

AM 2 Chronicles 18:1-19:3 Two Kings and a Sovereign God

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[0 : 00] to read this story, you'll find it in 2 Chronicles chapter 18. 2 Chronicles chapter 18. Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honour, and he made a marriage alliance with Ahab.

After some years he went down to Ahab in Samaria. And Ahab killed an abundance of sheep and oxen for him and for the people who were with him, and induced him to go up against Ramoth-Gilead.

Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Will you go with me to Ramoth-Gilead? He answered him, I am as you are, my people as your people, we will be with you in the war.

And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, Enquire first for the word of the Lord. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, 400 men, and said to them, Shall we go to battle against Ramoth-Gilead, or shall I refrain?

And they said, Go up, for God will give it into the hand of the king. But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here another prophet of the Lord of whom we may inquire?

[1 : 31] And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah the son of Imla.

But I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but always evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so.

Then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said, Bring quickly Micaiah the son of Imla. Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes.

And they were sitting at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria. And all the prophets were prophesying before them. And Zedekiah the son of Chenanah made for himself horns of iron and said, Thus says the Lord, With these you shall push the Syrians until they are destroyed.

And all the prophets prophesied so and said, Go up to Ramoth Gilead and triumph. The Lord will give it into the hand of the king. And the messenger who went to summon Micaiah said to him, Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favourable to the king.

[2 : 55] Let your word be like the word of one of them and speak favourably. But Micaiah said, As the Lord lives, What my God says, That I will speak.

And when he had come to the king, The king said to him, Micaiah, Shall we go to Ramoth Gilead to battle? Or shall I refrain? And he answered, Go up and triumph.

They will be given into your hand. But the king said to him, How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?

And 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 home in peace. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?

[4 : 11] And Micaiah said, Therefore hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left.

And the Lord said, Who will entice Ahab the king of Israel that he may go up and fall at Ramoth Gilead? And one said one thing and another said another.

Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord saying, I will entice him. And the Lord said to him, By what means? And he said, I will go out and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.

And he said, You are to entice him and you shall succeed. Go out and do so. Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets.

The Lord has declared disaster concerning you. Then Zedekiah the son of Chanana came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, Which way did the spirit of the Lord go from me to speak to you?

[5 : 22] And Micaiah said, Behold, you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide yourself.

And the king of Israel said, Seize Micaiah and take him back to Ammon, the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son and say, Thus says the king, Put this fellow in prison and feed him with meager rations of bread and water until I return in peace.

And Micaiah said, If you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me. And he said, Hear, all you peoples.

So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, went up to Ramoth Gilead. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes.

And the king of Israel disguised himself and they went into battle. Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of his chariots, Fight with neither small nor great, but only with the king of Israel.

[6 : 34] As soon as the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, It is the king of Israel. So they turned to fight against him. And Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him.

God drew them away from him. For as soon as the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him.

But a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate.

Therefore he said to the driver of his chariot, Turn round and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded. And the battle continued that day. And the king of Israel was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians until evening.

Then at sunset he died. Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned in safety to his house in Jerusalem. But Jehu 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?

[7 : 51] Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the Lord. Nevertheless, some good is found in you. For you destroyed the Asherahs out of the land and have set your heart to seek God.

Amen. And may God bless to us that reading from his word and to his name be the praise. Shall we come before and back in your Bibles to the passage we read, 2 Chronicles chapter 18, which we shall look at together under the title Two Kings and a Sovereign God.

Two Kings There is so much bad news these days. That is a comment I have heard made several times recently.

We live in an unstable world. There is so much unrest in society. Things that once were accepted without question are now being challenged and are being turned on their head.

Truth is at a discount and God's people are under attack. In many ways, the period of the kings in the Old Testament is relevant to our situation because for much of it there was religious and moral confusion, spiritual compromise and political upheaval.

[9 : 31] The events we are looking at this morning took place in the mid 9th century BC when wicked King Ahab was king of the northern kingdom of Israel and Jehoshaphat was king of the southern kingdom of Judah.

I would like to divide the passage into four sections. My headings are first, verses 1 to 4, a good king acts unwisely.

Secondly, in verses 5 to 11, false prophets give spurious encouragement. Thirdly, verses 12 to 27, a true prophet is treated with contempt.

And fourthly, verse 28 to verse 3 of chapter 19, God intervenes in mercy and in judgment. First then, in verses 1 to 4, we have, a good king acts unwisely.

The chapter begins with the words, Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honour. That's a significant observation.

[10 : 53] It flags up that Jehoshaphat enjoyed the Lord's blessing. The great riches and honour he enjoyed came from God.

Jehoshaphat was a good king. He followed the Lord. He obeyed his commandments. He courageously cleaned up religious practices in Judah.

And so the Lord blessed him. But despite all that, the first four verses of the chapter mention three unwise things that Jehoshaphat did.

For a start, there's the marriage alliance which is mentioned in verse 1. Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram married Ahab's daughter Athaliah.

This was a dynastic marriage. It was meant to seal peace between the two royal houses after some 50 years of hostilities.

[12:01] But was it wise for a good man like Jehoshaphat to ally himself with the notoriously wicked Ahab and his scheming wife Jezebel?

Was there not the danger of spiritual compromise? And why did Jehoshaphat need to get involved with Ahab and his family at all when the Lord was with them?

Jehoshaphat's second unwise action follows on from the first. It's in verse 2. After some years, Jehoshaphat went down to Ahab in Samaria.

Now that the two families were bound together by marriage, a royal visit to Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, would have been expected.

It was almost inevitable. It was surely a mark of friendly relations. And Ahab provided Jehoshaphat and his entourage with lavish hospitality.

[13:13] He killed an abundance of sheep and oxen. But again, was it wise for Jehoshaphat to go to Samaria?

Was it wise for him to make himself in any way beholden to Ahab? I'm sure you've heard the expression, there's no such thing as a free lunch.

Well, Jehoshaphat discovered that. He found that Ahab's hospitality came at a price. Ahab wanted something in return.

He asked Jehoshaphat to join him in attempting to recapture the city of Ramoth-Gilead, which Syria had taken from Israel sometime before.

Ahab's hospitality was part of a strategy to induce Jehoshaphat to commit to a joint military campaign.

[14:15] The third unwise thing Jehoshaphat did was to reply the way he did to Ahab's request.

When Ahab asked him if he would go to battle against Ramoth-Gilead, he said, I am as you are, my people as your people, we will be with you in the war.

Jehoshaphat seems to have replied without hesitation. Yes, of course we'll join you. We're right there with you. You can count on us. It wouldn't have been easy to say no to Ahab in these circumstances.

But again, was it wise for Jehoshaphat to commit himself and his people to a joint military campaign without giving the matter very serious thought?

Jehoshaphat did say to Ahab in verse 4, inquire first for the word of the Lord. Ahab, you need to find out what the Lord's will is before we do anything.

[15:29] That was good advice. But the problem is it seems to have been something of an afterthought. God's will should have been sought before Jehoshaphat gave Ahab his word.

But instead, Jehoshaphat promised Ahab his support and only afterwards thought about inquiring of the Lord. So there we have three unwise actions on Jehoshaphat's part.

And the same basic issue lay behind them all. It's summarized very neatly for us by Jehu the seer who met Jehoshaphat when he eventually returned to Jerusalem.

Look at what he says in verse 2 of chapter 19. Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?

Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? You see, despite being a godly man, Jehoshaphat was prepared to ally himself with those who did not share his spiritual outlook.

[16:51] He was prepared to make common cause with them. Even though he enjoyed the Lord's blessing, Jehoshaphat craved the security he thought a marriage alliance would bring him.

Instead of trusting the Lord, he sought worldly security at the risk of spiritual compromise. Can you see yourself doing something similar?

Perhaps there is a situation or activity which you know is not good for your spiritual health. But you still get involved in it.

Perhaps because it offers you something you feel you need. or you are afraid of what your friends might think if you don't get involved.

Or you are simply afraid of missing out. It is so easy to succumb. And why is that? It is because you don't believe the Lord has your best interests at heart.

[18 : 05] You fail to seek first his kingly rule and the righteousness which pleases him. In the words of a well known him, trust and obey.

Trust and obey. For there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. Spiritual compromise is a very real danger.

And if we don't resist it at the outset the chances are we'll be drawn further and further into it. Jehoshaphat probably thought that he could keep a handle on relations with Ahab but his visit to Samaria and the lavish hospitality he received there made it difficult for him not to go along with Ahab's request to join in the attack on Ramoth Gilead.

By the time he asked for the Lord's will to be sought he had begun to lose control of the situation and events took their course with potentially serious consequences.

A good king acts unwisely. Secondly in verses 5 to 11 we have false prophets giving spurious encouragement.

[19 : 33] False prophets gave spurious encouragement. Ahab heeded Jehoshaphat's advice to inquire of the Lord. He gathered the prophets together some 400 of them and he asked them the question shall we go to battle against Ramoth Gilead or shall I refrain?

The prophets answer was unanimous. It was unequivocal. Go up for God will give it into the hand of the king. Ahab asked a straightforward direct question and he got a straightforward direct answer or so it seemed.

Not only did the prophets promise success they sounded suitably spiritual. They said God would give the city into the king's hand.

They appeared to acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty. But Jehoshaphat was uneasy. He seems to have been unsure that the 400 prophets were true prophets.

He asked Ahab in verse 6 is there not here another prophet of the Lord of whom we may inquire?

[20 : 54] Was he concerned that all the prophets said the same thing without hesitation? Did he suspect that the prophets the 400 prophets were bound up in some way with the Baal and Asherah worship that Ahab's wife Jezebel had introduced to Israel?

After all it wasn't long since real prophets of the Lord had been hunted down in Israel. Remember how the prophet Elijah complained to God the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant thrown down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword and I even I only am left and they seek my life to take it away.

Whatever prompted Jehoshaphat's concern Ahab admitted there was one other prophet of whom they might inquire but he added I hate him for he never prophesies good concerning me only evil Ahab didn't like Micaiah because he didn't like what he had to say he didn't give the king the kind of upbeat encouraging message he wanted to hear he was more like a prophet of doom but Ahab agreed to summon Micaiah while the other prophets kept on repeating their encouragement to go to war these days there are many false prophets who are willing to tell people what they want to hear they tell us for example that if we want to find meaning and purpose in life all we have to do is to look inside ourselves we should aim to be whoever and whatever we want to be the teaching of the Bible that God has created us to live in his world on his terms for his glory seems so restrictive by comparison sadly there are false prophets within the professing church they preach a gospel there is no gospel at all it's many years since the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr warned of a gospel in which a God without wrath brings men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross a God without wrath brings men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.

If they're interested at all, that's the sort of gospel many people want to hear. God accepts you just as you are. He's not bothered about sin.

[24 : 11] He loves everyone. But that's not the biblical gospel. God does love a lost world. But his is a holy love.

He demonstrated his love by sending his son into the world to die the just for the unjust to bring us to God. If we refuse to turn and trust in him, we remain in our sin and we face a lost eternity.

In a confusing world, we need to hold to the truth of God's word. Only his word can be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

False prophets offer spurious encouragement. Thirdly, in verses 12 to 27, a true prophet is treated with contempt.

A true prophet is treated with contempt. The messenger who was sent to summon Micaiah told him that all the other prophets had spoken enthusiastically in favor of the king's proposed campaign.

[25 : 24] The messenger encouraged Micaiah to do likewise. Let your word be like the word of one of them and speak favorably.

But Micaiah wasn't prepared to parrot the party line. As the Lord lives, he said, what my God says, that I will speak.

It therefore comes as something of a shock that when Ahab actually asks Micaiah what he thinks about attacking Ramoth Gilead, Micaiah says just what the other prophets have said.

Go up and triumph. They will be given into your hand. I think Micaiah must have spoken in an ironic tone.

Perhaps he was flagging up that he knew what the other prophets had said and that he knew that what they said was wrong.

[26 : 34] Ahab seems to have detected the irony in Micaiah's reply. He challenged him to say what he really thought. How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?

Micaiah then disclosed that he had received a vision in which he saw all Israel scattered on the mountains like sheep without a shepherd.

The people of Israel were about to lose their shepherd king. This time Micaiah gave Ahab the unvarnished truth.

It was what Ahab had apparently asked for but he instantly dismissed it as yet another example of Micaiah's bias against him.

He turned to Jehoshaphat and said did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me but evil. Micaiah confirmed the truth of what he had said by disclosing a further vision he had been given.

[27 : 45] He had seen the Lord surrounded by the host of heaven. The Lord had asked who will entice Ahab the king of Israel that he may go up and fall at Ramoth Gilead.

Eventually a spirit had come forward and offered to be a lying spirit in the mouths of Ahab's prophets. Micaiah concluded with the words Now therefore behold the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets.

The Lord has declared disaster concerning you. What Micaiah has to say here is startling. The epistle of James warns us against saying that when we are tempted we are being tempted by God. Let no one say when he is tempted I am tempted by God for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one.

How then can Micaiah say that the Lord has put a lying spirit into the mouths of Ahab's prophets? What does he mean? I think the basic point he is making is that in his sovereignty God uses even evil in the furtherance of his purposes.

[29 : 09] Nothing is outside his control. In this instance the Lord allowed Ahab's prophets to feed him lies and he used their lies to bring about Ahab's death.

The prophets were still responsible for what they said and Ahab was still responsible for accepting their lies rather than the truth he had urged Micaiah to tell him.

Micaiah was a true prophet. He told Ahab the truth and what did he get for his pains? He was arrested and imprisoned.

The king ordered that he be fed with meager rations of bread and water until he returned in peace. To which Micaiah's response was if you return in peace the Lord has not spoken by me.

Micaiah was confident that what he had said was true. He was confident that it would come to pass. He was prepared to put his reputation on the line.

[30 : 22] After all the mark of a true prophet is that what he says comes to pass. It's interesting that neither Ahab nor Jehoshaphat appears to have been stopped in his tracks by Micaiah's prophecies.

They certainly didn't alter their plans. Perhaps they were so set on what they were about to do that they treated what Micaiah said as virtually irrelevant.

That's alarming isn't it? To think we can be so set on doing our own thing and going our own way that we dismiss the truth even when it hits us in the face.

We can be so blind to the truth that we fail to take it on board. God's word is truth.

It will be vindicated. In his second letter the apostle Peter tells his readers that he had been privileged to be an eyewitness of Jesus transfiguration.

[31 : 39] That was a tremendous privilege. But Peter goes on to say that the prophetic word is even more sure. No prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation he writes for no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

That's why the Bible is true. That's why it can be relied on. It is the living word of the living God and we need to heed it not blind ourselves to its truth.

A true prophet is treated with contempt. Fourthly in the remainder of our passage God intervenes in mercy and in judgment.

Ahab and Jehoshaphat set off for Ramoth Gilead and before they engaged the Syrians in battle Ahab told Jehoshaphat he had a plan.

He was going to go into battle in disguise but he wanted Jehoshaphat to wear his royal robes. Ahab was going to take what he might have thought were reasonable precautions just in case what Micaiah said was true.

[33 : 10] He wanted to pass himself off as just another soldier and by the same token he was prepared to expose his ally Jehoshaphat to greater risk and danger.

Jehoshaphat doesn't seem to have objected. Ahab was very much the senior member of the partnership and by this time Jehoshaphat had ceded any initiative to him.

What neither Ahab nor Jehoshaphat was aware of was that the king of Syria had specifically ordered his charioteers to target the king of Israel.

Not surprisingly when the charioteers caught sight of Jehoshaphat they assumed he was Ahab and they went after him. Jehoshaphat was in mortal danger.

He cried out to the Lord in his need. Jehoshaphat cried out the chronicler says and the Lord helped him. God drew them away from him.

[34 : 23] By God's grace the charioteer stopped pursuing Jehoshaphat and his life was spared. And what about Ahab?

He was incognito but an archer happened to draw his bow at random. The arrow he shot happened to strike Ahab.

Not only that it happened to find a gap in the king's armour and it inflicted a deadly wound. Ahab was taken out of the battle and within a few hours he was dead.

Micaiah's prophecy was fulfilled. Here we have two sovereign interventions. In God's mercy Jehoshaphat was rescued from almost certain death.

With death staring him in the face he cried out to the Lord. He sent up what we sometimes call an arrow prayer. It may have been little more than an anguished cry but the Lord heard and answered and saved.

[35 : 39] Hebrew scholars point out that it's the same Hebrew word which is used in verse 2 to describe how Ahab induced Jehoshaphat to go up against Ramoth Gilead.

And in verse 31 to describe how in the heat of the battle the Lord drew the Syrians away from Jehoshaphat.

Ahab drew Jehoshaphat into his web of intrigue and it must be said Jehoshaphat allowed him to do so. Ahab could equally easily have drawn Jehoshaphat to his death but in his mercy God drew the Syrians away from him.

You see Ahab's plans were no match for the Lord's. The Lord had his hand on the situation in his grace he protected Jehoshaphat by his supernatural power.

God hadn't given up on Jehoshaphat. Isn't that encouraging? His unwise actions had consequences. He experienced the Lord's chastisement.

[37 : 01] Jehu the seer told him that in chapter 19 wrath has gone out against you from the Lord but in it all God was merciful.

He had more work for Jehoshaphat to do. And there's something else that's encouraging about Jehoshaphat's rescue. The Lord helped him in response to prayer.

We sometimes ask what's the point of praying to a sovereign God? If God is sovereign why pray? But we see here as elsewhere in scripture that God uses our prayers in the out working of his purposes.

The other sovereign intervention was quite different. Ahab entered the battle in disguise. He did all he could not to be recognized but that didn't protect him from being mortally wounded by a random archer.

The archer drew his bow at random he had no idea who he was aiming at he may not even have been aiming at anyone in particular but in God's providence the random arrow struck Ahab in a vulnerable spot and that was that.

[38 : 30] Humanly speaking the arrow was totally random but it wasn't really random was it? It was under God's control arrow just as the charioteers were who were pursuing Jehoshaphat it was God who determined the flight path of the arrow and Ahab could do nothing to thwart God's purposes none of us can that's a sobering truth for those who refuse to recognize God's authority they may shake their puny fists in God's face but they can no more resist his will than a stream can flow uphill it's a sobering truth for God's people too but there's comfort in knowing that even the apparently random events of life the apparently random details are in

God's hands nothing happens by chance in all things God is at work for his own glory and the good of his people so may we be alert to the danger of spiritual compromise may we refuse to heed the false prophets of our day may we have confidence in the truth of God's word and may we trust in the sovereign God who is able to do in us and for us more than we can ask or even imagine shall we pray oh Lord we pray that we may learn the lessons of this passage of your word help us not to be unwise like

Jehoshaphat good man though he was help us to seek first your kingly rule and that righteousness which pleases you help us to commit ourselves to the God who is sovereign the God who is in control even of random events and random happenings may we trust you and may we seek to obey you for your glory amen you