



Jehoshaphat: The Tragedy of Compromise

Lesson 10

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 2 Corinthians 6:14

How should godly people interact with ungodly people? We often emphasize kindness and compassion, and we should. We ought to be gracious and friendly, and we ought to have relationships with people who don't know Christ. But where do we draw the line? Can we ever be too friendly? What's the difference between kindness and compromise?

Jehoshaphat was Judah's fourth king, and unfortunately he compromised in an attempt to form peace. After growing up watching his father fight in long wars against Baasha, Jehoshaphat was able to strike a peace deal with the formerly hostile kingdom of Israel. In fact, he went so far as to ally with them! This decision, while perhaps understandable on a human level, was disastrous for him on a spiritual level. Studying Jehoshaphat should cause us to be extremely careful about those we with whom we partner and develop close friendships.

Why is this kind of teaching not popular in the church today?

What happens if we ignore the warnings of separation we find in this story?

Jehoshaphat's Strong Start (2 Chronicles 17)

Like many other kings of the south, Chronicles begins by describing for us the successful beginning of Jehoshaphat's reign.

I. Jehoshaphat's political strength

From a national perspective, the beginning of Jehoshaphat's reign showed great promise. A number of details in this chapter show us how God's blessing and Jehoshaphat's leadership led to a stable country.

A. He built up fortresses (17:1-2).

Who does it seem these fortresses were built to protect against? What was the background for this (cf 1 Kings 15:16)?

B. He built up the treasury (17:5).

Because of Jehoshaphat's faithfulness to God ("therefore" in the beginning of the verse ties this concept back to verse 4), God blessed Jehoshaphat materially. While we need to be careful that we don't think obedience to God means we will automatically live healthy and wealthy lives, the Bible does teach that obedience to God brings God's blessing. This was especially true in the Old Testament, where God's covenant blessings were tied to his work with his people as a nation.

C. He built up the army (17:10-19)

Jehoshaphat also has great military strength and is able to subdue the nations around him with his impressive army. Yet again, obedience to God has tangible blessings for the king and the people.

As we will see below, all of these political and social victories come during a time of spiritual fervor. Once again we see the theme emerge that during this era, God's blessing falls on those who obey him.

How can we apply such a truth today without falling into the trap of the health and wealth gospel?

II. Jehoshaphat's religious fervor

Interwoven throughout this section are the spiritual successes of the king. This focus on the Lord was the true secret of the power of the kingdom.

A. He sought God not Baal (17:3-4).

Asa is described as a king who "sought" God and led the people in doing so as well (14:4, 7; 15:12). Jehoshaphat follows in the footsteps of his father and seeks the Lord rather than Baal.

What had been the result of Asa seeking the Lord, how had his reign gone? How do you think this might have had an impact on Jehoshaphat?

Who in your life has sought the Lord faithfully and been an example of the blessing of obedience?

B. He removed idolatry (17:6, cf 1 Kings 22:46).

Didn't his father Asa already remove idolatry? How were there more idols to remove?

How does this statement square with the statements in 2 Chronicles 20:33 and 1 Kings 22:43? What does this teach us about the nature of idolatry?

These idols kept creeping back in, but during the reign of Asa and Jehoshaphat they were systematically removed, and then systematically removed again. Fighting for complete allegiance to God is a lifelong pursuit. Unfortunately, it's not a battle we can ever stop fighting.

C. He taught the people the law (17:7-9).

Jehoshaphat gets innovative in his leading the nation to obey God. He sends out his government officials and Levites to go and teach the people the Law of the Lord. Here we have a king taking his spiritual responsibility to lead others with a seriousness not previously seen.

How can you take initiative to lead others in the study of God's Word?

Jehoshaphat's Spiritual Compromise (2 Chronicles 18)

Suddenly this very positive story hits a major snag. A godly, successful king of Judah does something that has never been done in the brief history of the divided kingdom – he makes a marriage alliance with Israel.

What advantages could come from a political marriage?

What was the interaction between Israel and Judah while Jehoshaphat was growing up? What was Jehoshaphat's original stance towards Israel (cf 17:1)? What do you think it was that caused Jehoshaphat to change his posture?

How do you think Jehoshaphat was able to justify this partnership? How might people today use the same logic?

This alliance causes major issues for Jehoshaphat and those who would follow him. The compromise of a godly king with a wicked king no doubt made sense on a number of levels for Jehoshaphat, but the impact was devastating. The first partnership between these two nations is a token of things to come.

I. Ahab's proposal (18:1-3)

As Jehoshaphat celebrated a feast with the most ungodly king Israel would know, Ahab hits him with a request. Sitting in Ahab's palace, with a feast in front of him, surrounded by Ahab and related through marriage put him in a real awkward position. Saying "no" at this point would look incredibly ungrateful, and perhaps even be dangerous.

How should Jehoshaphat responded to friendliness from the north?

How should New Testament believers think about the wording of Jehoshaphat's response?

II. A message from the Lord (18:4-27)

Jehoshaphat wisely asks that they inquire of the Lord before going to battle. A consistent feature we see of those who

follow the Lord is a reliance on him in battle and a prophetic message to give God's instructions.

A. The false prophets (18:4-11)

Ahab gladly brings out 400 prophets (a very interesting number given 1 Kings 18:19, 22). They all give the same message: "Go for it! The Lord will give you victory." Jehoshaphat rightly feels uncomfortable, however. Something doesn't sit right. So after hearing 400 prophets tell him to go for it, Jehoshaphat asks for a second opinion. Ahab reluctantly complies.

Why do you think Jehoshaphat asked for another prophet?

B. God's prophet (18:12-27)

A true prophet of the Lord named Micaiah appears and sarcastically gives the answer everyone wants to hear. Apparently, he gives away in his voice that what they want to hear is not the truth, because Ahab demands that Micaiah tells him only what the Lord says. Micaiah warns that the war will bring disaster and even hints that Ahab will meet his end.

What points to Ahab's death in Micaiah's prophesy?

Ahab responds with anger and ignores this messenger from the Lord. He demands they move ahead with the plan anyway, and they do.

Why does Jehoshaphat not listen to the prophet of the Lord? Why would a godly king ignore God's clear instruction in this instance? How can this be a warning to us?

III. A disastrous result (18:28-34)

As one might imagine, the result is utter defeat. Ahab tries to trick the king of Syria, but God makes sure that he is fatally wounded anyway. Jehoshaphat must run for his life, and is spared by God after crying out for help. Ahab listened to the message he wanted and paid the price. Jehoshaphat was too much of a coward to listen to the prophet when there was pressure put on him by the king of the more impressive northern kingdom and also paid a great price.

What price is paid today by those who refuse to separate from evil influences as God would have them?

Jehoshaphat's Spiritual Renewal (2 Chronicles 19:1-20:30)

I. Jehoshaphat is reprimanded (19:1-3).

Jehoshaphat is given an appropriate rebuke from a prophet for cooperating with the wicked king of the north. Yet even this rebuke is tempered by the fact that Jehoshaphat has shown great zeal to rid Judah of the pagan gods of Canaan. In many ways, it almost highlights the awkwardness of wiping out Baal and Asherah worship while partnering with the king and queen most known for promoting Baal and Asherah worship.

II. Jehoshaphat sets up judges (19:4-11).

Remember, one of the primary purposes of kings in ancient times was to be the promoters of justice. There was no separation of powers, kings were the head of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. Jehoshaphat takes this role seriously, and does more in the nation to promote the righteousness that God expected all kings to promote.

III. Jehoshaphat faces a coalition (20:1-30).

After faithfully following God, Jehoshaphat is faced with a big test of faith. Several nations team up together and come at Judah with more troops than the small nation should be able to handle.

A. Jehoshaphat's prayer (20:1-12).

Immediately the king is afraid and does what everyone who is afraid should do – he seeks the face of the Lord. He enlists the entire nation in seeking God's help for this trial. Jehoshaphat then leads the people in a powerful prayer appealing to God's character, promises to the patriarchs, and ultimately his power.

B. A prophet promises victory (20:13-19).

A prophet comes and promises that there will be victory over this nation, a victory that Jehoshaphat will not have to earn. Judah will not have to lift one sword. A mighty three army nation approaches, and yet Judah will win without having to do anything. The people believe God and rejoice, worshipping the Lord.

Why is such worship especially noteworthy? How can this be a rebuke to us today?

C. God works a mighty victory (20:20-30).

Judah has an interesting battle plan. Musicians led the way worshipping the Lord, because after all, the army wasn't going to need to fight. Sure enough, there is dissension among the three kings, and the enemy alliance falls apart. The armies start attacking one another, and by the time Judah comes upon the scene, everyone is dead or gone.

It would be great if we could end the story of Jehoshaphat there. He started well, made some big mistakes but in the end learned his lesson. Unfortunately, as we will see, in the end Jehoshaphat went back to his old ways and once again partnered with those who don't love the Lord. After seeing the blessings of faith and the disaster of compromise, Jehoshaphat compromised again.

Why do you think it is that compromise has such an appeal to even godly men and women?

Jehoshaphat's End (2 Chronicles 20:31-37)

I. Summary of Jehoshaphat's legacy (20:31-34).

In the end, Jehoshaphat is viewed as a righteous king. He spent his life following God and seeking to obey him. The only caveat we get is that he also allied himself with wicked kings, and that the idolatry he set out to eliminate was never completely eradicated.

How might Jehoshaphat's two failures be related? What does this teach us?

II. Jehoshaphat's final compromises (20:35-37; 2 Kings 3).

Sadly, we end our story with a king who still hadn't learned his lesson. Jehoshaphat overlaps with two other sons of Ahab, and he partners with both of them!

A. His financial compromise (20:35-37).

Jehoshaphat decides to undergo a financial venture with Ahaziah, Ahab's immediate heir. God is upset by this partnership, and so he destroys the ships.

B. His political compromise (2 Kings 3).

2 Kings gives us one final scene from the life of Jehoshaphat. After a disastrous war with Ahab and a disastrous financial partnership with his son, Jehoshaphat enters into another war with a different son of Ahab (Joram/Jehoram)!

Partway through this campaign, it becomes clear that they are out of water and are doomed to fail unless God shows up in a big way. Fortunately, Jehoshaphat asks if a prophet of the Lord is nearby, and finds that Elisha is in the group (likely ministering to those soldiers who were willing to listen, much like a military chaplain). God graciously provides water and a partial victory, although in the end the war itself is a failure.¹

¹ The last verse of the chapter is a perplexing statement that has puzzled many Bible students. While different understandings have been promoted,

What was the cost of Jehoshaphat's compromises?

Why is it that even godly men struggle with the practical necessity of separating from evil?

What would it look like for a modern believer to separate from evil as 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 would admonish? What would it not look like?

the most satisfying answer is that the essentially pagan Israelites were terrified of what the false god Chemosh of Moab would do that they fled in terror.