

JEHOSHAPHAT AND DEALING WITH THE BATTLES OF LIFE
2 CHRONICLES 20

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Professor James Holmes from the US Naval War College describes this engagement as the second most significant naval battle in world history. The year was 1588. Philip II was on the throne of Spain. He was recognized as the most powerful ruler in the world at that time, and his navy was the most dominant force sailing the world's oceans. Spain had colonies scattered throughout the world.

England also had outposts in the New World, but it had experienced leadership struggles. Henry VIII had broken away from the Catholic Church. When he died, his young son Edward became king. Then Edward's older sister Mary became queen and tried to reimpose Catholicism upon the land. Philip II actually married Queen Mary, who acquired the nickname of Bloody Mary for her harsh treatment of evangelical Christians. But Mary died suddenly and was replaced by her sister, Elizabeth I, who was a Protestant. She promoted Protestantism. She made a treaty with the Protestants in the Netherlands to provide protection for them.

This was all too much for King Philip of Spain. With the backing of the pope, he decided that the Spanish needed to invade England and reestablish Catholicism as the true religion of the land. So he began gathering an armada to accomplish the task. He put together 130 ships with 8000 seamen and 18,000 soldiers. The plan was to pick up 30,000 additional soldiers as the armada neared England. In Las Vegas the odds makers were betting heavily on the Spanish.

In some of the battles which we encounter in life the odds seem heavily weighed against us. The scene of battle may be health, old age, conflicts with people, work situations, finances, addictions, or family relationships. It is these crises of life which reveal the source of our real security. To what, or to whom, will we turn?

King Jehoshaphat in the ninth century BC was facing a physical battle. We saw last week from Chapters 17-19 of 2 Chronicles that he was regarded as one of the godly kings of the southern kingdom of Judah. (PROJECTOR ON--- DIVIDED KINGDOM) He promoted worship of the true God and tried to rid his kingdom of idols, especially idols related to the religion of the Canaanites.

We saw that Jehoshaphat had a major slipup during his reign. He bought into the tradition of the Ancient Near East of marrying off his son to someone from another country's royalty. In this case he arranged a marriage with a daughter of Ahab, the evil king who ruled in the northern kingdom of Israel. He followed up this effort to draw closer to his fellow Hebrews by agreeing to assist Ahab in attacking the Syrians. A

prophet warned the two kings not to do it. They proceeded anyway. Ahab was killed in battle. Jehoshaphat barely escaped with his life. He seemingly learned from this incident, which lesson was reinforced by another prophet of God who spoke to Jehoshaphat.

In the passage before us today we find evidence of King Jehoshaphat's increased faith as he faces another battle. That is the subject of our study in 2 Chronicles #20. (which is found on p. 372 of the black Bibles under many of the chairs)

I. A.

(I. JEHOSHAPHAT'S SUCCESS IN HIS BIGGEST BATTLE IN LIFE) In vv. 1-30 of 2 Chronicles #20 we learn about JEHOSHAPHAT'S SUCCESS IN HIS BIGGEST BATTLE IN LIFE. In the first part of this section, vv. 1-3, we discover THE NATURE OF THE BATTLE. (I. JEHOSHAPHAT'S...A. THE NATURE OF THE BATTLE) Verse 1 through the first part of v. 3 says, **"After this the Moabites and Ammonites, and with them some of the Meunites, came against Jehoshaphat for battle. 2 Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, 'A great multitude is coming against you from Edom, from beyond the sea; and, behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar' (that is, Engedi). 3 Then Jehoshaphat was afraid..."**

(DIVIDED KINGDOM) The Meunites were from Edom, to the southeast of Judah. It appears that this combined army was approaching Judah from the southeast. Ammon and Moab were to the east of the Jordan and the Dead Sea. Besides picking up the Meunites along the way, perhaps they thought that this flanking maneuver was more likely to yield success rather than attacking Judah directly from the east.

This foreign army is described as a great multitude, or a vast horde. Last week we saw that Judah had an army of 1.16 million men. The original word for "thousand" may have actually referred to smaller military units. In the previous battle Judah was allied with Israel against one enemy nation. This time Judah is fighting alone against an army representing three nations. The text implies that Judah is at a great numerical disadvantage.

Intelligence reports indicate that this foreign enemy is already at Engedi (ENGEDI MAP), which was less than fifty miles to the southeast of Jerusalem. The natural reaction to this situation on the part of Jehoshaphat and company was fear. It was a serious situation. The question was: How will Jehoshaphat respond?

That is the challenge which is posed to us in the most serious battles of life.

(PROJECTOR OFF) How will we respond? What is the source our real security in life? In what, or in whom, will we place our trust? Our most serious battles in life are ultimately spiritual in nature. They raise ultimate questions about the meaning and source of life and the reality of God.

Such was the challenge to Queen Elizabeth I. By all accounts she was a genuine believer in Jesus. She was a product of the Protestant Reformation where leaders like

Martin Luther and John Calvin objected to traditional Catholic teaching and turned to the Biblical emphasis upon salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus with the Scriptures as the source of all authority. There was a chapel next to the English palace which Elizabeth visited each day for regular prayer. Unlike her sister Mary, Elizabeth would not persecute her religious opponents. She tolerated the Catholics. Yet Philip II was coming for her, intent upon wiping her and her supporters out.

B.

In the second part of v. 3 through v. 19 we learn about THE RESPONSE TO THE BATTLE OF FAITH IN GOD. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. A. B. THE RESPONSE TO THE BATTLE...) According to the second part of v. 3 through v 4, **“...and [Jehoshaphat] set his face to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. 4 And Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord; from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord.”**

Jehoshaphat has learned his lesson about the need to turn to the Lord in faith in times of battle. The phrase about “seeking the Lord” has appeared several times in the account of his life. That faith is reflected in his declaration of a national fast. Fasting was not a requirement of the Old Testament Law, but it was a practice which first began in the time of Samuel and was practiced by some of God’s people in times of special stress.

The king’s announcement of a national fast was met by a great response from his people. Why was this the case? It was due to the seriousness of the situation, but also to the king’s promotion of Biblical literacy. Back in #17 vv. 7-9 we were told that Jehoshaphat early in his reign sent a teaching team throughout his country to explain to his people the law of God. There is a lesson in that for us. We are better prepared to meet the crises of life if we have developed a solid foundation in God’s word.

So here in Judah there was a big meeting held at the Jerusalem temple. The king led in a beautiful prayer. We read in vv. 5-9, **“And Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court, 6 and said, ‘O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you. 7 Did you not, our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? 8 And they have lived in it and have built for you in it a sanctuary for your name, saying, 9 “If disaster comes upon us, the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before you—for your name is in this house—and cry out to you in our affliction, and you will hear and save.””** Thus the king remembers God’s character and his past dealings with Israel and His promises.

Jehoshaphat seems to show a knowledge of his ancestor Solomon and his prayers. (2 CHRONICLES 6:34) Solomon in 2 Chronicles 6 vv. 34 & 35 prayed, **“If your people go out to battle against their enemies, by whatever way you shall send them, and**

they pray to you toward this city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, (2 CHRONICLES 6:35) then hear from heaven their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause.” Jehoshaphat seems to recall the faith of his ancestor.

The king continues his prayer in vv. 10-12 of our text: (PROJECTOR OFF) **“And now behold, the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom you would not let Israel invade when they came from the land of Egypt, and whom they avoided and did not destroy— 11 behold, they reward us by coming to drive us out of your possession, which you have given us to inherit. 12 O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”**

When God brought Moses and his people toward the promised land, He told them not to bother these people groups who are now attacking Judah. (PROJECTOR ON--- DEUTERONOMY 2:9) In Deuteronomy #2 v. 9 God told Moses and the children of Israel, **“Do not harass Moab...”** A few verses later (DEUTERONOMY 2:19) He added, **“...the people of Ammon, do not harass them...”** Both of these ethnic groups were descendants of Lot and thus related to the children of Israel. But now this earlier kindness is met with evil. Jehoshaphat throws his entire faith upon YHWH, the God of Israel, to deal with this wrong.

It is a great prayer. It is an example for us in times of crisis. We likewise need to claim the promises of God and throw ourselves upon His care for us. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The story continues in vv. 13-17: **“Meanwhile all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children. 14 And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly. 15 And he said, ‘Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the Lord to you, “Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's. 16 Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they will come up by the ascent of Ziz. You will find them at the end of the valley, east of the wilderness of Jeruel. 17 You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.” Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out against them, and the Lord will be with you.”**” A quick answer to Jehoshaphat’s prayer from the Lord comes through a prophet. This prophet is a descendant of the line of Levites who were charged with providing music for worship in the temple.

Thus the Lord takes on responsibility for this battle. Such is the faith which their ancestor David displayed. In his battle against Goliath (PROJECTOR ON--- 1 SAMUEL 17:47) he declared, **“...the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand.”** David in that case did have to take on Goliath. In this case Israel only needs to stand by and watch what happens.

In the battles which we face we sometimes need to directly become involved in conflict. Sometimes we do not. It is better just to stand by and pray and watch how the Lord works out situations. We need wisdom from God to know how to respond individually and as a group. As a church we do not have enough resources in people and money to attack every injustice and meet every need which we see in the world around us. So we need wisdom to know where to get involved.

The confrontation involving Judah is going to take place at the ascent of Ziz. (ASCENT OF ZIZ) This was a valley ascending from the Dead Sea to the southeast of Jerusalem. The Hebrews gathered in Jerusalem were instructed to go to this place to see what would happen.

According to vv. 18 & 19 in our story, **“Then Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshiping the Lord. 19 And the Levites, of the Kohathites and the Korahites, stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.”** In response to the revelation from God through this prophet Jahaziel the administration immediately set up press interviews, signed him to book deals, and sent him on a speaking tour. No, they simply fell to the ground and worshiped God.

In the face of the looming battle facing Queen Elizabeth I (QUEEN ELIZABETH) she also turned to faith in God. Her political opponents called her a bastard child. The most powerful country in the world set out to dethrone her. This godly woman continued in her daily prayers in her private chapel. The Spanish armada approached England in the summer of 1588. In July and August there were some initial skirmishes in the English Channel against the British navy. Trenches were dug on the beaches near London. The outlook was grim.

On August 9, 1588, the queen addressed 4000 troops posted at a town on the seashore named Tilbury. In her speech she declared, **“Let tyrants fear. I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and good-will of my subjects; and therefore I am come amongst you, as you see, at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live and die amongst you all; to lay down for my God, and for my kingdom, and my people, my honour and my blood, even in the dust.**

“I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm: to which rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field.”

At the end of her message she vowed, **“...we shall shortly have a famous victory over these enemies of my God, of my kingdom, and of my people.”** (SPANISH

ARMADA MAP) Unknown to the queen and her people at the time, their naval forces had just had some success in fighting off the Spanish. The leaders of the armada recognized that they needed to regroup. A sudden strong wind from the south forced the enemy fleet to move to the north, and the danger of an invasion was put off.

C.

We come then in vv. 20-25 to GOD'S INTERVENTION IN THE BATTLE. (I. A. B. C. GOD'S INTERVENTION IN THE BATTLE) We take up the story in v. 20: **"And they rose early in the morning and went out into the wilderness of Tekoa. And when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, 'Hear me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established; believe his prophets, and you will succeed.'"** Tekoa was just ten miles southeast of Jerusalem. (WILDERNESS OF TEKOA) The scene would have looked something like this. King Jehoshaphat's faith remains strong. He urges the people to believe in YHWH their God and in his prophets.

Verse 21 says (PROJECTOR OFF), **"And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the Lord and praise him in holy attire, as they went before the army, and say, 'Give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever.'"**

This is an interesting military strategy, isn't it? Send the choir to the front ahead of the assault troops. The king and his supporters are putting great confidence in God. They are especially focusing upon His steadfast love. This is that Hebrew word *chesed*, which describes an essential attribute of God--- his steadfast love, sometimes translated as "loyal love."

In v. 22 the Lord goes to work: **"And when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed."** Praise and thanksgiving seem to be the human keys which set God into action

Verse 23: **"For the men of Ammon and Moab rose against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, devoting them to destruction, and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they all helped to destroy one another."** The Meunites were the ones who were based around Mt. Seir. Thus this enemy coalition fractures and ends up in self-destruction. But we know that it is the sovereign work of God.

Verses 24 & 25: **"When Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, they looked toward the horde, and behold, there were dead bodies lying on the ground; none had escaped. 25 When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take their spoil, they found among them, in great numbers, goods, clothing, and precious things, which they took for themselves until they could carry no more. They were three days in taking the spoil, it was so much."** This is total destruction. The army of Judah did not have to lift a finger to accomplish the victory. All which they had to do was to collect the spoils. God's intervention was clear to them.

In 1588, after initial skirmishes with the British navy (SPANISH ARMADA 2) the Spanish armada need to regroup. They were short of food and water. They needed to make some repairs on their warships. The wind blew them north. So the Spanish leaders decided to go around the British Isles and come down around Scotland and Ireland. But storms came early that fall. They were bad storms. Many of the Spanish ships were driven into the rocks. Some of the Spanish sailors became seriously sick and died. Some drowned and others actually starved to death. Some of the Spanish were captured or killed by the inhabitants where their ships were driven to shore. The ships were looted. The historians estimate that 5000 of the sailors in this Spanish armada were killed in these ways. It was a disaster for them.

As we approach the Thanksgiving season, it is incumbent upon us to remember the ways in which God has intervened in our battles and delivered us from difficult situations.

D.

In vv. 26-30 we learn about THE AFTERMATH OF THE BATTLE. (I. A.. B. C. D. THE AFTERMATH OF THE BATTLE) According to v. 26, **“On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Beracah, for there they blessed the Lord. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Beracah to this day.”** “Beracah” means “blessing.” This battle was preceded by a national fast. Now it is concluded with a thanksgiving service. They recognize how God has blessed them with a victory and with the spoils of war. In turn they bless the Lord, which means that they praise and thank Him.

Verses 27 & 28: **“Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat at their head, returning to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had made them rejoice over their enemies. 28 They came to Jerusalem with harps and lyres and trumpets, to the house of the Lord.”** The king leads in the celebration. Music plays a central role in what happens. Also they meet in Jerusalem in the temple.

We are planning a joint Thanksgiving service on the Wednesday night before Thanksgiving. Perhaps that is something that is worthy of your attention, and He would be pleased to have you there. The people of Judah were motivated to worship collectively after their victory. Perhaps some of us have seen the Lord help us in our battles in this past year. We would be happy to have you join us on Thanksgiving Eve in the parking lot with several other churches in town who will be joining us,

Verses 29 & 30 in our text describe two practical results from the victory of Judah over the enemy coalition: **“And the fear of God came on all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel. 30 So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around.”** Judah experienced peace as a result of this battle. Also the country gained fear and respect from the surrounding nations. Perhaps it was this battle which resulted in the willingness of the Philistines and Arabs in #17 v. 11 to pay tribute to Judah. Victories in

physical and spiritual battles have lingering positive effects upon us and upon the people around us, especially if divine intervention is involved.

Professor Holmes from the Naval War College says this about the defeat of the Spanish in the battle with England: **“Had the Armada replaced a Protestant with a Catholic monarch, it’s conceivable that the British Empire never would have been founded--- and certainly not in the form it actually took. How would Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Ocean history have unfolded then? The Implications of that question boggle the mind--- and qualify the Armada’s defeat as decisive in the largest sense.”** (The National Interest, Dec. 20, 2019) I would add that there were tremendous spiritual effects that stemmed from this battle. For it was Protestants from England who had a profound effect upon the establishment of evangelical Christianity in what would become the United States. An English queen who trusted in the God of the Bible was instrumental in this outcome.

II.

We come finally to vv. 31-37 and THE EPILOGUE OF JEHOSHAPHAT’S LIFE. (II. THE EPILOGUE OF JEHOSHAPHAT’S LIFE) According to vv. 31 & 32, **“Thus Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah. He was thirty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. 32 He walked in the way of Asa his father and did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord.”** We know that Jehoshaphat messed up badly in his alliance with evil King Ahab. So it is fascinating to see this overall positive evaluation of his life. This is especially true since we find out that he messed up again.

Verse 33: **“The high places, however, were not taken away; the people had not yet set their hearts upon the God of their fathers.”** The devotion and spiritual commitment of the common people is still incomplete.

Verse 34: **“Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, from first to last, are written in the chronicles of Jehu the son of Hanani, which are recorded in the Book of the Kings of Israel.”** Jehu is probably the prophet who is described in 1 Kings #16.

A problem arises in vv. 35 & 36: **“After this Jehoshaphat king of Judah joined with Ahaziah king of Israel, who acted wickedly. 36 He joined him in building ships to go to Tarshish, and they built the ships in Ezion-geber.”** This tendency which Jehoshaphat has shown to unite with the northern kingdom gets him in trouble again. We can understand his desire to reunite the whole country. But the northern kings have all been characterized as evil. Perhaps he justifies his action by thinking that this is not a joint military operation. This is just a business deal. Perhaps he also tries to justify it by thinking that Ahaziah from Israel is a different king. He is not as bad as his father Ahab.

But Ahaziah is evil. In v. 37 we find the Lord’s intervention again: **“Then Eliezer the son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, ‘Because**

you have joined with Ahaziah, the Lord will destroy what you have made.' And the ships were wrecked and were not able to go to Tarshish."

This is the end of the story of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles. We might wonder how the king of Judah responded to this latest incident. We still have the overall positive evaluation in v. 32. That verse says that Jehoshaphat did the right thing. But does this incident at the end of his life mess up his grade?

Fortunately we have an additional bit of information about Jehoshaphat (1 KINGS 22:49) from 1 Kings #22 v. 49. After the ships were wrecked, we are told, **"Then Ahaziah the son of Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, 'Let my servants go with your servants in the ships,' but Jehoshaphat was not willing."** The good thing with Jehoshaphat is that his pride does not keep him from listening to God's prophets. He learns his lessons and gets back on track.

Such is the lesson for us. We all mess up at times. When that happens, we need to get back on track with the Lord. The most important thing which we need to do is to make sure that we have put our trust in Jesus. The Bible tells us that we are all sinners who are separated from a holy God by our sinful condition. Jesus was God who became a man. Because he had a divine nature and a human nature, His death on the cross was sufficient to pay the penalty for our sins. But in order to benefit from that we must personally put our trust in Him. We must believe that He was and is God as well as man and that He died in our place. When we trust in Him, we receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.