

Jehoshaphat: “They Taught the Book of the Law”

Scripture Readings: 2 Chronicles 17-20 (excerpts); Ephesians 6:4; 2 Timothy 1:5

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Dear Congregation of Christ: “To err is human, to forgive, divine,” so wrote English poet Alexander Pope in 1711. But let me quote a few variations of this proverb. Early church theologian St. Augustine: “It is human to err, but it is devilish to remain willfully in error.” American biologist Paul R. Ehrlich: “To err is human, but to really foul things up you need a computer.” Former Vice-President Hubert Humphrey: “To err is human. To blame someone else is politics.” And Canadian computer whiz Henry Spencer: “To err is human, but to really [mess] things up requires a design committee of bureaucrats.”

The Holy Scriptures say that all human beings not only err, but sin, because all are conceived and born with a sinful nature. And our king today, Jehoshaphat, is not an exception. His name, which means, “Yahweh has judged or governed,” is fitting for his accomplishments. His 25-year reign can also be called a “golden age” of the southern kingdom of Judah, much like Solomon’s “golden age.” So his reign is summarized positively in 2 Chronicles 17:3–4, *“The LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the earlier ways of his father David. He did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments, and not according to the practices of Israel. Therefore the LORD established the kingdom in his hand.”*

His kingdom was blessed by God because he walked in God’s commandments as his father David did. He worshiped only the LORD and not the pagan idols of other nations. He reformed the government system, appointing judges to judge, not for man, but for God. He appointed Levites and priests to go to different cities in the nation to teach the people the laws of the LORD. Therefore, for most of his reign, his kingdom had peace and prosperity and faithfulness to God.

However, there were a few times that Jehoshaphat surrendered to his sinful nature. He made alliances with pagan nations instead of trusting God alone. This led to an invasion by a coalition of several nations, and this invasion brought him and his people to their knees, pleading to God for salvation. And God heard their prayer and delivered them. Finally, in the last paragraph about his reign in 2 Chronicles 20, he again collaborated with another pagan king to build commercial ships, which ended in another disaster.

This morning, we will study how obedience to God’s word results in blessings, and how disobedience incurs God’s curses.

Jehoshaphat Walks in the Law of the LORD

Because Jehoshaphat walked in the law of the LORD, God prospered him and his kingdom. The LORD always promises his covenant people that if they walked with him and his covenant laws, he will be with them, he will be their God, and they will be his beloved people.

It is striking to read in verse 17:4 that Jehoshaphat *"walked in [God's] commandments, and not according to the practices of Israel."* Israel was the northern kingdom, which turned into pagan worship of idol-gods. Beginning with Solomon, the southern kingdom of Judah started worshipping pagan gods because Solomon himself worship them in addition to the God of his father David. Solomon's son Rehoboam and grandson Abijah both did evil in the sight of God, worshipping idol-gods (2 Chr 12:14; 1 Kgs 15:3). These two kings were merely following their fathers' evil footsteps. Abijah then had a son named Asa who inherited his throne, and Asa *"did what was good and right before the LORD"* (2 Chr 14:2). Jehoshaphat was Asa's son, and he followed his righteous father's footsteps in doing what was good and right before God.

What good and right things did Jehoshaphat do when he was king? First, *"he did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father and his commandments"* (17:3-4). The people of the northern kingdom of Israel, led by the evil king Ahab and his wicked queen Jezebel, worshiped the Canaanite idol-god named Baal. Baal means "lord" or "master," and was the god of fertility, often portrayed as a bull, and also the god of the storm. The priests of Baal offered sacrifices, sometimes human, and would often go into a frenzied state, even cutting themselves in their worship. When 850 prophets of Baal tried in vain to call fire from their pagan gods at Mount Carmel, they danced in a delirious state and cut themselves. The prophet Elijah defeated them when he called on the LORD to send fire from heaven (1 Kgs 18):20-40). But Jehoshaphat followed his father Asa in destroying all the pagan gods and their high places of worship (2 Chr 19:3).

The second good and right thing that Jehoshaphat did was sending Levites and priests as itinerant preachers all over the land, *"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"* (17:9). He knew the words of Psalm 19, *"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes"* (7-8). The word of God revives the sinsick souls of the people, makes them wise, rejoices their hearts, and enlightens their eyes. The law of the LORD is *"More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb"* (10).

This is also a warning to God's people today. God's word is not taken seriously in the churches. The words sin, judgment and hell are taboo and never mentioned in the service and in preaching. All we hear is, "God is love," therefore, he will not judge anyone, and will not send anyone to hell. The Holy Scriptures teach us that there are three marks of a true church: the faithful preaching of the gospel; the right administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper; and the right exercise of church discipline. In most churches, these three marks are absent. Therefore, their worship services are copies of pagan rock concerts and late night comedy shows.

We see the result of the descent of the church into the abyss of errors and false teachings in the godless culture of our nation. God commands us parents and grandparents, *"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise"*

(Deu 6:6-7). But what have we done? Nothing. We have neglected the responsibility of raising our children in godliness and holiness to our churches, where the word of God, godliness, and the fear of God is not taught.

We have left the training of our children to the schools, where teachers and administrators teach them all kinds of lessons in wicked transgenderism and disobedience to authority. They learn their life lessons from TikTok, Twitter, Zoom, and drag queen shows. They are raised by their godless Generations X and Y single parents or same-sex parents. Why are America's Baby Boomers all the way to today's Generation Z, godless and wicked, turning good into evil and evil into good? Because we parents who know what is right and what is wrong before God have not taught them.

But God is not mocked. When 18th century preacher Jonathan Edwards preached his most well-known sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," he used a verse fitting for our nation today, "*Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly*" (Deu 32:35). While all people are enjoying eating and drinking and partying, mocking Christ, God will come suddenly like a thief in the night, at an unexpected hour, to exact vengeance on them and send them to eternal hell (Matt 24:38-39).

Jehoshaphat remembered the warning and the reward in Psalm 19:11, "*Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*" The word of God warns his people that curses follow disobedience, but reward follows keeping God's law. He knew this because of the peace and prosperity of his kingdom because of his devotion to God's word.

Jehoshaphat Disobeys the Law of the LORD

But even when he knew this, Jehoshaphat still had a few episodes of "to err is human." First, like Solomon, he made a marriage alliance with the wicked King Ahab of the northern kingdom of Israel. This is the same Ahab whose queen is the wicked Jezebel. He and Ahab wanted to defeat and get rid of the Syrians to the north, and the false prophets of Ahab told him that they would defeat the Syrians. In the battle, Ahab was defeated and killed, but Jehoshaphat and his men escaped. But upon returning to Jerusalem, a prophet rebuked him, "*Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the LORD*" (2 Chr 19:2).

God had always warned his people and their king not to make alliances with wicked nations, but to trust him alone. In Psalm 146:3, "*Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.*" And in Psalm 20:7, "*Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.*" The LORD is a mighty warrior who has led them to victory over the Egyptians and all their Canaanite enemies. This, again, is a warning to us as God's people. We are not to put our trust in our possessions, family and friends, but in God alone. And, as citizens of our earthly nation, we are not to put our trust in government, in international alliances, and in our power as the mightiest and greatest nation on earth. We could not even defeat tiny nations like Vietnam and Afghanistan with all our science and technology in warfare. All the mighty empires—Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, Spain, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union—met their inglorious end because of godlessness and wickedness. Today, our nation mirrors all these godless

and wicked empires, and it will only be according to God's sovereign timing when our nation will also meet its ignominious downfall. Ultimately, the only thing that will matter in eternity is whether or not we have saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

But even after Jehoshaphat was disobedient in his alliance with wicked King Ahab, God was merciful to him. God told him, *"Nevertheless, some good is found in you, for you destroyed the Asheroth out of the land, and have set your heart to seek God."* Even after he disobeyed God's law, he did not stray away from seeking God. Although the text does not say that he repented of his sin, we can conclude that he did because God continued to bless his reign with peace and prosperity until he died. And he showed his contrite heart and faith in God in another war against Judah's enemies.

Jehoshaphat Prays for Help According to the Law of the LORD

The direct result of Jehoshaphat's sinful alliance with King Ahab when they invaded Syria but were defeated was an invasion against Judah by an alliance of many nations, some of them under Judah's rule. This great horde from many nations around Judah laid siege to Jerusalem, so that Judah's situation seemed to be hopeless. So he gathered all his people and led them in a prayer to the LORD for help and salvation. We can learn a few elements from his prayer.

First, he acknowledged that God is in heaven, praising him as sovereign over all nations. Wars and rumors of war fill our TV screens daily, and we fear that war will also come to our nation. But God alone is sovereign, destroying the weapons of war of wicked empires and nations. No one can withstand God's power and might. Behind the rise and fall of nations is God's mighty hand. Second, he acknowledged that God fulfilled all his promises to their forefather Abraham, giving his descendants the Promised Land. Third, he knew that these good promises are contingent upon their obedience to God's covenant laws. If they violated these laws, disaster upon disaster will come to them. But if they turned to God and repented of their sins, God will hear their pleas for mercy. Fourth, the LORD is the only one who is able to execute judgment on his enemies. He may intervene directly, or he may use other nations to judge another. Fifth and last, when they worshiped and prayed for help, the people of God stood before him: men, women, the elderly, the wives, infants and children. All attended the worship service, not just the adults like in most churches today, but all, including fussy, fidgety and noisy babies and little children.

In this invasion, God intervened directly. As the people of Judah were singing praises to the LORD on the night before the battle, God intervened. He instigated the alliance of armies from different nations to mistrust one another. This mistrust led to fighting within the alliance, so they destroyed one another. When dawn came, the army of Jehoshaphat arrived at the battleground and found all the invading armies dead. God had saved them without a battle, just as he did when God destroyed Jericho's great walls! As we will later learn, God fought for them again during the reign of King Hezekiah.

The second episode in which Jehoshaphat erred as a sinful human being served as an epilogue to Jehoshaphat's reign. He did not learn his lesson from history when he made another alliance

with another wicked king of Israel, Ahaziah. He wanted to build merchant ships to go to Tarshish to make profits. Again, he was rebuked by God's prophet Eliezer, and God destroyed the ships.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Jehoshaphat's reign of 25 years was marked mostly by his faithfulness to God's laws. So for most of his reign, the kingdom of Judah enjoyed peace, prosperity and above all, godliness. But Jehoshaphat was also a sinful man, like all human beings. He committed two major sins, making a marriage alliance with wicked King Ahab, and an alliance with King Ahaziah, Ahab's son, in shipbuilding for profits. However, in both sinful episodes, he and his rule were spared by the LORD, for he was a godly king, repenting of his sins.

Whenever we pray, we include a plea to God to forgive us our sins, and to help us live a godly and righteous life. He does not give us physical weapons of war, but the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word. With this spiritual armor of God, God in effect fights our spiritual battles against sins and temptation, because without these weapons, we are helpless like Jehoshaphat and his people. And, with this spiritual armor, we teach our children in the discipline and nurture of the Lord. Without these teachings, our children will never live a life of faith and godliness. If we, as God's people, turn back to God's Word and Spirit, putting our faith and trust in Christ alone as our only Savior and Lord, then God will be merciful and gracious to save us from destruction in eternal hell.