

Introduction: He Sought the God of His Father (17:1-6)

17 Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place and strengthened himself against Israel. ² He placed forces in all the fortified cities of Judah and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim that Asa his father had captured. ³ The LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the earlier ways of his father David. He did not seek the Baals, ⁴ but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments, and not according to the practices of Israel. ⁵ Therefore the LORD established the kingdom in his hand. And all Judah brought tribute to Jehoshaphat, and he had great riches and honor. ⁶ His heart was courageous in the ways of the LORD. And furthermore, he took the high places and the Asherim out of Judah.

Right up front, the Chronicler tells us that he wants us to think of Jehoshaphat like we think of his father, Asa.

The pattern is very similar:

- an opening statement of their reform of worship, building programs, and large armies –
- followed by a battle report –
- followed by further reforms –
- followed by a second battle report,
- and concluding with transgression and death.

Both kings are said to have suppressed the high places –
and are said to have *failed* to suppress the high places.

As we saw last time with Asa,
that is easy to understand,
since worship at the high places had been a practice in Israel and Judah
for generations.

It was unlikely that any king could successfully suppress it for his entire reign
without diligent and constant attention to the subject.

Both Asa and Jehoshaphat enjoyed the rewards of their piety –
and during their reigns the fear of the LORD fell upon the nations around them.
(What that means, in effect, is that the nations around them
decided not to attack Judah,
because the reward for conquering the little kingdom in the hill-country
was simply not commensurate with the amount of effort it would take!)

Also, both Asa and Jehoshaphat get in trouble for entangling foreign alliances:
Asa with Syria (against Israel)
and Jehoshaphat with Israel (against Syria).

Asa, the father, is corrected by the prophet Hanani.

Jehoshaphat, his son, is corrected by the prophet Jehu (the son of Hanani!).

1. The Godly Reign of Jehoshaphat (17:7-19)

a. The Teaching Priests and the Law (17:7-9)

⁷ *In the third year of his reign he sent his officials, Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah;* ⁸ *and with them the Levites, Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tobadonijah; and with these Levites, the priests Elishama and Jehoram.* ⁹ *And they taught in Judah, having the Book of the Law of the LORD with them. They went about through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people.*

The third year of his reign might actually be the first year of his sole reign.

It is likely that Jehoshaphat became co-regent with his father after his father's foot disease incapacitated him.

We saw last time that the prophet Azariah spoke of the "distress" of Israel in the days when they were "without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law." (15:3)

Now, Jehoshaphat seeks to remedy this in his kingdom.

It has now been over sixty years since the death of Solomon, and the temple in Jerusalem has not "taken off" like it was supposed to.

People are still worshipping at the high places, rather than coming to Solomon's temple to worship.

(Now, you need to remember that "worship" in the Bible *always* includes offering sacrifices.

You cannot come into the presence of a holy God without the shedding of blood – and so when they talk about "worship" at the high places, they mean "offering burnt offerings and sacrifices").

And so Jehoshaphat sends a group of officials, Levites, and priests having the book of the Law of the LORD with them, and they traveled through the cities of Judah teaching the people Torah.

This is one of the first examples of "christian education" in the church – and particularly, you might think of this as a christian education 'curriculum' used throughout the whole church.

b. The Fear of the LORD Fell upon All the Kingdoms (17:10-11)

¹⁰ *And the fear of the LORD fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah, and they made no war against Jehoshaphat.* ¹¹ *Some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents and silver for tribute, and the Arabians also brought him 7,700 rams and 7,700 goats.*

Notice the result of these efforts at Christian education?

(Incidentally, I use the word 'Christian' because the word 'christos' simply means "anointed one" – and the Son of David was in fact the anointed one – the Messiah of his time).

When the Son of David instructs the people of God in the way of God through the teaching of the priests and levites, the fear of the LORD falls upon the surrounding kingdoms,

so that no one attacks Jerusalem –
and in fact, some Philistines and Arabs bring paltry gifts.

(I say “paltry” because quite frankly, these are tiny numbers compared to elsewhere)

c. Jehoshaphat the Builder and Warrior (17:12-19)

¹² *And Jehoshaphat grew steadily greater. He built in Judah fortresses and store cities, ¹³ and he had large supplies in the cities of Judah. He had soldiers, mighty men of valor, in Jerusalem.*

¹⁴ *This was the muster of them by fathers' houses: Of Judah, the commanders of thousands: Adnah the commander, with 300,000 mighty men of valor; ¹⁵ and next to him Jehohanan the commander, with 280,000; ¹⁶ and next to him Amasiah the son of Zichri, a volunteer for the service of the LORD, with 200,000 mighty men of valor. ¹⁷ Of Benjamin: Eliada, a mighty man of valor, with 200,000 men armed with bow and shield; ¹⁸ and next to him Jehozabad with 180,000 armed for war. ¹⁹ These were in the service of the king, besides those whom the king had placed in the fortified cities throughout all Judah.*

In verses 12-13 we hear of Jehoshaphat’s building projects.

One result of having rest from your enemies,
is that you can devote your resources and manpower to building projects!

Verses 14-18 then give an account of a massive army of over one million men.

As we saw a couple weeks ago,
there is no way that you could fit one million people into the area of ancient Judah
without massive cities the size of modern-day Jerusalem.

(Today the population of Jerusalem is around 800,000 –
but the population of the ‘old city’ is only around 35,000.)

But whether the Chronicler is talking about having 300 commanders,
or whether he is just using exaggerated numbers to make his point,
the result is that we should get the point that Jehoshaphat had an impressive army!

Indeed, the only king in Israel who had such a large army was David (1 Chron 21).
Jehoshaphat’s army demonstrates God’s favor on the king!

2. Jehoshaphat’s Marriage Alliance with Ahab (18:1-19:3)

Chapter 18 then relates Jehoshaphat’s marriage alliance with Ahab, king of Israel.

a. Jehoshaphat and the King of Israel (18:1-3)

¹⁸ *Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor, and he made a marriage alliance with Ahab.*

² *After some years he went down to Ahab in Samaria. And Ahab killed an abundance of sheep and oxen for him and for the people who were with him, and induced him to go up against Ramoth-gilead. ³ Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, “Will you go with me to Ramoth-gilead?” He answered him, “I am as you are, my people as your people. We will be with you in the war.”*

There is nothing explicit in chapter 18 that suggests that Jehoshaphat is doing anything wrong. Indeed, one could argue that a marriage alliance with Israel could be a politically astute move that could result in the house of David regaining control of the northern kingdom as well. Jehoshaphat may well have thought that by having his son, Jehoram, marry the daughter of Ahab, Athaliah, he could bring the house of Omri back to the LORD – a sort of “missionary marriage.”

But the Chronicler does tip you off to the danger that is coming. He says that Ahab “induced” Jehoshaphat to join him in battle against Syria. The word here is the word “entice” – or “seduce” – the word used of Jezebel in 1 Kings 21:25, and how she “enticed” her husband Ahab and led him astray. In Deut 13 it is used to speak of people who “seduce” you away from worshiping the true God.

In the book of Kings we learn more about the diplomatic history of the era. The Assyrian king, Shalmaneser III, was trying to expand Assyrian influence over Syria and Israel. In 853 B.C., Ahab of Israel and Ben-Hadad of Syria had joined forces to repulse Shalmaneser at the Battle of Qarqar. But now that Shalmaneser is out of the picture, Ahab and Ben-Hadad return to the local squabble over the control of Ramoth-gilead.

At this point in Ahab’s life, he has ruled for over twenty years, he has built the temple of Baal in Samaria, and Elijah has already proclaimed a curse on Ahab and his offspring.

But Jehoshaphat now takes the daughter of Ahab for his son. He brings the curse of Ahab into his own home. And he solidifies this with his words in verse 3: “I am as you are, my as your people. We will be with you in the war.” This suggests that Jehoshaphat views Ahab not as an equal, but as his superior. He may hope to gain influence with Ahab, but he starts the relationship very definitely as the “junior partner.”

Still, you can see Jehoshaphat’s fidelity to the LORD, though, even in this inadvisable alliance, as Jehoshaphat insists that the first inquire of the LORD.

b. The Prophets of the King of Israel: “God Will Give It into the Hand of the King” (18:4-11)

⁴ And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, “Inquire first for the word of the LORD.” ⁵ Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, four hundred men, and said to them, “Shall we go

to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?” And they said, “Go up, for God will give it into the hand of the king.”

And so the “king of Israel” gathers his prophets.

Note that the name of Ahab will not be used for the rest of the story –
except once! (in verse 19 – since I know you are all going to look for it now!)
He will always be referred to as “the king of Israel” –
which has the effect of depersonalizing him.

But the king of Israel now summons his 400 prophets,
and they declare that “God will give” Ramoth-gilead “into the hand of the king.”
Jehoshaphat had asked if they could inquire of the LORD (Yahweh),
but the prophets only speak in the name of El (God).

And El is somewhat ambiguous – since “el” can refer to any deity (just like the English “god”).
And so in verse 6, Jehoshaphat asks:

⁶ But Jehoshaphat said, “Is there not here another prophet of the LORD of whom we may inquire?” ⁷ And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah the son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but always evil.” And Jehoshaphat said, “Let not the king say so.” ⁸ Then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said, “Bring quickly Micaiah the son of Imlah.”

Jehoshaphat is eager to hear the word of the LORD –
perhaps he is trying to urge the king of Israel to reform his ways,
and listen to the word of the LORD!
And so “the king of Israel” sends for Micaiah.

But, of course, the 400 prophets have also heard this exchange,
and so while the officer goes to find Micaiah,
the rest of the prophets now start to prophecy in the name of Yahweh!

⁹ Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes. And they were sitting at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria, and all the prophets were prophesying before them. ¹⁰ And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron and said, “Thus says the LORD, ‘With these you shall push the Syrians until they are destroyed.’” ¹¹ And all the prophets prophesied so and said, “Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph. The LORD will give it into the hand of the king.”

The prophets say that the LORD will give “it” into the hand of the king.
They plainly *mean* that the LORD will give Ramoth-gilead into the hand of Ahab.
But ambiguous prophecies frequently have multiple meanings!
Even false prophets can accidentally speak the truth!
In Hebrew it simply says,
“Go up to Ramoth-gilead and make prosperous,
and Yahweh will give into the hand of the king.”

The ESV rightly translates their meaning.
But there is a double-meaning behind their words.

A double-meaning that Micaiah plays up.

c. Micaiah's First Word: "Go Up and Triumph" (18:12-14)

¹² *And the messenger who went to summon Micaiah said to him, "Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably."* ¹³ *But Micaiah said, "As the LORD lives, what my God says, that I will speak."* ¹⁴ *And when he had come to the king, the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?" And he answered, "Go up and triumph; they will be given into your hand."*

When the messenger came to Micaiah, he urged him to speak favorably to the king of Israel,
but Micaiah – true to his prophetic call – swears an oath
[“as the LORD lives”] that he will speak only what God says.
And when he came to the king, Micaiah answered,
“Go up and triumph; they will be given into your hand.”

[Now, there is one slight difference here from the account in 1 Kings 22.
In Kings Micaiah says, “the LORD will give it into the hand of the king.”
Here, he says, “they will be given into your hand.”
I think that while the Chronicler recognizes the ironic, if not sarcastic tone,
he simply cannot bring himself to use the name of Yahweh
in a false prophecy given by a true prophet!]

But certainly something in Micaiah's tone signaled the king of Israel
that he was mocking him.

Maybe it was simply the fact that Micaiah said what he wanted to hear –
and Ahab *knew* that there was no way that Micaiah would ever say
what he wanted to hear!
Or maybe Micaiah had a habit of always starting with what the king wanted to hear.
“How many times shall I make you swear
that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?”

For some reason Ahab was willing to believe the 400 prophets when they lied,
but he could not believe Micaiah when he said exactly the same thing!
And so as he stands before the kings on their thrones,
Micaiah explains that he has seen a vision of a greater throne.
And even as the earthly kings have taken counsel from their advisors,
so also Yahweh has his counselors in the heavenly court.

d. Micaiah's Second Word: "I Saw All Israel Scattered...as Sheep that Have No Shepherd" (18:15-22)

¹⁵ *But the king said to him, "How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me*

nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?” ¹⁶ *And he said, “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the LORD said, ‘These have no master; let each return to his home in peace.’”* ¹⁷ *And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?”*

Normally sheep without a shepherd would not be a good condition;
but in this case, the lack of a shepherd will bring *shalom* to Israel!
“let each return to his home in peace.”
“Shalom” is almost always used to speak of a favorable result.

Certainly in the book of Kings, the effect is clear:

Ahab is worse than nothing!

The Chronicler takes over the story with only minor alterations –
so the effect is similar.

But now Micaiah is on a roll:

¹⁸ *And Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left.* ¹⁹ *And the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab the king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said one thing, and another said another.* ²⁰ *Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, ‘I will entice him.’ And the LORD said to him, ‘By what means?’* ²¹ *And he said, ‘I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And he said, ‘You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.’* ²² *Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets. The LORD has declared disaster concerning you.”*

Finally, here in verse 19, Ahab is mentioned – but only in the curse of Yahweh himself.

In verses 9-11 we heard about the earthly throne room –

Jehoshaphat and Ahab in their royal robes.

Now we are hearing the heavenly version of the same event.

The prophecy of Zedekiah had a heavenly origin!

And it wasn’t just “a” spirit that came forward.

Verse 20 has the definite article:

the Spirit came forward.

Especially when we consider verse 23 “the Spirit of the LORD”

we should conclude that this was in fact the Holy Spirit himself.

Some folks have difficulty with this.

How could the Holy Spirit (or even a holy angel)

be a *lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets?*

Well, as Psalm 18:25-26 says

With the merciful you show yourself merciful;

with the blameless man you show yourself blameless;

with the purified you show yourself pure;

and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous.

J.R.R. Tolkien said it nicely: *to crooked eyes, truth may wear a wry face.*

The Holy Spirit inspires the prophets of Ahab to declare the word of the LORD to him.

The Spirit of the LORD is indeed upon them,

“but the words they speak are misleading, equivocal, and intended to seduce.”

(Peter Leithart)

This is a valuable reminder that God’s judgment is a double-edged sword:

he will vindicate his people, but he will destroy those who oppose his word.

*Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets;
the LORD has declared disaster concerning you.*

The coming of the Spirit of the LORD results in blessing for God’s people,
but also in judgment against his enemies.

I should point out that the word ‘entice’ in verse 21
is a different word than “induce” in verse 2,
but they have a very similar range of meanings:
“entice, seduce, deceive, lead astray.”

But the warning should come across clearly to you:
if you set your feet on a crooked path,
then do not be surprised if God encourages your self-deception!
Because you will hear what you want to hear!

e. Micaiah’s Last Word: “If You Return in Peace, the LORD Has Not Spoken by Me” (18:23-27)

²³ Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, “Which way did the Spirit of the LORD go from me to speak to you?” ²⁴ And Micaiah said, “Behold, you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide yourself.” ²⁵ And the king of Israel said, “Seize Micaiah and take him back to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king’s son, ²⁶ and say, ‘Thus says the king, Put this fellow in prison and feed him with meager rations of bread and water until I return in peace.’” ²⁷ And Micaiah said, “If you return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me.” And he said, “Hear, all you peoples!”

*Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek and said,
Which way did the Spirit of the LORD go from me to speak to you?*

Zedekiah was the one who had prophesied in the name of Yahweh,
so he mocks Micaiah, suggesting that if the Spirit of Yahweh
was lying through him,

then why wouldn’t the Spirit of Yahweh be lying through Micaiah!

*And Micaiah said, ‘Behold, you shall see on that day
when you go into an inner chamber to hide yourself!’*

Do not blaspheme the work of the Spirit!

Jesus says that blasphemy against the Son of Man can be forgiven,
but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.
When the Holy Spirit plainly decrees destruction and judgment,
do not mock the word of the LORD!

But Ahab is a mocker and a scoffer, and he has had enough of this prophet,
so he orders Micaiah imprisoned until he returns.

Note that Ahab does not order Micaiah to be executed.

He wants to mock Micaiah further.

*Put this fellow in prison and feed him meager rations of bread and water,
until I return in peace.*

And Micaiah said, 'If you return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me.

We don't hear anything more about Micaiah or Zedekiah.

What did happen to Zedekiah when he went into an inner chamber?

We don't know!

What happened to Micaiah when Ahab failed to return home?

We don't know...

What we do know is that the King of Israel did not survive the battle.

f. The Battle: the Death of the King of Israel (18:28-34)

²⁸ So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. ²⁹ And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes." And the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into battle. ³⁰ Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of his chariots, "Fight with neither small nor great, but only with the king of Israel." ³¹ As soon as the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, "It is the king of Israel." So they turned to fight against him. And Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him; God drew them away from him. ³² For as soon as the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. ³³ But a certain man drew his bow at random^[a] and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate. Therefore he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded." ³⁴ And the battle continued that day, and the king of Israel was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians until evening. Then at sunset he died.

So Ahab and Jehoshaphat set out for battle against Ramoth-gilead.

Ahab decides that he will try to avoid the curse of God by disguising himself.

(As though God could not see through the disguise!)

But what is the effect of this disguise?

Ahab defrocks himself.

Ostensibly Ahab is the "senior partner" in this alliance,
but the only king leading the armies of Israel into battle
is the Son of David.

Ben-Hadad orders his captains to fight only with the king of Israel.

So when they see Jehoshaphat, they pursue him,
but when he cried out, they turned away.

This is curious.

The voice of the Son of David turns back the armies of his enemies.

But Chronicles adds a line here:

“and the LORD helped him; God drew them away from him...”

The voice of the Son of David turns back the enemies

because of God’s promise to Solomon –

that when the LORD’s anointed cries to him, he will hear from heaven and save.

On the other hand, Ahab cannot escape the voice of the LORD.

And so the seemingly random shot of a Syrian archer, guided by the voice of the LORD,
pierces Ahab’s armor.

NOTE that there is an important difference with Kings here.

Chronicles is not interested in how Ahab died – or the prophecies of Elijah.

The point for the Chronicler is that Ahab died,

and so it simply says,

“at sunset he died.”

In Kings we are told that

the blood of the wound flowed into the bottom of the chariot.

And when they washed *the chariot by the pool of Samaria,*

*the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed themselves in it,
according to the word of the LORD that he had spoken.*

All of this was important in Kings because of the prophecies of Elijah.

But Elijah doesn’t play much of a role in Chronicles.

But whereas Elijah is not important for Chronicles,
certainly Jehoshaphat is!

g. Conclusion: Should You Love Those Who Hate the LORD? (19:1-3)

19 Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned in safety to his house in Jerusalem. ² But Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him and said to King Jehoshaphat, “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the LORD. ³ Nevertheless, some good is found in you, for you destroyed the Asheroth out of the land, and have set your heart to seek God.”

Verses 1-3 of chapter 19 then give us the Chronicler’s assessment of chapter 18 –
through the words of the prophet, Jehu the son of Hanani.

Hanani was the prophet who had rebuked Asa for his alliance with Syria.

Now Hanani’s son rebukes Jehoshaphat for his alliance with Israel!

“Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD?”

Some people struggle with this,
because they think about how we are supposed to love even our enemies!
But I hope that you can see that there is a distinction.

You are supposed to love all people –
because they are created in the image of God –
and because they may be restored to that image!

But that does not mean that to are to help them attain what they desire!

Ahab wants to squash the true worship of Yahweh throughout Israel.

Should you help him?

Should you form an alliance with him that will encourage and further his goals?

“You adulterous people!

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?”
(James 4:4)

Friendship in the biblical sense of the term

refers to a relationship that has a common end – a common goal –
a common direction that you pursue together.

You cannot be friends with the world.

If your closest relationships – if the relationships that define your existence –
are hostile to God –
then you will be hostile to him as well!

You *cannot* love those who hate God.

If they *hate* that which you most love,
then you cannot possibly ally with them in any ultimately meaningful way.

You can love them for what they were created to be.

You can love them for what they may yet become.

Jehoshaphat was trying to bring peace between Israel and Judah.

He was a reforming king—a good king—
who had good intentions for reuniting Israel and Judah.
But in his good intentions for reuniting the church,
he overlooked the problem of idolatry.

Indeed, Jehoshaphat’s alliance with Ahab will nearly result in the end of the house of David,
because one fruit of his alliance is that his son, Jehoram will marry Athaliah,
the daughter of Ahab.

He may have thought that this was a good way to try to bring Israel back into the fold,
but you do not bring about reformation by intermarrying with idolaters!