

Introduction: The Prayer of Who?

Who is Jehoshaphat? Perhaps the only time you've heard the name is in the expression, "Jumpin' Jehoshaphat." A search on the web will show that there is no certainty where that phrase comes from or exactly what it means. It seems to be just a fun-sounding exclamation, like "leaping lizards," or, as my grandfather was fond of saying, "Great Caesar's ghost." But Jehoshaphat was a real person of biblical proportions.

Jehoshaphat was a king of ancient Israel. He was the son of Asa and the fourth king of the southern kingdom of Judah, in the line of David. He reigned from 873–49 BC, almost twenty-five years. He was a good king. His name means "The LORD has judged." Jehoshaphat had great concern for the

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glory of God and for faithfulness to his righteous decrees. As was to be the case in a theocracy, Jehoshaphat recognized that God was the real king. Jehoshaphat's job was to rule under God, for God, and by God.

Jehoshaphat was a good king in that he honored God and respected his wishes. An assessment of him is found 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.

Later we are told that he was “courageous in the ways of the LORD” (2 Chron. 17:6).

An example of Jehoshaphat's mindset and heart can be seen in an interaction with a king whose heart was not so inclined to the Lord, King Ahab. You can read the entire account in 2 Chronicles 18. The gist is that Ahab wanted to ally himself with Jehoshaphat, joining forces against a common foe. Before he would commit himself, Jehoshaphat insisted, “Inquire first for the word of the LORD.” Ahab gathered four hundred so-called prophets, who with one accord predicted success and encouraged the joint undertaking. Jehoshaphat, however, wasn't impressed. “Is there not here a prophet of the LORD of whom we may inquire?” Jehoshaphat wasn't interested in numbers, but in truth. The four hundred were unanimous but Jehoshaphat wanted to hear from his God.

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Such was the heart of Jehoshaphat. His obituary captured his life in these terms:

He walked in the way of Asa his father and did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the LORD.
(2 Chron. 20:32)

It was from this heart for God, awareness of God, and concern for the honor of God that we see his prayer.

Against All Odds

A great multitude, a vast horde assembled together against Jehoshaphat and his army. At least three nations, united as a mighty army, advanced against him. Word came to Jehoshaphat that this juggernaut loomed ominously on the horizon, poised to wreak havoc, destruction, and devastation.

Jehoshaphat was a king, commander of an army of his own. But his forces were paltry, dwarfed by the formidable army coming against him. He was like a dog that had strayed onto the interstate, facing a wall of surging, unstoppable agents of destruction.

When Jehoshaphat heard the news, he was gripped in fear—and rightly so. What could he do? How could he stand? Should he fight? Should he flee? Should he just roll over?

But Jehoshaphat was not alone. True, he was a king, but his rule was not absolute. His was a subordinate rule.

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The Sovereign Lord of creation was with him. Steeped in a close walk with God, Jehoshaphat's reflexive action was to seek his Lord, not as last resort but as first recourse.

And so Jehoshaphat turned to his Lord in the face of sure ruin and sore distress. What does he ask of God?

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. (2 Chron. 20:12)

Jehoshaphat addresses him as the God he is, and then he lays before this God his plea in utter honesty and abject awareness.

Finding Your Voice in Distress

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.

Can you relate to this prayer? Don't its words fit you well, as a tailor-made suit contoured to the form of your distress? Does its flow that drains you of self and amplifies your inability run with the current of your anguished heart?

In this prayer of Jehoshaphat, God gives us a prayer of the powerless. We find recorded in his Word a prayer by

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which we might prevail upon him. Sometimes, it's all we can find the ingenuity and strength to utter.

Moreover, this prayer is remarkable not only for what it says, but for what it does not say. That's all part of its profound simplicity.

Let's turn to this prayer of Jehoshaphat.¹ Let's delve into what our God has provided to give us voice in distress, despair, and disaster. Let's explore the anchor he gives us in time of storm. And, particularly, let us give ear to him who speaks, that we might know not only his resources but know him.

Obviously, this book is small. It is not an exhaustive treatment of the text. Rather, a few pages will be devoted to each section. The idea is to set you on the track that you might progress as you ponder these things in your heart, and to stimulate your salivary glands to taste and savor the glory and goodness of this God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

1. The entire account of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chron. 20:1–30 can be found at the back of this book.