

April 29 : Scriptures 2 Chronicles 19-21

SUMMARY

As we transition into chapter 19, King Jehoshaphat returns home from the Aramean disaster that took King Ahab's life. Not only does the good king have to deal with defeat, but the Lord's seer (another name for a prophet), Hanani, greets him with a rebuke about joining forces with the wicked (19:2). Despite the rebuke, Yehovah also commends the king for what he did to destroy idolatry in Judah and for actively seeking the Lord.

King Jehoshaphat continues his reforms by helping his people turn from their idols and follow Yehovah more closely. He also installs more judges to decide cases by God's laws with impartiality. This action makes me think the king was reading his Torah scroll where it says, "Appoint judges and officials for your tribes in all your towns the Lord your God is giving you. They are to *judge the people with righteous judgment. Do not deny justice or show partiality to anyone. Do not accept a bribe, for it blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. Pursue justice and justice alone, so that you will live and possess the land the Lord your God is giving you*" (Deuteronomy 16:18-20 italics author). King Jehoshaphat also commands the Levites and priests to serve as judges in Jerusalem (19:8).

After all this talk about King Jehoshaphat assigning judges all around Judah, here's some interesting information. The name "Jehoshaphat" means "Jehovah has judged." Why was the king so interested in maintaining justice in Judah? Because it's who he is!

In chapter 20, King Jehoshaphat faces a substantial threat. The Moabites and Ammonites (who lived east of the Dead Sea) are rapidly advancing toward Jerusalem (20:2). They've already crossed the Jordan River and reached En-Gedi, a small natural brook in a valley in the Judean wilderness on the west side of the river. (Take a moment to search "Ein Gedi" online to see where it is in Israel and appreciate its beautiful spot!) Now, King Jehoshaphat's commitment to Yehovah shines through. Rather than immediately rushing to battle, he calls for a fast among all the people who came to Jerusalem to seek the Lord's help (20:3-4).

What's the essence of the king's prayer? "Aren't You the Sovereign God? Didn't you drive out the Canaanites and settle us in this land? Didn't we build Your Temple here? Didn't You agree with my great-great-grandfather King Solomon that if an enemy attacks us and we turn to You, You would hear and act on our behalf? When we came out of Egypt, You told us not to lay a hand on our 'relatives,' and now see how they repay us! We can't do this, but You can. Help!"

Yehovah answers the king powerfully through Jahaziel, one of Asaph's descendants (20:14). "Don't sweat it, Jehoshaphat, old boy! This battle isn't yours. It's the Lord's! Just take your army down to meet them and see what happens because Yehovah's with you" (20:15-17). Most of us might doubt that kind of "prophetic word," especially when faced with such an imposing threat. Not King Jehoshaphat! He'd already seen how Yehovah promised to strike down King Ahab and made it happen. So, he and the people choose to believe what God said. They sing loudly while the worship team unleashes some rowdy music (20:19).

And then comes one of the most amazing accounts in scripture, and only a people who have God's word and trust Him would do this. As the King and his army near the approaching enemy, Jehoshaphat decides to put the choir in front of the military, and he commands them to sing as loudly as they can. Now I can understand the enemy becoming confused if they confronted a line of bagpipes, banjos, and accordions. But this is just a mass choir. Why would it affect them? *Because the battle is the Lord's, not theirs!* The Lord throws them into confusion, so the Moabites and Ammonites attack the Edomites, then turn and attack each other.

When Judah's army and the people appear, what greets them? Silence! Seriously. Not one of the enemy soldiers survived (20:24). All the Judahites have to do is strip the dead and carry off the loot. Then they named the place The Valley of Blessing because the Lord blessed them when they blessed the Lord. The Lord also drops a little terror on the surrounding nations when they hear of Judah's victory so that they wouldn't mess with His people (20:29).

Two quick things close out this chapter. The first is King Jehoshaphat's obituary. He was thirty-five when he became king and reigned for twenty-five years. For those with a Ph.D. in math, Jehoshaphat was sixty years old. (I'm so brilliant!) His spiritual assessment is that he was a good king, although some of the high places (idolatry) weren't removed. But the second thing isn't so flattering. King Jehoshaphat made another unholy alliance with a king from the northern kingdom, something the prophet had rebuked him for earlier (20:35; see 19:2). Because Yehovah isn't pleased with the arrangement, He wrecks the ships (20:37). So there!

Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, becomes king after his father in chapter 21. He has many brothers, but since he was the firstborn, Jehoshaphat makes him king (21:3). Bad move! Even though King Jehoshaphat had done the same thing for his sons that King Rehoboam did (provided them wealth and cities to govern to keep them from challenging the new

king, 2 Chronicles 11:23), King Jehoram made sure he was the uncontested king by killing all his brothers (21:4). What a sweetheart! We can probably guess how the Chronicler'll evaluate him.

King Jehoram is thirty-two years old when he becomes king and only reigns for eight years. He's a rotten egg because he abandons Yehovah in favor of his in-laws' (Ahab and Jezebel) gods – Baal and Ashtoreth. Why? Because this wretched king had married King Ahab of Israel's daughter Athaliah. While Chronicles covers the same incident that 1 Kings 8 does about Edom's rebellion against King Jehoram and the idolatry he promoted, only the Chronicler includes a section about the prophet Elijah's letter to the wayward king (21:12-15). It ain't good news. The Lord tells King Jehoram that because he went after his in-laws' gods, led Judah into deeper idolatry, and killed his brothers ("who were better than you!"), Yehovah will make the remainder of his life miserable, along with his family and the Judahites. In fact, it's going to get so ugly for King Jehoram, he's going to contract numerous diseases. Those diseases include an intestinal disease that will kill him when his guts rot and fall out (21:15). Yuck. I don't know about you, but I can think of better ways to go.

Soon, the Philistine and Arab enemies attack the weak king and carry off the king's possessions, his wives, and all but one son, Jehoahaz, the youngest. Then the intestinal disease hits, and he's in pain and suffering for two years. Finally, his guts fall out, and he dies, just like the Lord said. Did the people care? No. He died in disgrace, and the nation buried him with dishonor (21:20). "He died to no one's regret." That's some epitaph.

INSIGHT

Like King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah, when seeking the Lord for His guidance, it's wise to spend time in an atmosphere of praise and worship that blocks out the troubles around us and helps us "tune in" to the Lord's voice. Seeking the Lord in prayerful worship is not something limited to prophets or super-spiritual people, and it's available to all born-again Christians. Why do so many Christians stumble about and fret when the largest source of information in the universe stands ready to help? Because we often don't take the time to sit and listen.

April 30 : Scriptures 2 Chronicles 22-24

SUMMARY

And it just keeps getting worse. Chapter 22 opens with King Jehoram's youngest son, Ahaziah, becoming king. Wait! What? Wasn't the kid's name Jehoahaz? Yes, it is. This is one of those "two different names for one guy" things I mentioned before. King Jehoahaz = King Ahaziah. His dad was Judah's King Jehoram, and his mother was Athaliah, Israel's King Ahab and Jezebel's daughter. Remember when I said King Jehoshaphat's choice of wife for Jehoram would bring trouble? Here it is in all its despicable glory!

Israel's idolatry has infected Judah through the unholy marriage, and it's rotting Judah from the inside out the same way King Jehoram's body had deteriorated before he died (2 Chronicles 2:19). King Ahaziah's mom taught him well (insert sarcasm here). His mother and his grandfather's (King Ahab's) counselors were his advisors (22:4).

The text quickly jumps to King Ahaziah's disastrous alliance with Israel's King Joram when they went together to battle Aram's King Hazael. You may remember this whole chain of events was from the Lord so He could deal with the rampant idolatry in the northern kingdom as told to the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 19:15-17. King Joram is wounded, and King Ahaziah goes to Jezreel to meet with his recuperating colleague. The soon-to-be king of Israel, Commander Jehu, greets the two kings on the road and promptly dispatches them both. Judah's people take King Ahaziah's body to Judah for burial out of respect for his grandfather, Jehoshaphat (22:9).

Her son's death leaves his mother, Athaliah, in charge of Judah. Like the nice person she is (insert more sarcasm here), she decides to wipe out all of the remaining royal heirs of King David's line (22:10).

Now follow me with this. Athaliah's daughter and King Ahaziah's sister, Jehoshabeath (aka Jehosheba – 2 Kings 11:2), rescues the last remaining heir, King Ahaziah's son and her nephew, Joash, from Athaliah's annihilation squad. Why did she do this? Even though 1 Kings 11:2 records this event, we get the reason here in 2 Chronicles 22:11. *Jehoshabeath was married to the High Priest, Jehoiada!* Together they hid the nursing toddler within the confines of the Temple for six years until the time came to rip the throne from Athaliah the Usurper and restore it to David's family line. And wouldn't that make a great movie?

The day finally arrives, as recorded in chapter 23. High Priest Jehoiada and his men gather the Levites and clan leaders from Judah for the big moment. Jehoiada stations the

Levites and priests around the Temple to protect the boy (23:7). No one is going to get close to the future king! High Priest Jehoiada brings out the boy, crowns him, places the royal Torah scroll in his hands, anoints Joash, and proclaims him as king (23:11). Queen Athaliah flips out when she hears the proclamation and sees the new king. But the High Priest has her dragged away and put out of everybody's misery (23:15).

Then Jehoiada leads the people in a covenant renewal ceremony that includes smashing idols again. The land had peace because of their recommitment to the Lord, the king was on his throne, and Queen Athaliah was dead. (Ding, dong, the witch is dead! Which of witch? The wicked witch!)

Chapter 24 opens with a brief bio of King Joash. He was crowned at seven years old and reigned for forty years. As you read through the biography, something might jump out at you that gives you pause. Did you catch it? "Throughout the time of the priest Jehoiada, Joash did what was right in the Lord's sight" (24:2). What does this imply? You'll see.

King Joash's life achievement that the Chronicler records is his Temple renovation project. The building was in dire need of repair because Queen Athaliah and her sons broke into the Temple and stole the treasures for her Baal temple. King Joash does an excellent job, and the Temple function continues (here it is again) "throughout Jehoiada's life" (24:14). Hmm, I wonder what that could mean?

When High Priest Jehoiada dies, he's a remarkable 130 years old! He was such a dedicated servant of the Lord "with respect to God and his temple," the nation buried Jehoiada Judah's kings.

And now that sad part at which the Chronicler was hinting. When King Joash no longer had the High Priest Jehoiada to guide him, he listened to the elders of Judah instead. They convinced him to abandon the Temple he had spent so much time, money, and energy renovating and embraces the gods he had removed from Judah! Do you think this goes unnoticed by Yehovah, "the God of their ancestors?"

Of course not. The Lord sends one of His prophets, Zechariah, Jehoiada's son(!), to rebuke the straying king. Did King Joash listen? Nope. He and a group of men stoned Zechariah in the Temple precincts that his father had so faithfully served (24:21). What an abomination! With his fading breath, Zechariah calls on Yehovah to act justly to settle the unjust act.

Yehovah sends a much smaller Aramean army against Judah, true to form and the covenant rules, and the smaller force wins! (See? Even a minor thing can defeat you when the Lord lifts His protection.) Remember the leaders who swayed King Joash's heart from the Lord? Well, they died at the Arameans' hands. King Joash is left deeply wounded, and two traitors take the opportunity to assassinate the king. That's how the Lord settled King Joash's unjust account.

Once again, we have a king who starts great but ends badly. Why? He didn't stay committed to the Lord and allowed himself to drift away under the influence of ungodly advisors over time. As a final comment on his spiritual condition and ultimate failure, the people bury King Joash, but not with the other kings of Judah. Wow! There's a slap in the face.

INSIGHT

Why was King Joash so faithful in the first part of his reign? Because he was raised close to the Lord's High Priest and the Temple. His reign is divided easily into two parts. The first is his concern for the upkeep of the Temple. The second is his falling away from Yehovah, even to the point of killing his friend and surrogate brother, the prophet-priest Zechariah.

How easy it is for people to get off track from the Lord when they don't have a close relationship with Him! There are some in the church today who "ride on another's coattails" regarding spiritual matters. Children rely on their parent's faith, congregation members rely on leadership, and one friend depends on another's faith. This "tag-along" attitude explains why so many Christians chase after prophetic words today when the Lord has promised to speak to each person individually as needed. All we have to do is listen.

As Jesus said, "I still have many things to tell you, but you can't bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and declare it to you. Everything the Father has is Mine. This is why I told you that He takes from what is Mine and will declare it to you" (John 16:12-15). And having the Holy Spirit in us is so much better than a High Priest next to us, right?

Many Christians simply don't have a close relationship with the Lord or a working knowledge of the Bible or an open ear that's ready to hear Him speak to guide them. Then

when their secondary source of revelation is removed, they easily listen to others and the world only to fall away from the Lord, even into apostasy.