

# ROYAL INTRODUCTIONS

## Kings of the Past Who Point Us to the True King

### **JEHOSHAPHAT: Unsteady Faithfulness**

(1 Kings 22:41-50; 2 Chronicles 17-20)

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Even with the best kings, we get a mixture of both faithful obedience and rebellious idolatry. Jehoshaphat is no exception. While he was definitely one of Israel's good kings, he also had his issues. Before we get into the life and reign of Jehoshaphat, I want to take a little side road to help us understand more about the structure of this section of Holy Scripture.

Some folks wonder why the Bible has the book of Kings *and* the book of Chronicles, since they basically cover the same time period and the same people. If you read both of these accounts of the history of Israel, you will notice some significant differences, as two very different story tellers write with their own agendas. Kings gives us an account of all of the kings of Judah and Israel while Chronicles' only focus is Judah. Kings is written as an explanation of the exile of both Israel and Judah. Therefore, much more of the unfaithfulness of the kings of both northern and southern tribes is brought to light. Chronicles, on the other hand, is an attempt to defend and identify the royal lineage of David which is carried through only in Jerusalem. Therefore, Chronicles gives us a more positive impression of Judah's kings, even some of the most blatantly evil.

This different approach is particularly evident as we examine the reign of Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa. 1 Kings hardly mentions Jehoshaphat except in its account of the evil reign of Ahab. He gets a total of 9 verses that are his own. 2 Chronicles is very different in that it devotes four chapters to Jehoshaphat. Kings does not think very highly of Jehoshaphat, considering him good in the sense of Asa, his father. 2 Chronicles compares Jehoshaphat's faithfulness to that of David, the greatest king in Israel's history. Fortunately, we get both the good and the bad, that we might learn from their faithfulness and from their failures.

Our main subject for today, Jehoshaphat, had a strong 25-year reign. Unlike his father, he finished fairly well. He carried out many religious reforms throughout his years on the throne, including sending the Levites throughout the country to teach the people the Law. He wanted to share his zeal for Yahweh with his people.

The pinnacle of his journey of faith came when the nations of Moab and Ammon came up against Jerusalem with a great multitude. The very first thing Jehoshaphat did was to gather his people to pray. He proclaimed a fast for the whole nation that they might all seek the help of Yahweh. The prayer he prayed is a glorious example of dependent trust in the protection of his Covenant God. This is how he concluded that prayer: **"For we are powerless against this great horde**

***that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you” (2 Chronicles 20:12).***

Notice two things about this prayer. First, he did not trust his own capabilities or his understanding. A healthy distrust in ourselves is the beginning of great faith. For too many of us, we never get to this point. Secondly, because he had nothing else that could give him any hope of deliverance, he put his trust in the One who could deliver. These two keys are intimately related. We don't cast ourselves on our Covenant God for deliverance because we have yet come to the place where we think we need Him. This is our struggle with prayer. It is not our discipline to have devotional times, though discipline might be lacking. We don't pray because we remain under the illusion that we can get ourselves out of trouble on our own. Here is the gift that our God brings to us in the form of overwhelming circumstances. These times give us understanding of our weakness and drive us to the only One who is in any way sufficient for the day. Blessed is the one who hits the bottom and is without hope, for he is the one who finds sufficient help as he looks up to the Savior.

While Jehoshaphat experienced significant spiritual high points in his life, he was also fraught with destructive tendencies, which the writer of Chronicles clearly highlights. As Jehoshaphat is introduced, the writer goes to great lengths to show how Yahweh established his kingdom, giving him great wealth and honor, and subduing enemies around him. Jehoshaphat had it made. He was rich, highly respected, and at peace, all because of the goodness of his God. You would think that would be enough to satisfy anyone. You would think.

Unfortunately, that was not enough for Jehoshaphat. Twice in his reign he was strongly rebuked by God's prophets for basically the same thing: he made alliances with the evil kings of Israel. First, there was Ahab. **2 Chronicles 18** tells us that through his son, Jehoram, Jehoshaphat made a marriage alliance with Ahab, the worst of Israel's kings. Ahab gave his daughter Athaliah to Jehoram as a wife. Athaliah would bring great trouble on Judah in a few short years. Jehoshaphat also allied with Ahab to go up against Syria to regain lost territory. The writer says in **18:2** that Ahab **“induced”** Jehoshaphat to join him in this quest through a grandiose display of wealth at a feast. How is it that a king who already possessed such great riches, honor, and security would be impressed with such a feast? Is it because he thought what he had was just not enough?

In the case with Ahaziah, Ahab's son, they partnered to build ships to travel to Tarshish, obviously for trade. Such an agreement would enrich both kings. Jehoshaphat's desire to trade with Tarshish was not a great evil, but to engage in such pursuits with a king as evil as Ahaziah was definitely problematic. Yahweh thought so, and wrecked the whole fleet to put a stop to it.

In both of these cases, Jehoshaphat partnered with evil to gain more of what Yahweh had already given to him. Why did he feel the need for more, especially to the point that he would be accomplice to such blatant evil? A discontented heart can lead to great foolishness. I remember when I was a few years out of college and working in Atlanta. The very first car I had owned was showing a few signs of

wear, though not something that could not be fixed. It was also paid for completely. I became discontented with that car, especially when I saw a brand new model. My heart was hooked. I needed a new car. The problem came when I could not qualify for a loan. That should have put a stop to my quest, but I was determined. What I had was no longer good enough. I needed more. I went to a friend to ask him to co-sign for the loan, making him responsible if I failed to pay. He was not inclined to do it, and even quoted scripture speaking of how unwise such loans were. Even with that, I was determined. He ultimately agreed to do it, though he should not have. What I did not know was that within the year I would leave my job to head to seminary. Being a poor seminary student, I had no way to afford to make the car payments and had to sell my new car at a loss, after owning it for less than two years. Kind of like with Jehoshaphat's fleet, the Lord brought my empty and faithless pursuit to an end.

Here is the wickedness of discontentment. Because we are made in the image of God, we are made for more than what this world can provide. We are made for glory, and only God Himself will be enough for us. We will never be satisfied with what the world can provide. In pursuing satisfaction in the world's wealth, we reject the lavish good that our God has given to us as insufficient and we question His good nature. When we turn away from Him, our true good, we will always be left hungry, and we will go to greater and greater lengths to satisfy that hunger. In my case, I rationalized biblical truth away. In Jehoshaphat's case, he had to rationalize away the evil of Ahab and Ahaziah, maybe considering that they were all of the same blood of Israel, which made it okay. Our hunger for more can lead us to make seriously poor choices that will be destructive to ourselves and to others.

This is the complete opposite of our future King's nature. Paul said of Him in **2 Corinthians 8:9**, ***"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."*** Jesus laid aside His eternal wealth and entered the world, not in the wealth and honor of the palace, but the poverty of a stable. He never possessed anything, never owned a home or received great honor. Even when He was tempted with all of the wealth, riches, and honor the world could provide, He flatly rejected being "induced." Instead, being fully satisfied in the love of His Father, He gave Himself to enrich us who lived in the poverty of this fallen world. He did not seek for Himself, but instead laid Himself down for those He loved. In this season, we give thanks and celebrate our good and gracious King.