

2nd Chronicles 19:4-20:32

*The Lord defends a powerless Nation.*

About nine hundred years before the birth at Bethlehem of Jesus Christ, mankind's Savior and God, there lived a king by the name of Jehoshaphat. His capital was Jerusalem. Spiritually, he was a believer in the one and only true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the Bible speaks favorably of him, reporting, for example, that he brought his idol-worshipping citizens "back to the Lord God of their fathers" (19:4), and that he did "what was right in the sight of the Lord" (20:32).

That was not all, this godly king then appointed judges to administer justice according to the rule of law, that is, to administer justice without favoritism. To be sure, far from banishing the God of heaven from his courtrooms, far from ordering federal workers to strip the walls of every last biblical symbol, as has been done in recent years in America, the king charged his appointees: "Let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes.... You shall act in the fear of Lord, faithfully and with a loyal heart.... Whatever case would come to you from your brethren who would dwell in their cities... you shall warn them, lest they trespass against the Lord and wrath come upon you and your brethren. Do this and you will not be guilty" (19:7, 9-10). By doing this the king intended to bring upon his beloved people an era of peace and of blessing from the Lord. Jehoshaphat knew that in order to receive Heaven's precious blessing, his nation needed

righteousness. The only way in which this could be done would be to turn the hearts of his people away from their idols, urge them to repent and to believe the gospel of God, and in this way transform their minds through the mighty power contained in the gospel words themselves so that they could act righteously, responsibly, and helpfully before God and toward their neighbors with peace and love in their hearts.

Just the same, as the king was working intently and prayerfully at this, a national emergency arose. Three neighboring nations conspired to attack his nation of Judah. This was no minor threat. They vastly outnumbered Judah's army. In man's eyes, according to man's estimate, speaking strictly in human terms, these nations could devastate Judah thoroughly.

What did Jehoshaphat do? Did he call together his generals? Did he order an immediate draft of all men who could fight? Did he order his arsenals to stay open around the clock in order to turn out more spears, swords and arrows? He did the right thing. He did the wisest thing. Knowing the commands and promises from God's own mouth which the Bible records, yet the word "knowing" is not enough; better: "being convinced strongly" by the commands and promises in the Bible, the king went to the Lord in prayer. The text relates that he "set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah" (20:3). By proclaiming an abstinence from large meals, the king wanted all of his people to center their appetites on the serious issue facing all of them.

Next he summoned all of his citizens to assemble together in order to urge them to depend on the Lord's

promises to come to their aid, and to deliver them. Where is such leadership today? God is not merely consulted last, but not at all by our national leaders in public assemblies. In a national crisis, first the National Security Council is consulted, then, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Pentagon, national political advisors, congressional leaders, NATO, and the UN. How would you feel if your own family would make a decision in a crisis which concerned you, but would leave you out of it? How would God your Creator and Preserver feel?

Not only did the king determine to pray to the Lord, but he called on his citizens with a sense of urgency to join him in prayer to the Lord for protection. While our own land is not threatened by invasion at this time, our people are being afflicted by all sorts of hardships and burdens, national and local. The story of Jehoshaphat's behavior demonstrates the emphatic, repeated teaching of the Bible that the Lord will keep his protection promises for an individual or for an entire nation of repentant, gospel-believing followers.

Think again about the dangerous situation recorded in the text! The land of Judah was outnumbered by its enemies. The enemy knew that. The people knew that. The Lord knew that. So what is a person to do in such a circumstance? Pray to the Lord! Remind him reverently that you will continue to trust his pledge to protect you! You do not know how the Lord will protect. You do not know what action he will take, how he will set it in motion, how he will bring it to a successful conclusion, or what the invisible mechanics, so to speak, will be involved in order to accomplish the result. Could you follow along if a scientist would

explain to you how to construct a nuclear reactor? How could you ever follow along if you were to be told of the unfathomable workings of God almighty? Trying to find out the unknowable workings of God is not where God wants you to look in order to get assurance. The assurance which you would need will be found only in his protecting pledges. That is where he will direct you to look. Will you not do so?

Listen to Jehoshaphat's prayer! "O Lord God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven, and do you not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand you? Are you not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham your friend forever? And they dwell in it, and have built you a sanctuary in it for your name, saying, 'If disaster would come upon us, such as the sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this temple and in your presence for your name is in this temple, and cry out to you in our affliction, and you will hear and save'. And now here are the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, whom you would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them and did not destroy them, here they are, rewarding us by coming to throw us out of your possession which you have given us to inherit. O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon you" (20:6-12).

What a prayer! What political leader today in the United States, name me one, could compose a prayer as

this in his own words? Decades ago our Presidents could and did. Read Lincoln's declarations for the various days of Humiliation and Prayer which he called on this nation to observe during the dark days of the Civil War, and for his public praises after a victory! A Christian theologian, after suffering for years in the school of affliction, and experienced in prayer composition, could not have written anything finer. However, for decades now U. S. Presidents have used talented, articulate ghost writers to draw up their speeches. Indeed, to win elections, Presidential candidates are simply required to have plenty of hair, good writers, good debating instincts, and other such non-leadership and non-morals qualities, not to have repentance and faith, nor to be competent at composing a prayer.

In this prayer Jehoshaphat bared his soul as to what he believed. In fact, he put his trust into practice. He prayed openly and urgently in public to the Lord, reasoning with him to stand by his stated promises of protection, and to keep those pledges by doing something physically to help. To be sure, God did not need to be reminded of what he had promised. So why did he let Jehoshaphat go on with his long prayer? Think about that for a moment! Since God knew what was on the king's mind, indeed, since God himself moved the neighboring countries to threaten Judah militarily (Amos 3:6), why did God wait for the king to make a prayer?

Take note! It will always be for this reason: God wanted the king to exercise his faith. This is the reason. He wanted the king's trust in his pledges to be stronger. This is why God let the king pray. This is why God brought on a situation which would move the king to

pray, and to be a great example and encouragement to his people. By this situation the Lord impelled the king to flex his faith's muscles to the intent that they would be made stronger. The Lord wanted him to sink the footings of his trust deeper into the foundation of his pledges. Jehoshaphat's ordeal gave him a deeper trust in God's promise to help. It was a difficult, but a beneficial exercise, for through the Lord's holy training the king was blessed with a stronger hold on Heaven's help, and a clearer conception of his ever-present protection. The king would not let an overwhelming military threat dissuade him from the certainty which had been pledged him that God will protect his believers.

This is why the Lord brings hardship upon his repentant followers. It is not to punish them, but to move them to exercise their faith so that their trust would become more strong, firm, and reliant on his pledges to feed, to clothe, to protect, and to save them.

While God wants you to wait for him as he fulfills his pledge in the best way and at the best time, God nevertheless had surpassing mercy on King Jehoshaphat and the gathered citizens of Judah, for he spoke through one of his prophets explaining to them how he would deliver them. To be sure, through this prophet, God the Holy Spirit assured the people more than once not to be afraid, because he knew that their sinful flesh inside them would doubt and fear because the sinful flesh ever refuses to look to God's promises.

The high lesson which you could and should take to heart from this prophet's words; the surpassing reassurance which the Lord would give you, is this: "The battle is not yours, but God's" (20:15). "Stand still and

see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you... Do not fear or be dismayed... for the Lord is with you!" (20:17.)

How did the king and the people respond to this mighty assurance? Did they shake their heads in serious doubt, exclaiming, "How could this be? We cannot see any way out. God must be wrong"? Did they resort to drilling their people in military warfare? The text reports that they believed this further pledge of God, bowed to him in reverence, and worshiped him (20:18). They did the right thing. They got an A+ on the Lord's test of their trust. Where is America's reverent response? How does it stand in doing the right thing before the Lord? Would this country pass or fail? Presently, the overwhelming majority has failed. Still the sneer rises up from the citizenry: "Who needs God?"

What is more, the Lord's prophet invited the people of Judah to go out and to see the Lord's power in action, that is, to witness how the Lord would carry out his promise to save their lives.

Did the people hesitate to go out? Did they show signs of doubt in the Lord's pledge or selfish fear as the overwhelming majority of American citizens do? Confidently, they traveled to the designated place, all the while singing to the Lord, and praising the beauty of his holiness (20:21). To be sure, only believers who are certain of the Lord's promise, only those who are convinced and sure that he will keep his pledges faithfully, can face any evil triumphantly in this life, including death. They could and should triumphantly sing high compliments to God, and go down life's path with calming assurance. Do you want to be this way? Listen to God's gospel promises as they invite you to

trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding! (Proverbs 3:5.)

After the king and the citizens arrived at the designated place, they were amazed. Their deliverance from their enemies had already taken place. They saw the result. Two of the three enemies had fought against the third one. Then the other two fought against each other until no one was left alive. "No one had escaped" (20:24). Without Judah raising one sword, its enemies went down to defeat. How? Learn the lesson well! It was because of God's doing, none of man's. God had held out a protection promise to Judah. The people of Judah responded by trusting it. God then kept his word. On the other hand, the three enemies of Judah ignored God's protection pledges, proposed sinful, indeed, murderous behavior, trusted in the mighty arm of man, as Scripture terms it (Jeremiah 17:5), that is they trusted in their combined military might. Because they made no effort to put themselves on the Lord's side, they went down to annihilation - not one was left. Turn the pages of the Old Testament and see this sad event occur over and over! Read the passages (Psalm 44:3; Jeremiah 48:25) which warn against the folly of trusting in the arm of men!

Yet men will not listen nor learn. Various Americans propose solutions to our critical problems which leave God out, and put their hope in the arm of men. Others who would bring up God put him on the side of the white hats against the black hats. Yet the question is not: "On whose side is God?" rather: "Who is on the Lord's side?" (Exodus 32:26.) Are You? If your

response would be “No,” then get on his side! Repent and believe!

Realize that unforgiven sin separates you from God! It inflames God’s fury and calls down his terrible punishment, both in this life and in the next. “God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day” (Psalm 7:11). “The wicked shall be turned into hell” (Psalm 9:17).

Confess your “transgressions to the Lord” (Psalm 32:5)! Then, pray: “Save me for your mercies’ sake!” (Psalm 4:5)! Depend on his promised mercy toward you (Luke 18:13)!

Indeed, be assured, based on God’s own pledge, that he has declared you righteous (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:19), freed you from sins’ guilt and your sins’ punishment by the holy life of and by the punishment in hell of God the Son – Jesus Christ, who did it to gain your release! What love he has shown you! To be sure, “God proved his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 5:8-9).

Therefore, “put your trust in the Lord!” (Psalm 4:5.) Confess confidently: “You are my King, O God. You have saved us from our enemies” (Psalm 44:4, 7)! Do not trust the might of men! “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord! For he will be as a tree planted by the waters which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but her leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit” (Jeremiah 17:7-8).