

Jehoshaphat

A Lesson in Overcoming

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Nothing could be plainer right now than the fact that all over the world, not just here in the United States, we are experiencing a crisis of leadership.

We do not have any Churchills or Thatchers. We do not have any Washingtons or Reagans. Not even any de Gaulles, Bolivars, or Bismarcks. If there is a leader of that sort of a historical caliber, I have not seen him or her, or any sign or trace that one is coming.

Most of our presidents and prime ministers are politicians, and personalities, and profiteers. They are not statesmen like some of those ones that I just mentioned were. They are in their offices for their personal aggrandizement rather than for the true good of their nation, or even for the world.

Even if they say they are like our president—a citizen of the world—he is not doing anybody any good. He is just there for his own pleasure and his own profit.

Please turn with me to Ezekiel 34. We have been here a couple of times in the last few months, but I want to go over it because it bears reading again just to get the sense of it.

Ezekiel 34:1-5 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered.”

As we have learned in my dad’s going over this in the last little bit, the shepherds are in large part the secular leaders of the nations (in this case, the nations of Israel and Judah). It can be then made to cover all the nations of Israel as they are today, seeing

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that this is a prophecy. But I am kind of narrowing it down to Israel and Judah as they were historically at this time.

We can also understand that this is talking about leaders in general, so it also includes the religious leaders. They have to be included in all this too.

But the prime takeaway from the first part of this chapter, as we have read so far, is that the shepherds—the leaders of Israel and Judah at the time—were in it for themselves. They were in it to get whatever they could. They were in it for their own power, to fulfill their own lusts, or what have you. And that has not changed a whole lot. That is the way it is today as well.

The result, as it shows here, is that the sheep were scattered (meaning they were leaderless; they were going their own way). It is almost like what is said there at the end of the book of Judges, that every man did what was right in his own eyes, and we know how bloody and terrible the book of Judges shows the culture to be at the time: There was just no leadership.

Because of that, because there was no unity under a leader that would teach them to do well—to go after God, to seek God—they were vulnerable. They were vulnerable to all kinds of different dangers from inside and out; and not just vulnerable as individuals, but vulnerable as a whole people.

We see that, ultimately, as a whole people, they were carted off into slavery into the land of the Medes; and then the Jews, after them, about 135 years later, to Babylon. So what we see here is that it was mostly a lack of good leadership from the top down that caused such terrible problems and weakened the nation.

Let us go down to verses 14 through 16 and see a contrasting description, and the contrast is God Himself, His style of leadership, and how He will work.

Ezekiel 34:14-16 I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord God. “I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment.”

So what we have here is the godly model of leadership, how He works in governing a

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nation. Remember, that this is Yahweh. Yahweh is the same Lord God that became Jesus Christ who called Himself the Good Shepherd in John 10.

So we see here the source (maybe you could call it the beginnings, or the origin) of the idea that Jesus had, in John 10, of His own governance in the church and how He works with us. What we find here is that His concern is focused directly on the sheep. He wants their wellbeing and their good. In a sense, He has removed Himself from consideration in a great part of how He deals with us, and He is just totally focused on making sure that the sheep have what they need.

He is not one who is trying to gain power for Himself. He does not need to; He has got all power, He has got all wealth. And so He puts all of that aside and focuses His attention solely on the sheep—the people that He is leading.

Notice the things that He does here: He feeds them; He gives them peace and rest; He heals them; and then the final thing, which I think is very interesting, is that He gives them justice and true judgment.

This is the pattern of true leadership in any organization—whether it is in a family, a mom-and-pop business, a corporation, a church, or government of any size. If the leaders are truly focused on those whom they are leading, and they put themselves off to one side, then they are on the road to being successful.

Let us flip back in the Bible several books, to the book of II Samuel. This is after Saul had died and David had become king over Judah at Hebron, and for a while there was strife. Israel did not come into the fold, as it were, right away. But then, finally, certain events happened and Israel decided to give themselves over to the leadership of David. And I want you to see what they said.

II Samuel 5:1-3 Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and spoke, saying, “Indeed we are your bone and your flesh. Also, in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in [What does that sound like?]; and the Lord said to you, ‘You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.’” So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord. And they anointed David king over Israel.

Now the two nations were one. They were one because the people in Israel, represented by their elders, recognized that David was a good shepherd—that he was

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the one, even under Saul, who had been the one leading them properly; and that when he led them, God gave them victory and things went well. So they said, finally, “We’re going to put ourselves under your leadership and you can be our shepherd officially.” So they called him here “shepherd” and a “ruler” over Israel.

These two phrases—“You shall shepherd My people Israel” and “be ruler over Israel” at the end of verse 2 there—are said in parallel. You know how Hebrew works. A lot of times there will be a couplet where it will say the same thing in two different ways.

But in this case, it is not just that it is saying the same thing (it is), but there are two different emphases in these words “shepherd” and “ruler.” They are kind of an interesting study especially because they are made about David. He was, we could say, the high watermark of all rulers over Israel, until his greater Son came and became *the* model and pattern for all rulers (I am speaking of Jesus Christ). But to him (David) all the other kings were compared.

So it behooves us to look at this and to see this idea that comes out of here—he was both shepherd and ruler. Both of them mean mostly the same thing, but they are slightly different, and I want to point out what the difference is.

‘Shepherd’ is the word ‘raʿ, aʿ, h’ and it generally means ‘to shepherd.’ But it implies the care and the leadership of a flock, as you would expect. So in it goes all of those things that a shepherd does, as we saw there in Ezekiel 34—the care, the feeding, the tending, the leading in and out, and so forth.

But the shepherding idea is focused on that the shepherd himself is giving himself to the people (to the sheep as it were) and helping them to do what they need to do—to live, to grow, to be prosperous, and so forth. So this is the part of leadership focused on the people, his responsibility, and that he does his responsibility well.

‘Ruler’ is ‘naʿ, gid.’ This is slightly different. It has elements of the shepherd idea in it because its basic idea, or root idea, is one who goes in front, which a shepherd would do: A shepherd goes out in front and leads the flock from place to place.

But the word did not stay there necessarily in its root meaning. It later came to mean (you can see the evolution of the word here) a prominent one. Since the one out front was the one you saw first, and he was the most prominent, then it moved to a commander.

A commander of an army is supposed to be out in front, leading his troops. And then it

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became more generally 'a leader,' the one who is out in front of a group, an organization, a nation—the one who attracts the eyes of the public or what have you. He is the one at the top that everyone looks to.

So that is how the word is used mostly in biblical Hebrew, in terms of being a leader (a prince, an officer)—someone who is out in front commanding or is most prominent.

So what is the difference between these two terms?

Well, shepherd emphasizes the king's concern and his positive beneficial actions for the people. 'Naì, gid' (ruler) highlights his decisive leadership as the nation's face and final authority.

So you have two different qualities here that make the good leader, under God, and both need to be there to be a truly great leader. In one sense, we could say that the great leader must have both a bleeding heart and a backbone of steel. Put it another way, he acts both with his heart and thinks with his head. Here is another one: He must be soft and stern at the same time. Or, as the old book on masculinity said, he must be a man of steel and velvet. But that is probably over-simplifying it because those are the ways that we would, as humans, look at it.

Let us put it in a more theological sense what does it mean to be a shepherd and a ruler. This might be the best way to understand it: He must love his neighbors, and he must judge and act according to the will of God.

So the 'shepherd' part was loving his neighbor as well as loving God—because you cannot love God if you are not loving your neighbor—and the harder part, the sterner part, was his acts of will and judgment that he did on behalf of the nation.

Really, this is an ideal that is beyond the best of kings and best of leaders. You cannot do it perfectly. You cannot perfectly love your neighbors and do God's will. You could try; it is a wonderful goal to reach. But not even David was able to do that. He was not perfect by any means. Of course, he was the standard that everyone else—all the other kings—were judged against.

So, today, we are going to look into the life and reign of one of the best kings that Judah ever had. In fact, I put him in the top four. I put him after the top two (David and Josiah), and I put him in the same league as Hezekiah.

The one we are going to look at is Jehoshaphat. I believe he was at least number four, if

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not number three; and he had the potential to be number two, or even number one. But that is just my own grading system.

He was a good man. He had a problem: he made a big mistake. But he was such a good man that both God and Elisha the prophet said that they respected him greatly.

He is a king. If we want to look at it this way, as an overall summary of his life, he is a king who got the shepherd part right for the most part. I give him an 'A' on the shepherd part.

But that ruler part: He was a good ruler, do not get me wrong, but he made one huge mistake early in his career, early in his reign, that kept biting him again and again throughout the rest of his reign. So, on the ruler part, I would give him a 'C' or maybe even a 'D.'

So let us take a look at the life of Jehoshaphat and see what I mean. Let us go to I Kings 22.

Now the author of Kings does not give Jehoshaphat very much ink. He seems more intent on giving the history of the nation of Israel—especially, at this point, the person of Ahab and the things that he and Jezebel were doing—a lot more time, describing them. And I can understand why he did because they were the chief personalities of the time. So his account of Jehoshaphat is cursory at best.

I am going to warn you, his slant on Jehoshaphat is negative. I do not know why. Maybe I do know why he is emphasizing this one bad thing that he did. But it kind of taints the entire tale of Jehoshaphat, from his point of view.

I Kings 22:41-44 Jehoshaphat the son of Asa had become king over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel [that tells you something, right there]. Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi [how would you like that name, ladies? Azubah!]. And he walked in all the ways of his father Asa. He did not turn aside from them, doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Nevertheless the high places were not taken away, for the people offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places. Also Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel.

There it is, verse 44! That was the big mistake: "Jehoshaphat made peace with the king

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of Israel.” Now you could think, “Well, that sounds pretty good. He made peace with Ahab.” But this peace was not a good peace. It was not something he should have done.

Well, we can squeeze some broad strokes about Jehoshaphat out of this very brief passage. I am going to give you five points here that we need to understand about Jehoshaphat, before we go any further.

The first is that he became king when he was a mature man. He was 35 years old and he reigned a respectable 25 years. If you want the dates, he reigned from 872 BC to 848 BC. So this was only a few generations after David and Solomon.

He was David’s great great great grandson, I believe. That is the way it works out. Solomon’s great great grandson. Let me see if I can do this off the top of my head: David-Solomon-Rehoboam-Abijam-Asa-Jehoshaphat. Anyway, he was not too far after the great kings. There was still memory of the united kingdom in Judah. There were still ideas of reuniting the kingdom and being one again.

But the point here (in this first point) is that he had no excuses. He was 35 years old. He could not say, “Oh, I was too young. I was foolish. I didn’t know what I was doing.” He had had plenty of time to learn.

By the way, I should mention that he spent four years (I think it was about the last four years of Asa’s reign) as a co-regent of Judah. So he had several years of practice before he took the throne, alone. He really had no excuses to fall back on for his bad decision. He should have known better. He probably had pretty good training under Asa. Asa was a fairly good king until the very end, when he started to have problems.

The second point (and this is a *major* point) is that, as we pointed out a couple of times, he reigned during the height of Ahab and Jezebel’s apostasy and misrule. It says here, it was the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel and up comes Jehoshaphat. They were probably of an age.

Personally, it seemed like Ahab and Jehoshaphat got along pretty well, from the little scenarios that we have here (and in II Chronicles) where they are shown together. But, anyway, Ahab and Jezebel were an influence that was a very negative influence on Jehoshaphat.

This was perhaps one of the most prosperous times of Israelite and Judahite history. Both Israel and Judah were very wealthy at this time. But it was all overshadowed by

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Jezebel and Ahab's evil ways (and I put Jezebel first for a reason: She seemed to be the evil power behind the throne).

Unfortunately, for Jehoshaphat, Israel under Ahab was more powerful and wealthy at this time than Judah, and so, in the alliance, he ended up being the junior partner and that was a problem. Mostly, the reason why he was the junior partner was not just because of power and wealth, but because the other partner in the alliance was Phoenicia and that was Jezebel's family.

Jezebel was a princess from Zidon, and their alliance had come earlier than the alliance with Israel and Judah. So Judah was coming in late to this tripartite alliance (between Phoenicia, Israel, and Judah) and had the short straw. They got all the bad parts of that alliance and it shows in the history.

Third point. On the bright side, he was also contemporary with Elijah, Elisha, and the schools of the sons of the prophets. They were functioning at that time. Probably, by the time that Jehoshaphat became king, Elijah was gone (he was living then in Syria) and Elisha was the primary prophet. But they were focused primarily on preaching to Israel where they were more needed than in Judah. So there was not much contact between Jehoshaphat and those prophets of God.

Fourth point, another kind of positive one: He ruled and lived at least as good as his father Asa, as it says here, doing what was right in God's eyes. That is what you need to underline: He did what was right in God's eyes. So he was an upright man as far as it goes—and I think goes fairly far.

But, it says, the thing that kind of knocks him down in this writer's estimation is that he was not able to root out completely the people's practices of worshipping on the high places. We find out elsewhere, though, that he did a fairly good job of removing a lot of it but he just did not get it all out. So that is kind of negative, yes, but positive for the most part. He just did not complete the job.

The fifth point that we need to understand is the big one. Verse 44 declares unequivocally his biggest fault—that he made this alliance with Ahab. This one act, which occurred very early in his reign, would continue to haunt him for the rest of his reign—for all 25 years. And it actually put a big black mark on it that would be nice to have seen removed.

Now this was, we might call it, his thorn in the flesh, although it was self-inflicted. He agreed to the alliance of marriage between his son and Ahab's daughter. And God did

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not remove it; God let it fester for 25 years to see how Jehoshaphat would react to it. We will see that a lot of times it was not too good.

Now I need to explain a few things, in terms of the geopolitics of the time and of the area, because it is very important to understand what was going on and why Jehoshaphat was making the decisions that he was. So we need to understand the geopolitics of the land of Israel.

When Israel and Judah together were economically, politically, and militarily united (as they were under David and Solomon), they could be really strong. They could hold their own against the nations that were around them. Even against the big empires, like Egypt and Assyria, they could hold their own.

If they had any other help they could actually overcome them, especially when those larger empires were fairly weak. Because Egypt and Assyria did not stay strong all the time. They had weak rulers. They had internal strife. They had problems of their own. So a lot of times they were weak. And a lot of times, in the vacuum of power that created, a good ruler of Israel or Judah could rise up and become strong (especially if Israel and Judah were united).

When they were together, united or allied like they were this time (during the time of Ahab and Jehoshaphat), or in control of Phoenicia (Phoenicia with its trading ports; the Phoenicians were known to go out with their ships and trade all over the Mediterranean bases)—when that happened, Israel and Judah became an empire in their own right and they were very strong.

So you could see some things going on here that might have induced Jehoshaphat to get into this alliance: There was national power; there was control over the area; and there could be a good hope of peace (peace through strength, as it were).

Now the reason is that they could become nearly an empire when all of those three parts (Phoenicia, Israel, and Judah) were combined is that it allowed the alliance to control the trade routes.

There were trade routes that came through Canaan (we will call it Canaan for lack of a better term), and Canaan itself was a chokepoint. There was desert to the south and east and all the trade had to come from the north and east (or the south and west) because you had the Mediterranean there blocking the west. So they all had to come through that area to go either from Egypt to Mesopotamia, or Mesopotamia back to Egypt. They became the center of this trading route.

When they controlled the trade routes coming in and out of this chokepoint of Israel (or Canaan), they made a killing. Through taxes, tolls, and trade, they became 'multibazillionaires'—they became very wealthy—and with wealth comes power.

And if they controlled all this land, they have strategic depth—which is still a problem with the state of Israel today because they do not have all that same area that they should. Also they could coordinate defensive arrangements, so that they could block access to the inner part of Israel (from the south, the north, and the east) and they could make efficient use of fortifications. One of those alone was too small to defend itself; they needed a whole series of fortifications and defensive arrangements to make sure that they were safe.

What this meant too, when all of these factors were in Judah and Israel's favor, the nations around them were weak and that meant they were probably paying tribute. Most of all, the best part of it was that they acted as a buffer zone between Israel and Judah and the big empires. So if the big empires decided to try to come at Israel or Judah, they had to go through these smaller nations first, and the armies of Israel and Judah and Phoenicia could meet them there rather than within their own country.

So from political, military, and economic points of view, it seemed to like a good idea to make an alliance between Ahab and Phoenicia at this time.

Let us go to II Chronicles 18 and we come upon a verse here that tells us exactly where we are.

II Chronicles 18:1 Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance; and by marriage he allied himself with Ahab.

What we have here is a restating of I Kings 22:44. The way it looks in the Bible here is that God had already been prospering Jehoshaphat—he was already rich and he was already respected.

So what we can understand here in II Chronicles 18:1 and what is being shown here, in the way that it is put, is that God had *already* blessed him. He had already given him a lot of what he desired in terms of wealth and power (and, as it says, "honor").

He already had what God had given, and then he made the mistake here of making this marriage alliance with Ahab. So he sealed this marriage alliance. It was the wedding of Jehoram, who was Jehoshaphat's son, and Ahab's daughter Athaliah.

Most scholars say that this alliance took place in 865 BC. So if we look at the time that it happened, he became sole ruler somewhere around 869 BC. It was like within the first four years of his reign. But before he was 40, he had already inked the deal and given his son to Athaliah in marriage. So this was seven years into his reign, if we count it from the time he was co-regent with his father.

Now I am sure that Ahab realized the geopolitical situation, as I have described it, in his own way. And I am sure that he used every tactic at his disposal to convince Jehoshaphat that it was in Judah's best interest to play ball.

Not only that, he said: "Why don't we seal it with a marriage between the two nations so that their power and their prosperity (both Israel and Judah's) would last for many years to come, and who knows, maybe even our grandkid, whoever that is, would be ruler over both?" Maybe he dangled that in front of Jehoshaphat: A reunited kingdom.

Whatever it was (the Bible does not say that), but you know that somebody like Ahab was willing to promise the moon to get what he wanted, not that he would ever give him what they agreed to. But I am sure that he played to Jehoshaphat's desires (or, maybe they were lusts) as well as his fears.

"Look, if we're united, we have super-strong military when we add them together. Nobody would be able to touch us. You'll be safe from those Edomites and those Moabites down there. You don't have to worry about the wandering Midianites and the Arabs coming up from the south. We'll take care of them. The Philistines, they wouldn't dare come out of their cities if we have this great army. And we can do all these fortifications and have these strategic maneuvers. We'll be set and we'll be safe." And Jehoshaphat agreed.

Like I said, politically, the alliance made sense. It made a special sense for Ahab: Ahab was going to get the better part of this because he was the stronger partner.

But the way it turned out was that, for Jehoshaphat and for Judah, it was, I think, unmitigated disaster. Jehoshaphat was enough of an upright man and as things developed down the line, he tried to keep Ahab (and later his son Jehoram and then his grandson Ahaziah) from making things worse, which they did (they got worse). But it was usually too little, too late or not loud enough.

So, as the junior partner in the alliance, he seemed to have felt constrained—like he *had* to go along with Ahab and Jehoram and Ahaziah, or else Ahab would turn his might on

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him with the might and the wealth of Phoenicia behind him. I am sure politically he felt stuck. He had to do it. But that is calculating without God in the picture.

God had already given him great wealth and honor. He could give him more. He could give him whatever he wanted. He could make him safe from his enemies. He could make him safe from Ahab. But he took the political decision (remember, this was part of the 'ruler' part of leadership) to ally himself with Ahab and it was the wrong decision.

There are three instances shown in Scripture in the life of Jehoshaphat in which this alliance with the wicked house of Ahab rose up to bite him. It was kind of the proverbial bad penny that keeps coming back. It was that wound that just would not heal. And it really did not stop with him.

We should understand this that this decision—to make this alliance with Ahab—was a generational disaster. His son's marriage to Athaliah was a disaster itself. It had two bouts of murder: one, a fratricide in which seven brothers were killed; and then, after that, a parricide (the killing of close relatives). In this case, Athaliah killed all her grandchildren in order to take over the throne, but she missed Joash who was hidden by one of his aunts and Jehoiada the priest (her husband).

But you could see the horrible things that came from that marriage. There were two bloody coups that took place: Athaliah's coup; and then Joash's coup, which was run by Jehoiada to get the throne back for the true prince of Judah. And, of course, she was Jezebel's daughter and she brought idolatry, especially the worship of the Baals, into Judah in great strength.

So the alliance with Ahab was a horrible decision, especially for Judah, and it paid calamitous dividends for years and years to come. One could say that Judah never really recovered because they had let the idolatry in force into the door and it just would not ever leave. There were hardly any kings after this, but Hezekiah and Josiah, who had the strength to push it out. And they did not completely make the reforms that needed to be done.

We are in II Chronicles 18. This is the beginning of one example of Jehoshaphat's attempt to keep his alliance with the Ahab's house from doing too much damage. But as we will see, as hard as he tries, it ends in disaster. So let us start in verse 2. By the way, this is probably about 853 BC. It is 12 years after the alliance was made. So he had plenty of time to think about it.

II Chronicles 18:2-3 After some years he went down to visit Ahab in

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Samaria; and Ahab killed sheep and oxen in abundance for him and the people who were with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramoth Gilead. So Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "Will you go with me against Ramoth Gilead?" And he answered him, "I am as you are, and my people as your people; we will be with you in the war."

This tells you something here, partly, that Jehoshaphat was still cowed by Ahab. But, on the other hand, it seemed like Jehoshaphat, sometimes if you give him a nice meal and a glass of wine, could be persuaded. Maybe all the lavish things that Ahab did to welcome him on the state visit turned his head a little bit and made him give in when he knew he probably should not. But he does. Let us go on.

II Chronicles 18:4 Also Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Please inquire for the word of the Lord today."

So this is one of the ways he is going to try to make things a little better. "Okay, I said to you that we will go to war with you against Ramoth Gilead."

I should tell you what happened there, that the Syrians came down and captured Ramoth Gilead. It was actually on one of those trade routes. It was a very important city. Ahab wanted it back. He wanted it back *now*. And so he wanted all the forces out of Judah to come help him take it.

I guess, thinking that he probably needed to do this, Jehoshaphat says: "Yes, but first let us inquire of the Lord about this like all of the righteous kings and leaders of old did. At least let's bring God into this, okay?"

II Chronicles 18:5 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, four hundred men [guess who they were!], and said to them, "Shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?" And they said, "Go up, for God will deliver it into the king's hand."

Hey, that sounds pretty good. Four hundred guys have all agreed. But they were the prophets of Baal!

II Chronicles 18:6-8 But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of Him [of the Lord]?" So the king of Israel

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said to Jehoshaphat, "There is still one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, because he never prophesies good concerning me, but always evil. He is Micaiah the son of Imla." And Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say such things!" [meaning "You're disrespecting a prophet of God here. You got to be careful what you say about him." But that was neither here or there to Ahab.] Then the king of Israel called one of his officers and said, "Bring Micaiah the son of Imla quickly!"

So he calls in Micaiah reluctantly. But he knows that he is probably going to hear it from Micaiah again. Anyway, he goes ahead and does it.

Now it seems like here even though he is trying very hard to resist (it seems very hard, to me, maybe I am giving him too much credit), it seems like Jehoshaphat is trying to delay here. He is trying to see if maybe there is perhaps a way that he can get out of this.

And you know what? There is. This was a good idea in the situation, but it was not the best idea. The best idea had been for him to say, "No, Ahab, not this time. I'm sorry. We're going to keep our troops back in Judah. You can go ahead and defeat Ramoth Gilead on your own." But he did not do that. Like I said, he probably felt constrained and he went with him anyway.

So, probably thinking that this alliance might have something good in the end, he goes along with it. And of course, they bring Micaiah in after he asks for a true prophet.

II Chronicles 18:12-13 Then the messenger who had gone to call Micaiah spoke to him, saying, "Now listen, the words of the prophets with one accord encourage the king. Therefore please let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak encouragement" [he has probably got a sword in his back too]. And Micaiah said, "As the Lord lives, whatever my God says, that I will speak."

So the prophet is showing more backbone than Jehoshaphat at this point, in saying "I'm going to say only what God tells me to say."

II Chronicles 18:14-16 Then he came to the king; and the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?" And he said, "Go and prosper, and they shall be delivered into your hand"

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[because he is mocking the four hundred prophets of Baal that had told him to go]. So the king said to him, “How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?” [He is saying: “I know you’re not really telling me what the Lord is telling you because every time you have told me what to do, it’s been bad! And this is not bad, tell me something bad.”] Then he said, “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, ‘These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.’ ”

So he gave him what he asked for. He gave him the prophecy that Ahab would die.

We will not go through the rest of that because he tells him the story of what had happened in heaven, that there was a demon sent to make Ahab go to the battle, and he just laid it all out there saying, “I’ve come to tell you the truth, and you’re going to die in this battle. If you want to listen to these four hundred prophets of Baal, go ahead. They’ve been deceived. They’ve been sent with this demon to convince you to go die.” And he goes and dies. But there is more to the story. But I am focusing on Jehoshaphat here.

This was a warning to Ahab. But I believe it was actually more of a warning to Jehoshaphat. Ahab was as good as dead. God had decreed that Ahab would die in this battle at Ramoth Gilead. It was going to happen one way or the other, whether Jehoshaphat went with him or not. Ahab was dead.

So Jehoshaphat still had time to back out, because he could say “The prophet of God—the one whose advice I’m going to follow—said that this is not a good course of action.” And he could have gone home feeling good about himself, and in good standing with God, because he took the warning.

So God was giving Jehoshaphat a way of escape from this dilemma, from this trial (I Corinthians 10:13—God will provide a way of escape out of our temptations and our trials). Did he take it? No. Let us go on.

II Chronicles 18:28-29 So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat [this is like the night before the battle, or early in the morning], “I will disguise myself and go into battle; but you put on your robes” [and dress up like a king]. So the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into battle.

Jehoshaphat is being given another chance here to make a good decision. He could have backed out because this was Ahab's attempt to thwart the prophecy. "If I go into battle and nobody knows it's me, I'm more likely to remain alive because if Jehoshaphat goes out into battle dressed like the king, they are all going to come streaming after him and kill him thinking that he's Ahab, and I'll be fine." I mean, would that not be grounds for saying "No way! I'm going home. You're trying to make me die out here and make my army suffer all the losses just to save your own life, to save your own skin"?

But he would not back out. He went ahead and went into the battle. Luckily, God had his back.

II Chronicles 18:30-34 Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of the chariots who were with him, saying, "Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel." So it was, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, "It is the king of Israel!" Therefore they surrounded him to attack; but Jehoshaphat cried out [it was a prayer], and the Lord helped him, and God moved them to turn away from him. For so it was, when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. Now a certain man drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor. So he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and take me out of the battle, for I am wounded." The battle increased that day, and the king of Israel propped himself up in his chariot facing the Syrians until evening; and about the time of sunset he died [just as the prophet had said].

So with all that little finagling that Ahab tried to do to try to make Jehoshaphat the target, he still died. The prophecy came to pass. It was a witness against Jehoshaphat that he should have taken the out when it had been given to him, but he failed to do that.

Now they may have taken Ramoth Gilead back, but they lost the king of Israel. It was a disaster really because Jehoshaphat, from this point of view, had failed again. He had not taken the opportunity to make a good decision. And so God immediately sends a prophet to chastise him—to rebuke him.

II Chronicles 19:1-3 Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned safely to his house in Jerusalem. And Jehu [this is not the same Jehu we did the sermon about last year, this is another one] the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to King Jehoshaphat, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Therefore the wrath of the Lord is upon

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you. Nevertheless good things are found in you, in that you have removed the wooden images from the land, and have prepared your heart to seek God.”

He said, “Personally, in your relationship with God and your reforms, you’re doing pretty well. But this other thing—your stupid decisions that you’ve been making politically, leaving God out of the picture—for that you face judgment. The wrath of God is upon you.” He had already begun to see it in what had happened at Ramoth Gilead, and it did not end there. So what he told him here was essentially “You’re going to continue to have trouble from Me” (from God).

It is similar to what David did in numbering Israel, back in II Samuel 24 (also in I Chronicles 21). He thought he was doing something good to help the nation militarily to be strong and therefore safe. But he left God out of the picture entirely, and so he had to face the consequences: the wrath of God for his lack of faith.

So what happened with Jehoshaphat? In II Kings 3, which I will not read, Jehoram who is Ahab’s son, not too long after what had happened in II Chronicles 18, decides that he is going to go up against Moab because Moab had begun to rebel. He assembled the nations of Israel, Judah, and Edom (this time) against Moab. And it ends. We will not turn there, but the last verse of II Kings 3 says that it ends in indignation, or wrath, against Israel. They had to hastily withdraw, and their main object, which was the conquering of Moab’s capital city, was not done. It was left there in the middle of the battle.

This is the occasion where the king of Moab went up on the walls and sacrificed his own son in the sight of all the warriors that were there gathered against it, and they went home in indignation, it says.

Now no one knows what this indignation actually was. Was it the horror of the human sacrifice that made them all turn away? Was it wrath against Israel’s strategy of total war? If you read the account there in II Kings 3, it was total war. They basically salted the earth in Moab. It could have been simply that God had said “Enough! This has gone too far.” And He sent them packing.

But even though it was a victory, again, like at Ramoth Gilead, it was a Pyrrhic victory because it was unfinished and it had left a bad taste in their mouths—that God was for them to a certain point, and then He seemed to turn against them so that He did not let them have a full victory.

Now the next bit of God's wrath against Jehoshaphat is found in II Chronicles 20:35-37. This time Jehoshaphat again allies himself with the house of Ahab. This is the third time and this time it is Ahaziah, Ahab's grandson. They decide to do a trading venture. They would build ships at Eziongeber and sail to Tarshish, possibly perhaps to Ophir, for gold and trade. They were going to make a killing on the seas by trading. But, notice, in verse 37.

II Chronicles 20:37 But Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the Lord has destroyed your works." Then the ships were wrecked, so that they were not able to go to Tarshish.

So, evidently, there was some sort of natural disaster (a storm or whatever) and the ships were wrecked and unable to do what they were meant to do. So here is the third incident of God's wrath coming down on a partnership between Jehoshaphat and the kings of Israel. But notice in I Kings 22. It is talking about the same time.

I Kings 22:49 Then Ahaziah the son of Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "Let my servants go with your servants in the ships" [meaning "Let's do this again, let's rebuild, and we'll all get together again and make sure this venture works this time."]. But Jehoshaphat would not.

Hey, he learned his lesson! After three times of allying with the house of Ahab and facing disaster or near disaster, he decided "No, I'm not going to do it this time. I've had enough." By this time he was approaching his mid-50s, maybe even a little bit later. It took him all that time to figure out that he could stand up to Ahab's house and say "No."

Now at this point we should add II Chronicles 20. I read it the last time very quickly. But that was the great victory God performed for Judah against an attack from Moab, Ammon, and others who came up and tried to attack the southern part of Judah.

This attack probably occurred shortly after his alliance with Jehoram when the human sacrifice happened. It was probably just a few years after that that Moab struck back. They struck back at Judah because Judah was the weaker junior partner in it and it was also closer. It was right there, right across the Dead Sea. In this case, Jehoshaphat seeks God. Notice this.

II Chronicles 20:3-12 And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the

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Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to ask help from the Lord; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord. Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court, and said: “O Lord God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You [I think he is learning, and he is putting it in this prayer]? Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever? And they dwell in it, and have built You a sanctuary in it for Your name, saying, ‘If disaster comes upon us, such as the sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this temple and in Your presence (for Your name is in this temple), and cry out to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save.’ And now, here are the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir—whom You would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them and did not destroy them—here they are, rewarding us by coming to throw us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit. O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.”

So here, finally, instead of saying “Hey Ahaziah! Help me! I need all your men”—he does not do that—he says: “We’re going to do as the righteous of old, as we’ve learned in God’s Word, and we’re going to have God fight our battles because He has promised it, and we will have faith.” And what does God do? He gives him a great victory.

II Chronicles 20:24-27 So when Judah came to a place overlooking the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and there were their dead bodies, fallen on the earth. No one had escaped [meaning their enemies]. When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away their spoil, they found among them an abundance of valuables on the dead bodies, and precious jewelry, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away; and they were three days gathering the spoil because there was so much. And on the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Berachah, for there they blessed the Lord; therefore the name of that place was called The Valley of Berachah until this day. Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat in front of them, to go back . . .

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Notice “in front of them”—he had now become their leader truly. He had fulfilled the second part. He had been a pretty good shepherd. If you want to go to I Chronicles 17:1-13 and II Chronicles 19:4-11, you will see all the wonderful things he did for the people of Judah. But only now, right at the very end, he was their true ruler and leader.

II Chronicles 20:27-30 [He was] in front of them, to go back to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had made them rejoice over their enemies. So they came to Jerusalem, with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets, to the house of the Lord. And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel. Then the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around [because he had finally learnt the lesson].

He had finally, for himself, shrugged off the yoke of Ahab and that alliance.

I just want to quickly tell you the reforms that he had done for the people, to give you the shepherd part.

1. It started with himself. It says, in II Chronicles 17, that he sought the Lord. He kept the commandments and avoided the ways of the wicked Israelites.
2. The second thing he did was in the area of religion. He took down the idols in the high places and he sent Levites out into the countryside to teach God’s way—and it mentions, specifically, from “the Book of the Law” meaning Deuteronomy. He was trying to re-establish the covenant in Judah.
3. Militarily, he built fortresses and storage cities throughout Judah and strengthened the army until they were over a million men (at least that is the numbers we have).
4. The judiciary, which is interesting because the theme of Jehoshaphat’s reign has been bad judgment, bad judgment, bad judgment time and time again, and finally a very good judgment. And because he had done all those bad judgments, God’s judgment was on him until the end when God lifted it and gave him peace and rest. So the fourth major area of reform that he had made was in the judiciary.

He had made a separation of church and state among the judges: Some were doing

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secular matters; some were doing, of course, religious matters. He appointed judges and appellate judges and he set up a Supreme Court for the land of Judah. And he made sure he told every one of those judges personally that they were to judge in the fear of the Lord and according to God's law.

So he did reform after reform to help his people. Now we can understand why it says that "the Lord was with Jehoshaphat" even though he was making those bad mistakes as the ruler of Israel.

So why does the author of II Chronicles betray Jehoshaphat as such a good king, even though he had this very bad problem—made these bad judgments?

My dad gave a sermon in September 1992 (yes, it was that long ago) why three kings are missing from Matthew 1. In it, he tells the stories of Joash and Amaziah and Uzziah because they had a fault in common. That fault was that they all started out very well but they finished badly, horribly.

Jehoshaphat was just the opposite. He started out with a major mistake, a major misstep. We could even go so far as to call it a sin. But after failing time and time again, he overcame in the end and ended on a high note as leader and shepherd of his people. He had victory and prosperity, peace and rest in the end.

Let us end in Hebrews 6. This brings it into the context of us in the church. Paul writes to these Hebrews:

Hebrews 6:9-12 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

So take this lesson from the life of Jehoshaphat: It is not how you start, but how you finish.