

Part Three —The Kings: Jehoshaphat

Upon the death of his father, Asa, Jehoshaphat took the throne. He was a righteous king and followed in the footsteps of his father. At this time there was a serious threat of war with Israel. Jehoshaphat took measures to protect his country.

And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead, and strengthened himself against Israel. And he placed forces in all the fenced cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim, which Asa his father had taken. And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; But sought to the LORD God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. Therefore the LORD stablished the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honour in abundance. (2 Chr. 17:1-5).

Most kings become vain and full of pride when they become rich and powerful. But not Jeshoshapat. Instead of allowing his success to go to his head, we read:

And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the LORD: moreover he took away the high places and groves out of Judah. Also in the third year of his reign he sent to his princes, even to Benhail, and to Obadiah, and to Zechariah, and to Nethaneel, and to Michaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. And with them he sent Levites, even Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tobadonijah, Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, priests. And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the LORD with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people. And the fear of the LORD fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat. (2 Chr. 17:6-10)

Even after Asa's reformation, some Israelites adhered to idolatry. Jehoshaphat determined to rid the land entirely of this abomination. He knew education was the most important factor in influencing his people, and his purpose was for them to be knowledgeable in the Law of God. The result was that the people learned to have the proper fear and respect for God. Jehoshaphat continued to direct the entire nation in the right direction. "And Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly; and he built in Judah castles, and cities of store" (2 Chr. 17:12). He had a standing army of 1,160,000 men, and many more who were stationed in fenced cities.

But Jehoshapat had one weakness. He desired to be allied with the Israelites of the northern kingdom. They, after all, were his kith and kin, and perhaps he longed for the former days when the whole house of Israel was united. But he overlooked one important fact. The northern kingdom was steeped in idolatry, and Ahab, its king, was one of the worst idolaters of all. Jehoshaphat ". . . joined affinity with Ahab" (2 Chr. 18:1). What does the Bible say about Ahab?

And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him. (1 Kings 16:30-33)

Ahab was the worst king ever to rule in the northern kingdom. He was completely under the spell of his

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pagan wife, Jezebel. “But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up” (1 Kings 21:25). Ahab had been at war with the Syrians and had lost territory east of the Jordan River. He determined to recover these lands. But he needed help. He took advantage of a visit made to him by Jehoshaphat.

And after certain years he [Jehoshaphat] went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramothgilead. And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Wilt thou go with me to Ramothgilead? And he answered him, I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war. (2 Chr. 18:2-3)

Even after agreeing to join Ahab, Jehoshaphat had reservations. He wanted to know if God approved of this venture? A true prophet was summoned and prophesied disaster for the venture, as well as the impending death of Ahab (1 Kings 22:19-23). Ahab ignored the warning, and Jehoshaphat went along with his stubbornness. In the battle that followed, Ahab was slain, and Jehoshaphat barely escaped with his life.

So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramothgilead. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and will go to the battle; but put thou on thy robes. So the king of Israel disguised himself; and they went to the battle. Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of the chariots that were with him, saying, Fight ye not with small or great, save only with the king of Israel. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him; and God moved them to depart from him. For it came to pass, that, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back again from pursuing him. (2 Chr. 18:28-32)

God spared Jehoshaphat in spite of his bad judgment, but what was the fate of Ahab? He must have thought his disguise would protect him from danger, but this was not the case.

For it came to pass, that, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back again from pursuing him. And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: therefore he said to his chariot man, Turn thine hand, that thou mayest carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. And the battle increased that day: howbeit the king of Israel stayed himself up in his chariot against the Syrians until the even: and about the time of the sun going down he died. (2 Chr. 18:32-34)

Jehoshaphat was rebuked for this mistake and learned a lesson—a lesson which stuck with him for a long period of time. He was able to take correction from a prophet of God, a thing that was difficult for his father, Asa.

And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God. (2 Chr. 19:1-3)

He put the experience behind him and continued in his zeal for God. He was determined to correct his mistake—setting the wrong kind of example by his alliance with the wicked king Ahab.

And Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem: and he went out again through the people from Beersheba to

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mount Ephraim, and brought them back unto the LORD God of their fathers. And he set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city, And said to the judges, Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts. (2 Chr. 19:4-7)

He encouraged the judges to be honest, and to be strong and courageous (vv. 8-11). Jehoshaphat had been misdirected in his political decision to join Ahab, but he was not misdirected in his zeal for God.

Later on, another crises arose. "It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazontamar, which is Engedi. (2 Chr. 20:1-2)

What did Jehoshaphat do? "And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD" (2 Chr. 20:3-4). Here was the fruit of his program to enlighten the people about God. They knew where to come for help.

Notice what Jehoshaphat said in his prayer to God.

And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir, whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not; Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee. (2 Chr. 20:10-12)

God inspired a prophet to give him and the people a message.

Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation; And he said, Harken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you. (2 Chr. 20:14-17)

How did Jehoshaphat respond to this encouragement?

And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another. And when Judah came toward the watch tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped. And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to

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take away the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance both riches with the dead bodies, and precious jewels, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away: and they were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much. (2 Chr. 20:20-25)

God's blessings on the kingdom of Judah increased dramatically.

And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah; for there they blessed the LORD: therefore the name of the same place was called, The valley of Berachah, unto this day. Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in the forefront of them, to go again to Jerusalem with joy; for the LORD had made them to rejoice over their enemies. And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the LORD. And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the LORD fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest round about. (2 Chr. 20:26-30)

But in his old age, Jehoshaphat lapsed into his desire to be involved with the northern kingdom. He joined Ahaziah, the wicked king of Israel, in a shipbuilding project in the Gulf of Aqaba, a northern arm of the Red Sea.

And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly: And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Eziongeber. Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Maresah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish. (2 Chr. 20:35-37)

God cursed this venture, and nothing came of it. What closing remarks does the inspired record say concerning Jehoshaphat?

And Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah: he was thirty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. And he walked in the way of Asa his father, and departed not from it, doing that which was right in the sight of the LORD. Howbeit the high places were not taken away: for as yet the people had not prepared their hearts unto the God of their fathers. (2 Chr. 20:31-33)

In spite of his best efforts, Jehoshaphat was unable to completely eradicate idolatry from the land. Not all the people had set their hearts on returning to God, but God blessed the nation because of Jehosaphat's righteousness. Much good resulted from his reign. He was a great man of the Old Testament.