

Jehoshaphat, The Shepherd King

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Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Well, let's turn to 2 Chronicles 17, going to look at the main parts of this chapter, as we look at this portrait in the gallery of kings that we find of King Jehoshaphat.

The portrait that 2 Chronicles gives us of Jehoshaphat is a very large portrait. It's a portrait indeed in which we find miniature portraits of other kings mentioned, or painted in, if you like, in the words of these chapters, particularly in the next chapter, where we find an account of the alliance that Jehoshaphat made with Ahab, who was one of the most wicked kings in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Jehoshaphat in the southern kingdom of Judah made an alliance with him. We're not going to go into that today, but 2 Chronicles actually gives more space to the account of Jehoshaphat than any other king mentioned, apart from Solomon and Hezekiah, two of the great kings that are mentioned in the book or in the Bible indeed.

So that Jehoshaphat actually is given more commendation amongst the things that are mentioned about him, even above Solomon and Hezekiah.

Only Josiah, who was another great reforming king, after a time of great abandonment of the things of God, Josiah is singled out for special mention and special commendation.

[1 : 31] But second to that, in terms of the commendations that are given to him, comes Jehoshaphat. And that shows you that in the writing of the Chronicles, the Chronicles were written very late on in the time of Judah and Israel's history.

You mustn't think that they were written actually during those times of kings like David and Jehoshaphat and Josiah. The second book, the books of Chronicles, were written pretty much to encourage those who had come back from all this long exile in Babylon, the things that you find mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah, which we looked at not all that long ago, long time after these things took place in the likes of Jehoshaphat's reign.

But the Chronicles writer put all of this together so that they could look back upon the history of those times, because they had by then in the return from Babylon become a very small and a very weak people.

Yet they could take their encouragement so much from the accounts they had of Jehoshaphat and Josiah and Hezekiah. And they could also take note of the way that the Chronicles writer spoke about wicked kings like Ahab and Manasseh.

That's the background to it. But here is Jehoshaphat. And Jehoshaphat, as we'll see in this chapter really, you could say that he was a shepherd king.

[3 : 01] Now, the king in Israel and in Judah, the role of the king was given by God involved a pastoral role. It involved pastoral responsibilities.

That's to say the king was given the responsibility of looking after the people. He wasn't there just to lord it over them. He wasn't there to actually exercise his kingship in a way that just served himself and his immediate family and his officials.

Although, sadly, you find that power corrupted in those days just as much as it does in our day. But the ideal of kingship is a pastoral one.

And that's why so often in the Bible you'll find the king and the good kings mentioned in terms of looking after the poor. Looking after those who are defenseless.

Looking after those who don't have access to the high levels of power in the society of that day. It was one of the king's responsibilities. He's specified by God that he had to look after the poor.

[4 : 04] That he had to be a pastoral king. That he had to follow a pastoral role in his kingship. And of course, all of that is designed for us to appreciate that the great king, God himself and especially God in Christ, is the great pastor.

He is the great shepherd. Which is why the words of Psalm 23 are so precious to God's people. The Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not be in want. But there were flaws in Jehoshaphat like every other human king.

And you'll find the flaws mentioned in the following chapters. But as we come through this gallery of kings, what God is really doing in taking us through this gallery at 2 Chronicles is bringing us to look at these portraits.

And as you come to look at these portraits and see the flaws that are built into them, as the Bible describes things truthfully for us, which is of course what is always the case, that you and I will come to actually put ourselves, as it were, with these people, as we look at these portraits, and as we know that God has promised a king that will deliver his people, the king, the great king, that we'll ask with these people, is this the one?

[5 : 32] And then as we come to the flaws, we'll realize, well no, this can't be the one. He's not perfect. He's not the ideal king. He's not the king. And therefore you go all the way through the gallery, and you end up with the last verses of 2 Chronicles, and you're then out of the gallery.

You're along with those who've come back from exile in Babylon. And the final words of 2 Chronicles. We've mentioned this before, but it's very interesting that the 2 Chronicles book is the last book in the Hebrew Bible.

The way the books are arranged in the Hebrew Bible, in the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures, 2 Chronicles is the last book. In other words, in the Old Testament Scriptures, the last words before the New Testament comes in, are the words of 2 Chronicles.

where Cyrus, the king of Persia, is mentioned as giving the decree that would allow the Jews to come back from Babylon to rebuild in Jerusalem.

And in rebuilding would look forward to a better age. This is how it finishes. Thus says Cyrus, the king of Persia, The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

[6 : 56] Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up. These are the last words of the Old Testament.

Let him go up. In other words, the reader of the Old Testament is encouraged to think ahead, to go up to the next stage. What is that? It's the coming of the king.

It's the coming of Christ. That's why the Bible in the Old Testament scriptures is arranged the way it is by God. So that the last words of the Hebrew scriptures are looking up, or encouraging those who are reading them to go up to look up to the next stage of redemption, of revelation in Christ.

That's why, coming through this gallery of kings, we're going to look at very important things for our own age, for our application to our own circumstances, but as we look at these kings, we will see in every single one of them, even the very best of them, certain flaws, and certain failures, that will immediately say to us, this is not the one, but there is one who is flawless, and he is in a gallery of his own.

He is the Lord Jesus Christ. His personal faithfulness to God, first of all, that's Jehoshaphat's personal faithfulness to God.

[8 : 27] In the first five, six verses or so, you find that mentioned, his own personal life, and how his life was one of walking in the ways of David, his father.

Of course, David wasn't his natural father, his literal father. It means his father in terms of his ancestry, but also his father in terms of the faith that he lived by.

It's interesting, it doesn't say that he walked in the ways of Asa, his father. Asa, the last picture we looked at, the reign of two halves, a good king in some respects, especially the earlier part of his reign, but then he tailed off and became such a bad king in many respects in the latter part of his reign.

You remember that from last time. So what it's saying here too is that it wasn't Asa whose footsteps Jehoshaphat, his son, walked in, but in the footsteps, in the earlier ways, of his father David.

And of course David, in the account of scripture, yes, he had his flaws, of course, as well, but he's known as the man after God's own heart. The man that is in many ways the ideal of kingship, the man who actually comes to be set before us as the obedient king, the man who had God's laws foremost in his mind and who established the kingdom under him.

[9 : 49] Well, that is what you find with Jehoshaphat. He walked in the ways, in the earlier ways, of his father David. He did not seek the Baals.

These were the idols of the Canaanites, but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments and not according to the practices of Israel.

Israel, the northern kingdom, from the time of Jehoshaphat, from the time of Jeroboam rather, who broke away, as we saw, in the time of Rehoboam, first king of Judah, the northern kingdom of Israel by and large followed on in that idolatrous way and more and more departed from the ways of the Lord.

Jehoshaphat is set out as contrasting with that. He did not walk according to the practices of Israel. There's something there for us as well as we look back into our own spiritual ancestry.

Whose footsteps are we walking in today? Whose footsteps are you walking in? Whose footsteps are you following? Of course, ultimately, it is the Lord himself and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[11 : 03] We walk in his ways. But there are many ways in which there are many references to our ancestry in the Bible in a good sense, in a covenant sense.

we have come to be today those who have inherited the good ways of walking in the commandments of God through people who have gone before us, who have passed on to us these scriptures, these ideals, these ways of God as they themselves found them set out in the Bible. They passed that on to us. All the way back in history, you find generation after generation faithful to the Lord and seeking to instruct those who are coming after them that they too would walk in the ways of the Lord.

And that's what God has given to us, not only to walk in the ways of the Lord because it's been passed on to us through his grace by our ancestors, by those who were ahead of us in time, but nevertheless in spiritual ancestry, walking the same way.

Not only has he given us, that great privilege today in the gospel here as a congregation, he's given us also the responsibility of passing that on to our children. That's why we've got Sunday school, that's why we've got Point to Life, that's why we teach our children in our homes, in our families, the things of the Bible because we want them to walk in the ways of their father David.

[12 : 33] To be obedient to the Lord, not to stray from the ways of the Lord, but to be like Jehoshaphat, his heart was courageous in the ways of the Lord.

We don't have courage of ourselves, we need the courage given to us. Jehoshaphat sought it from the Lord. He prayed to the Lord for it. He was close to the Lord so that the Lord actually answered his prayer and his desire by giving him a courageous heart.

You need a courageous heart today, I need a courageous heart. It's something that is necessary in facing that world out there as hostile as it is to the gospel. If you're going to witness for God, you need a courageous heart.

If you're going to stand up against the apostasy of our day, you need a courageous heart. It's no use going out there in your own strength. It's no use going out there as a weak and sickly Christian. It's no use going out there as somebody who is not really consistently walking in the ways of the Lord because your life will not be effective. And the Lord will show that.

[13 : 43] And you're more likely to bring others down than to help them up. Same with me. Every one of us has that same responsibility to walk in the ways of our Father David, of our spiritual ancestry, of those who walked in the ways of the Lord and whose burden it was to pass that on to the next generation.

That's what his personal faithfulness is described as. And you see the consequences of that in verses 3 and 5. The Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he walked in the earlier ways of his Father.

Now you go back to chapter 15. We've mentioned that verse previously where Esau was met by Azariah, this man of God, this prophet of God.

He went out to meet Esau, Jehoshaphat's father, and said, Hear me, Esau, and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.

There's the connection that God himself made between obedience and faithfulness to him on our part, and his being with us on his part. If we're not faithful to him, we can't just say, yes, but the Lord is going to be with us.

[15 : 04] The fact is, he's not. He's not going to be with us, certainly not in the way that will make our lives effective, and the lives they should be, unless we are with him.

And you remember, Israel had that demonstrated after coming into the promised land, and facing all of the defended and walled cities, cities, when they came to I or A, they thought, this is a piece of cake.

People who can actually cause the overthrow of Jericho, this is going to be a walkover. Of course, they failed, because there was in their midst an unattended problem, problem.

A problem, yes, of one man, who had taken something that God himself had specifically banned, not to take off the spoil of war from their enemies.

And Achan had gone against that specific command of the Lord. Of course, you know the story, he was actually finally singled out, and Joshua had to deal with the problem.

[16:19] But, they went out to Ai, or to I, in their own strength, in their own confidence, confident that come what may, they would actually achieve a great victory.

And the Lord was saying to them, you're not going to have victory come what may, you're going to have victory if you're obedient to me. You're going to be powerful if you walk in my ways, if you do my commandments, if you stay close to me, then I will be with you.

But if I'm not with you, God is saying, or if you're not with me, I'm not going to be with you to the extent that I will bless your life and make your life powerful and effective.

That's what they found out, and that's what is true of ourselves today. We need to be effective Christians in this world. This world needs effective Christians. This world needs powerful lives.

Lives that will demonstrate the grace and the power of Christ, and the love of Christ, and the mercy of God. That's why it's such a great thing to have the opportunity to be built up in our lives spiritually, and to be with God so that God will be with us.

[17:32] And the Lord established the kingdom. You find in verse 5, therefore, the Lord established the kingdom in his hand. The word therefore there is also very important, isn't it?

It makes the connection with Jehoshaphat's obedience and Jehoshaphat's faithfulness. Not only was the Lord with himself personally, he was with him too in his kingship, in his reign, he was with him to the extent of establishing the kingdom.

How is your own life going to be established firmly? How is it going to be set on a right foundation? How is our life built up in all the component parts of our lives as we find them, whether it's thinking of them in terms of husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children, whatever aspect of our lives we're thinking of, when you put it all together, including your place in the world, your work in the world, your place in school or in college, wherever, you put it all together, how is it going to be established?

How is all that really going to be built up the way it should be effectively? Only by the Lord. the kingdom was established therefore, in other words, it isn't just a matter of saying yes, the Lord is the one who establishes people's lives, who puts them together the way they should, who gives them a right foundation, but that happens as they are obedient to him.

Of course, that doesn't destroy at all the whole matter of God's grace in the first place coming to take us and to meet us and to bring us out of our darkness and our sin, but from then onwards, we need to remain as Joshua did, close to the Lord, and obedient to God and faithful to God.

[19:24] And it's then as we do that, that our lives are built up steadily, piece by piece, layer by layer, that God establishes, therefore, the Lord established the kingdom in his hand.

So that's something of his own personal faithfulness. And how there are so many points in that that are applicable to our own age. But then you move secondly to his program of instruction.

As we said, Jehoshaphat could be said to be a shepherd king or a pastoral king because one of his great achievements was to set in motion a program of instruction.

instruction. And the program of instruction had to do with the law of God being taught to the people. The officials and the Levites were involved in it.

You notice that throughout the chapter there. It's mentioned in verses 7 and 8 especially. He sent his officials, these were particularly officials of his own royal house, but along with that the Levites and with these Levites the priests Elishamah and Jehoram.

[20:35] In other words, when you put all that together, it's different to our own day in the sense that everything in Israel and Judah in those days had their religion and the life that they had in relationship to God, whether you think of it as civil or religious, it was all bound up together in their covenant with God.

But if you think of it in terms of the officials being, if you like, the civil officials and the priests and the Levites being the religious officials, the great thing you find here is that Jehoshaphat organized things and ordered things so that both came together for this great program of instruction.

It wasn't just left to the Levites, the religious people, and the priests, the other religious people or the people in charge of the religion, we might put it that way.

It wasn't just left to them, there were these royal officials, the civic people as well, who were given the task of leading this great program. And why is that important to ourselves?

Well, because it's such a huge contrast, even allowing for the differences in the setting of Israel compared to the setting that we have in Scotland today.

[21 : 52] But there's such a huge difference, such a huge contrast, between the civic emphasis and what you might say would be our own reference emphasis in promoting the gospel.

That's to say what a great difference it would make if the civic power, in the same measure as we ourselves as Christians in the religious power, if the church and the state, in other words, put it that way, were both conjoined in equal measure in promoting the religion of Christ.

That's what we're seeing. What a difference that would make in our own circumstances, in our own land. We have come to the point where we tend to think of the church and state being entirely separate when it comes to Christianity or promoting the gospel.

whatever we say of that, the free church that you and I belong to does not believe that that's how it should be.

The church is in fact, certainly the national church, is not a disestablished church. I'm not going into politics here at all, but when we think of an important matter like the referendum that's coming up in a year, whatever political persuasion you're off, and that's not my interest at the moment.

[23 : 23] You're free to, like I am, to have your own political persuasions as you see them, as you see them best yourself. What I'm saying is this, whatever we seek by way of independence or otherwise, there is one important consideration in all of that amongst many others, but this one is important to us, what place will be given to the church in the land, and especially to the church that wants to promote the gospel.

Is it going to be the case that whether we are independent or remain within the union, that the church will be seen along with the state to be equally promoting the gospel of Christ?

Let me try and put that in another way. We believe as a church in what's called the establishment principle. And as a church, the establishment principle for the free church in its official position, and this is going back right to the founding of the free church, and right back to the reformation indeed. It says, the establishment principle means not just that the church promotes the Christian religion, so too should the state.

It's the responsibility of the state, certainly if it claims in any sense to be a Christian state, and even if it doesn't, in accordance with the teaching of the Bible, the civic power ought to be a power that promotes not just religion, and not just tolerance of all religions, but specifically the religion of Christ.

[25 : 05] The religion that is God's religion in Christ in the scriptures. Now you go back to the likes of Jehoshaphat again, and that's what you see.

There's a civic power, and there's a religious power, if you like, or an ecclesiastical one, if we can use those terms, though strictly speaking they weren't applicable in Jehoshaphat's day, but for us to learn from it for our day, the civic power and the ecclesiastical power, they are there together, conjoined in the promotion of God's truth.

That's really such an important thing for ourselves. It is important to have toleration of religion, freedom of religion.

Everybody should have the right, without persecution, to believe what they want to believe. That doesn't mean they shouldn't believe in Christ, or they shouldn't have the gospel promoted to them, but the fact is that it should still be the religion of Christ, that church and state promote.

And that to separate church from state in that regard is to go contrary to what we believe is the teaching of the Bible. Now that's not getting into politics like we say, that's not our interest.

[26 : 29] Our interest is the gospel, our interest is how the gospel is promoted, our interest is where does the church and state sit together in the promotion of the gospel. you go back to Jehoshaphat's day and you say they exist together equally in promoting the truth of God.

And the Levites, along with the officials, do that and the priests. And what they were doing in that was really widening out on Asa's reforms. You remember Asa, his father, he carried out a reformation in Jerusalem, but it was focused largely in Jerusalem.

You read here that the concern of Jehoshaphat was to widen that because he sent these people out into all the cities of Judah.

In verse 9, they went about through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people. That's the interest Jehoshaphat had. It was more or less saying, well my father focused in his reforms on Jerusalem, but my concern is to widen that out throughout the cities of the nation as a whole and make this law of God a better known and taught and explained in all the cities of Judah.

Isn't that what you're about? Isn't that what our Christian life is for? Isn't that what our Christian service is about? Ephesians chapter 4 talks about the preaching of the gospel and God giving gift to certain people to be pastors and teachers in the church.

[28 : 02] Why? What is the purpose of that? For the building up of the saints. What is the purpose of building up the saints? The building up of the saints, the people of God, the people of the church.

They are built up through the preaching of the gospel. To what ends? For the service of Christ. For Christian service. For carrying out the mandate of Christ to go to all nations and make disciples of them, teaching them the things of God.

That is what we are committed to. And you and I as individuals have to ask ourselves today, how much am I personally caught up in the vision of that?

How much am I personally today myself fitted in willingly on my own part to this great mandate that God has given to his people to widen the influence of the gospel?

To carry the message of the gospel into those, like in Jehoshaphat's day, those cities of Judah that need it explained. This world, these districts of ours need the gospel explained to them.

[29 : 18] Who is going to explain it to them? They don't come to church to have it explained to them. In the first instance, you have to do it. You have to go to them.

If they don't come to the gospel as they don't, if they don't knock on the door of the mansus, they don't sing, help me understand Christianity, of course they don't.

But God has given us the privilege, the opportunity in a day of mission, in a day where mission is so required, to be missionaries in our own localities, to seek like Jehoshaphat, to spread that influence, of the law of God, of the word of God, the teachings of Christ, to this needy, needy world, to those surrounding people.

Because that's our mission field. And while it's so interesting and so important, as we'll see tonight, to hear what God is doing elsewhere in the world, to read of the inspiring accounts that are given, of how God is at work in South Sudan, in Korea, wherever else it is, so that in very difficult circumstances at times, these committed people of God are seeing growth, and are committed to reaching out even in these very difficult environments with this witness that they have for Christ. Why is that inspiring? It's inspiring not just because it thrills our heart that that's going on there, it's inspiring because it should motivate us to be likewise minded. To do that where we're set, to be engaged with young, middle-aged, and old, incomer and local, doesn't matter.

[31 : 11] That's Jehoshaphat's great program of instruction. And of course, the curriculum, if you like, the national curriculum, we're needing to just rush through the rest of it, but the national curriculum there was the law of God.

these taught in Judah having the book of the law of the Lord with them there in verse 9. That is what they taught. It's similar. When you go back home, just compare this with Nehemiah chapter 8.

I think the reference is in your notes. Chapter 8 of Nehemiah, where in assistance to Ezra who proclaimed the law of the Lord as he stood preaching to the people, the Levites went amongst the people explaining the meaning of it.

He didn't just leave it to the one man who was preaching, standing on the pulpit there, the erased platform in those days of Nehemiah and Ezra. The Levites went amongst the people.

That's the what's essential still for ourselves. We could fill this church tomorrow if we started a program of healings and of slayings in the spirit and of speaking in tongues and all those fancy things that you find on TV channels and all the rest of it.

[32 : 30] You'd find a rush of people. But what's the point if their souls are not nourished? What's the point if the law of God, if the whole teaching and the counsel of God is neglected and all that they're taught is the brilliance of these so-called miracles?

And they get rich because God wants you to be rich philosophy. Instead of that, instead of these visions and these healings, God has given us the gospel.

God has given us responsibilities in the gospel to actually go to people who are so impoverished spiritually that they don't even know the basics of the Bible, some of them.

And it's your responsibility and it's your privilege as well as mine to be instructors for God. How we do that, there are many answers to that question, many questions to that question.

But that we should be doing it and you and I should be playing our part in it, there's no question about that. This is our curriculum. The word of God, the gospel of God, the teaching that God has given for his church.

[33 : 52] Now remember, this was written to encourage those who had come back from the exile. They remember they had started building the foundation of the temple and as they came to that first stage and finished that first stage, we're told that the people actually wept, loudly wailing.

Why? Because there were some people who remembered the first temple. the grand and glorious gold adorned temple of Solomon, which the Babylonians had flattened and demolished.

And they remembered these glorious days. They wept because this was so insignificant compared to it. The glory days had gone. They were just a memory for some.

But God had not gone. And the power of God had not disappeared. And God was saying to them, yes, these glory days have gone.

But the glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former. That's what he sent Hezekiah, the prophet, to preach to these exiles. And that's what this book of 2 Chronicles is itself designed to actually do for these people.

[35 : 09] They're saying about themselves, what can we do now? We're so small, we're so insignificant. What are we surrounded by so many people of different beliefs and of resistance to what we're doing?

And God is saying to them, am I small? Have I changed? Have I changed? You're still my people. And as we'll see tonight from Luke's study as well, what's one woman whose life is changed by Christ because He heals her so she's able to stand upright after 18 years bent over?

What's a grain of mustard seed? When you look at it in itself, it's tiny. But it's not what it looks like that counts. It's what it can come to be.

And that's what God is teaching us. Don't look at yourself and say, I'm so small. What can we do? Don't get discouraged by thinking of yourself in terms of size compared to the size of the world. world. Think of what God is saying with regard to these people and encouraging them through what happened in the days of Jehoshaphat. The glory days may be gone.

[36 : 39] Ah, but if God brings glory days, they will exceed the glory days that were before. Why shouldn't they? God is God confined to the revivals of the past?

Is God limited now so that he's not going to go beyond what he achieved in past days? Of course not. Let's give ourselves to him and let's leave the results of that to himself.

And then there's the international results. I'll just make the point. You can see that in verses 10 and 11. The fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah.

They made no war against Jehoshaphat. The Philistines and the Arabians brought presence. I'll just say about that that it's a glimpse isn't it really of the kingship of Christ.

Imperfectly represented in the kingship of Jehoshaphat the shepherd king. But there's a glimpse of it nevertheless. And the great prophecies of the Bible that to Jesus the king would be brought the tributes of the nations.

[37 : 52] The presence of the nations. You see the fear of God fell upon all these nations around Israel. That's what the Chronicles writer is saying. Why was there peace? Why did they not attack?

Why did they bring presents instead of military weapons? Because the Chronicles writer says the fear of God had fallen upon them. If you and I come to be really empowered by God, really empowered beyond what we presently know, that's going to have an effect on those around you. The effect of it will be that they will come to be in awe of God. It wasn't the fear of Jehoshaphat that fell on them. What they were aware of was not simply the greatness of Jehoshaphat, but the greatness of Jehoshaphat is God.

That's what you want and I want. That people will say, none of us they are a great people, but that they will say, these people have a great God.

Let's pray. Lord, our God bless, we pray your word once again and grant to us that we too may be encouraged and motivated and inspired by reading of those events of long ago and help us when you know that you are our shepherd king that we may delight ourselves, Lord, in your pastoral care, but in a way that will go forth as your disciples and make your word known in the world around us. [39 : 31] Hear us now, we pray, for your glory's sake. Amen.