

Jehoshaphat - A Near-Fatal Mistake

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[0 : 00] Let's turn then to 2nd Chronicles, the passage we read in chapter 18. 2nd Chronicles 18, we're going to look at the teaching found throughout the whole of the chapter, looking at this episode in the life of Jehoshaphat.

Looking at these pictures of kings, we've called them the gallery of kings in 2nd Chronicles, and Jehoshaphat, as we saw last time, has more said about him than any other king apart from Solomon and Hezekiah.

And he is commended as being a very good king. We called him last time the shepherd king, from what you find in chapter 17. But he made mistakes, like every good king, sometimes they make mistakes as well.

This time, the mistake that he made was a serious one, from which he recovered, because when you come to read chapter 19, obviously, there's more to his life than in this chapter. But the mistake he made was a serious one.

It nearly cost him his own life. And it was serious for the people as well, because it was joining in with King Ahab in the northern kingdom, who was one of the worst kings ever in the history of the people of Israel and Judah.

[1 : 16] Just picture the scene for a moment. Travelling up the A9, on the way back to Lewis, everything seems fine. It's not a particularly nice day, but it's quite a bright day.

It's quite cold. Then all of a sudden, a shower ahead has just covered the road with a sheet of ice. And cars coming, and lorries the other way begin to slide all over the place.

One goes onto its roof, slides along into a bunch of trees. We keep crawling onwards, slowing down gradually.

Another car comes flying in the air towards us. Somersaults in the air. And just when it seems to go and land on top of us, it flips sideways and lands right beside. And we say, wow, that was close.

That's how it should be reading this chapter. Because after you've read this chapter and realize the mistake that Jehoshaphat made, you should say, that was a really close thing.

[2 : 29] He went within an inch of losing his life. And he brought his people into real danger by what he did.

It was a near miss in his life. And by the goodness and mercy of God, it didn't lead to disaster the way it could have done. So three things about Jehoshaphat from this chapter.

First of all, Jehoshaphat joined forces with evil Ahab. You see there at the beginning, Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor. And he made a marriage alliance with Ahab.

We're not told there what it is. We learn elsewhere that he married off his son to a daughter of Ahab. Now, Ahab really was the depths of idolatrous, of wickedness.

Idolatry, wickedness. Because the description you find of Ahab, there's a summary of his life in 1 Kings. But you know yourselves, the kind of things that the Bible tells us about Ahab.

[3 : 34] Just let me read the summary you have in 1 Kings, chapter 16, verses 30 to 33. Because the king's writer as well is quite insistent that Ahab was such a bad man in so many ways.

He married, of course, this daughter of Ethbal, the king of the Sidonians. Who were idolatrous, and she led him into the serving of Baal, although he seemed quite glad to do that himself.

Ahab, the son of Omri, did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat.

He took for his wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbal, king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him. He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria.

And Ahab made an asherah, which was an object of idolatrous worship. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

[4 : 39] And you can read the account, of course, of his life is tied up with the account you have in 1 Kings there of the great prophet Elijah. Ahab was somebody you just avoided.

He was not the kind of man that you would deliberately go and make an alliance with. He's the kind of man that you would just keep well away from, if you knew what was good for you.

And yet you find here Jehoshaphat actually coming to make an alliance with him, not just by marrying off his son to Ahab's daughter, but he then after some years went down to Ahab in Samaria.

They had a great celebration, of course. And Ahab, king of Israel, said, will you go with me to Ramoth Gilead? And he said, I am as you are, my people are as your people, we will be with you in this war.

And if you look at, in verse 2 there, you'll find an important word used there. Ahab induced him to go up against Ramoth Gilead.

[5 : 42] The word induced is a word which means to entice. To draw away in a kind of subtle, enticing way.

And that's the kind of man Ahab was. Once you got into an alliance with Ahab, and with the Ahabs of this world, they're the ones who are really going to be, in their own particular manipulative way, they're going to control your life.

I'm sure Jehoshaphat went into this alliance with very good intentions. And perhaps he had political reasons for this alliance with Ahab.

But it was a disastrous alliance, because he was actually joining himself with somebody who lay under the curse or the displeasure of God for his wickedness and his evil and his idolatry.

And the result of that was very predictable. It got Jehoshaphat into serious trouble. The word that's used here, the word enticed or induced, it's very important in Chronicles.

[6 : 51] It's used elsewhere in the chapter as well, because it's that picture of, it's a difficult thing theologically, but the Lord is portrayed as speaking to spirits in his presence.

And one of them comes forward and offers to go to be a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets. And the Lord sends him and says, fine, go and do that. And that's Micaiah's way of showing that Ahab is actually dominated by lies, by untruth.

He wants that. And he hires prophets and keeps them in his high to tell him the things that he wants to be told. And yet here is this good king actually going to make an alliance with him.

An alliance that gets him into trouble. Now, the Bible always tells us that it's important who we have formal alliances with. We can't live in the world without interacting in some way with the world.

But the Bible tells us that the friendship of the world, that's a different thing to having contact with the world, to actually interacting with the world the way we must. Friendship of the world.

[8 : 06] This is what Jehoshaphat was really doing. He was entering into an alliance of friendship with Ahab, as if they were really on the same level spiritually. And, as John puts, the friendship of the world is enmity against God.

James rather says that friendship of the world is enmity against God. 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 33.

It's somewhat strange to find it in that context, but it's a verse that says that bad company corrupts good morals. Paul was writing there in 1 Corinthians 15, as you know, about the resurrection.

And setting out to prove the fact of the resurrection, both in Christ's case and on the part of God's people, who would be raised to life with Christ. And there were people in Corinth who were disputing this, or who were not accepting this truth of resurrection at all.

And they were actually influencing other people as well. They were influencing people by inducing them, or enticing them away from the truth. That's exactly what you find built into this word that's used here by the writer of Chronicles.

[9 : 22] Ahab induced Jehoshaphat. Ahab enticed Jehoshaphat. That is what worldliness actually does. If we come into its friendship, it will be the inducing partner, the enticing partner.

It is very much a part of what is specifically warned against in the scriptures. And of course we pass that on to our young people as well.

The importance of the company they keep. The importance of finding people who have the same values as we teach them in our homes, in our services in church, and the things that are important

to us, and the development of their lives.

And they hopefully will pass that on to the next generation themselves. That's what the Bible is really about, in terms of our passing on things to those who are coming after us.

But it of course applies to all ages. It applies to every single age group. What kind of friendships do we have? What do we have friendship with?

[10:31] What is most influencing our thinking? Who is most influencing our thinking? So this is Ahab, this wicked man. And here is Jehoshaphat who comes to ally himself with him.

And in doing so, he is induced into a war against the Syrians. Which may be of political advantage to Jehoshaphat, but for personal and for spiritual ways, it's a disastrous alliance.

That's the first thing. He joined forces with evil Ahab. The second thing is, he failed to heed God's word. Now you notice there in verse 4, that he was very concerned, as a man of God, to have God's guidance, to have God's word made clear to him, so that he would know for sure, that this was in fact the right thing he was doing, joining with Ahab to go to war, to go against the Syrians.

So he said to the king of Israel, inquire first for the word of the Lord. Now in those days, of course, you know, the word of the Lord came through prophets.

Elijah, and in this chapter you find Micaiah, were prophets of the Lord. People that God had specifically set apart and endowed to convey his word to those that were their own contemporaries, whether they were kings, or the people, it didn't matter.

[11:57] Elijah, Micaiah, they were prophets of the Lord, who spoke from the Lord, as the Lord directed them. The problem was, that there were many false prophets.

Elijah, in most of the detail you have about Elijah's life, he's in a contest with the false prophets. And that of course is the background to the famous contest on Mount Carmel.

Well it's the same here of course, in this chapter you find, the first thing that Ahab does, he calls the prophets. But they're not the prophets of the Lord, they're his prophets. They're the prophets that he has kept in his hire, because he likes what they say to him, because it fits in with what he himself wants to hear.

He wants people who will actually tell him good things about himself. People will tell him, yes, go and do what's in your mind to do. You're the king, of course it will work out, God will be with you.

That's the kind of people he had around him in the school of the prophets, this group of prophets, 400 of them, and he said to them, will we go to battle, or shall I refrain, will I not?

[13:07] And they said, go up, for God will give it into the hand of the king. Now Jehoshaphat knew this. He knew that these prophets were not the Lord's prophets.

He knew it very well, so he said, is there not another prophet of the Lord of whom we may inquire? And of course Rahab said, yes, there's a man here, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him.

See how pointedly and beautifully the Bible brings that out. It's just exactly as he said it. Oh, there is one man here, this Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him.

Why did he hate him? Well, he said himself, he never prophesies good concerning me, but always evil. That was Ahab's way of saying, he always tells me the truth.

And I don't like it. And just imagine, how difficult it was for Micaiah. Here he is, surrounded by 400 prophets who are on Ahab's payroll, who tell Ahab everything he wants to hear.

[14:23] He is totally outnumbered by people who are absolutely committed to destroying him.

And when he's told by Ahab, when he's called in, of course, Ahab says that he must say the same thing as the other prophets.

And this man says, what the Lord tells me, that's what I will speak. Now that takes bravery, that takes courage, that takes enormous strength to actually stand in that context against the man who's the king, who has power of life and death over you, and facing 400 prophets who are hired by him to tell him what he wants to hear.

And yet, here's this man of God, this Micaiah, who says, as the Lord lives, what my God says, that will I speak. But that's how it must be.

That's how it must be for me and for you in the society you and I belong to as well. There are plenty of people who are quite happy to be prophets who will just say what people want to hear.

There are plenty of people who stand in pulpits who will actually just preach things that will please those who are in front of them. Whose sermons will really just be the kind of thing that Ahab wanted his prophets to say.

[16:03] Things which will leave them feeling nice, nice and comfortable. But you see, that's not what God calls us to do.

We have to have God's truth conveyed to ourselves, to yourselves, to every single one of us. Just as this man, Micaiah. So, that was the problem. The false prophets, and here is this man who is hated by the prophets and by Ahab, but he stands for the truth.

And this is what he is saying. I will say as the Lord gives me, what my Lord speaks, what God speaks, that is what I will do. And now, the thing is, Jehoshaphat then heard Micaiah's prophecy. Micaiah first of all said, when the king asked him, shall we go to Ramoth Gilead to battle or shall I refrain? And in verse 14, Micaiah first of all said, go up and triumph for they will be given into your hand.

[17:02] There's a bit of a problem with that, because you don't expect Micaiah to say that, because he doesn't believe that. He knows that Ahab's not going to prosper. He knows if Ahab goes up to that battlefield, he's going to lose his life.

And the people will have no shepherd, which is what he came to prophesy. So it seems that he spoke these words, the first words there, that he just was kind of mimicry or copying the false prophets and just saying sarcastically to Ahab, like he would say, oh yes, go up, triumph, come on, on you go, it'll be alright.

Just in a way that was ridiculing what the false prophets were assuring him of. And Ahab knew that. Ahab knew that he was just not being serious.

So they said, how many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord? And then Ahab was told, I saw Israel scattered in the mountainous sheep that have no shepherd.

And he was talking there about Ahab's death and the people no longer having a king because Ahab was going to be killed if he went up to battle. And then of course he went on to speak about how he had seen the Lord in a vision sitting on his throne and this evil spirit, this false spirit offering to go and enter into the prophets of Ahab and that he would follow their lies and that would be how he would actually be led astray.

[18:30] I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of his prophets. And the Lord said, go and do so. Now therefore, behold the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these two prophets.

The Lord has declared disaster concerning you. These are the words that Jehoshaphat hears from the mouth of a man he knows is a prophet of the Lord. And what does he do?

You might expect him to say, I'm out of here. I can't stay with you in any alliance any longer. The word of the Lord is clear. It's not going to succeed.

Well, that's not what happened. The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, went up to Ram with Gilead.

He didn't turn around and go home. Verse 28 there, he kept up the alliance. He went into battle against the word of the Lord. He proceeded with his life contrary to what he knew was God's word and God's revelation of what the outcome would be.

[19:43] And that is always disastrous, isn't it? But we do it all the time. We do things that we know are not right in the light of God's truth.

We say things that we know are not in accordance with the quality of speech that God's word requires. We think thoughts that we know and reflection are not in accordance with what God's truth sets out.

Whenever we find the light of God's word shining into our lives, we must never act against that. We must never act contrary to that.

In other words, when the Lord tells us clearly in his word, as he does with all the most important things, this is what you must do, or this is what you must never do, don't ever act contrary to what you know is the truth.

Because that light in Jehoshaphat's case will always lead to disaster. It will always be a bad policy to make an alliance with something that you know is contrary to the word of God.

[20:57] God's word. Having joined horses with Ahab, he then heard the word of God, he heard it clearly, but he still didn't turn from the course that he was on.

And that means thirdly that Jehoshaphat very nearly lost his life. Isn't this an amazing episode here at the end when it describes how they went together to battle against the Syrians?

Ahab devised a cunning plan. Now that tells you that Ahab was scared. Ahab was apprehensive.

Ahab had listened to the words of Micaiah. And Ahab knew deep down in his heart that this holy man of God, this man of God who kept to the truth of God, though it hurt himself, though it actually led to him being imprisoned.

Ahab knew that this man of God was telling him the truth. He buried it out of sight. He put it to the back of his mind, but he couldn't get rid of it. And he was apprehensive going into that battle because at the back of his mind, the words of Micaiah kept coming to him, you're going to die.

[22 : 21] This is going to live in place where you're killed. So he devised this cunning plan. And the cunning plan was he said, I will disguise myself and go into the battle, but you Jehoshaphat, you wear your robes.

Now it seems on the surface, again you see the seductive aspect of it, it's really saying to Jehoshaphat, you're the one who's really going to be important in this.

You just keep wearing your robes and you'll be seen as the king and everybody will think you're the king and you'll get, you know, the implication is you'll get all the praise when the victory is done.

You'll be at the head of things, you'll be the one who's led us in all your robes and all your finery, I'll just dress up like one of the soldiers, I'll be a nobody. What was he doing? He was trying to preserve his own life.

And it didn't matter that he knew Jehoshaphat would probably lose his. That's what it is, you see, that's what it's like when you make an alliance with evil, when you make an alliance with the world in its worldness, when you become friends with the world, the friends that you make, if they're friends that are themselves thoroughly worldly, they're going to look after themselves.

[23 : 34] The world will look after itself. The evil of this world will want to look after itself, even if it's at your expense, and my expense. Here's a man who has no conscience about Jehoshaphat coming to be killed.

As long as he preserves his own life, that's okay. But the word of God, you see, has left its mark on his conscience, and as he goes into battle, Jehoshaphat is the target, because the Syrians had devised a plan, go for the king, because if we get the king, then everything will fall apart.

The people will panic, and we'll get the victory. That was their strategy, obviously. So, of course, when they saw this man dressed up in the robes of his kingship, they immediately assumed, there's the king of Israel, target him.

And then Jehoshaphat realized what was going on, so he cried out to God. That's the implication, it's not just that he cried out in alarm, he cried out to God, because God helped him, the Lord heard him.

And there's a great point, really, to be made in that itself. You get into trouble, as we all do. We act against the word of God, and the consequences of it sometimes, lead us into trouble.

[24 : 58] what do we do? We don't devise a cunning plan of any kind, we just cry to the Lord. Because it doesn't matter that we've got into trouble, the Lord is not going to refuse our cry, just because we've got ourselves into a problem.

The Lord is there for our problems. He's not just there for our emergencies, don't get me wrong, we're not saying that you turn to the Lord just when things are problematic, just when you've got yourself into some sort of problem, just when things are not going quite so well in your life.

But the fact of the matter is, when that is the case, the Lord is there for you, the Lord is there to be turned to, the Lord is there to be cried to, and here is Jehoshaphat, this man who in his stupidity has actually got himself into trouble by an alliance with Ahab, and Ahab has now got one over him, and he's put him into danger, so that his life is really on the line, what does he do?

He cries out to the Lord, what does the Lord do? He hears him, and he helps him. Isn't that a great point? Despite Jehoshaphat's foolishness, despite the fact that he had gone all this way in this alliance with Ahab, the Lord doesn't say to Jehoshaphat, you're on your own now, you've got yourself into this pickle, you've got to make your own way out of it, I'm not going to actually deal with you, you've been stupid, you've been foolish, I'm going to leave you there, get yourself out of it.

That's not how the Lord is. The Lord will come to our aid. You look through the book of Psalms, you don't need to go any further than that in the Bible, look through the book of Psalms, look at all the number of times in the book of Psalms, the psalmist cried out in his distress, all kinds of different distresses at different times, and you'll always find and the Lord heard, and the Lord delivered.

[27 : 03] It's one of the great features of this passage that although it doesn't say it out and out, what you're left with is without any doubt whatsoever, the Lord is gracious, the Lord is merciful, the Lord is for us to cry to, the Lord is in favor of us, coming to ask him for help.

So we put away our pride, we put away the idea that says, well, okay, I got myself into this mess, but I know I can make my own way out of it, I'll make it, I'll do it.

The Lord is saying, don't be stupid, do what Jehoshaphat did, cry out to me, let me come to your help, ask me, and I'll hear, and I'll come, and I'll help you.

And then you notice the contrast there, this is the plan that Ahab had to foil the word of God. Now, keep in mind, you see, that it's not just Ahab wanting to preserve his own life at the expense of Jehoshaphat.

What is really theologically deep down is saying to us, this passage is really saying the teaching of it is, here is a man who is desperately trying to devise a plan by which he will escape from the word of God coming to be fulfilled in his experience.

[28 : 35] He knows the word of God has said through Micaiah, you go up to that battlefield and you'll be killed. So, here is a man who knows that that's the case, who knows that's what the word of God is saying, and who devises this cunning plan to try and escape.

Escape from what? Escape from the word of God being fulfilled. It can't be done. And that's what is proved in this passage.

That's what's proved to us in this passage. The word of God, what God says, will be done. It doesn't matter how ingenious Ahab is, how evil he is even, in the plan that he has to escape and not actually come under what Micaiah said would be his end.

That's the word of God. He's trying to escape from it. It doesn't matter how ingenious he is, how evil he is in devising his plan. The fact of the matter is, he's going to die because God said so.

And it's really amazing the contrast in the passage, very deliberately again, just, it's put that way so that it will have an impact in our minds. Because on the one hand you've got this very sophisticated, very cunning plan on the part of Ahab.

[29 : 56] On the other hand you've got a reference to an unnamed archer, who's not really taking aim at anything, but he just draws his bow and fires an arrow towards the army of the Israelites.

He hasn't a clue where that arrow's going. He just does it. And that arrow finds a narrow gap between the top part of Ahab's armour and the bottom part of his skirt, as they called it, the armour that covered you from the waist down towards your knees, and then there was the breastplate above that.

Between them, to allow movement, there was this very tiny narrow gap, that's where the arrow hit. See, God never misses. And the contrast is between his own really sophisticated and elaborate and ingenious and cunning plans, that's on the one hand, and yet that's all just done away with by a man who just shot an arrow, without knowing where it was going.

And yet that was God's way of destroying Ahab's attempts to hide from his word. There are many people that devise very sophisticated means and arguments against God.

They're all around us. All kinds of philosophies, all kinds of devices, all kinds of things that are all designed to protect themselves from the word of God.

[31 : 32] To assure themselves that God's word is not true, that it will not ever find them out. It can't be done. It doesn't matter how sophisticated it is, how much it has stood throughout centuries of human thinking, every single argument that's devised against the word of God against the Lord of this word will be found out.

And all of these arguments and all of these devices, all of these means, they feel so secure. You listen to atheists, you listen to humanist and secularist society thinking and you read what they say on blogs and on the websites that they have.

Boy, are they confident. They're so confident, they're just like Ahab, confident in his cunning plan, confident in the armor that he's wearing.

There is Ahab confidently going into battle thinking, I've done it, Jehoshaphat's going to be killed and I'll have escaped the word of God. And then Nazarro comes smack into his gut.

So it is, you see, with every single plan. God knows where the gaps are. And every time we devise a plan against him, he will always find the gap.

[33 : 08] He will always show that that's no security at all for us. You see, our security is not in opposing his word. Our security is not in acting contrary to his word.

Our security is taking his word and saying, this is my security. This is where my future rests. This is where my life has to be based in God's own word.

However many hundreds are saying, differently to that of us. people when Paul came to write to the Ephesians, one of the things that he mentioned is the warfare that they were in spiritually.

And he actually specified that they were to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. And then he said, put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

[34 : 19] Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand firm. Stand therefore having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace, in all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

And as you examine that armor, there is one thing that strikes you, there are no gaps. It gives you complete security, where every other type of armor does not.

So there is Jehoshaphat's mistake. It nearly cost him his life, but we learn from it that our trust in the word of God is absolutely crucial, and that trusting in him, we have all the protection we need.

Let's pray. Gracious Lord, we give thanks again for your word, which directs us and surrounds us, which you place in our hearts, which we know in our thoughts, is a word that directs us in a safe way.

We bless you today for giving to us such guidance, and for your mercy and kindness in giving us your word. Help us, we pray, to use it in such a way that would follow in the ways of those who are obedient to your truth.

[36 : 14] Grant us these aspects of spiritual armor to be worn by us, and give us faith and trust and reliance in all of these things.

We pray that your glory will be made great as we seek our security. Hear us, we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.