

## **The Battle Is Not Yours, but God's**

2 Chronicles 20:1-4; Zechariah 4:6

April 15, 2018

Greg L. Price

King Jehoshaphat received most urgent and distressing news one day. There had amassed about 30 miles from Jerusalem the combined military forces of the Moabites, the Ammonites, and of other nations ("a great multitude" 2 Chronicles 20:2). What were Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah to do? How were they to defend themselves? In one of the most miraculous displays of God's almighty power to defend His people and to judge His enemies, they trusted not in princes, swords, chariots, or armies (for all their defenses seemed hopeless before such a great multitude), but rather they put their faith and hope in Almighty God.

God certainly has blessed many times in Scripture (and even throughout history) the means of armed defense against enemies that sought to destroy His people (weapons are a lawful means of self-defense). But the Lord demonstrates from our text today that it is ultimately not in weapons that we are to put our trust; but is in our great God who is able to destroy the enemy (if He so chooses) even by prayer, fasting, and the singing of psalms in faith and to the glory of God. As we prepare for our Day of Prayer and Fasting on behalf of our Christian brethren in South Africa, let "the LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle" (Psalm 24:8) be Him who is our first and chief resort.

The main points from our text this Lord's Day are: (1) Great Trials Drive Us to Look to a Great God (2 Chronicles 20:1-4); (2) A Great God Delights in Urgent Prayer (2 Chronicles 20:5-13); (3) A Great God Delivers His People in Ways We May Not Expect (2 Chronicles 20:14-25).

### **I. Great Trials Drive Us to Look to a Great God (2 Chronicles 20:1-4).**

A. As this great multitude of invading forces plot and plan to destroy God's people, what might have been some natural (though sinful) reactions for Jehoshaphat and Judah to exhibit?

1. **Fearing Man** ("And Jehoshaphat feared" 2 Chronicles 20:3). Worry and panic are common (yet sinful) emotional responses when you face the possibility of some great loss in your life (whether the loss of work, family, job, property, health, freedom, or life).

2. **Questioning God**. Jehoshaphat may have reasoned: "It is God that governs and reigns over all nations (Psalm 22:8). It is God who turns the hearts of rulers as He wills (Proverbs 21:1). Why then has Thou, my God, brought these nations against us, when I have sought to bring reformation in my household and in this kingdom?" Dear ones, when you are overwhelmed by the trials that a sovereign God has brought into your life, you too will be tempted to question God's love, God's justice, God's power, and God's faithfulness, "Why God? Why has thou brought such forces against me before whom I feel I will fall?"

3. **Trusting in the Arm of Flesh**. It would have been very natural in such a situation for Jehoshaphat to put all of his confidence in his military or in some alliance with other nations to come to his rescue. How easy it is to put our confidence in doctors or supplements for our health, or to put our trust in our employer or in our pension for our present and future needs, or to put our hope and happiness in a wife, husband, or children. It is natural (though sinfully natural) to look first and chiefly to man for what you need in times of desperation.

B. Jehoshaphat "feared", but his fear drove him to "set himself to seek the LORD" (2 Chronicles 20:3). "To seek" is to tread out a path.

1. Jehoshaphat's fear did not paralyze him or disable him or blind him to the sovereign God who brought these wicked forces against him in order to glorify Himself and to show Himself the Almighty God who was his trust, his help, and his salvation. Dear Christian, your help is in the name of the Lord who

made heaven and earth (Psalm 124:8). Why did Jesus send His disciples into the very sea in which the waves and the wind would bring them to such fear of loss of life? Was it to destroy their faith or to build their faith and confidence in Him who controls all of the storms of life? It is no different in whatever mighty storm you face.

2. Jehoshaphat appointed a fast for the people of God as a means of seeking God (2 Chronicles 20:3). Why are fasts appointed?

a. Fasts are appointed to reveal our weakness and God's great power. When you grow hungry and weak from a fast, you are reminded that you cannot stand against the enemies of your soul and your body in your own mere power, but in the power of God alone.

b. Fasts are appointed to humble you and to crush your pride and self-righteousness wherein you sinfully look to your own resources, strength, and goodness to grant you success. We do not need more self-esteem; we need more God-esteem (Zechariah 4:6).

c. Fasts are appointed to bring you to confess your many sins and your desperate need of God's mercy in Christ Jesus and to rejoice that all you need in this life and in the life to come are found in Jesus Christ. This is so contrary to our corrupt nature to look to Christ daily (to beat out a path to Him) for all that we need and to rest in Him.

d. Fasts are appointed to point you to a greater hunger you should have than a mere growling in your stomach: a hungering and thirsting for Jesus Christ, His gospel, His fruit of the Spirit, His commandments, and His glory to be revealed in your life, marriage, job, church, nation, and world. A fast should cause you to look beyond this perishing world to the glory that awaits you in heaven.

e. Fasts are appointed to show you what you deserve from a holy God: perpetual hunger and torment forever with no hope of relief. But then fasts are also appointed to show you what you have received from the love, mercy, and grace of God alone: a perpetual feast in feeding upon the Lord Jesus Christ (and all the benefits of His death and resurrection) now and for all eternity in heaven.

3. Jehoshaphat's fear drove him to God, not away from God.

## **II. A Great God Delights in Urgent Prayer (2 Chronicles 20:5-13).**

A. First note in Jehoshaphat's prayer before God's people that he does not begin with his prayer request, but begins with the greatness, glory, and majesty of Almighty God. Where do you usually begin your prayers—with what you desire from God or with the glory of the God to whom you pray? How did Jehoshaphat exalt the Lord God?

1. He is the gracious God who covenanted with our fathers (2 Chronicles 20:6).

2. He is the sovereign and almighty God (2 Chronicles 20:6).

3. He is the faithful God to keep His promises (2 Chronicles 20:7-9). How big is your God? Is anything too hard, difficult, or impossible for Him (Genesis 18:14; Luke 1:37)? Notice how Jehoshaphat recalls the past deliverances of God for His people (2 Chronicles 20:7). Those Christians who only know of God's present works will not be feeding upon the Lord's faithfulness for hundreds and thousands of years in mercifully preserving and rescuing His people. Remember even in your own life how merciful the Lord has been to you and to your family.

B. Second note in Jehoshaphat's prayer on the occasion of this appointed fast when the enemies were ready to attack and destroy God's people that he follows his exaltation of God by presenting before this great and glorious God his (and their) need (2 Chronicles 20:10-12). "Neither know we what to do." Sound familiar? Of course it does, because we are all insufficient and powerless before the enemies that assail us. Our cry to God in standing for Jesus Christ against the Goliaths that we face is the same as Paul's (2 Corinthians 3:5). Where do you turn when you know not what to do? God's people were facing annihilation and Jehoshaphat (speaking for himself and for God's people in Judah) says, "But our eyes are upon thee."

1. When Peter took his eyes off of Christ and looked at the wind and the waves around him, he sank into the sea. Whenever you feel like you're sinking and about to be swallowed up by the sea of trials and tribulations you face, it's time to take your eye off of the winds and the waves and time to turn the eye of faith and the eye of hope to the Lord Jesus who alone can calm your fears. When Peter began to sink, he fell upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, "Lord, save me" (Matthew 14:30). Jehovah God is your refuge and strength in whatever you face; a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1).

2. If your eye is on yourself and your resources or is on your enemy that would destroy you, you will sink. If your eye is on your great and glorious God, He will save you even when you feel as though you are sinking and about to drown. Dear ones, if the greatness of your problems is what overshadows your prayers, your faith will hide behind a rock. However, if the greatness of your God is what overshadows your prayers, your faith will stand like a David with a small stone in a sling that will slay the Goliaths you face.

### **III. A Great God Delivers His People in Ways We May Not Expect (2 Chronicles 20:14-25).**

A. In God's infinite mercy, He sends His Word to Jehoshaphat and His people by means of a prophet, Jahaziel, who comforts and strengthens them with the words found in 2 Chronicles 20:15-17. There is no need to run in fear or to cower before this great multitude because the battle is not yours but the Lord's. He will fight for you. You must trust Him and obey Him, but He is the warrior who fights for you (who has already defeated all your enemies through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ). Take up your rest in Him and be not moved!

1. Dear ones, the real battle is in your heart and mind against the enemy. It is first and foremost a spiritual battle, and the true enemies are also spiritual enemies that war against you (Ephesians 6:12-13).

2. The Lord has given to you a more sure word of prophecy in the Scriptures you hold in your hand (2 Peter 1:19). You cannot say, "If I only had a prophet like Jahaziel to speak God's Word unto me, I would trust the Lord." You have in your hands and hear with your ears a "more sure word of prophecy"; for Holy Scripture has been recorded and preserved by the providence of God throughout history for you to read over and over again. You are not less responsible to obey God's Word than was Jehoshaphat and Judah, it could be argued that you are more responsible because Jesus Christ has now come; He has died; He has been raised from the dead; and He has fulfilled all the prophecies spoken of Him. You have greater confirmation that God is speaking to you now in the completed canon of Scripture and in the preached Word than even did Jehoshaphat and God's people at that time. We must stop making excuses for why we cannot trust the Lord with everything. "The battle is not yours, but God's."

B. It is one thing to hear the Word of God; it is another thing to believe it and obey it. Amazing as it may sound, Jehoshaphat and God's people went forward to meet the enemy not armed with military might, but rather armed with prayer and praise to God in singing His Psalms (2 Chronicles 20:20-21). Perhaps it was Psalm 118 that was sung which repeats several times the refrain, "for his mercy endureth for ever."

1. Surely, if these enemies had heard of this plan for God's people to sing their way to victory, they would have laughed, they would have mocked, they would have taunted the living God as did Rab-shakeh and the Assyrians outside the walls of Jerusalem (2 Kings 18) i.e. until that night when God destroyed 185,000 Assyrians (without even an arrow flying over the wall). The Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites might have amused themselves all night saying, "Do they really believe their prayer and fasting can defeat such a multitude of forces as are at our disposal?" Yet faith in the living God, fasting, prayer, and praising God were the weapons of their warfare. Dear ones, do not listen to the mocking of your enemy (within or without); and let not your own heart mock the Lord God Almighty or the means He chooses to rescue you and save you. The battle is His, not yours.

2. You may have a Bible. You may occasionally read it. You may even memorize some Bible

verses. But dear ones, if you do not love and obey what is taught in it (even those most difficult commandments of the Lord), you do not evidence that you believe it.

3. Those that hear God's Word preached or even occasionally read it but do not believe and practice it are like one who builds his/her house on the sand, Jesus said (Matthew 7:24-27). When the rains and storms assail this house, it will be swept away. But those who hear God's Word preached, read it, believe it, love it, and practice it are like one who builds his/her house on a firm foundation (Jesus Christ), which the storms of life may assail, but which they cannot destroy.

C. What happened to the mighty enemy that plotted and planned to destroy God's people? God caused dissension and confusion among them to arise to such a degree that they turned against one another until they had destroyed one another (2 Chronicles 20:22-23). And that is what we pray the Lord will do with wicked governments today who conspire to destroy God's people (Psalm 55:9). God's people in Judah then went out to gather the spoils of God's victory (2 Chronicles 20:24-25). Just as God's people were materially enriched through this great trial that threatened their extermination, so will you always be spiritually enriched through your trials if you trust not in yourself or in the resources of this world, but rather trust in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ (Psalm 118:8-9).

D. Let us, however, not dictate to God the means of His deliverance in our lives. God took Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego into a fiery furnace, but delivered them out of it. God took Daniel into a lion's den, but saved him out of it. God delivered Israel from the Midianites (122,000 men) by 300 men who had only lamps, pitchers, and trumpets. God healed a deaf and mute man by having him put his fingers in his ears and by spitting on his tongue. God delivered Peter out of prison by means of an angel. However, the Lord delivered John the Baptist, Stephen, and James into the glories of heaven by way of martyrdom. Which deliverance is more glorious (Hebrews 11:36-40)?

My brothers and sisters, it's not so much about the size of your faith. It's all about the size of your God in whom you trust. But you say, "I am so unworthy." That's true, but when was that at any time not the case? And yet the Lord has chosen you in love from the foundation of the world when you were unworthy. Jesus Christ suffered and died for you when you were unworthy. The Holy Spirit raised you spiritually from the dead when you were unworthy. And the Lord has continued to show you His mercy in causing you to persevere, and in delivering you out of the hands of your enemy though you are unworthy. Let your unworthiness drive you to Him alone who is worthy—the Lord Jesus Christ. "For the battle is not yours, but God's."

Copyright 2012 Greg L. Price.