

# A Day in the Life of Jehoshaphat

2 Chronicles 20:1-30

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The nation of Israel is one of the oddities of history. I am sure that you are convinced of that. There is simply no way to explain the continuance of that nation apart from some kind of divine intervention. For more than three thousand years there has been a nation that we have identified as Israel and, though they have waxed and waned -- at times been powerful, and at times almost disappeared -- they are always there. Jesus said that their continuance is linked with that of the sun and the moon. As long as there is a sun in the sky, and as long as the moon appears, there will be a nation of Israel. If you ever wake up some morning, and the sun does not rise, then you can worry about Israel! But as long as the sun is there, the nation of Israel will endure.

One of the earliest extra biblical references to Israel is found on an Egyptian monument that dates from the thirteenth century B.C. It was erected by an Egyptian pharaoh named Mer-en-Ptah. He had just completed a raid through Syria and Palestine, and he returned and recorded his victories on this monument. Among other things he said, "Israel is desolate. There is no seed left to her." This is almost like Mark Twain's statement, "Reports of my death have been highly exaggerated," because Israel is still there! It is a bit ironic that the Egyptians still have to look at that monument in their museum, for Israel is very much alive and well. God has guaranteed their continuance. You can explain the ability of Israel to survive again and again only as you trace it back to God's work in their midst. Of course, you can say the same thing about our relationship to the Lord. Its continuance is based, fundamentally, on God's faithfulness to us. And Israel, in the Scriptures, is an illustration of our life.

In chapter 20 of 2 Chronicles we find an illustration of a battle in which Israel was victorious. In my estimation, this is the greatest victory that Israel ever accomplished. It is much greater than the conquest of Palestine, the victory over Jericho, or any of the other victories recorded in Scripture, because it is used again in Scripture as a symbol of the final battle, Armageddon, on the great Day of the Lord, when the Lord will deliver his people. It occurred during the reign of Jehoshaphat, whose life we looked at briefly two weeks ago. He was a king of Judah, the Southern Kingdom. In this chapter we find recorded a day in the life of Jehoshaphat. The circumstances surrounding that day are given to us in verses 1 and 2:

**Now it came about after this that the sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon, together with some of the Meunites [Edomites, descendants of Esau], came to make war against Jehoshaphat. Then some came and reported to Jehoshaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea [the Dead Sea], out of Edom and behold, they are in Hazazontamar (that is, En-gedi)."**

The three nations mentioned here were ancient enemies of Israel who lived just across the Jordan River. They were related to Israel, having descended from the patriarchs. The Ammonites and Moabites were descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew, and the Edomites were descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. Though these were relatives of Israel, they had always been very hostile and on occasion carried out raids across the border, as in this instance. It is significant that they did so at a time when Israel was at rest. This was a time of spiritual victory. It came right after a period of great accomplishment in the life of Jehoshaphat. Chapter 19 records the great reformation Jehoshaphat carried out. Verse 4:

So Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem and went out again among the people from Beer-sheba to the hill country of Ephraim and brought them back to the Lord, the God of their fathers.

God used Jehoshaphat to bring about a great revival in Israel. They were enjoying the fruits of that revival and

were at rest when suddenly they were assailed by these enemies from across the Jordan. This assault upon Israel is symbolic of the sort of assaults we experience from time to time in our life, these tragic circumstances that strike us the death of a friend or loved one, or perhaps, if you are a young person, the separation of your parents, or you parents receive word that your children have somehow gone astray, or you are notified that you have lost your job, or you are assailed by guilt or the temptation to go back to some sin you felt had long since been eradicated from your life. Or maybe it is a period of dryness in your life, when the sky seems to be as brass, and you feel that God is not listening, that he does not hear and does not care. It could be any number of attacks like this.

And frequently they come right at a time when things are going so well. Perhaps we have made some step of commitment to the Lord which was very difficult, but we did it, knowing that was what God wanted. And we feel somehow that thereafter things ought to go well, but they do not. Everything happens. The car breaks down, you lose your job, your children do not respond the right way, and everything begins to fall apart. Well, that is what happened to Jehoshaphat. Right at the time when he expected things to go well, everything began to come apart. The messenger appeared at his house and told him that this invading army was just a day's march away, in En-gedi, something like fifteen miles from Jerusalem. Chapter 20, verses 3 and 4:

**And Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention [or, "set his face"] to seek the Lord; and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to seek help from the Lord; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the Lord.**

Jehoshaphat's immediate reaction was to be afraid -- and whose wouldn't? We know from the account in chapters 18 and 19 that he had a standing army of more than a million men. And yet this horde from across the Jordan was even greater. He was frightened. He knew he did not have the resources to meet this attack. We need to realize that an initial reaction of fear is not wrong. That was the only sensible reaction Jehoshaphat could have had to this situation! It is not the initial reaction of fear which matters; it is what we do with that fear. What does the fear do to you? Does it drive you to be irritable and bluster or to get stoned, or to be resentful and rage at God and at those around you, or to withdraw and retreat? What does it make you do? You see, we are not even accountable for the immediate reaction to these assaults on our life. What we are accountable for is what we do after that initial reaction. When Jesus said to the disciples, "Fear not," he used a present tense -- "Do not keep on fearing." The initial reaction of fear may be the only reasonable reaction for us to have, but where do we go from there?

Jehoshaphat set his face to seek the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast in Israel. A fast involves denying yourself food for a period of time. It has always been the practice of God's people from time to time to give up the necessary requirements of the body in order to attend to the things of God, and to set their thoughts, their minds, on God. But denying yourself food does not exhaust the meaning of fasting. It goes much deeper than that. The idea behind fasting is to deny yourself any resource other than God himself, because our tendency, in times of stress, is to start casting about for some tangible, visible resource we can depend on. We check our bank account, or whatever resource we turn to in time of pressure. But Jehoshaphat declared a fast. He simply would not depend on any of the natural resources that man would depend upon, but he set his face to seek the Lord. He knew that this was the place from which his help would come.

So that is the first thing to do when you are afraid deny yourself that tendency to go back and trust the things you have always counted upon, and set your face to seek the Lord. Remind yourself that he and he alone is the source of help. That is what Paul, in Ephesians 6, calls "girding the loins with truth." It is pulling your thoughts together, reminding yourself that there is only one place, ultimately, where help comes from the Lord himself.

**Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord before the new court, and he said, "O Lord, the God of our fathers, art Thou not God in the heavens? And art Thou not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Thy hand so that no one can stand against Thee. Didst Thou not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Thy people Israel, and give it to the descendants of Abraham Thy friend forever? And they lived in it, and have built Thee a sanctuary there for Thy name,**

saying, 'Should evil come upon us, the sword, or judgment, or pestilence, or famine...'

These are representative of the attacks on our life. The sword stands for these terrible, tragic assaults, when people around us whom we have depended upon are cut down. Judgment is when a sense of guilt and condemnation assaults us. Famine is those dry spells which we all experience from time to time.

**'...we will stand before this house and before Thee (for Thy name is in this house) and cry to Thee in our distress, and Thou wilt hear and deliver us.' And now behold, the sons of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom Thou didst not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt (they turned aside from them and did not destroy them), behold how they are rewarding us, by coming to drive us out from Thy possession which Thou hast given us as an inheritance. O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on Thee. "And all Judah was standing before the Lord, with their infants, their wives, and their children.**

The first step Jehoshaphat takes is to remind himself of the source of his help. Secondly, he begins to remind himself of who God is. Notice that twice he asks the question, "Are you not..." "Are you not God in the heavens? And are you not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations?" He begins by calling to his mind who the Lord really is. "Aren't you the God in the heavens? Don't you reign in the realm of spiritual realities? Aren't you Sovereign? Is your throne threatened, is it shaky?" Is God pacing the floor and biting his nails and pulling his hair, filled with anguish over the state of affairs in your life? No, he is not. He is utterly unshaken, absolutely tranquil. He is not troubled in the least; he is at peace.

We on the staff of PBC have been studying through the book of Revelation. It struck us, in looking at one description there of God seated upon his throne, that there is a reference to "a sea of glass" which surrounds the throne. We take this to be symbolic of the peace which surrounds God. Have you ever seen a sea like glass? I have seen very few. Usually the sea is troubled, and there are waves. But a sea without chop, without waves, is a picture of peace and quiet. My family and I were at Lake Tahoe two weeks ago with the Landrith family, and as we drove around the lake my little boy kept asking, "Where are the waves?" It was one of those windless days, and the lake was like glass. You could see reflected in it the mountains on the other side. I thought of that passage in Revelation. It is a picture of the tranquility of God. He is not anxious. Things are not out of control. He is in control.

But he is in control not only of the heavens; he also rules over all the nations of the world -- all the nations. That means he rules over the Ammonites and the Moabites and the Edomites, as he rules over those same people today in the Middle East. He rules over our President and his Cabinet, and those who are associated with him. He rules over your family and mine, over your circumstances, your place of employment. Whatever your situation is, God rules. He is Sovereign. He is not under attack; he is not threatened. He is at peace; he is quiet; he is restful. And Jehoshaphat reminds himself of that. Though everything is chaotic around him and his kingdom appears to be tottering and about to crash down at any moment, God is not frustrated, He is not inhibited, His hand is not shortened. He is serene and quiet and in control. Then Jehoshaphat reminds himself not only of who God is, but of what he can do, and has done in the past, verses 7 and 8:

**Didst Thou not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Thy people Israel, and give it to the descendants of Abraham Thy friend forever? And they lived in it, and have built Thee a sanctuary there for Thy name...**

He calls to mind the deliverance of Israel, and the promise that the land is theirs for eternity, and that no matter who may try to force them out of the land, the land belongs to them, and that God would guarantee them their place, and they could rest there. God had shown them time and time again in their experience not only who he was but what he could accomplish. And so Jehoshaphat takes his stand on that principle. "We are powerless before this great multitude. We don't know what to do, but our eyes are on you." And Jehoshaphat and all the people stand before God. He says, "I don't understand the circumstance. I don't know why you let it occur. It doesn't

make sense to me. I don't see any way out. I'm utterly powerless. I don't know what to do, but my eyes are upon you.

A long time ago, it seems, I went to Highland Park High School in Dallas, Texas. For some reason, the three years I was there we had a disastrous athletic program. The year I was a senior we lost the first six football games of the season, and it did not look as if the rest of the season were going to be any better. I remember attending a pep rally one time. The cheerleaders were jumping up and down and leading everyone in a cheer that went something like this, as best I can remember: "Victory, victory, is our cry; V-I-C-T-O-R-Y. Can we do it? Yes, we can! Highland Park, Highland Park, we can, can, can!" Or something like that. And I remember that it struck me, after six losses and not much possibility of improvement, just how hollow those words were! "Can we do it? Yes, we can!" So often that is our response to these problems. But we really know we cannot. We know we are powerless that we really do not have the resources. And all we can do is say, "Lord, I don't have the power. I don't know what to do. I don't know where to go, except to you. And my eyes are on you. I'm going to stand on that truth -- that you are able to accomplish on my behalf all that you have promised to do."

Whenever we take that position, God always responds. C. S. Lewis says that down through the ages, if men needed wisdom, they might cry out, "William Shakespeare, help me!" and nothing much happened. Or if they needed courage, they might cry out, "Billy Budd, help me!" and nothing much happened. But for nineteen hundred years, whenever men have cried out, "Lord, Jesus, help me," something happens. And this was true in the life of Israel. Whenever they cried out to the Lord, something happened. And so Jehoshaphat cried out to the Lord, "Lord, I don't know what you're going to do, but you know of my distress, and you hear my prayer, and you are going to deliver."

**Then in the midst of the assembly the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel [Often help comes from the most unlikely quarter. Right out of the congregation someone began to speak.] the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, the Levite of the sons of Asaph; and he said, "Listen, all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: thus says the Lord to you, 'Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's.'"**

"The demand does not rest upon you, it rests upon the Lord. It is his battle. There is an untroubled, unruffled Sovereign of the universe who is going to fight on your behalf. What's the panic? Why are you afraid? The battle is not yours but God's."

**'Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they will come up by the ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the valley in front of the wilderness of Jeruel [virtually right outside the gates of Jerusalem]. You need not fight in this battle; station yourselves [the Hebrew says, "Take a stand" - stand on what you know to be true], stand and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah, and Jerusalem.' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out to face them, for the Lord is with you. "And 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. And the Levites, from the sons of the Kohathites and of the sons of the Korahites, stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel, with a very loud voice.**

Now they are on top of things, because they realize that the demand ultimately rests upon the Lord, and he is adequate to face this circumstance. They do not need to fight; they only need to stand still and see what God is going to do. But it is obvious that this stand is not just a physical posture they are to maintain. They are also to go out and face the enemy. To "stand" in this usage, is a mental posture. It is a position we take based on our understanding of who God is, and what he will do. We stand fast in our mind on that fact, but we still have to face the opposition, whatever it is. It is never God's will for us to run from a difficult circumstance. I know from my own experience that whenever I have done this, sooner or later God has brought me back to face it again, because he wants to teach me that I can face into any obstacle, any problem, as long as my stance is right, as long as I am standing, mentally, spiritually, on the truth that I know about God - who he is, and what he can do. That is what

enables you to face into problems instead of withdrawing, retreating, giving way to your fear.

So, this is what they did, but this is the sort of thing which has to be renewed over and over and over again. It is not like flipping a switch and suddenly having all your anxiety flee. My experience is that I will resolve this issue two or three times during the day, and I will go to bed at night with a quiet and peaceful heart. Then I will wake up the next morning - and for a few seconds everything is okay, while I try to remember who I am -- but by the time I get the alarm turned off, suddenly I am assaulted again by all of these doubts and fears and anxieties, and feelings that I cannot cope -- "How in the world am I going to do this thing today that I dread so much?" I am overwhelmed by them. And this is what happened to Israel, because verse 20 says,

**And they rose early in the morning and went out to the wilderness of Tekoa; and when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, put your trust in the Lord your God, and you will be established. Put your trust in His prophets and succeed."**

Here he equates the word of the prophets with the word of God. "Put your trust in the prophets, which is the same as putting your trust in God." He is doing the same thing you and I must do every morning, and perhaps dozens of times during the day -- remind ourselves again of where we are in our relationship to Jesus Christ. Because these fears and these problems come back again and again, and we have to stop and get our eyes off the circumstances, off the things we would realize it is from him that we receive our strength, remind ourselves of who he is and what he can do for us, and stand on that. You may have to do this many, many times through the day. But the result is that, having done it, you are able to stand. You are able to face into the things you dread. Verse 21:

**And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who sang to the Lord, and those who praised Him in holy attire, as they went out before the army and said, "Give thanks to the Lord, for His loving kindness is everlasting."**

They began to sing and praise God -- give thanks for the victory that was already theirs. They were thanking God in advance for the victory over this coalition of nations. And that is the action of faith to give thanks before you see the victory. Yet that is precisely what faith does. In Philippians 4 Paul says, "Have no anxiety for anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." "Lord, I need courage to face this circumstance tomorrow. Thank you that I have it. Lord, I need love to handle this situation tonight. Thank you that I have it." It is walking in the expectation that God will fulfill his promises, which is the true expression of faith. "Thank you, God, that you are going to do everything you have promised to do." And will you notice verses 22 and 23:

**And when they began singing and praising [and only then], the Lord set ambushes against the sons of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were routed. For the sons of Ammon and Moab rose up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir destroying them completely, and when they had finished with the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another.**

They turned on one another and destroyed one another. If you read between the lines a bit you can see what is happening. Israel is marching down this valley, and occasion ally they come to a rise from which they can look down on the plain and see these enormous armies amassed, ready to attack. They go down another incline and climb another rise, and the armies are still there. But they are still singing and still thanking God. They go down another incline and come up, and the armies are still there. And they go down again and come up, and the armies are all dead! Verse 24:

**When Judah came to the lookout of the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and behold, they were corpses lying on the ground, and no one had escaped.**

Have you ever dreaded something so desperately that you thought you simply could not face it, but you acted as

Jehoshaphat did - took your stand on what you knew to be true about God -- and you faced it anyway. And when you got there, what you had dreaded was dead. Of course you have. It happens over and over again.

**And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take their spoil, they found much among them, including goods, garments, and valuable things which they took for themselves, more than they could carry. And they were three days taking the spoil because there was so much.**

This adversity which appeared to be such a tragedy turned into a triumph. They came back with more than they left with. This is what Paul means when he says that we are "more than conquerors through him who loved us". God takes the most traumatic, tragic circumstances in our life, and he turns them to triumph. Verses 26 through 30:

**Then on the fourth day they assembled in the valley of Beracah [the Hebrew word which means "blessing"], for there they blessed the Lord. Therefore they have named that place "The Valley of Beracah" until today [the time of the Exile, when this was written. Interestingly enough, that valley is still called The Valley of Beracah, commemorating the time when God blessed his people]. And every man of Judah and Jerusalem returned with Jehoshaphat at their head, returning to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had made them to rejoice over their enemies. And they came to Jerusalem with harps, lyres, and trumpets to the house of the Lord. And the dread of God was on all the kingdoms of the lands when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel. So the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God gave him rest on all sides.**

That will be your experience and mine, as we act upon the principles laid out in this passage. When you are assaulted and tempted to give way to fear, first remind yourself of the source of your help, and deny the tendency all of us have to trust other resources. Call to mind who the Lord is and what he can do, and take your stand on that. And then move out to face that obstacle, that opposition, whatever it may be. The result is that when we get there, the thing we feared is impotent. Power is taken from it. The thing which caused so much stress and sorrow becomes a source of blessing and encouragement, and the result is peace, because we learn that every demand, every attack, every stress, every pressure is really upon the Lord. The battle is the Lord's, not ours.

Later on in the Scriptures, Joel, in prophesying of the coming again of the Lord, and of the great victory he works on Jerusalem's behalf, calls the place where that victory occurs, "The Valley of Jehoshaphat", in memory of this victory that God worked out on behalf of this king. This victory in 2 Chronicles 20 is really an illustration of all the victories God wants to produce in our lives. Life is a series of mountaintop experiences and valley experiences. There are mountaintop times, as Jehoshaphat experienced in chapter 19, when every thing is going well. And there are valley experiences, when things appear to be coming apart. But those valleys can be The Valley of Jehoshaphat. They can be the place where God judges, where God provides your needs. Our responsibility is to stand, to trust him, and to wait for him to work out the victory he has accomplished in our life.

Father, we are reminded again this morning that the battle is yours, and we thank you that we can be free from the strain and stress of having to carry the responsibility of the battle. We thank you that in Christ we are always led in triumph, and we ask that today we might translate this truth into experience in our life. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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