

Introduction: The theme of our Bible notes last week and this week is to take a sobering view of the sins into which believers can fall – such as the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat. No wonder the Apostle Paul calls the life of every believer a “warfare” between the old sin nature, called the “flesh” and the new Christ-life inside us. We return now to some of the consequences of sin in the life of the king of Judah, before returning in future notes to 2 Kings and the wicked deeds of the family of king Ahab. Through it all, God works His sovereign will for the good of His people (Romans 8:28).

Mon/Tues: read 2 Chronicles 18:1-3; Numbers 14:36-45 & Psalm 32:8-11. After uniting his kingdom with Ahab’s through marriage, Jehoshaphat tried to make something good out of a decision that was entirely bad. In joining forces with Ahab in war, the king of Judah displayed a stubbornness of heart which, when exposed, tries to make up for the mistake instead of humbly owning the sin and tragedy of a wrong decision. Have you ever seen a child, caught in a misdeed, trying to put the broken toy back together instead of simply acknowledging their mistake? Or think of Israel in its stubborn refusal to enter the Promised Land under Moses. What do they do when they realize their disobedience? Well, instead of repenting and seeking the LORD for mercy, they try to force their way into the borders of the Promised Land, seeking to cover their disobedience by seizing the Promised Land themselves without God (Numbers 14:39-45).

Meditate and Pray: May God give us grace to heed the advice of Psalm 32:9, not to be stubborn when we are exposed in our sin. Two or three wrongs don’t make a right. Let us learn to quickly run to the LORD for forgiveness, the moment we realize our sin. Sing about such quick, pliable and soft-hearted repentance in hymn # 335 in our red hymnals:

1 Gracious Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would gracious be;
and with words that help and heal
would thy life in mine reveal;
and with actions bold and meek
would for Christ my Savior speak.

2 Truthful Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would truthful be;
and with wisdom kind and clear
let Thy life in mine appear;
and with actions brotherly
speak my Lord’s sincerity.

3 Mighty Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would mighty be;
mighty so as to prevail,
where unaided man must fail;
ever by a mighty hope,
pressing on and bearing up.

4 Holy Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would holy be;
separate from sin, I would
choose and cherish all things good,
and whatever I can be
give to him who gave me thee!

Weds/Thurs: read 2 Chronicles 19:1-11; 2 Chronicles 20:1-34 & Romans 13:2-7. Continuing with our focus on the kingdom of Judah and its line of mostly godly kings, we see the rich fruit of repentance which the LORD’s rebuke of Jehoshaphat produced when that king was humbled by the words of Jehu the prophet in 2 Chronicles 19:1-3.

Properly chastened, Jehoshaphat sets up a godly system of checks and balances to govern the spiritual and civil life of Judah in 2 Chronicles 19:4-11. In short, Jehoshaphat grew in his healthy distrust of his own wisdom and power and commanded other elders and priests in the land to join him in judging the conflicts and sins among the people. This is nothing new, as Moses set up such a system of *elder-led* courts in Exodus 18:24-27 (at the advice of his god-fearing father-in-law Jethro). Now Jehoshaphat was simply re-instituting a government blueprint that ensures God's people are led *not by a dictator but by a plurality of leaders chosen from among the people*. In this way Jehoshaphat wisely sought the consent of the governed as he "brought the people back to the LORD" in 2 Chronicles 19:4-7.

This is how God governs His church in our day – through godly elders who rule along with the pastor as representing the interests of God's people before the throne of grace. We don't rule in the church by mob-rule or by mere congregational vote. We have representative government in Christ's church, as every three years in our church each elder comes up for re-election by the congregation. Also, each elder must first be certified by the other elders whom God has already called.

Yet even in civil government, there is much wisdom to be learned from the way in which Jehoshaphat rules the people of Judah in his day. As Paul says *about all governments which God appoints in this world* – "They are to rule for the preservation of the good and the punishment of evil" (Romans 13:2-4).

May God help us now as we pray for our nation, that it would be true again in our day that we are to "have no fear of the one who is in authority."

Meditate and Pray: LORD, because of the polluting effects of the internet and just plain old, gossip, as well as because of cruel, persecuting hypocrisy on the part of some of our elected leaders, many believers today live with an unhealthy paranoia of the governments of this world which you have appointed. Forgive us when we give into the devil's lie that "all are out to get us." Please help us to live courageously, realizing that your throne is above our government – and even if we are punished unjustly like our Savior, please help us to remember His words when we are treated harshly:

You would have no control over me unless it had been given you from above. (John 19:10-11)

Thank you for your sovereign control of even the harshest of rulers. But thank you even more when you give us rulers like Jehoshaphat who fear you and walk in your ways. Amen.

Friday: read 2 Chronicles 20:1-34. A second fruit of the prophet's stern rebuke of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 19:1-3 is how the king leads his people through days of national crisis in chapter 20. Facing overwhelming odds as hostile kingdoms rise up against Jerusalem, Jehoshaphat prays one of the most memorable prayers of faith in all the Old Testament. Here is some of what he said to God in 2 Chronicles 20:6-12:

... O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you ... Your people have built for you a sanctuary for your name, saying, 'If disaster comes upon us, the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before you—for your name is in this house—and cry out to you in our affliction, and you will hear and save.' ... And now behold our foes coming to drive us out of our Land, which you have given us to inherit. O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? 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.

Meditate and Pray: Isn't that a great summation of how we often feel today? "We do not know what to do, but our eyes, LORD, are on you." Here Jehoshaphat is teaching us real wisdom. Instead of trying to manipulate his life, positioning himself with unwise marriage alliances to the North and then risking his life in an ill-advised war (both signs of over-confidence and pride) he now humbles himself in dependence on God.

May God give us the same lowly and humble reliance on God's wisdom, and not our own, as we memorize Proverbs 3:5-6:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

Sat/Sun: read 1 Kings 22:47-50 & 2 Chronicles 20:35-37. What a roller-coaster the Old Testament can be! Earlier this week, our Bible notes showed us Jehoshaphat's ruling for the good of the people as he set up a system of judges to ensure justice on every level of society in Judah in 1 Chronicles 19. Then we saw Jehoshaphat courageously lead God's people against over-whelming foes as Judah as a nation cried out to God for deliverance in 2 Chronicles 20.

But today we see how, near the end of his life (and no doubt this temptation arose in part from the king's great power and great wealth – two blessings which can easily go to the head of even a godly leader –(see 2 Chronicles 18:1), Jehoshaphat makes another ungodly alliance with the evil family of Ahab when he enters into a shipping agreement with Ahab's son, the king of Israel (2 Chronicles 20:35-37).

As part of this agreement, Jehoshaphat builds special ships able to carry smelted precious metals. That is what it means when these ships are described as "ships of Tarshish" in 1 Kings 22:48. Tarshish is derived from the word for a "mine" and used of place names where mining was carried out. In this case, Jehoshaphat built these ships of Tarshish to go all the way to the end of the Red Sea to gather gold – in Ophir (1 Kings 22:48).

Why would the king of Judah be willing to go to such expense of building a navy and then going into alliance with the evil son of Ahab? Jehoshaphat gave into the temptation of wanting to be great and powerful in his old age – as we see aged statesmen in our day seeking to enrich themselves and garner peoples' approval – all for the sake of their "legacy." After all, mighty king Solomon also sent ships to Ophir to add to the untold wealth of his dominion – see 2 Chronicles 8:17-18. Why not Jehoshaphat? That would have been the king's thinking.

But thankfully God has other plans. He restrains Jehoshaphat from soul-destroying sin, foiling his foolish plans through a storm that came on the newly constructed ships and destroyed them before they even set sail. Then, to make sure the king of Judah got the message – He sends a prophet to the king to declare once again how wrong it was for the godly to make a treaty with the idol worshipping kingdom of Israel. God's prophet, Eliezer, declares (2 Chronicles 20:37):

Because you have joined with Ahaziah, the LORD will destroy what you have made.

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks that our God has the power to frustrate every one of our plans which is not according to His will. As one Puritan said, speaking about God's power to prevent the progress of sin in us:

This is one part of His grace and love. He meets men sometimes, in their highest resolutions for sin, with the highest effectiveness of His grace. This is how God manifests *the power of His own grace*, and gives our souls strength to take a farewell of sin ... By this God melts down lusts, causing them to wither at the root, that we shall no longer strive to bring forth what we have sinfully planned, filling us instead with shame and sorrow at the sin we conceived and desired to carry out... Paul's heart was full of wickedness, blasphemy, and persecuting hatred of Christians, his goal was to give full vent to his rage against them (Acts 9). But in the midst of his violent pursuit of murdering these believers, a voice from Heaven withers Paul's heart-anger and violent plans, causing him to cry out, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" (Acts 9:6)

(John Owen, Vol 6, pg 275)

Amen!