

## LESSONS FROM KING JEHOSHAPHAT'S LIFE

**Speaker:** Dr. Joseph John

**Date:** 24-12-2023

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles chs. 17, 18, 19, 20

As we come to the end of the year, I thought of sharing something from God's Word, especially from the life of King Jehoshaphat. If you are familiar with the Old Testament, the books of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles have a lot of repetition in them, especially in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles. These two books were written primarily for the remnant who came back from Babylon. Thus, God's Spirit put it in the writers, the prophets, to look at the history and bring out those aspects which the 'new' nation, which is building up again, should know.

As you know in the history of the nation, Israel, in the time of King Saul, King David and King Solomon, they were united as one nation. Soon after that, they were divided into two – the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. It's so sad to read that there are about 19 kings in the northern kingdom, and not a single one was a righteous king. Coming to the southern kingdom, there were 20 kings out of which eight were righteous and followed the Lord.

And Jehoshaphat was one such king. I believe it's the Spirit of God that inspired the writers of Chronicles to devote 4 full chapters to King Jehoshaphat – 2 Chronicles chs. 17, 18, 19 and 20. His life had cycles of ups and downs, very similar to our lives. And we will see some lessons from his life which will be useful for our lives too.

- What are some of the good things to follow from King Jehoshaphat's life?
- What are some of the things which we need to be careful or we need to avoid?

But before going into that scripture, let me read one verse which a prophet named Hananni spoke to King Asa, the father of King Jehoshaphat. It was a warning to him.

2 Chronicles 16:9, the first part reads like this: *For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.*

Unfortunately, King Asa started very well, but ended miserably. This prophet, who gave this warning, was put in prison. That's what Jehoshaphat's father did. So, let's read some of the verses about King Jehoshaphat.

2 Chronicles 17:3-6

*<sup>3</sup>The LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because in his early years he walked in the ways of his father David before him. He did not consult the Baals <sup>4</sup>but sought the God of his father and followed his commands rather than the practices of Israel. <sup>5</sup>The LORD established the kingdom under his control; and all Judah brought gifts to Jehoshaphat, so that he had great wealth and honor. <sup>6</sup>His heart was devoted to the ways of the LORD; furthermore, he removed the high places and the Asherah poles from Judah.*

We will look at about 5 cycles or phases in the life of King Jehoshaphat. In these 4 chapters, I found two things:

1. The kind of decision-making. We take decisions every day, small or big. What is the importance of some of these decisions – we'll see that from the life of King Jehoshaphat.
2. Lots of good leadership examples. I believe God has put especially those of us who are parents, as leaders, and it's our duty to give good leadership to our families, to our children, to bring them up in the fear of the Lord.

## SOME GOOD EXAMPLES FROM THE LIFE OF JEHOShAPHAT

2 Chronicles 17:4 tells us that he did not consult the Baals but sought the God of his father and followed his commands rather than the practices of Israel. This is a wonderful example for all of us to follow in our personal lives – to seek the Lord in what we do, and seeking God’s glory and honor. So, when we take a decision, or when we take this path or that, do we first see whether it will bring honor and glory to God, or do we take the decision randomly? That’s something to watch out for. That’s something we can learn from the life of King Jehoshaphat – to seek the Lord in all that we do.

Then we saw in v. 6 that his heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord. Many of the writers, especially in the Old Testament, talk about the heart of the king; whether his heart was devoted to the Lord or not. The same thing is applicable to us. The bible talks a lot about the heart, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Why? That’s where everything we do starts; what we allow our hearts to meditate on, what we allow our hearts to think about. That is why it is so important that our hearts are devoted to the ways of the Lord. It also says in v. 6, “Furthermore, he removed the high places and the Asherah poles from Judah.” So, to have our hearts devoted to the Lord, we also need to remove the bad things from our hearts. So it’s both. We need to take special care to ensure that our hearts do not dwell on things which are not good.

I like the way it’s put in v. 5. “The Lord established the kingdom under his control; and all Judah brought gifts to Jehoshaphat, so that he had great wealth and honor.” As Jehoshaphat gave his priority, his heart to the Lord, he devoted himself to the Lord, the Lord took care. Very often, this is a common mistake that we make – as we mature in age and climb the ladder in our professional career, we start to think we are in control, that we can manage it all. I think that’s the mistake, and this is something we need to learn from the life of King Jehoshaphat, that actually God is the one who is in control, not us. As we seek the Lord with all our heart, God would take control and He would make sure that whatever we are involved in, God would give us victory. I speak from experience as I have made this mistake in my own life.

So, two examples to follow from the life of King Jehoshaphat:

- Seek the Lord in all that we do and wait on Him rather than on our own insight.
- To have a heart fully devoted to the Lord with no place for any rubbish.

Let me read from 2 Chronicles 17:7-9

*<sup>7</sup>In the third year of his reign he sent his officials Ben-Hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel and Micaiah to teach in the towns of Judah. <sup>8</sup>With them were certain Levites—Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah and Tob-Adonijah—and the priests Elishama and Jehoram. <sup>9</sup>They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the LORD; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people.*

In the many times I have read these verses, I realized I missed something. I never ever noticed these specific efforts King Jehoshaphat took. We often think that teaching the scripture only happened in the New Testament. But it’s right here in the Old Testament. It’s so nice to see how Jehoshaphat got together a good team of officials and Levites, and he could impress upon them, motivate them and make them go around all the towns. It is clearly mentioned there: They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the Lord; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people.

This is something so vital. Jehoshaphat realized that there is no substitute to God’s Word, and so he sent people around with the Book of the Law.

What were the consequences?

vv. 10 and 11 <sup>10</sup>*The fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands surrounding Judah, so that they did not go to war against Jehoshaphat.* <sup>11</sup>*Some Philistines brought Jehoshaphat gifts and silver as tribute, and the Arabs brought him flocks: seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred goats.*

We live in times where we are very concerned about our rights. Social media is full of it. Every second it will tell you what is happening around the world. Things were not like that in the early days. In fact, if you read the Old Testament, especially this history, you would see that every nation is concerned about the leadership around them – to see whether they had an opportunity to overthrow them. The same thing happened here when Jehoshaphat was king; all the neighbors were watching carefully. The best part is the fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the land surrounding Judah so that they did not make war with Jehoshaphat. God took care of taking care of the enemies surrounding the nation of Judah.

That's very interesting! This is a very important principle.

Proverbs 16:7, written by great-grandfather of King Jehoshaphat, says, "When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." And we see that happening right here.

What is the application for us? When we give priority to God, when we seek God, when we keep Him first in our life, God would take care even of some of the things which you would never have been able to do. I have seen this many times in my own life. God takes care.

We need to give priority to read God's Word and study it, and live in obedience to God's Spirit. We are so lucky because we have God's Word with us. They had one, but today, we have plenty of bibles with us. So it's all the more important that we make it a point to read and study God's word and allow God's Spirit to lead us. You can be sure, and I speak from my life, God will take care of many of the things you are worried about. God will give you the wisdom and the discernment which God gave to King Jehoshaphat.

This was the good part of the early days of King Jehoshaphat. He did extremely well.

### **SOME BAD DECISIONS FROM THE LIFE OF JEHOSEPHAT**

18:1 *Now Jehoshaphat had great wealth and honor, and he allied himself with Ahab by marriage.*

Even before this, despite the fact that God took care of his enemies, Jehoshaphat put in a lot of effort to build a strong army, and making it even stronger. I don't know why he did it. It's quite likely that all his success made him a bit too proud. God had explicitly forbidden any kind of relationship or alliance with the northern kingdom, King Ahab in particular. It says that there was no king as bad as him. And yet, Jehoshaphat made it a point to make an alliance through marriage with such a king. And he almost paid with his life for that decision.

What happened? He made a trip to King Ahab who said, "Let's go and attack this particular town called Ramoth Gilead. It belongs to us, and now it is with the king of Aram." And Jehoshaphat was too naïve and said, "I am as you are, and my people as your people." But he did a wise thing. He said, "Let's seek the counsel of the Lord," and sure enough, Ahab had 400 prophets. He said, "Not one; here are 400." All false prophets! They all said, "Go! You will have victory."

Jehoshaphat was wise enough to ask this question: "Is there not one prophet here of the Lord?" and Ahab says, "Yes, there is one, but he never speaks good things about me." This prophet Micaiah came, and literally tells him that you are going to pay with your life. The question was: Should we go

and attack? The answer was that you should not go. If you do, you will get killed. But it is very sad that Jehoshaphat, who feared God all his life, did not follow this advice. Despite that, he went. And sure enough, Ahab was very deceitful. He told Jehoshaphat that "I will be in disguise. You put on your royal clothes." And sure enough, the king of Aram had told all his commanders to attack only the king. Don't attack anybody else. So the commanders attacked Jehoshaphat thinking that he was the king of Israel.

Even in such a situation, we see God's grace.

2 Chronicles 18:31-32 <sup>31</sup>*When the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought, "This is the king of Israel." So they turned to attack him, but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him. God drew them away from him,* <sup>32</sup>*for when the chariot commanders saw that he was not the king of Israel, they stopped pursuing him.*

This is just God's grace. Sometimes we go entirely against the Lord, and we think that God's grace would save us. And it may not. So, be extremely careful. He literally almost paid with his life. There was somebody else who drew an arrow at random, and that hit Ahab and he died at the end of the day. God is sovereign. This deceitful King Ahab thought he could disguise himself and get away. But God made sure that whatever God spoke through His prophet would come true.

So, this comes as a warning for all of us. As I said, what we learn from Jehoshaphat's life is that we must be extremely careful about the decisions we make every day. You must be guided by God's word. Wait on the Lord. This is what we read and we understand from this particular portion, especially ch. 18.

Now sure enough, when King Jehoshaphat returned, he was very severely rebuked by prophet Jehu. 2 Chronicles 19:1-3 <sup>1</sup>*When Jehoshaphat king of Judah returned safely to his palace in Jerusalem,* <sup>2</sup>*Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani, went out to meet him and said to the king, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, the wrath of the Lord is on you."* <sup>3</sup>*There is, however, some good in you, for you have rid the land of the Asherah poles and have set your heart on seeking God.*

**What do we learn from this bad cycle in his life?** Be careful about taking decisions, especially when associating with those who are against the Lord. Sometimes, we take it so casually. So, be very careful.

Moving on to the third phase which we find in ch. 19. The good thing about Jehoshaphat is that he took this rebuke very seriously, and it looks like he repented. How do we know that?

2 Chronicles 19:4 <sup>4</sup>*Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem, and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim and turned them back to the Lord, the God of their ancestors.*

I love this verse very much. It says 'again', which implies that for a time period some time back, he was not doing it. Now he has come back again on track. This time he himself went around his own kingdom, "and turned them back to the Lord, the God of their fathers". One very important message that we see in the Old Testament, especially in this book on the history, is that the king had so much impact on his kingdom, whether he was good or bad. That's what we find in the northern kingdom – they went completely away from the Lord, all because the person at the top was not a godly person.

Similarly in the southern kingdom, we see the same thing. Whenever they had a good and righteous king, the whole nation flourished. Their hearts were closed to the Lord, but Jehoshaphat made it a point to win them back to the Lord. That's true about all of us; it's not a one-day affair. We need to

constantly come back to God. We need to align ourselves with God and there is no other way than investing ourselves in God's word. I like the way Jehoshaphat did it. It is a good leadership lesson for all of us, especially those of us who are parents – take special steps to make sure that our children are following the Lord and bring them up in God's fear so that they would follow our path.

We come to the next cycle – chapter 20. In fact, Jehoshaphat is generally known for this particular chapter. Here you find that there's a joint attack on the southern kingdom, a major threat to the whole nation by the joint armies of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir. Such a vast army that they were terrified. But the best part is the way Jehoshaphat responded.

2 Chronicles 20:12-15

*<sup>12</sup> "Oh our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."*

*<sup>13</sup> All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD.*

*<sup>14</sup> Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.*

*<sup>15</sup> He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.'"*

We always quote this particular verse: "The battle belongs to the Lord". God said, "You don't have to do anything; I will take care." We see later, all that Jehoshaphat and his armies did was to praise the Lord. As the army marched out, in front of them were the Levites praising God saying, "Give thanks to the Lord for His love endures". And what happened? These three nations fought with each other, so much so that not a single person was left.

Sometimes, God solves our problems in ways we could never comprehend. I want to share that as an encouragement to you – as we depend on the Lord, as we trust in Him, God will take care. That is the lesson. Unfortunately, there is this pride in all of us especially as we grow in age and go up in our profession. We think we can manage. That is the danger. And the lesson we learn from King Jehoshaphat's life is that we must be sure to always depend on the Lord. I like the way it is put in v.12: "For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

Most often, we go to God only when we are driven to the extreme. It's true for most of us. When we know that nothing can be done, then we go to God. But really, for anything and everything, even the smallest matter, we should be going to the Lord, asking for His strength. "We don't know what to do!" That is a good prayer to pray when we are asking for God's wisdom. Lord, I don't know what to do. There's a popular song in Malayalam which says exactly this. "Lord, I don't know what to do; tell me what to do. I don't know what decision to take; tell me what to do." When we do that, go with that kind of attitude, God would show us what we should be doing.

So this is something we learned from Jehoshaphat's life – his dependence on God and putting everything into God's hands.

Proverbs 3:5-6 written by Jehoshaphat's great grandfather, King Solomon.

*<sup>5</sup> Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;*

*<sup>6</sup> in all your ways acknowledge Him,  
and He will make your paths straight.*

We think we know things, what to do. And there lies the problem. Yes, maybe we have experience, maybe we know what to do. But still, always be sure that in all your ways, acknowledge Him. "Lord, is this the way I should take? This looks okay to me; is it the right way to go?" Ask God and He will make your path straight – that's the promise there.

Now the last cycle which is again a foolish decision. That's why I said it goes up and down, up and down with him. Similar to what we do.

2 Chronicles 20:35-37

*<sup>35</sup> Later, Jehoshaphat king of Judah made an alliance with Ahaziah king of Israel, whose ways were wicked. <sup>36</sup> He agreed with him to construct a fleet of trading ships. After these were built at Ezion Geber, <sup>37</sup> Eliezer son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have made an alliance with Ahaziah, the LORD will destroy what you have made." The ships were wrecked and were not able to set sail to trade.*

Once again we see the bad decision made by Jehoshaphat. Ahaziah was the son of Ahab, and once again Jehoshaphat goes and makes an alliance, this time a professional association. It was a major failure in all his investments. Sometimes when we make investments, are we sure? Are you going in the right directions? Are you sure that what you're doing is as per God's will and plan?

## **SUMMARY**

Let me summarize some of the lessons we learned from King Jehoshaphat's life.

Psalms 111:10

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His precepts have good understanding.*

When you say fear of the Lord, it's the reverence for the Lord, seeking the Lord, devoting our heart to the Lord. when we do that, that's the beginning of wisdom. God's word is full of principles specific instructions of what we should do and what we should not do. We are very privileged to have God's Spirit residing in each one of us as we surrender our hearts to God.

What we learned from the life of King Jehoshaphat is the importance of taking decisions. We take decisions every day. It is very important that we seek God's wisdom and discernment when we take decisions. Also, our daily decisions have serious consequences. Hence, don't be casual when you take decisions, but take time to prayerfully make those decisions. I cannot emphasize this enough – invest your time in reading and studying God's word and memorizing God's word so that it becomes part of your life. Without that, I don't see any way we can make progress in our life.

Amen.

\*\*\*\*\*