

# Jehoshaphat's Near-fatal Mistake

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now, will you turn with me, please, to the passage we read in 2 Chronicles, chapter 18? We want to try and pick out some of the main points from this whole chapter, when we look at Jehoshaphat's near-fatal mistake.

Some winters ago, a few years ago now, traveling north on the A9 in late winter, and all of a sudden, a shower of ice rain came down very unexpectedly.

The road instantly turned to a sheet of ice, thick, solid ice, never experienced anything like it. And then cars started sliding all over the place.

Two cars went off on the embankment on the opposite side, and then I heard Donna in the back, in the front, scream, look out, and there's a car coming towards us in the air, flipping itself over, and just about coming straight for us.

And at the last minute, it flipped sideways, landed beside us on its wheels, just a couple of feet away. I still remember holding on to the steering wheel and saying, Lord, that was close.

[ 1 : 18 ] And that's what we should say after this chapter. That's what Jehoshaphat, I'm sure, must have said when he got home after this episode.

That was really close. A really close shave. A near-fatal mistake. How did it come about? And what uses this to us, anyway?

This is an Old Testament chapter. It deals with something way back in the midst of time. How are we to treat it? What uses it for us here today at Stornowee Free Church, here in 2017?

We mustn't treat it like you look at an old antique, which you admire for a while, and you say, well, it's nice, it's lovely to look at, it's got a bit of history, but I need to put it back because it's no use for me today, it's no use to me now, it's not relevant to my needs now.

You must never do that with these narratives of the Old Testament, because what you need to do with them is come to them, not just for the history that's recorded, which we know is indeed factually correct, because this is the Word of God, as we take our Bibles to be so.

[ 2 : 25 ] But it's something from which you extract principles that you then apply to ourselves, and indeed to human life, whatever generation we belong to, you'll find in these passages of the Old Testament, things which are important, principles which you extract, in order to seek to apply them to your own life, to the day in which we live, to the conditions we face, to the society we're part of.

And there are three things that we can look at in the study this morning. First of all, it came about, as we follow Jehoshaphat in his experience here, this near fatal mistake, it came about, first of all, because he formed an alliance with ungodly Ahab.

That's what you find in verses 1 to 3, briefly describing how Ahab, king of the northern kingdom of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, king of the southern kingdom of Judah, how they came to an alliance against the Syrians.

He formed an alliance with ungodly Ahab. Secondly, he failed to obey God's Word. From verse 4 through to verse 28, it's really pretty much about Jehoshaphat becoming familiar with what God is saying about this proposed venture, what the false prophets were saying, as we'll see, and then what this true prophet of the Lord said in contrast to that, this man Micaiah.

Jehoshaphat heard all that, and yet he still went ahead with his alliance and went into battle with evil Ahab. That's the second thing. Thirdly, he found that God is always true to himself, because from verse 29 through to the end of the chapter, you'll find that God is true to himself, firstly, in regard to preserving Jehoshaphat's life in response to Jehoshaphat's prayer to him.

[ 4 : 23 ] He cried out to the Lord in this danger and distress, and the Lord heard him, and the Lord saved him. This is what the Lord's doing. God was true to himself in answering prayers addressed to him, but he was true to himself as well in that his word never fails.

The word that he spoke about Ahab tragically, it came to be true tragically in his death, for all that he had attempted, a very clever in his own mind plan of preserving his life, actually it didn't help, and he died on the evening of that day.

Let's look at these three points briefly. He formed an alliance with ungodly Ahab. Now you have a contrast here between these two kings. Jehoshaphat is a good man. Jehoshaphat is a man of God. You find in chapter 17, and then also in chapters 19 and 20, some of the attainments, some of the achievements, some of the ways in which Jehoshaphat set out to establish the Lord's cause in the kingdom, and how these good things that are mentioned there are evidence that he, in fact, in his heart, did love the Lord and wanted the Lord's ways kept in the kingdom.

So chapter 18, in a sense, is an aberration. It's something of a blip or something of an untypical act by Jehoshaphat, but it was a very serious one.

[ 5 : 55 ] And it does remind us that even the people of God need to be constantly watchful because even they cannot always guarantee that they're going to take right decisions.

We all make mistakes. We all make very obvious mistakes at times, but the Lord is always true to himself, and recovery, as we come to the Lord and express our sorrow and our confession of sin to him, meets with his pardon.

So he formed an alliance with this ungodly Ahab, and Ahab's wickedness, as mentioned in other parts of the Bible, of course, as well in 1 Kings, especially 16.

We've been looking for a number of weeks at Elijah's ministry during those days of Ahab, and you can see what a devious, scheming, nasty, unreliable, and ungodly man he was.

He's not the kind of person you would want to form an alliance with. But this is a political thing. Jehoshaphat made a marriage alliance with Ahab.

[ 7 : 10 ] And because of that marriage alliance, this was a political maneuver, but political maneuvers sometimes, even by good people, can end up with near disaster or disaster.

So his political mind took over from his spiritual mind, briefly at least, and led him into trouble.

But you do notice that it says there in verse 1, having made a marriage alliance with Ahab, he went down to Ahab in Samaria, 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.

See, Ahab put on a great show. Ahab put on the kind of show that really flattered Jehoshaphat, and he fell for it. And that word induced is very important.

You might not think that people of God can be induced to do things that are wrong, but you'd be mistaken. That's where you have to watch the kind of influences that are around you that are inside yourself and your own heart as well.

[ 8 : 15 ] Because here is a man of God, a good man essentially, and yet he's induced, he's enticed by Ahab, by this wicked king, he is induced to join him in this alliance.

1 Corinthians, chapter 15, verse 33. It's a very pithy statement, brief but very powerful.

Bad company corrupts good morals. Bad company corrupts good morals. They write in that big chapter to do with the resurrection, there is Paul coming up with this bad company corrupts good morals.

Because in Corinth, people have been led astray by wrong thoughts about the resurrection and about the resurrection of Jesus. And what he does is he sets out a principle, not just applying to the teaching of the Bible about the resurrection, but a principle that applies to all kinds of moral behavior and moral attitudes and moral standards.

Bad company corrupts good morals. Ahab was not good company. An alliance with Ahab was bound to lead to problems.

[ 9 : 39 ] Bad company for Jehoshaphat led to bad morals. And that's the kind of world we live in today. It's not just in terms of the company you keep in a physical sense, although of course that's included in it.

It's not just that you and I must not make an alliance with people who are rampantly ungodly or unmanifestly against God. It's fine and it's important to actually go with the gospel and challenge them with the gospel and tactfully draw them to Christ and all of that type of witnessing is important. We have to go forth and make disciples of all nations, of all kinds of people. But that's a different thing to having an alliance with them, to living as if you were just one of them.

And remember, it's not just in that physical sense, but there are so many dangers nowadays with online influences, for example. What are our children watching or listening to?

Children don't have to leave their bedrooms nowadays to come under bad influences, to have bad company. make sure your children, your grandchildren, are not being groomed unknown to you, are not being led into bad moral practices, immoral practices, that they're not watching pornography, that they're not being contacted, they're in correspondence with people who don't have their best interests at heart.

[ 11 : 14 ] Bad company, corrupt good morals. false. The dangers are there. An alliance with evil of whatever kind is a bad idea.

And if there are young people left here, it is now. And even for older people like myself as well, I have to say to myself, you get somebody contacting you online that you don't know, forget it. Don't befriend them. Don't think it'll be all right. Don't think just because they've got other friends showing on Facebook or whatever that you know that it's going to be all right. Unless you know them and trust them, don't do it. Don't be led into bad morals. So he formed an alliance with ungodly Ahab.

Secondly, he failed to obey God's word. Now he wanted God's guidance and that's such a good thing. Of course, you expect that with a good man. Verse 4, there Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, inquire first for the word of the Lord.

[ 12 : 22 ] So the king of Israel gathered the prophets together. And this was the problem. Although Jehoshaphat wanted the guidance of the Lord and wanted to hear the word of the Lord, when Ahab gathered his prophets together, they were his prophets.

They were not the prophets of the Lord. They were there to please him. They were there to tell him what he wanted to hear. They were there just to bring out the kind of guidance, the kind of advice that Ahab himself lived by and wanted to hear and wanted to apply elsewhere.

And that's, of course, very familiar to ourselves. There are false teachers out there. we're not in any way elevating ourselves in saying this as a church or individually.

But there are false teachers out there and the Bible actually warns against that. There are false teachers out there who have really taken essentially what is the gospel and twisted it into what's not a gospel at all and taken the word of God and just hacked it or manufactured something out of it or refashioned it to actually suit the thinking of the trends of the day, of the secular age that we belong to.

And that's why certain aspects or certain people or certain church people who are leaders in the church will sometimes say to those in government, look, this is what you want to hear.

[ 13 : 48 ] We're glad you're actually bringing in all of these laws that change our view of the Bible and of human behavior and of marriage and all the rest of it. That's just the same thing as was happening in the days of Ahab.

Prophets that told him what he wanted to hear until Micaiah came in. That's a different story. Jehoshaphat knew, you see, that these prophets of Ahab were not spokesmen for the Lord.

So that's why he said, is there not another prophet of the Lord of whom we may inquire? Now he probably knew, may or may not have known that this man, Micaiah, was a true believer, that he spoke for the Lord, that he was also there, but he was obviously kept out of sight by Ahab and it looks like kept really in prison or in confinement at least by Ahab.

What there is, he said, there's another man here, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, but I hate him for he never prophesied good concerning me but always evil.

Ahab didn't like to hear the truth of God. Truth of God's not palatable to somebody who wants to live in sin. You don't actually find the truth of God comforting when you yourself want to diverge from what that word calls you to do morally and spiritually.

[ 15 : 16 ] It still remains the word of God. Micaiah still remains true to his God, though surrounded by 400 prophets who are telling false truths to Ahab in the place of truths.

So he is called in and he says, first of all, he just mimics. I think that's how we take these words of Micaiah when he was called in.

He just said the same thing as the false prophets. Go up to Ramoth, Gilead, and prosper. The Lord will give it into the hand of the king. Verse 11.

Sorry, that's the false prophets. And they acted this out, of course, under Zedekiah, the son of Canaan. But when Micaiah was called in, he really said, well, what the Lord says, that is what I'm going to speak.

You see, they tried to say to him, first of all, don't let your words be unfavorable to the king. Don't annoy the king by telling him what he doesn't want to know. Micaiah, of course, says, I can't do that. [16:21] What the Lord called, what the Lord gives me to say, that's what I must speak. So when he's asked the question, will we go to Ramoth, Gilead? He just mimicked the false prophets, said, go up and try them.

They'll be given into your hand. So the king said, how many times shall I make you swear you speak to me nothing but the truth? Tell us the truth. Tell us your truth. So Micaiah did.

And it wasn't very easy listening. because Micaiah told him to his face that it was going to be a disaster. All this will be like sheep scattered in the mountains without a shepherd.

Not only that, but Ahab would be enticed into this by the falseness, the falsehood of his prophets. And I know there's a theological difficulty or mystery about the way it opens up how things happen between the Lord and these spirits.

But you know, that's what happens when people believe lies and go on believing lies. The Lord gives them to go on believing that and they think it's the truth and they're quite happy with it. And so this spirit comes forward and he says, I'll go to Ahab.

[17:36] I'll be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. In other words, when you have these 400 prophets, what they're actually saying is from this false spirit that nobody can see.

And yet he's put lies, falsehoods into the mouths of these 400. And that's what he's told by Micaiah. And when Zedekiah comes and smacks him on the cheek, and he says, which way did the spirit of the Lord go from me to speak to you?

In other words, he's saying, look, I've got the word of the Lord. Don't come here and say you've got the word of the Lord. It didn't go from me to you. When did that happen? And of course, Micaiah's ready for it.

And he said, if you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me. And he said, hear all you peoples. Now, that's an essential element of a gospel witness because there are so many ways in which we need to maintain that truth of God for the benefits of our society as well as ourselves.

[18:54] Here's a man who is actually so brave by the grace of God as to stand on his own, it seems, against all of these false prophets. But he maintains the truth of God.

Our society needs the truth of God. We need to maintain our outreach with the truth of God. We cannot in any way seek to reinvent the gospel, as it were, so that it's more palatable for the age in which we live.

Now, please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying we mustn't be tactful and careful and loving and considerate and patient and all of these things. But the gospel is the gospel.

And you don't change the gospel, though you may have to change at times how you present it, how you go about witnessing to it, what you do in these respects.

And so, this is what Jehoshaphat heard, you see. He heard all of this. He heard this was going to be a disaster. Micaiah, the true prophet of the Lord, spoke. And yet, Jehoshaphat continued with his alliance with Ahab.

[20:08] Now, it's important that you and I never act against the word of God, against the light the word of God gives you. That's what this man did. He knew what God was saying.

He knew that God was saying, if you go, it'll be a disaster, Ahab. So why did he keep joining himself to him? Why did he keep the alliance going right up to the field of battle?

Well, that's not easy to answer, but that's what he did. Whatever the word of God says to you today, and you know, despite all that you hear about the word of God not being clear about certain issues, even certain issues like marriage or human behavior, the problem is not that the word of God is not clear.

The problem is that so many people know it's clear enough, but it's not what they want to hear. It doesn't fit with their own outlook on life, what they want to do with their lives, how they want to live their lives.

Well, of course, they're free, as we all are, to live lives whatever way we think best, but it doesn't remove the fact that this is what's commended by God's word, the morality of the Bible, the morality that seeks to put away anything of an alliance with ungodliness, with evil, and wants to maintain what is true to God.

[21:36] He failed to follow that advice, that teaching of God's word. What is God saying to you today? What is God saying to you now through the scriptures, through preaching of the gospel?

I'm not asking you what am I saying? What are you hearing me saying? Something much more important than that. This is just a human voice and a flawed human being, but God is speaking to you.

God is saying something to you through this word. God is saying to you, are you on this path of Bible morality and spiritual wholesomeness?

Have you wandered from this path of God? Have you given up on it? Is something else in its place? Are you here but know you've got to get back to God and put things right with God?

Well, if so, let this word speak to you today and don't actually just let it pass over you or pass from it when you leave this very moment.

[ 22 : 45 ] Let this moment be significant for you. What God is saying to you, that's what you and I must do. That was one of the complaints of Jesus after all.

Why do you call me Lord, Lord? Yet you do not do the things which I say. we must never be like that.

Thirdly, he found that God is always true to himself. Now you notice here towards the end of the chapter from verse 29 especially, Ahab sets about this very devious elaborate plan.

See, he wants to preserve his own life. He doesn't care about Jehoshaphat's life. He doesn't care that this plan of his may very well lead to Jehoshaphat's death instead of him.

If the Assyrians think this is the king of Israel with all his robes, then they'll kill him. And that's what Ahab is doing. He's saying, I'm going to preserve my life. You know, that's what evil will do for you.

[ 23 : 46 ] That's what the world will do. That's what ungodliness will do to you. If you form an alliance with ungodliness, it's going to be merciless. It's not going to look after you when things go bad. It's not going to have an interest in you and in your well-being.

It'll just laugh it off. It'll disguise itself. And leave you to it. So that's what he did. That's what he was intent on. But Jehoshaphat was preserved by God.

That's what the Bible tells us here. That's what verse 31 says. As soon as the captains of the chariot sought 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 wasn't the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him.

God intervened and heard his prayer. And even today, if you've made a mistake, if you've been following a mistake, if you know that you're not as things should be between yourself and God, well, here's your great encouragement.

[ 24 : 56 ] Cry out to the Lord. God, go to him. Confess your mistake. Tell him you've done wrong. Tell him you want to put it right. And he will hear you.

And he will save you. That's his promise. That's what he did to Jehoshaphat. But he fulfills his promise and his word. It's a proof that his word never fails because despite how elaborate Ahab's plan was, he was still killed.

And Jehoshaphat's life was spared. Now, you notice there's a contrast here that really makes a very telling point. And the contrast is between this very, very careful, thought-out, deliberate plan of Ahab and this random act of an unnamed archer who aimed his bow in the general direction of the soldiers of Israel.

Certain man, verse 33, he drew his bow at random. He wasn't aiming for anyone in particular. He just thought, right, that's it, I'm going to let this fly and it'll hit somewhere. And you know, that was as surely aimed as it could possibly be because God had aimed it.

And for all of Ahab's elaborate, carefully thought-out strategy, that arrow smashed its way into his body and he died shortly after it.

[ 26 : 31 ] You may feel secure today in a secularist mindset. People may find that very elaborate plans against God and against his gospel and the strategies that are set up in order to undermine and overthrow the gospel and jettison the Bible and get rid of all this stuff from human life, from private life and from public life.

Let's get rid of it all. We don't want religion anymore. Secularism is the great God. Humanism is the great God. Well, it feels safe and yet it isn't.

There are many chinks in that armor and God knows where they are. your only safe armor today is to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and have him as your refuge.

Because it doesn't matter how many arrows, how many bullets the devil may fire at you, or enemies of the gospel may fire at you, Jesus is your safety.

The truth of God is your refuge. God is true to himself, even when he may be against you.

[ 28 : 00 ] God is through to himself, even when he may be against you. And always remember, God is true to himself, even when he may be against you.

But please experience it as God for you by coming to him, by laying your life into his hands, and as a Christian too, by placing yourself daily under that armor that he has provided for us in Jesus Christ.

Amen. May he bless his word to us. Let's sing now in conclusion, singing from Psalm number 18.

That's from page 19 in the Psalm book, Psalm 18, and singing verses 1 to 6.

I love you, Lord, you are my strength, a fortress is the Lord to me, my rock and my deliverer, for refuge to my God I flee. He is my stronghold and my shield, the Lord who saves me by his might.

I'll call on him and give him praise. I'm saved, he puts my foes to flight. So on to verse 6, Psalm 18, on page 19 to God's praise.

[ 29 : 19 ] verse 6, verse 6, verse 6, verse 6, I love you, Lord, you are my strength, a fortress is the Lord to me, my rock and my deliverer, forever forever still my God I flee.

He is my stronghold and my shield, the Lord who saves me by his might.

I'll call on him and give him praise. I'm saved, he puts my foes to flight.

The hearts of death death and tangled me, destruction hit me like a way, and circled by the steers of death, I fished the terrors of the grave.

In my distress I called on God, I cried out to the Lord for it.

[ 31 : 31 ] He promised him to the temple heard my voice, he listened to the prayer I made.

I'll go to the main door if you allow me to get to the main door, please. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you now and always. Amen.

Amen.