

LESSON EIGHTEEN 15-17

ASA, THE REFORMER; HANANI, MAN OF GOD. THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JEHOSHAPHAT

4. THE REIGN OF ASA—Continued (14-16)

INTRODUCTION

King Asa worked a religious reformation among his people. Asa's alliance with Syria brought the prophet's rebuke. Jehoshaphat provided good leadership for Judah.

TEXT

(Scripture text in Lesson Seventeen)

PARAPHRASE

(Scripture text in Lesson Seventeen)

COMMENTARY

Azariah, son of Oded, appears on the scene to bring the word of Jehovah to Asa. There are twenty eight different persons in the Old Testament named Azariah. The name "Azariah" means "Jehovah is keeper." The prophet addressed his words specifically to Judah and Benjamin. The northern kingdom is called "Israel" in verse 3. Asa's only hope was to trust Jehovah. He must go with God. He must seek the Lord. The alternative carried with it some terrible consequences. If Jehovah's people are unfaithful, He will forsake them. Those Hebrews who had been a part of the northern kingdom had suffered anguish that could not be described. God had abandoned them. There was no priest to plead their cause. They did not even have the advantage of hearing the reading of the Law. There were some Israelites who in their extremity had turned to God in deep repentance. Azariah reminded Asa that Jehovah had heard their cry. The majority of the people in the northern kingdom had been carried into captivity and there they lost their identity. Azariah told Asa that these awful sorrows could be avoided if king and people would seek Jehovah. He charged the king to be courageous and promised

that Asa's good work would be rewarded.

Azariah's ministry moved Asa to destroy all of the idols he could find in his kingdom. Verse 8 speaks of "the prophecy of Oded". Oded is mentioned here only because he was Azariah's father. The king repaired the altar of burnt offering and set it where it was supposed to be in the court of priests just in front of the Temple. The good work that Asa accomplished was advertised throughout the kingdom. From scattered places in the land of Palestine the people came to Jerusalem. Seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep were offered to Jehovah on the altar. The third month corresponds nearly with our month of May.

Jehovah's word through Azariah produced good results. As the king provided good leadership, the people were encouraged to do God's will. Once again the covenant (as in Genesis 12:1-3) was renewed. This commitment to the Lord was complete as Moses had demanded in his day (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5). Asa was so certain that his reformation was what the Lord desired that he dared to pronounce the death penalty on anyone who would not cooperate. An idolatrous city, a false prophet, or a person who worshipped idols were to be destroyed or put to death according to the Law (Deuteronomy 13). In this matter there was to be no respect of persons. Verses 14 and 15 describe what happens when God's Spirit moves His people. Azariah had come clothed in the Spirit. He shared the Spirit with Asa. The king by his strong leadership and his fear of Jehovah shared the Spirit with all of the people. They pledged themselves to the Lord. They praised Him with song and musical instruments. Peace reigned in their hearts and in their land.

If a king deprived a queen mother of her authority in the kingdom, he had to have a very good reason for his action. From Bathsheba's time the queen mother had exercised considerable power in Jerusalem. Maacah, queen mother had set up an Asherah (a pole or an obelisk) which she used in her worship of Baal. Asa dared to ruin her place of worship and to remove her from the government of Judah. Making dust out of an image reminds us of the golden calf at Sinai. The Kidron

valley had already been desecrated by heathen worship, so it was a proper place to burn this idol. Asa did what he could to work a complete reformation. He was not able to remove all idolatry because so much of it remained in the hearts of the people. He did what he could to re-establish the Temple and make it the true center of worship for Jehovah's people. He could not live long enough nor could he exercise sufficient authority to completely cleanse the people and the land. "His heart was perfect all his days". This does not mean that he made no mistakes or that he did not sin. He conscientiously tried to do God's will.

Baasha was used by Jehovah to bring the dynasty of Jeroboam to an end. Nadab, Jeroboam's son, had sinned like his father. One day Nadab was in the village of Gibbethon about twenty miles north west of Jerusalem. Baasha killed Nadab and began to reign as Israel's king (I Kings 15:25-28). Late in the reign of Asa, Baasha fortified the southern boundary of his kingdom at Ramah (about eight miles north of Jerusalem). Baasha did not want his people to have any contact with the southern kingdom. Asa was alarmed at Baasha's military action and he made a counter move in buying protection from Benhadad and the Syrians. Such alliances were contrary to Jehovah's purpose; however, Asa's move was very effective in causing Baasha to discontinue his fortifying the southern border of Israel. Once more the Temple was robbed of its treasures in order to pay the Syrians. Ben-hadad was in an agreement with Baasha. He did not hesitate to break this pact. The Syrians attacked the northern border of Baasha's kingdom at Ijon, Dan, and Abel-maim. These places were located in Naphtali not far from Mount Hermon. When Baasha learned about these border attacks, he withdrew from Ramah. Asa took advantage of the situation and used stones and timbers out of Ramah to fortify Geba and Mizpah on the north border of the southern kingdom. Geba was about ten miles north of Jerusalem in the territory of Benjamin. Mizpah was about three miles north west of Geba.

Hanani appeared at this time to rebuke Asa for trusting in Syria rather than in Jehovah. A "seer" was one who by

Jehovah's endowment had more knowledge and understanding than ordinary persons. Samuel was called a "seer" when Saul was hunting his father's lost asses (I Samuel 9:9). Hanani implied that the Syrians should have been defeated in battle instead of being paid money as allies. Asa was reminded of the great victory over the Ethiopians (14:9) which Jehovah granted because Asa and Judah trusted God. The prophet declared that nothing happens among men which is hidden from Jehovah's eyes. Wherever He finds one "whose heart is perfect", He provides whatever may be needed. The man with "the perfect heart" relies on the Lord and thinks His thoughts after Him. Asa was charged with foolishness and was informed that he would be involved in war for the remainder of his reign. Like other prophets who had spoken unpopular messages, Hanani was mistreated by Asa. He was thrown into a "house of stocks", a place of torture. Asa was so upset by the words of the seer that he turned his wrath upon some of the citizens of his kingdom. In these matters Asa showed himself to be unworthy of the high office which he filled.

Historians were a part of Asa's cabinet and they kept careful records of his reign. So Asa's life was recorded in "the book of the Kings of Judah and Israel". The king's last years were most difficult. He was involved in war and all of the attendant political problems. He also suffered from diseased feet. He could have been afflicted with gout.¹ In these extreme circumstances he failed to call on God. He forgot his manner of life when he was a great reformer. Asa turned only to physicians for healing and forgot to turn to Jehovah in prayer. He began his reign very well. He concluded his life in misery and shame. After a reign of forty one years he died. He was granted all of the honors of a kingly burial and his remains were placed in a grave which he had prepared for himself. The "great burning" had to do with spices and incense burned at the time of the king's death.

¹Clarke, Adam, *A Commentary and Critical Notes*, Vol. II, p. 663

5. THE REIGN OF JEHOSHAPHAT (17 - 21:3)

TEXT

Chapter 17:1. And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead, and strengthened himself against Israel. 2. And he placed forces in all the fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim, which Asa his father had taken. 3. And Jehovah was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto the Baalim, 4. but sought to the God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. 5. Therefore Jehovah established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat tribute; and he had riches and honor in abundance. 6. And his heart was lifted up in the ways of Jehovah: and furthermore he took away the high places and the Asherim out of Judah.

7. Also in the third year of his reign he sent his princes, even Ben-hail, and Obadiah, and Zechariah, and Nethanel, and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah; 8. and with them the Levites, even Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tobadonijah, the Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, the priests. 9. And they taught in Judah, having the book of the law of Jehovah with them; and they went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught among the people.

10. And the fear of Jehovah fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat. 11. And some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and silver for tribute; the Arabians also brought him flocks, seven thousand and seven hundred rams, and seven thousand and seven hundred he-goats. 12. And Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly; and he built in Judah castles and cities of store. 13. And he had many works in the cities of Judah; and men of war, mighty men of valor, in Jerusalem. 14. And this was the numbering of them according to their fathers' houses: Of Judah, the captains of thousands:

Adnah the captain, and with him mighty men of valor three hundred thousand; 15. and next to him Jehohanan the captian, and with him two hundred and fourscore thousand; 16. and next to him Amasiah the son of Zichri, who willingly offered himself unto Jehovah; and with him two hundred thousand mighty men of valor. 17. And of Benjamin: Eliada a mighty man of valor, and with him two hundred thousand armed with bow and shield; 18. and next to him Jehozabad, and with him a hundred and fourscore thousand ready prepared for war. 19. These were they that waited on the king, besides those whom the king put in the fortified cities throughout all Judah.

Chapter 18:1. Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance; and he joined affinity with Ahab. 2. And after certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that were with him, and moved him to go up with him to Ramoth-gilead. 3. And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah. "Wilt thou go with me to Ramoth-gilead?" And he answered him, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war."

4. And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, "Inquire first, I pray thee, for the word of Jehovah. 5. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, four hundred men, and said unto them, "Shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?" And they said, "Go up; for God will deliver it into the hand of the king." 6. But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not here a prophet of Jehovah besides, that we may inquire of him?" 7. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of Jehovah: but I hate him; for he never prophesieth good concerning me, but always evil: the same is Micaiah the son of Imla. And Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so." 8. Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, "Fetch quickly Micaiah the son of Imla." 9. Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, arrayed in their robes, and they were sitting in an open place at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them. 10. And Zedekiah

the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron and said, "Thus saith Jehovah, 'With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until they be consumed.'" 11. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper; for Jehovah will deliver it into the hand of the king."

12. And the messenger that went to call Micaiah spake to him, saying, "Behold, the words of the prophets declare good to the king with one mouth: let thy word therefore, I pray thee, be like one of theirs, and speak thou good." 13. And Micaiah said, "As Jehovah liveth, what my God saith, that will I speak."

14. And when he was come to the king, the king said unto him,

"Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?" And he said, "Go ye up, and prosper; and they shall be delivered into your hand."

15. And the king said to him, "How many times shall I adjure thee that thou speak unto me nothing but the truth in the name of Jehovah;" 16. And he said,

"I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd: and Jehovah said, 'These have no master; let them return every man to his house in peace.'" 17. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat,

"Did I not tell thee that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?" 18. And Micaiah said,

"Therefore hear ye the word of Jehovah: I saw Jehovah sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left. 19. "And Jehovah said,

'Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one spake saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner. 20. "And there came forth a spirit, and stood before Jehovah, and said, I will entice him. And Jehovah said unto him. 'Wherewith?' 21. "And he said, 'I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'Thou shalt entice him, and shalt prevail also: go forth, and do so.' 22. "Now therefore, behold, Jehovah hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets; and Jehovah hath spoken evil concerning thee."

23. Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near, and smote Micaiah upon the cheek, and said, "Which way went the Spirit of Jehovah from me to speak unto thee?" 24. And

Micaiah said, "Behold, thou shalt see on that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself." 25. And the king of Israel said, "Take ye Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; 26. and say, 'Thus saith the king, "Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I return in peace." ' ' 27. And Micaiah said, "If thou return at all in peace, Jehovah hath not spoken by me." And he said, "Hear, ye peoples, all of you."

28. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. 29. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself, and go into the battle; but put thou on thy robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself; and they went into the battle. 30. Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of his chariots, saying, "Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel." 31. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, "It is the king of Israel." Therefore they turned about to fight against him: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and Jehovah helped him; and God moved them to depart from him. 32. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. 33. And a certain man drew his bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the armor: wherefore he said to the driver of the chariot, "Turn thy hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am sore wounded." 34. 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 going down of the sun he died.

Chapter 19:1. And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem. 2. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, "Shouldest thou help the wicked, and love them that hate Jehovah? for this thing wrath is upon thee from before Jehovah. 3. "Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast put away the Asheroth out of the land,

and hast set thy heart to seek God.”

4. And Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem: and he went out again among the people from Beer-sheba to the hill-country of Ephraim, and brought them back unto Jehovah, the God of their fathers. 5. And he set judges in the land throughtout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, 6. and said to the judges, “Consider what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for Jehovah; and he is with you in the judgment. 7. “Now therefore let the fear of Jehovah be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with Jehovah our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of bribes.”

8. Moreover in Jerusalem did Jehoshaphat set of the Levites and the priests, and of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel, for the judgment of Jehovah, and for controversies. And they returned to Jerusalem. 9. And he charged them, saying, “Thus shall ye do in the fear of Jehovah, faithfully, and with a perfect heart. 10. “And whensoever any controversy shall come to you from your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and ordinances, ye shall warn them, that they be not guilty towards Jehovah, and so wrath come upon you and upon your brethren: this do, and ye shall not be guilty. 11. “And, behold, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of Jehovah; and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, in all the king's matters: also the Levites shall be officers before you. Deal courageously, and Jehovah be with the good.”

Chapter 20:1. And it came to pass after this, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them some of the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. 2. Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, “There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea from Syria; and, behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar (the same is En-gedi).” 3. And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek unto Jehovah; and he proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. 4. And Judah gathered themselves together, to seek help of Jehovah: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek Jehovah.

5. And Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of Jehovah, before the new court; 6. and he said, "O Jehovah, the God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and art not thou ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? and in thy hand is power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee. 7. "Didst not thou, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and give it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever? 8. "And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying, 9. 'If evil come upon us, the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house, and before thee (for thy name is in this house), and cry unto thee in our affliction, and thou wilt hear and save.' 10. "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 aside from them, and destroyed them not; 11. behold, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. 12. "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." 13. And all Judah stood before Jehovah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.

14. Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, the Levite, of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of Jehovah in the midst of the assembly; 15. and he said, "Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king of Jehoshaphat: Thus saith Jehovah unto you, 'Fear not ye, neither be dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. 16. 'To-morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the ascent of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the valley, before the wilderness of Jeruel. 17. 'Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of Jehovah with you, O Judah and Jerusalem;' fear not, nor be dismayed: to-morrow go out against them; for Jehovah is with you." 18. And Jehoshaphat bowed his head

with his face to the ground; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before Jehovah, worshipping Jehovah. 19. And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites and of the children of the Korahites, stood up to praise Jehovah, the God of Israel, with an exceeding loud voice.

20. 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 Jehovah your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. 21. And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed them that should sing unto Jehovah, and give praise in holy array, as they went out before the army, and say, "Give thanks unto Jehovah; for his lovingkindness endureth for ever." 22. And when they began to sing and to praise, Jehovah set liers-in-wait against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, that were come against Judah; and they were smitten. 23. 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.

24. And when Judah came to the watch-tower of the wilderness, they looked upon the multitude; and behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and there were none that escaped. 25. And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance both riches and dead bodies, and precious jewels, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away: and they were three days in taking the spoil, it was so much. 26. And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in "the valley of Berach;" for there they blessed Jehovah: therefore the name of that place was called The valley of Berach unto this day. 27. Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in the forefront of them, to go again to Jerusalem with joy; for Jehovah had made them to rejoice over their enemies. 28. And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of Jehovah. 29. And the fear

of God was on all the kingdoms of the countries, when they heard that Jehovah fought against the enemies of Israel. 30. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet; for his God gave him rest round about.

31. 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. 32. And he walked in the way of Asa his father, and turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah. 33. Howbeit the high places were not taken away; neither as yet had the people set their hearts unto the God of their fathers. 34. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold, they are written in the history of Jehu the son of Hanani, which is inserted in the book of the kings of Israel.

35. And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel; the same did very wickedly: 36. and he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish; and they made the ships in Ezion-geber. 37. Then Eliezer the son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, Jehovah hath destroyed thy works." And the ships were broken, so that they were not able to go to Tarshish.

Chapter 21:1. And Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Jehoram his son reigned in his stead. 2. And he had brethren, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, and Jehiel, and Zechariah, and Azariah, and Michael, and Shephatiah; all these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. 3. And their father gave them great gifts, of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fortified cities in Judah: but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram, because he was the first-born.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 17:1. Then his son Jehoshaphat became the king and mobilized for war against Israel. 2. He placed garrisons in all of the fortified cities of Judah, in various other places through-

out the country, and in the cities of Ephraim that his father had conquered. 3. The Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he followed in the good footsteps of his father's early years, and did not worship idols. 4. He obeyed the commandments of his father's God—quite unlike the people across the border in the land of Israel. 5. So the Lord strengthened his position as king of Judah. All the people of Judah cooperated by paying their taxes, so he became very wealthy as well as being very popular. 6. He boldly followed the paths of God—even knocking down the heathen altars on the hills, and destroying the Asherim idols.

7, 8, 9. In the third year of his reign he began a nationwide religious education program. He sent out top government officials as teachers in all the cities of Judah. These men included Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah. He also used the Levites for this purpose, including Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tobadonijah; also the priest Elishama and Jehoram. They took copies of The Book of the Law of the Lord to all the cities of Judah, to teach the Scriptures to the people.

10. The fear of the Lord fell upon all the surrounding kingdoms so that none of them declared war on King Jehoshaphat. 11. Even some of the Philistines brought him presents and annual tribute, and the Arabs donated 7,700 rams and 7,700 male goats. 12. So Jehoshaphat became very strong, and built fortresses and supply cities throughout Judah. 13. His public works program was also extensive, and he had a huge army stationed at Jerusalem, his capital. 14, 15. Three hundred thousand Judean troops were there under General Adnah. Next in command was Jeho-hanan with an army of 280,000 men. 16. Next was Amasiah (son of Zichri), a man of unusual piety, with 200,000 troops. 17. Benjamin supplied 200,000 men equipped with bows and shields under the command of Eliada, a great general. 18. His second in command was Jehozabad, with 180,000 trained men. 19. These were the troops in Jerusalem in addition to those placed by the king in the fortified cities

throughout the nation.

Chapter 18:1. But rich, popular King Jehoshaphat of Judah made a marriage alliance (for his son) with (the daughter of) King Ahab of Israel. 2. A few years later he went down to Samaria to visit King Ahab, and King Ahab gave a great party for him and his aides, butchering great numbers of sheep and oxen for the feast. Then he asked King Jehoshaphat to join forces with him against Ramoth-gilead.

3, 4, 5. "Why, of course!" King Jehoshaphat replied. "I'm with you all the way. My troops are at your command! However, let's check with the Lord first." So King Ahab summoned 400 of his heathen prophets and asked them, "Shall we go to war with Ramoth-gilead or not?" And they replied, "Go ahead, for God will give you a great victory!" 6, 7. But Jehoshaphat wasn't satisfied. "Isn't there some prophet of the Lord around here too?" he asked. "I'd like to ask him the same question." "Well," Ahab told him, "there is one, but I hate him, for he never prophesies anything but evil! His name is Micaiah (son of Imlah)." "Oh, come now, don't talk like that!" Jehoshaphat exclaimed. "Let's hear what he has to say." 8. So the king of Israel called one of his aides. "Quick! Go and get Micaiah (son of Imlah)," he ordered. 9. The two kings were sitting on thrones in full regalia at an open place near the Samaria gate, and all the "prophets" were prophesying before them. 10. One of them, Zedekiah (son of Chenaanah), made some iron horns for the occasion and proclaimed, "The Lord says you will gore the Syrians to death with these!" 11. And all the others agreed. "Yes," they chorused, "go up to Ramoth-gilead and prosper, for the Lord will cause you to conquer."

12. The man who went to Micaiah told him what was happening, and what all the prophets were saying—that the war would end in triumph for the king. "I hope you will agree with them and give the king a favorable reading," the man ventured. 13. But Micaiah replied, "I vow by God that whatever God says is what I will say." 14. When he arrived before the king, the king asked him, "Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth-gilead or not?" And Micaiah replied, "Sure, go ahead! It will be

a glorious victory!" 15. "Look here," the king said sharply, "how many times must I tell you to speak nothing except what the Lord tells you to?" 16. Then Micaiah told him, "In my vision I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountain as sheep without a shepherd. And the Lord said, 'Their master has been killed. Send them home.'" 17. "Didn't I tell you?" the king of Israel exclaimed to Jehoshaphat. "He does it every time. He never prophesies anything but evil against me." 18. "Listen to what else the Lord has told me," Micaiah continued, "I saw him upon his throne surrounded by vast throngs of angels. 19, 20. "And the Lord said, 'Who can get King Ahab to go to battle against Ramoth-gilead and be killed there?' " "There were many suggestions, but finally a spirit stepped forward before the Lord and said, 'I can do it!' " "How?" the Lord asked him. 21. "He replied, 'I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all of the king's prophets!' " "It will work," the Lord said; 'go and do it.' 22. "So you see, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these prophets of yours, when actually he has determined just the opposite of what they are telling you!"

23. Then Zedekiah (son of Chenaanah) walked up to Micaiah and slapped him across the face. "You liar!" he yelled. "When did the Spirit of the Lord leave me and enter you?" 24. "You'll find out soon enough," Micaiah replied, "—when you are hiding in an inner room!" 25. "Arrest this man and take him back to Governor Amon and to my son Joash," the king of Israel ordered. 26. "Tell them, 'The king says to put this fellow in prison and feed him with bread and water until I return safely from the battle!'" 27. Micaiah replied, "If you return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me." Then, turning to those around them, he remarked, "Take note of what I have said."

28. So the king of Israel and the king of Judah led their armies to Ramoth-gilead. 29. The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I'll disguise myself so that no one will recognize me, but you put on your royal robes!" So that is what they did. 30. Now the king of Syria had issued these instructions to his charioteers: "Ignore everyone but the king of Israel!" 31. So

when the Syrian charioteers saw King Jehoshaphat of Judah in his royal robes, they went for him, supposing that he was the man they were after. But Jehoshaphat cried out to the Lord to save him, and the Lord made the charioteers see their mistake and leave him. 32. For as soon as they realized he was not the king of Israel, they stopped chasing him. 33. But one of the Syrian soldiers shot an arrow haphazardly at the Israeli troops, and it struck the king of Israel at the opening where the lower armor and the breastplate meet. "Get me out of here," he groaned to the driver of his chariot, "for I am badly wounded." 34. The battle grew hotter and hotter all that day and King Ahab went back in, propped up in his chariot, to fight the Syrians, but just as the sun sank into the western skies, he died.

Chapter 19:1. As King Jehoshaphat of Judah returned home, uninjured. 2. the prophet Jehu (son of Hanani) went out to meet him. "Should you be helping the wicked, and loving those who hate the Lord?" he asked him. "Because of what you have done, God's wrath is upon you. 3. But there are some good things about you, in that you got rid of the shame-idols throughout the land, and you have tried to be faithful to God."

4. So Jehoshaphat made no more trips to Israel after that, but remained quietly at Jerusalem. Later he went out again among the people, traveling from Beer-sheba to the hill country of Ephraim to encourage them to worship the God of their ancestors. 5. He appointed judges throughout the nation in all the larger cities, 6. and instructed them: "Watch your step—I have not appointed you—God has; and he will stand beside you and help you give justice in each case that comes before you. 7. Be very much afraid to give any other decision than what God tells you to. For there must be no injustice among God's judges, no partiality, no taking of bribes."

8. Jehoshaphat set up courts in Jerusalem, too, with the Levites and priests and clan leaders and judges. 9. These were his instructions to them: "You are to act always in the fear of God, with honest hearts. 10. Whenever a case is referred to you by the judges out in the provinces, whether murder cases or other violations of the laws and ordinances of God, you are to

clarify the evidence for them and help them to decide justly, lest the wrath of God come down upon you and them; if you do this, you will discharge your responsibility." 11. Then he appointed Amariah, the High Priest, to be the court of final appeal in cases involving violation of sacred affairs; and Zebadiah (son of Ishmael), a ruler in Judah, as the court of final appeal in all civil cases; with the Levites as their assistants. "Be fearless in your stand for truth and honesty. And may God use you to defend the innocent," was his final word to them.

Chapter 20:1. Later on, the armies of the kings of Moab, Ammon, and of the Meunites declared war on Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah. 2. Word reached Jehoshaphat that "a vast army is marching against you from beyond the Salt Sea, from Syria. It is already at Hazazon-tamar" (also called Engedi). 3. Jehoshaphat was badly shaken by this news and determined to beg for help from the Lord; so he announced that all the people of Judah should go without food for a time, in penitence and intercession before God. 4. People from all across the nation came to Jerusalem to plead unitedly with him.

5. Jehoshaphat stood among them as they gathered at the new court of the Temple, and prayed this prayer: 6. "O Lord God of our fathers—the only God in all the heavens, the Ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth—you are so powerful, so mighty. Who can stand against you? 7. O our God, didn't you drive out the heathen who lived in this land when your people arrived? And didn't you give this land forever to the descendants of your friend Abraham? 8. Your people settled here and built this Temple for you, 9. truly believing that in a time like this—whenever we are faced with any calamity such as war, disease, or famine—we can stand here before this Temple and before you—for you are here in this Temple—and cry out to you to save us; and that you will hear us and rescue us. 10. "And now see what the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir are doing. You wouldn't let our ancestors invade those nations when Israel left Egypt, so we went around and didn't destroy them. 11. Now see how they reward us! For they have come to throw us out of your land which you have given us. 12.

O our God, won't you stop them? We have no way to protect ourselves against this mighty army. We don't know what to do, but we are looking to you." 13. As the people from every part of Judah stood before the Lord with their little ones, wives, and children,

14. the Spirit of the Lord came upon one of the men standing there—Jahaziel (son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Je-iel, son of Mattaniah the Levite, who was one of the sons of Asaph). 15. "Listen to me, all you people of Judah and Jerusalem, and you, O king Jehoshaphat!" he exclaimed. "The Lord says, 'Don't be afraid! Don't be paralyzed by this mighty army! For the battle is not yours, but God's! 16. Tomorrow, go down and attack them! You will find them coming up the slopes of Ziz at the end of the valley that opens into the wilderness of Jeruel. 17. But you will not need to fight! Take your places; stand quietly and see the incredible rescue operation God will perform for you, O people of Judah and Jerusalem! Don't be afraid or discouraged! Go out there tomorrow, for the Lord is with you!' " 18. Then king Jehoshaphat fell to the ground with his face to the earth, and all the people of Judah and the people of Jerusalem did the same, worshiping the Lord. 19. Then the Levites of the Kohath clan and the Korah clan stood to praise the Lord God of Israel with songs of praise that rang out strong and clear.

20. Early the next morning the army of Judah went out into the wilderness of Tekoa. On the way Jehoshaphat stopped and called them to attention. "Listen to me, O people of Judah and Jerusalem," he said. "Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall have success! Believe his prophets, and everything will be all right!" 21. After consultation with the leaders of the people, he determined that there should be a choir leading the march, clothed in sanctified garments and singing the song "His Lovingkindness Is Forever" as they walked along praising and thanking the Lord! 22. And at the moment they began to sing and to praise, the Lord caused the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir to begin fighting among themselves, and they destroyed each other! 23. For the Ammonites and Moabites

turned against their allies from Mount Seir and killed every one of them. And when they had finished that job, they turned against each other!

24. So, when the army of Judah arrived at the watchtower that looks out over the wilderness, as far as they could look there were dead bodies lying on the ground—not a single one of the enemy had escaped. 25. King Jehoshaphat and his people went out to plunder the bodies and came away loaded with money, garments, and jewels stripped from the corpses—so much that it took them three days to cart it all away! 26. On the fourth day they gathered in the Valley of Blessing, as it is called today, and how they praised the Lord! 27. Then they returned to Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat leading them, full of joy that the Lord had given them this marvelous rescue from their enemies. 28. They marched into Jerusalem accompanied by a band of harps, lyres, and trumpets and proceeded to the Temple. 29. And as had happened before, when the surrounding kingdoms heard that the Lord himself had fought against the enemies of Israel, the fear of God fell upon them. 30. So Jehoshaphat's kingdom was quiet, for his God had given him rest.

31. A thumbnail sketch of King Jehoshaphat: He became king of Judah when he was thirty-five years old, and reigned twenty-five years, in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azubah, the daughter of Shilhi. 32. He was a good king, just as his father Asa was. He continually tried to follow the Lord, 33. with the exception that he did not destroy the idol shrines on the hills, nor had the people as yet really decided to follow the God of their ancestors. 34. The details of Jehoshaphat's reign from first to last are written in the history of Jehu the son of Hanani, which is inserted in The Annals of the Kings of Israel.

35. But at the close of his life, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went into partnership with Ahaziah, king of Israel, who was a very wicked man. 36. They made ships in Ezion-geber to sail to Tarshish. 37. Then Eliezer, son of Dodavahu from Mareshah, prophesied against Jehoshaphat, telling him, "Because you have allied yourself with King Ahaziah, the Lord has destroyed your

work." So the ships met disaster and never arrived at Tarshish.

Chapter 21:1. When Jehoshaphat died, he was buried in the cemetery of the kings in Jerusalem, and his son Jehoram became the new ruler of Judah. 2. His brothers—other sons of Jehoshaphat—were Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariah, Michael, and Shephatiah. 3, 4. Their father had given each of them valuable gifts of money and jewels, also the ownership of some of the fortified cities of Judah. However, he gave the kingship to Jehoram because he was the oldest. But when Jehoram had become solidly established as king, he killed all of his brothers and many other leaders of Israel.

COMMENTARY

Asa's son, Jehoshaphat, sat on the throne in Judah. Jehoshaphat's name means "Jehovah is judge". He was one of the best kings of the southern kingdom.¹ A continual condition of civil strife persisted between Judah and Israel. Jehoshaphat concerned himself with necessary fortifications to protect the territory of Judah. This involved strengthening several villages in Judah and in the territory on the border of Ephraim. Judah's king opposed every form of Baalism. In every matter pertaining to the kingdom he sought Jehovah's counsel. Jehovah was with him. The southern kingdom enjoyed a period of prosperity and Jehoshaphat was held in high honor as king. The lifting up of the heart sometimes meant boastful and foolish pride; however, Jehoshaphat boasted in Jehovah and gave his people strong spiritual leadership.

Jehoshaphat was deeply concerned that his people be trained in the word of God. He appointed princes, Levites, and priests to travel throughout the borders of Judah to teach the people out of the "book of the law of Jehovah". He wanted all of his people to be involved in religious education. In this matter he approximated the ideal in Deuteronomy 17:18, 19 which stated that the king should rule by the law of God. This is the only mention in the Bible of these particular princes of the Levites. They filled an important place of service in the days

¹Oehler, Grustave F., *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 403

of Jehoshaphat.

This course of action chosen by Judah's king brought great blessings upon the king and the people. Judah enjoyed an era of comparative peace. The Philistines brought tribute. Arab tribes in the environs of Judah brought great numbers of rams and goats. Store cities were built throughout the kingdom and much attention was given to improving social conditions. In addition to all of his peaceful pursuits, Jehoshaphat maintained a standing army of considerable proportions. Seven hundred eighty thousand warriors were numbered in Judah and three hundred eighty thousand warriors were numbered in Benjamin. They manned the fortified cities and helped the king in any assigned tasks. We do not know anything else about the captains or mighty men who are named in connection with Jehoshaphat's army.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

LESSON EIGHTEEN 15-17

656. Who was Azariah? How was he moved to do his work?
657. What promise and warning are detailed in 15:2?
658. How does Azariah summarize Israel's history?
659. What charge is given in 15:7?
660. Who was Oded?
661. How would Asa have authority in Ephraim?
662. Describe the covenant entered into in Jerusalem.
663. What about the person who would not seek God?
664. How did Jehovah reward His people?
665. Who was Maacah and what was done with regard to her?
666. Locate Kidron.
667. How complete was Asa's reform?
668. Identify Baasha.
669. Why would Baasha fortify Ramah?
670. For what purpose did Asa pay a considerable amount of money?

671. Locate Ijon, Dan, and Abel-maim.
672. Where were Geba and Mizpah?
673. Who was Hanani?
674. Why does Asa now come under rebuke?
675. What had been Asa's experience with the Ethiopians?
676. How extensive is Jehovah's domain?
677. What did Asa do with Hanani?
678. Evaluate Asa as a king.
679. Describe Asa's illness
680. Where did Asa go for help?
681. What is said about Asa's burial?
682. Describe Jehoshaphat's actions relating to Judah.
683. Explain Jehovah's attitude toward Jehoshaphat.
684. Explain the reference to Jehoshaphat's "heart being lifted up".
685. Why were princes sent out into Judah?
686. What special services did Levites render?
687. Why did the nations round about not make war on Judah?
688. What did the Arabians do for Jehoshaphat?
689. How many men of war were numbered out of Judah and Benjamin?