

“Jehoshaphat: Teach and Trust”

2 Chronicles 17-20

This summer we are studying the good kings in 2 Chronicles. We began our series looking at what God expected from His kings of His people in Deut. 17. God's kings had to write out their own copy of His word, they had to be accountable to God through the prophets, who pointed the kings to God's Word and the priests who guided the king about worship. Chronicles is a retelling of the history of Israel from David to the end of the Babylonian exile to the generation of Israelites who returned to Israel most of whom were born in Babylon. So they needed to learn how to live for God and how to worship God as God prescribed in His Word in their own land with the temple.

Therefore the Chronicler only focuses on the kings of Judah and highlights their good points so that the people would learn what pleased God then so they can please God now as they have returned to the land of Israel. You always have to learn to read the Bible first through the lens of the original audience. So we have to read Chronicles through the eyes of a returned exile who needs to know what mistakes not to make that got them into exile and to walk with God and His Word because He has graciously brought you home as He promised.

The last king we looked at was Asa. He was a good king who most of his life walked with God but didn't finish well at all. After 35 years of trusting God, he made the poor choice of using his God-given wealth to get him out of trouble with the north. He paid off the Arameans who had been helping northern Israel, who then broke off their agreement with them thus reducing Israel's army. So yes, Asa spared the Judah from war but he didn't trust God. God sent the prophet Hanani to rebuke Asa, who refused to repent and threw Hanani in jail. Then *Asa was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the LORD, but only from the physicians (16:12).*

Watching all this, I'm sure, was his son, Jehoshaphat, who saw how his father ended poorly and seemed to have learned from that. One day Hanani's son Jehu, who was also a prophet, would have to confront Asa's son Jehoshaphat the king. We'll see how he responds in a little while.

Jehoshaphat gets a lot of space in Chronicles, second only to Hezekiah – the two best kings of Judah. Asa named him, Yahweh is judge and Jehoshaphat must have learned that early in life. Here's what we read about him:

Jehoshaphat his son succeeded him as king and strengthened himself against Israel. ² He stationed troops in all the fortified cities of Judah and put garrisons in Judah and in the towns of Ephraim that his father Asa had captured. ³ The LORD was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the ways of his father David before him. He did not consult the Baals ⁴ but sought the God of his father and followed his commands rather than the practices of Israel. ⁵ The LORD established the kingdom under his control; and all Judah brought gifts to Jehoshaphat, so that he had great wealth and honor. ⁶ His heart was devoted to the ways of the LORD; furthermore, he removed the high places and the Asherah poles from Judah. ⁷ In the third year of his reign he sent his officials Ben-Hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel and Micaiah to teach in the towns of Judah. ⁸ With them were certain Levites—Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah and Tob-Adonijah—and the priests Elishama and Jehoram. ⁹ They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the LORD; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people. ¹⁰ The fear of the LORD fell on all the kingdoms of the lands surrounding Judah, so that they did not go to war against Jehoshaphat. ¹¹ Some Philistines brought Jehoshaphat gifts and silver as tribute, and the Arabs brought him

flocks: seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred goats.

So what are some things we learn about Jehoshaphat?

He was Genuinely Concerned for God's People (17:1-2, 12-19)

Jehoshaphat spent time and resources on their defense which protects their territory and property which protects the people. He especially made sure the towns of Ephraim his father captured were safe and secure. Those towns in Ephraim that were captured were in Northern territory. Jehoshaphat didn't want to give them back up. The people in the North had drawn away from God. They were worshipping golden calves that they said was God! Jehosha-phat didn't want to see any idol worship in his land so he protected his land and in doing so protected his people. He couldn't control what God's people did but he could put safe-guards around them to protect them from idolatry and going down a self-destructive path.

If we genuinely care for God's people that He's placed in our circle of influence, we need to do what we can to protect and prevent them from making idolatrous and sinful, self-destructive choices. We can't control our children, our friends or church family but we can guide them and protect them from things they don't need to see or know about or be involved in.

In vv.12-19 we are given the numbers of soldiers as well as how they are organized. While we easily skim over these exciting lists the Chronicler gave his father's army numbered at 580,000 in 14:8 whereas Jehoshaphat's army is exactly twice the size. This is God's way of affirming to the reader that He was blessing and protecting Israel as Jehoshaphat followed God.

Jehoshaphat showed He cared for the people spiritually as well. In vv.3-9 we read that he sent priests and Levites to teach the Word of God throughout the towns of Judah. In order to help God's people stay faithful to God they needed to know His Word. So Jehoshaphat had God's Word taught because . . .

He Had a Passion to Spread God's Word (17:3-9, 19:1-11)

How did he come to have this passion for God's Word?

He lived it (vv.3-6)

³... he followed the ways of his father David before him. He did not consult the Baals
⁴[he] sought the God of his father and followed his commands rather than the practices of Israel [idol worship] ⁶His heart was devoted to the ways of the LORD; furthermore, he removed the high places and the Asherah poles from Judah

You can't have a passion for God's Word if you're not obeying it. The more you know it and live by it, the more you love it. Listen to these verses out of Ps. 119,

²Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart—

¹⁰I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.

¹⁴I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

¹⁶I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.

Listen to how Jesus connects joy in God with obedience:

John 15:9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

True, lasting joy comes from obeying God's Word which creates a stronger desire to know God and His Word more. Jehoshaphat lived it. And so he wanted others to have this same passion therefore,

He had it taught (vv.7-9)

Levites and priests taught throughout Judah taking with them the Word of God. Jehoshaphat knew the key to God's blessing was the people's obedience. If the nation wanted to experience peace and security they needed to follow God. He made sure they knew what God said. For the returned exiles who are reading this for the first time, this is a reminder for them that even though you're back in the land the key to staying there and receiving God's peace and blessing was obedience to the Word of God.

In ch. 18 Jehoshaphat will make a serious mistake and in ch. 19 he will be confronted by the prophet Jehu, son of Hanani the prophet who confronted Jehoshaphat's dad, Asa. Unlike his father

He responded positively to rebuke (19:1-3)

When Jehoshaphat king of Judah returned safely to his palace in Jerusalem, ² Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani, went out to meet him and said to the king, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, the wrath of the LORD is on you. ³ There is, however, some good in you, for you have rid the land of the Asherah poles and have set your heart on seeking God." ⁴ Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem, and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim and turned them back to the LORD, the God of their ancestors.

You can't turn people back to God if you don't turn back yourself. The word 'turn' here is significant. It's the same word found in 2 Chron. 7:14 when God answered Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple and said,

¹⁴ if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Jehoshaphat turned from his wicked alliance with King Ahab in ch. 18 and then he again saw that the Word was taught since . . .

He applied it justly and broadly (19:5-11)

He went from Beersheba in the south to Ephraim in the north and

⁵ He appointed judges in the land, in each of the fortified cities of Judah. ⁶ He told them, "Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for mere mortals but for the LORD, who is with you whenever you give a verdict. ⁷ Now let the fear of the LORD be on you. Judge carefully, for with the LORD our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery." ⁸ In Jerusalem

also, Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites, priests and heads of Israelite families to administer the law of the LORD and to settle disputes. And they lived in Jerusalem. ⁹He gave them these orders: "You must serve faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the LORD. ¹⁰In every case that comes before you from your people who live in the cities—whether bloodshed or other concerns of the law, commands, decrees or regulations—you are to warn them not to sin against the LORD; otherwise his wrath will come on you and your people. Do this, and you will not sin. ¹¹"Amariah the chief priest will be over you in any matter concerning the LORD, and Zebadiah son of Ishmael, the leader of the tribe of Judah, will be over you in any matter concerning the king, and the Levites will serve as officials before you. Act with courage, and may the LORD be with those who do well."

He turned them back to the Lord not only by removing places of idol worship but by ensuring the laws were applied with justice so everyone's needs were met and cases were heard. The purpose of just laws was so that neither the judges nor the people would sin against the Lord.

Since Jehoshaphat cared for his people God blessed them and. . .

He Had a Good Testimony in the Community **(17:10-11; 20:29-30)**

¹⁰The fear of the LORD fell on all the kingdoms of the lands surrounding Judah, so that they did not go to war against Jehoshaphat. ¹¹Some Philistines brought Jehoshaphat gifts and silver as tribute, and the Arabs brought him flocks: seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred goats.

They probably didn't go to war because Jehoshaphat was so well protected. Just because you have a strong army doesn't necessarily mean you're going to attack anyone; it just means you're protecting your people and land. That drew the respect of the surrounding nations; even their enemies, the Philistines and the Arabs. They didn't want to mess with Judah. They even gave him gifts, which causes the reader to think just like the days of Solomon.

The author of Chronicles makes these connections deliberately to the 'good ole days when Solomon or David was on the throne. And rightly so because he wants to let the returned exiles know that God's blessing can always happen again when His people walk in faithfulness to His Words.

And over in ch. 20:29-30, after God had given Jehoshaphat a great victory (which we'll discuss in a moment) we read,

²⁹The fear of God came on all the surrounding kingdoms when they heard how the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. ³⁰And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side.

They didn't fear Jehoshaphat, they feared God. When you and I walk with God the people around us will see the difference He's making in our lives. They may not be able to explain it; they may not even give God the credit; but they can't help but notice our life is good and making a difference around us. All because we are trusting God.

Yet Jehoshaphat wasn't perfect – and neither are we. He had one major weakness:

He Made Poor Choices in Relationships **(18:1-3; 20:35-37)**

Look at ch. 18:1-3.

Now Jehoshaphat had great wealth and honor, and he allied himself with Ahab by marriage. ² Some years later he went down to see Ahab in Samaria. Ahab slaughtered many sheep and cattle for him and the people with him and urged him to attack Ramoth Gilead. ³ Ahab king of Israel asked Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "Will you go with me against Ramoth Gilead?" Jehoshaphat replied, "I am as you are, and my people as your people; we will join you in the war."

Jehoshaphat's counterpart in the north was King Ahab and Jezebel! Jehoshaphat had his firstborn Jehoram, marry one of Ahab and Jezebel's daughters. This would almost result in the annihilation of David's line had God not miraculously stepped in later on. Read 2 Chron. 21-23 later this week.

Not only does he make the poor choice of having his son marry the daughter of a godless couple, he agrees with Ahab to go to war together – another poor choice. He will learn from this poor choice but years later he will make another poor choice. Look at 20: 35-37, again late in life:

³⁵ Later, Jehoshaphat king of Judah made an alliance with Ahaziah king of Israel, whose ways were wicked. ³⁶ He agreed with him to construct a fleet of trading ships. After these were built at Ezion Geber, ³⁷ Eliezer son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have made an alliance with Ahaziah, the LORD will destroy what you have made." The ships were wrecked and were not able to set sail to trade.

After Ahab and Jezebel died Jehoshaphat sought to make a financial deal with the new king of the north. Again this decision is a poor one and God won't allow it to pan out.

God uses a prophet once again to confront Jehoshaphat with his sinful decisions about wrong alliances. Perhaps Jehoshaphat thought he could bring the north and south together. Maybe he thought he was godly enough to do it. We sometimes think that way. We think that we might be more spiritual than some others that if they only listened to what we had to say they could fix their marriages, raise better kids, solve their financial woes, get to church more often, etc. God warns us in Rom. 12 not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. It is not our job to fix people; God can do that quite fine. And wasn't it Jesus who said take out the log in your own eye before trying to remove the speck in your brother's eye.

Although he had a weakness with making unwise friends, there was one other thing that Jehoshaphat did well;

He Sought God's Direction when Making Decisions **(18:4; 20:1-12)**

Even when Ahab convinced him to join with him in attacking Ramoth-Gilead in the north, east of the Jordan, Jehoshaphat said

"First seek the counsel of the LORD."

And in ch. 20 Judah is attacked by the Moabites, Ammonites and Meunites. They are way outnumbered. Jehoshaphat calls for a nationwide time of fasting and prayer.

³ Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. ⁴ The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him. ⁵ Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and

Jerusalem at the temple of the LORD in the front of the new courtyard⁶ and said: "LORD, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you.⁷ Our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?⁸ They have lived in it and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying,⁹ 'If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.'¹⁰ "But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them.¹¹ See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance.¹² Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

God would speak through one of the Levites who told Jehoshaphat all they needed to do was march out and be in position for war but only to watch God deliver Judah without a single arrow shot. You can read the miraculous delivery yourself later.

Jehoshaphat did seek God when he was in trouble. And his prayer 'We do not know what to do but our eyes are on You' should be become part of our own prayer language when talking to God about difficulties we can't see the way out from (20:12).

Jehoshaphat was one of the best kings; genuinely concerned for others, passion to know and spread the Word of God, a good testimony overall and he usually sought God when needing to make decision. His poor relationships would hurt him as some-times our poor choices when our trusting in people (instead of God) hurts us.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net