

LESSON NINETEEN 18-20

JEHOSHAPHAT AND AHAB WAR WITH MOAB AND AMMON

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

INTRODUCTION

Judah's alliance with Ahab of Israel displeased Jehovah. The prophets were mistreated. Jehoshaphat worked diligently to bring his people back to God. He activated the priestly high court. The Moabites and Ammonites were defeated in Jehoshaphat's day.

TEXT

(Scripture text in Lesson Eighteen)

PARAPHRASE

(Scripture text in Lesson Eighteen)

COMMENTARY

Jehoshaphat's relation with the northern kingdom was not entered into with a view to weakening the southern kingdom. The king of Judah probably wanted to share some of the prosperity of his kingdom with Ahab. Jehoshaphat's reign extended over a period of twenty five years. His peaceful overtures toward the northern kingdom probably came during the first half of his reign. The "affinity" with Ahab was effected in the marriage of Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, with Athaliah, daughter of Ahab. As there had been a Jezebel in Samaria, there would be an Athaliah in Jerusalem. There were state visits between the royal houses. On such an occasion Ahab made lavish provisions for Jehoshaphat. The Syrians had set a great army against Ramoth-gilead, a village thirty miles southeast of the southern tip of the Sea of Chinnereth. Ahab needed military assistance. Jehoshaphat agreed to bring Judah's army into this conflict. Certainly in these matters Judah's king failed to seek Jehovah's will.

Jehoshaphat knew that Ahab did not serve Jehovah. On the

occasion when Judah's king agreed to go to battle against Syria with Ahab's army, Jehoshaphat suggested that they determine Jehovah's will in this matter. Ahab proceeded to ask counsel of the four hundred heathen prophets of Israel.¹ They advised him to go to war and assured him of victory through God (Elohim). Jeroboam had set up calf worship in convenient places in the northern kingdom at the beginning of his reign. His successors to the throne maintained these centers of worship. Ahab had married Jezebel, the Phoenician princess. She had brought Baalism out of her country into the northern kingdom. Ahab had completely committed himself to this heathen worship and had forsaken Jehovah. We marvel that these heathen prophets would presume to speak for Israel's God. Jehoshaphat loved Jehovah. He was not satisfied with the word of Ahab's false prophets. Upon inquiring as to whether or not a prophet of Jehovah was available, the king of Judah was informed about a man named Micaiah. This true prophet had declared Jehovah's word to Ahab on previous occasion and had condemned Ahab for his heathenism. Ahab told Jehoshaphat that he hated Micaiah. The king of Judah urged Jehoshaphat to weigh his words. Micaiah's location wasn't exactly known. He may have been imprisoned at the time. While the officer was sent to bring Micaiah to the court, the two kings held court at the gate of Samaria. Ahab's prophets continued their formal worship and stoutly maintained that Ahab should go to battle. One of the false prophets, Zedekiah, put on a mask fashioned like the head of a bull and equipped with iron horns. He moved among his fellow prophets and before Ahab and Jehoshaphat like an attacking animal. Zedekiah claimed that Jehovah had told him that Israel would be victorious. Whenever Zedekiah spoke, he was fully supported by the four hundred Baalists.

The officer who was sent to bring Micaiah tried to condition the prophet to say an agreeable word when he stood before the kings. Micaiah asserted his independency in relation to other prophets and his dependency upon God. He said, "What my God saith, that will I speak". In the presence of the kings in a

¹Beecher, Willis, J., *The Prophets and the Promise*, p. 55

sarcastic manner Micaiah told Ahab to join the battle and anticipate victory. Ahab's own conscience convicted him in this matter. Micaiah's attitude and manner of expression revealed to Ahab that the prophet had a true message from Jehovah. Since Micaiah had bound himself by Jehovah's name to declare God's will and since Ahab bound Micaiah under oath to reveal the truth, Micaiah said that Israel was a scattered flock without a shepherd. Ahab's army should be dismissed. In wrath Ahab interrupted Micaiah and contended that Micaiah ought not to have been called for advice. Micaiah described his vision of Jehovah. Ahab had hardened his heart. A lying spirit from Jehovah moved the false prophets to advise Ahab to go to battle.

Zedekiah humiliated Micaiah by striking him in the face and challenging him to identify the spirit that had prompted this insulting gesture. Zedekiah was informed that his own life would be in jeopardy at the hands of Israel's enemies (most likely, the Syrians). Ahab consigned Micaiah to prison where he would be sustained only by bread and water. The king's order was that Micaiah should be imprisoned until he returned from the battle front in peace. He may have intended to kill the prophet at that time. Even though he was under this sentence, Micaiah insisted that Ahab would not return in peace. Ahab, himself, was under the sentence of death.

This would have been the proper time for Jehoshaphat to withdraw himself and his army from the northern kingdom. In spite of this demonstration of Jehovah's will, the two kings went to war with Syria at Ramoth-gilead. Ahab was so confident that he could win the battle that he had no hesitancy to join the ranks of the fighting men. He knew that as king of Israel, he would be a special prize to the enemy. So he disguised himself. Jehoshaphat was especially vulnerable because he wore robes identifying himself as a king. In the heat of the battle when the king of Judah was recognized by the enemy, he was miraculously spared. Somewhere on the battle-field a Syrian soldier shot an arrow toward the army of Israel.¹ He did not

¹Spence, H. D. M., *The Pulpit Commentary*, II Chronicles, p. 216

aim at any particular Hebrew soldier. Jehovah guided that Syrian arrow in its flight and it penetrated Ahab's armor striking a vital organ in the king's body. In mortal pain Ahab withdrew from the battle and died at the close of the day.

After these tragic experiences with Ahab, Jehoshaphat returned to Jerusalem. His alliance with wicked Ahab did not go unrebuked. A prophet named Jehu stood in Jehoshaphat's presence and condemned him. Judah's king was also informed that Jehovah approved his efforts to rid his land of Baalism. With renewed determination Jehoshaphat visited all of his people from Beersheba in the south to Ephraim in the north encouraging them to worship Jehovah. He set up a system of judges and courts throughout his kingdom charging these officials to fear the Lord and not respect persons or accept bribes. He also re-established the high court at the Temple in Jerusalem in which the priests passed judgment on very serious matters which the lesser courts could not handle (Deuteronomy 17:8-13). Amariah, the high priest, was in charge of the Temple court and all of the matters of business that were associated with God's House. Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab had not completely turned him from Jehovah.

Later in Jehoshaphat's reign the Moabites, Ammonites, and some Edomites (Meunim) rebelled against the southern kingdom. Reports were brought to Judah's king to the effect that a great army was moving around the southern end of the Dead Sea and organizing for attack at Hazazon-tamar or Engedi on the west coast of the Dead Sea. In this crisis once more Jehoshaphat turned to Jehovah. He asked all of his people to fast and to pray for God's help. The people were called to Jerusalem. There in the court of the priests the king plead with Jehovah for mercy and deliverance. The content of Jehoshaphat's prayer is worth careful study. Jehovah is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is ruler over all kingdoms. He gave Palestine to Abraham's seed. The Temple is in Jerusalem. As Solomon had said in his prayer (I Kings 8), if the Hebrews would pray toward this house, Jehovah would hear. Jehoshaphat reminded God that Israel had been prohibited

from attacking Moab and Ammon when Moses brought Israel through that territory. Now, these very people who were spared rise up to attack Jehovah's people. Jehoshaphat said that he and his people were not able to defend themselves, so they cast themselves completely upon God's mercy—"our eyes are upon Thee".

When the king had prayed, Jahaziel, a Levite, was filled with the Spirit of Jehovah. He declared the word that the people longed to hear. "Don't be afraid of the enemy. The battle is not your concern; it is God's". The army of Jehoshaphat was to be drawn up against Moab, Ammon, and Edom. The place called Ziz is difficult to locate, but it is believed to have been in the vicinity of Engedi. The Hebrews were told that they would not have to fight. They were to come to the battle-field, stand still, and wait for Jehovah to act. Jehoshaphat and his people received the news gladly and they worshipped God.

The next morning the king of Judah moved his army toward Tekoa, southeast of Bethlehem about six miles. As the army moved, the king encouraged his people. "Believe in Jehovah. Believe His prophets." The soldiers sang as they marched, "Give thanks unto Jehovah" (Psalm 106:1; 136:1). The ancient strategy of ambush was used. Jehovah was in complete control. The result of the ambush was that the Ammonites and Moabites supposed that the Edomites had turned upon them. So the enemies of Israel fought among themselves. The complete overthrow of the enemy is described in verses 24-30. Somewhere beyond Tekoa in the vicinity of the Dead Sea the battlefield was covered with the corpses of the fallen enemy soldiers. Jehoshaphat's warriors stripped the dead and carried off much booty. They called the place "Beracah", which means "blessing". Jehoshaphat's people returned to Jerusalem praising Jehovah for this miraculous deliverance.

The total picture of Jehoshaphat's reign leaves a good impression. His reign extended through twenty five years. The leadership provided by this king is compared with that of his father, Asa. In the days of the Judges "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Judah's king

did "that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah" (verse 32). The reforms of Jehoshaphat were not complete, probably because idolatry had been rooted so deeply in the southern kingdom. In spite of the king's devotion to Jehovah, it was difficult to secure the same commitment on the part of his people. The prophet Jehu (I Kings 16:1) was used by Jehovah as a writer of history. An account of Jehoshaphat's reign was written by Jehu and incorporated in a larger book.

Sometime after Jehoshaphat had been humiliated in his alliance with Ahab he covenanted with Ahaziah, son of Ahab and king of Israel. This venture involved building and equipping ships like those used on the Mediterranean by the Phoenicians for the Tarshish trade. Jehoshaphat and Ahaziah intended to use Ezion-geber at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba for their home port. They would send the vessels to Ophir which was far to the South and from there extend their trade to the East. The project was disastrous because Jehovah sent a prophet named Eliezer to condemn Jehoshaphat for his renewed alliance with Israel. The ships were ruined by a terrible storm before they ever left the home port.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

LESSON NINETEEN (18-20)

690. What was Jehoshaphat's economic condition?
691. With whom did Jehoshaphat set up an alliance? What was the purpose of the alliance?
692. Carefully locate Ramoth-gilead.
693. With regard to proposed plans, whose word did Jehoshaphat want to hear?
694. Who were the four hundred prophets of 18:5?
695. Why did Ahab hate Micaiah?
696. Describe the scene as the kings awaited Micaiah's arrival.
697. Who is this Zedekiah?
698. What were the "horns of iron"?

699. How did the messenger try to condition Micaiah?
700. At first, how did Micaiah answer Ahab? Why did he so answer?
701. Did Ahab really want to hear the truth? Explain.
702. What illustration is used in 18:16?
703. Where was Jehovah when Micaiah saw Him?
704. How had the spirit worked to mislead Ahab?
705. Was Ahab responsible for his actions? Explain.
706. At this time what did Zedekiah do?
707. What did Micaiah predict with regard to Zedekiah?
708. Describe "the bread of affliction".
709. What did Micaiah say about Ahab's returning in peace?
710. As the kings prepared to go into the battle how could they be distinguished?
711. Explain the instruction of the king of Syria to his captains.
712. Which of the Hebrew kings was attacked first? Why was he not killed?
713. Describe the wound which Ahab received. How long did Ahab live after being wounded?
714. After the battle with Syria where did Jehoshaphat go?
715. Identify this Jehu. What did he say?
716. What would be the nature of Jehoshaphat's work as "he went out among the people"?
717. In appointing judges what did the king order?
718. Explain the phrase, "respect of persons".
719. Who served as judges in Jerusalem? Was such an arrangement within Jehovah's will?
720. Describe the attitude of one who acts under "the fear of Jehovah".
721. How could a judge keep himself from guilt?
722. Who was the high priest in these days?
723. Where were the territories of Moab and Ammon located?

724. From whom were Moab and Ammon descended?
725. When Jehoshaphat learned of the threat of military attack what did he do?
726. What great truths relating to Jehovah are mentioned in 20:6?
727. Who were the original inhabitants of the land of Canaan?
728. What kind of confidence did Jehoshaphat have?
729. Name the ancient people who lived in Mount Seir.
730. What did the king confess to Jehovah in 20:12?
731. Who was Jahaziel?
732. Explain the phrase, "the battle is not yours, but God's".
733. What was the plan for meeting this military crisis?
734. Upon hearing the word of Jehovah, what did the king and the people do?
735. As they prepared to execute the plan what did the king say to the people?
736. What was the word of praise in 20:21?
737. What actually happened to Israel's enemies this day?
738. How did Jehoshaphat and his people profit from this overthrow?
739. What happened in the valley of Beracah?
740. Describe the return to Jerusalem.
741. How long did Jehoshaphat reign?
742. In what respects was Jehoshaphat not altogether successful as a godly leader?
743. Who wrote this king's history?
744. Who was Ahaziah?
745. What happened to Jehoshaphat's navy?
746. Where was Ezion-geber?
747. Who was Eliezer?