies the Personified View as a legitimate possibility hermeneutically.

The next issue is whether the parabolic explanation of "the spirit" accounts for the reality of false prophecy in 1 Kgs 22:6. Those holding the Personified View would answer that it is "the spirit of false prophecy." But the question arises, "Who or what is the spirit of false prophecy?" It is at this point that the parabolic interpretation and its attendant identification falters.

The most defensible position is that 1 Kgs 22:19-22 has not been placed alongside 1 Kgs 22:6 for comparison as the parabolic understanding demands, but rather is a causal explanation for the actual false prophecy in 22:6. The more natural explanation is to understand Micaiah's vision to include a real encounter between God and Satan. Satan then performed the deception through his demonic assistants according to God's permissive will. J. Barton Payne concurs:

I would hesitate to involve the hermeneutic of symbolic interpretation without contextual substantiation, though it is true, the statement about the "spirit" occurs in a vision (yet most of us would argue for literalism even in such a case: cf. hell in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, or the millennium in the visions of Revelation). A connection in time and place with Job would favor Satanic understanding. . . .<sup>57</sup>

### *Biblical Visions*

A vision involves a supernatural presentation of certain events before the mind of the prophet that can be represented symbolically

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<sup>57</sup>J. Barton Payne, personal correspondence dated October 2, 1973.

(Dan 4:10-17) or actually (Ezek 8:5-18). Furthermore, because some objects in a vision can be symbolic, it is not necessary that all the objects be symbolic (Rev 4:2`5:14). A good rule of thumb is not to interpret symbolically when the object can be real, especially when there are no theological objections to do so (Ezekiel 40`48; Isa 65:25).

Visions can be *predictive*, such as that given to Micaiah in 1 Kgs 22:17 and 1 Kgs 22:19-23, or *didactic*, as when Micaiah communicated his vision to Ahab and Jehoshaphat after the fact. The subject passage affords a very rare situation because both the predictive and didactic aspects, along with the fulfillment, are present within the same context. The vision had originally been given to Micaiah by God as predictive; it was fulfilled in 1 Kgs 22:6; and it was related in its didactic sense in 22:19-23.

Why was the vision given to Micaiah? Obviously, the primary purpose was didactic, for the vision was not revealed by Micaiah until after the prophecy was fulfilled. What then does the vision teach? Two elements seem prominent. First, the four hundred prophets of Ahab had indeed prophesied falsely. Second, "the spirit" was the source from which the false prophecy had originated.

"The spirit," however identified, must account for the prophecy in 1 Kgs 22:6 which Jehoshaphat correctly evaluated as false. Interpreting "the spirit" as a personification of the spirit of prophecy does not provide a real answer as to the cause of false prophecy. The Holy Spirit is the source of God-breathed prophecy, but who or what is responsible for false prophecy?

A response might be that the prophets were just lying and really did not know the answer to Ahab's question. However, it would not be to the prophets' benefit to prophesy falsely, knowing that there was good reason to believe that the prophecy might fail. It was this same basic situation that the Chaldeans faced when Nebuchadnezzar challenged them to tell him his dream (Dan 2:1-11). Even in the face of a death sentence (Dan 2:12-13), they refused to speak falsely.

What caused Ahab's prophets to prophesy falsely? It certainly was not the Holy Spirit of God. Therefore, another source must be identified, one that would make the prophets believe their prophecy was indeed true. Biblically, that leaves two choices: Satan or his demonic assistants. This explanation fully satisfies the inquiry into the real source of false prophecy.

Additional support for a primarily literal as opposed to symbolic understanding of Micaiah's vision is added by three biblical

visions whose settings approximate 1 Kgs 22:19. The prophet Isaiah through a vision viewed the LORD with His heavenly court. In Isaiah 6, the description recalls Micaiah's account of the celestial encounter in 1 Kgs 22:19. The context of Isaiah 6 suggests an essentially literal understanding as does John's God-inspired, NT commentary. John 12:40 quotes from Isa 6:10 and interprets that Isaiah actually saw the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ (739 B.C.).

Joshua the high priest, the angel of the LORD, and Satan were all participants in the vision recorded in Zechariah 3. Not only the setting but also the appearance of Satan before the LORD is instructive as a parallel to 1 Kgs 22:19-23. Finally, the setting in Rev 4:2 approximates that of Micaiah's vision also, as do Ezek 1:26-28; Dan 7:9-10; Acts 7:55-56.

These passages by themselves are not sufficient to demand a literal interpretation of "the spirit" as Satan. However, taken together, they are other positive indicators which compel serious consideration for a Satanic identification of "the spirit."

## THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### *Satan*

#### Satan In The OT

Job 1:2 depicts Satan's appearing before God at the assembly of the sons of God. During this encounter, God and Satan discussed the future of an earthly inhabitant, i.e. Job. Understanding that the scene is anthropomorphically described, one is hard pressed to understand it as anything but a literal interpretation. Job 1:13-22; 2:7 record the real events resulting from this heavenly conference.

The similarities between these Job passages and 1 Kings 22 are striking in character and setting. Delitzsch, commenting on Job 1, opposes Keil's understanding of 1 Kings 22. He observes, "Finally, it agrees with 1 Kings xxii.19-22, Zech. iii., on the one hand and Apoc. xii. on the other that Satan here appears still among the good spirits. . . ." <sup>58</sup> Zckler similarly states, "In 1 Kings xxii.19, where a scene greatly resembling the present is discovered, the tempter bears no name, but his individuality is distinct, for he is characterized as *the spirit*." <sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>F. Delitzsch, *Job* (in *Commentary On The Old Testament*; trans. by Francis Boltin; rpt., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) 4:53.

<sup>59</sup>Otto Zckler, *The Book of Job* (in *Lange's Commentary On The Holy Scriptures*, trans. by

In Zech 3:1 Satan personally appeared before the LORD in the presence of others. This seems to reflect the norm for Satan's appearances in the OT.

That Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel is the report of 1 Chr 21:1. Interestingly, the parallel passage in 2 Sam 24:1 suggests that it was the LORD who caused David to conduct the census. John Davis explains,

The Chronicles account and the Samuel account merely reflect two aspects of the same incident. Satan was the immediate cause of David's action, but, theologically speaking, God was the ultimate cause in that He did not prevent the incident from occurring.<sup>60</sup>

The 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21 passages not only provide an almost identical parallel for identifying "the spirit" as Satan, but also mirror the causal factors in 1 Kgs 22:22-23. In v. 22 "the spirit" is the prevailer, and in 22:23 Micaiah attributes the false-prophecy phenomenon to the LORD.<sup>61</sup> By His permissive will, God allowed Satan to deceive the four hundred prophets of Ahab.

Illustrative of Satan's deceiving activities is his encounter with Eve in the Garden of Eden. The serpent in Gen 3:1 is certainly Satan (compare 1 Tim 2:14; Rev 12:9; 20:2). When man began to inhabit this earth, Satan was the chief deceiver. His character in Genesis 3 vividly recalls "the spirit" in 1 Kings 22.

These appearances of Satan in the OT and their close resemblance to 1 Kings 22 in action and character are strong reasons to identify "the spirit" as Satan. The personified spirit of prophecy has no

L. J. Evans; 1971 rpt., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.) 4:294.

<sup>60</sup>J. J. Davis, *The Birth of A Kingdom* (Winona Lake: BMH, 1970) 164; also see Richard Mayhue, *Unmasking Satan* (Wheaton: Victor, 1988) 138-39.

<sup>61</sup>James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971) 83, notes, "The divine responsibility for false prophecy is nowhere expressed more unequivocally than in the story of Micaiah ben Imlah (1 Kings 22:1-40)." See also J. J. M. Roberts, "Does God Lie? Divine Deceit As A Theological Problem in Israelite Prophetic Literature," in *Congress Volume: Jerusalem 1986* (ed. by J. A. Emerton; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988) 211-20. Although this subject deserves at least an article-length discussion, let it suffice for now to say that while God is ultimately the first cause of all, He is not the morally responsible, immediate agent of sin such as false prophecy (Job 2:10; Isa 45:7; Lam 3:38). Thus, it is asserted that the events of 1 Kings 22 were not caused by God's decreed will, but rather allowed by His permissive will, for which there is then human and angelic accountability to God in judgment.

biblical support in the realm of deceit and false prophecy, and thus is unconvincing. The possibility of "the spirit" representing demons collectively is recognized, but demons are never known biblically to have appeared before God. OT theology strongly supports the Satanic identification.

#### Satan in the NT

Satan is not directly referred to as "a spirit" in either Testament unless "the spirit" of 1 Kings 22 is Satan. This does not mean, however, that Satan is not a spirit. The Bible has indirect indications that Satan is a spirit. In 2 Cor 11:14, Satan is called an angel of light. Angels, of course, are spirits (Heb 1:14; cf. Ps 104:4). Satan must be spirit by nature, for he entered into Judas (Luke 22:3; John 13:27). Further, Paul discusses how to combat Satan in Eph 6:10-20. The opponent is identified in v. 11 and the nature of Satan is discussed in 6:12. The struggle is not against flesh and blood but against "spiritual" (*pneumatikw* [*pneumatikos*]) forces of wickedness. The nature of Satan as spirit in being harmonizes with a Satanic identification of "the spirit" in 1 Kings 22.

The apostle John characterizes Satan as a being in whom there is no truth, who is a liar, and in fact, is the father of lies (John 8:44). It was "the spirit" in 1 Kgs 22:22 who suggested deceit as the means to prevail over Ahab. Satan is the most likely identification.

The strongest objection to the Satanic identification is that Satan is not omnipresent and could not have indwelt all four hundred prophets simultaneously; so he could not be "the spirit." It is correct that Satan is not omnipresent, *but* this does not negate his identification as "the spirit." Satan can be in only one place at any given time because he is not the omnipresent God.<sup>62</sup> However, the effect upon many prophets can be explained by Satan's relationship with demons.

Matt 12:24 identifies Satan as the ruler of demons. Matt 25:41 and Rev 12:9 speak of Satan and his angels. Demons are fallen angels.<sup>63</sup> It is this precise relationship that of Satan's ruling over

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<sup>62</sup>Compare Job 1:7 and 1 Pet 5:8. Also see Rev 20:2-3 where Satan is confined to the abyss for one-thousand years.

<sup>63</sup>C. R. Smith, "The New Testament Doctrine of Demons," *Grace Journal* 10/2 (Spring 1969):32-35. Dr. Smith has written a well-documented case for demons being identified as fallen angels. Also see Ps 78:49 where demons are referred to as a band of destroying ("evil," NASB margin) angels.

demons`which explains Satan's worldwide ministry of evil and explains how one spirit who is not omnipresent could affect many prophets simultaneously.<sup>64</sup> One of the many functions of demons is to disseminate false information.<sup>65</sup> Jas 3:14-15 suggests that being against the truth is from a demonic source. It is perfectly natural that demons assisted Satan in light of his ruling relationship over them.

Acts 10:38 illustrates this inseparable relationship between Satan and demons. Peter, speaking to Cornelius, relates how Christ went about doing good and healing all whom Satan had oppressed. Numerous NT cases of people whom Christ healed, involved demon possession.<sup>66</sup> Here, Peter apparently speaks of Satan (the ultimate cause) who ruled and directed the demons (the immediate cause).

The height of attempted Satanic deception is in Matt 4:1-11. Satan attempted to deceive God in human flesh. The Lord Jesus Christ thwarted this subtle effort only because He is God. The deceiving activities of Satan in Revelation are frequent and worldwide in scope (Rev 12:9; 20:3, 8, 10). If Satan attempted to deceive Christ, he must have found it easy to deceive Ahab's four hundred.

Satan is called the father of lies in John 8:44. Ananias and Sapphira knew personally of this Satanic influence as Peter detected (Acts 5:1-11).

Rev 12:10 states that Satan accuses the brethren in the presence of God day and night. The fact that Satan accuses is not significant for identifying "the spirit," but the place of the accusations is. Satan stands before the presence of God, a characteristic that fits 1 Kgs 22:19-23.

Paul indicates Satan's relationship with false prophets in 2 Cor 11:13-15 where he notes that they disguise themselves as false apostles just as Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. False prophets are actually servants of Satan, so it is not surprising to see a direct relationship in 1 Kings 22 between false prophets and Satan.

Second Thess 2:9-12 in its similarity to 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21, parallels 1 Kings 22 in emphasis. Satan is at work through the lawless one (2:9-10), causing God to "send upon them" a deluding influence so that they may believe what is false (2:11).<sup>67</sup> The

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<sup>64</sup>M. F. Unger, personal correspondence dated September 25, 1973. Dr. Unger writes that **ur** is "probably a reference to , since the **ur** has the article. This is an extremely attractive thesis since Satan is King and Head over the demonic powers."

<sup>65</sup>M. F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology* 199.

<sup>66</sup>See Matt 4:24; 9:32; 12:22; 15:21-28.

<sup>67</sup>Robert L. Thomas, "1, 2 Thessalonians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Frank E.

close parallel between these three passages is perhaps the most convincing argument for the Satanic identification of "the spirit" in 1 Kgs 22:21.

## CONCLUSIONS

This essay has examined 1 Kgs 22:21 to identify "the spirit" which caused the false prophecy in 1 Kgs 22:6. The disciplines of philology, hermeneutics, and theology have been used as evaluative tools.

Six possible views—the aetiological, self-deluded, angelic, personified spirit of prophecy, demonic, and Satanic positions—received initial attention. The aetiological view was inadequate because of rationalistic presuppositions concerning the Scriptures and God. Replacement of biblical reasoning by subjective opinion was the basis for ruling out the self-deluded view. The angelic view failed because of the absence of biblical indications that good angels practice deceiving activities. This left the personified, demonic, and Satanic identifications as reasonable possibilities.

First came an investigation of philological matters. Textually the articulated reading of "spirit" was substantiated and found syntactically to support any one of the three reasonable alternatives. Next, *רַעַר* (*ra eger*) proved to be either "the spirit of deception" or "deceiving spirit," allowing for the correctness of any of the three views. Semantically, the use of *רַעַר* (*ra*) supported only the demonic or Satanic view as did the usage of *חַטְּהוּ* (*pth*) and *עֵגֶר* (*eger*).

Second, a hermeneutical investigation of the symbolic speech of the passage demonstrated that it was possible to understand Micaiah's vision literally as supporting the Satanic view, symbolically supporting the demonic view, or parabolically as supporting the personified spirit of prophecy view. However, in light of the literal understanding of Satan's appearances before God in Job 1 and 2, Zechariah 3, and Revelation 12, the Satanic view emerged as the most natural and the most likely.

The study of biblical visions reduced the possible causes of false prophecy in 1 Kgs 22:6 by one. The demonic and Satanic positions remained possible although the Satanic understanding was favored because of similar literal interpretations of heavenly visions in Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7, Zechariah 3, Acts 7, and Revelation 4. Hermeneuti-

cally, the Satanic view was most probable in both Testaments, but was not conclusive.

Third, the theological implications of OT and NT revelation concerning Satan, which include his activities and character, best describe "the spirit." Finally, the answer to the objection to a Satanic identification`i.e., that Satan is omnipresent and could not affect all four hundred prophets simultaneously`demonstrated Satan's role as ruler over demons. This relationship and the known activities of Satan theologically provided the most consistent explanation for identifying "the spirit" as Satan and demons as Satan's instrument in the mouths of Ahab's false prophets.

These philological, hermeneutical, and theological factors lead to the conclusion that "the spirit" in 1 Kgs 22:21 was in fact Satan and that demonic activity, initiated and superintended by Satan, provided the dynamic force responsible for the false prophecy in 1 Kgs 22:6.