

Faith and Encouragement

Lesson for January 21, 2024

Unit II: Learning about Faith

Adult Topic: Overcoming Fear

Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:5-20

Printed Text: 2 Chronicles 20:13-20

Key verse: “Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.” (2 Chronicles 20:20c, NIV)

Sometimes the Lord calms the storm. Sometimes he lets the storm rage and calms his child.

Unknown

“When we face opposition, we are tempted to give up because of fear. How do we loosen the grip of fear? The faith demonstrated by Jehoshaphat encourages us to overcome fear through trust in God” (*Townsend Press Commentary*, 2023-2024, p. 187).

Key Terms

1. **Dismayed** (verse 15) – Experiencing or showing feelings of alarmed concern or nervousness. Upset, worried, or agitated because of some unwelcome situation or occurrence.
2. **Salvation** (verse 17) – To save, help in distress, rescue, deliver, set free. Commonly, the deliverance of which the Old Testament speaks is material in nature, though there are important exceptions. In contrast, the employment of *soteria* in the New Testament, though it may include material preservation, usually signifies a deliverance with special spiritual significance.
3. **Spirit** (verse 14) – An immaterial force within a human being thought to give the body life, energy, and power. The Hebrew word for “spirit” in the Old Testament is *ruah*. Its basic meaning is wind (113 times). Breath is also a basic meaning of this term. It is the Lord who gives breath to people and to lifeless bodies.
4. **Tomorrow** (verse 16) – Time that is to come, future.
5. **Worshipping** (verse 18) – Reflecting great admiration or devotion, respectful, glorifying.
6. **Yahweh** (verse 13) – YHWH, the tetragrammaton because of its four letters, is, strictly speaking, the only proper name for God. It is also the most frequent name, occurring in the Old Testament 6, 828 times (almost 700 times in the Psalms alone). Yah is a shortened form that appears fifty times in the Old Testament, including forty-three occurrences in the Psalms, often in the admonition “hallelu-jah” (literally praise Jah). English Bibles represent the name yhwh by the title “LORD” (written in capitals to distinguish it from “lord”).

Lesson Background

The Book of 2 Chronicles was originally one book with 1 Chronicles in the Hebrew text. They were divided by the translators of the Septuagint and were entitled “Things Left Behind” (i.e., details not included in Samuel and Kings). The Hebrew title, “Daily Matters” like the English title, implies an important and detailed narrative account. Written by Ezra, a Levitical priest and teacher, the books of Chronicles view Israel’s religious institutions, the temple, priesthood, offerings, and feasts, as the essential elements of her national life. 1 and 2 Chronicles were also written as a history of the monarchy for the returning exiles.

Chapters 17 through 21:3 present the reign of King Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat is portrayed favorably as a man of faith and prayer and a religious reformer. Chapters 17 through 19 show Jehoshaphat’s sincere heart for the Lord reflected in political and religious successes. Chapter 20 shows how salvation from invading enemies comes by seeking the Lord. The verses through this week’s lesson were divided by Kirkland in the following manner:

- The Sudden Battle (20:1-4) (invasion)
- The Steadfast Petition (20:5-13) (petition)
- The Spirit-Given Assurance (20:14-19) (revelation)

In verses 1-2, the offspring of Lot – Moab and Ammon – located east of the Jordan, and those from Edom to the south (the offspring of Esau), had intentions of dethroning Jehoshaphat. They had come around the south end of the Dead Sea as far north as Engedi, at the middle of the western shore. This was a common route for enemies since they were invisible to the people on the other side of the mountains to the west.

This Trans-Jordanian invasion in Jehoshaphat’s day is not recorded by the author of Kings. It forms a backdrop for Jehoshaphat’s later involvement in Jehoram’s Moabite expedition (2 Kings 3:7).

After the revival among the people of Judah that Jehoshaphat had nurtured, the country discovered that not one but three armies “came against Jehoshaphat to battle”. As in other times, the revival of the people was threatened by a vastly superior foreign army (see 2 Chronicles 14:2-15).

Verses 3-6: Jehoshaphat again demonstrates that he was a righteous king and a man of prayer. Jehoshaphat made the appropriate spiritual response, the king and the nation appealed to God in prayer and fasting. The fast was national, including even the children (verse 13; compare Joel 2:12-17; Jonah 3:7).

All of Judah gathered together to implore God’s assistance against their enemies, and His protection of them. And they met not in their several cities, but at Jerusalem, as appears by what follows. “*Even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord*”. At the temple, where was the Ark, the symbol of his presence.

Jehoshaphat had taught them well. They knew their strength was not in the flesh of man, but in the power of Almighty God. God honors a faith of this nature.

Jehoshaphat stood in the redecorated center court praying for the nation, appealing to the promises, and the glory and the reputation of God which were at stake since He was identified with Judah. In his prayer, he acknowledged God's sovereignty (verse 6), God's covenant (verse 7), God's presence (verses 8-9), God's goodness (verse 10), God's possession (verse 11), and their utter dependence on Him (verse 12). This is where this week's lesson begins.

Lesson in Depth

I. A Devoted King Turns to God (2 Chronicles 20:13)

Now all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children, stood before the LORD: They and their wives, with their children, both small and grown up, which they brought with them. That as the sight of them, now in the utmost danger, might affect them, and make them the more fervent in their supplications to God. So, they might hope the Lord would have pity and compassion on them and save them.

This was such a serious matter that even the wives and children were in attendance. Entire families were praying before the LORD.

The sense is that after Jehoshaphat's great prayer, the people stood silently before the LORD, waiting upon Him for some sense of direction or encouragement.

II. Our Prayer-answering God (2 Chronicles 20:14-17)

Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation: The Lord responded immediately, sending a message of confidence through the prophet Jahaziel. Out of this huge group gathered together, the **Spirit of the LORD** came upon one man to speak to the entire **assembly**. This was a spontaneous word of prophecy that came as God's people waited before Him and sought Him.

This is an explanation that Jahaziel was of the Levitical lineage. He was in the temple, and the Spirit of the LORD descended upon him. The message was from God. The prayer was directly seeking an answer from God. The beautiful thing was that God used one of His own creation to bring the message through.

Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's: The threat was real – there really was a **great multitude** dedicated to destroying Judah. Yet the command was to **not be afraid nor dismayed**, because **the battle** was God's battle. He would fight on behalf of Judah against this **great multitude**.

This had to be a tremendous relief to Jehoshaphat and to the people in attendance. This battle was God's. This was not a "fear not"; God will be with you. It was a statement that the battle was God's. They must not fear, only trust God.

Tomorrow go down against them: This was an important command. One might think that because of the promise of 2 Chronicles 20:15, Judah would not even have to show up at the battle and perhaps God wanted them to stay in Jerusalem and pray. Yet, God wanted them to go out to battle against the enemy and He would use their participation in the battle.

They will surely come up by the Ascent of Ziz: The cliff of Ziz was the wilderness of Jeruel. These areas lie between Engedi on the Dead Sea and Tekoa, which is 10 miles south of Jerusalem and 17 miles northwest of Engedi. This is the pass that leads from the valley of the Dead Sea toward Jerusalem.

This was just explaining that they would not fight down in the valley, but would in fact, fight on an elevated area near the Dead Sea. This was a totally desolate area with no trees to hide behind. The army of Judah would be at a higher place, and they would look down upon their enemy.

God knew the plans of the attacking armies precisely and He relayed this information to the king and people of Judah.

Tomorrow march down against them: There were any number of ways that God *could* have defeated these armies assembled against Judah, but He appointed a way that demanded the participation of faith on behalf of Judah. They had to work in a faith-partnership with God.

You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD: Judah did not **need to fight in this battle**, yet it did not mean there was *nothing* for them to do. It was a significant step of faith to **position yourselves**, to **stand still**, and to believe that you would **see the salvation of the LORD** in the face of a large attacking army.

And Judah, and Jerusalem, fear not, nor be dismayed: Which is repeated for the confirmation of them.

Tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord will be with you: To protect them, fight for them, and give them victory; the Targum is, "the Word of the Lord shall be your help."

This is a very similar statement that Moses said at the Red Sea. Exodus 14:13 *"And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever."*

These are the same words our Lord speaks to us – His children today!

III. From Prayer to Praise (2 Chronicles 20:18-19)

Here was the praise of faith. They were confident enough in God's promise of victory to begin the praise before the battle was won. So great was their trust that the choir marched in front of the army, singing psalms.

Bowed before the LORD, worshipping the LORD: Both king and people knew that the prophetic word through Jahaziel was a true message from God. Receiving it as a word from God, they worshipped the LORD who promised to save His people against this terrible threat. It was a logical response.

And all Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, fell before the Lord, worshipping him: Adoring his goodness to them, in imitation of their king. They believed that God Himself, would save them and fell before Him in perfect adoration. This was an act of thanksgiving to God.

“They worshipped, but why did they do it? They were not delivered. No, but they were sure they were going to be delivered. Their enemies were not dead. No, they were all alive, but they were sure they would be dead, so they had worship, and their devotion rose from trustful and grateful hearts.” (Spurgeon)

Then the Levites of the children of the Kohathites and of the children of the Korahites stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with voices loud and high: In verse 18, we saw the king and his people adoring the LORD. Now we see those who ministered gave high praise to the LORD for His answer to these people.

In verses 18-19 notice the two postures of worship: bowing “his head” in humility and then standing confidently to praise God “with a loud voice on high”. First, they worshipped with the posture of their bodies and hearts; then with song led by the chorus of the Levitical worship leaders. These two postures are common to every season of revival.

IV. An Exhortation to Trust in God (2 Chronicles 20:20)

So, they rose early in the morning and went: This showed that they really did believe the prophecy from Jahaziel. It was one thing to profess faith among an excited assembly; it was another thing to actually walk out to meet the enemy armies.

Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper: With this exhortation, Jehoshaphat showed that he considered believing the prophets of God to be equal to believing the LORD your God Himself. This remains true; to believe God's word is to believe God Himself.

So shall you be established: Have courage and firmness of mind, as well as be safe and secure. Things will succeed to your wishes, and beyond your expectations. We could add to this, that they went out rejoicing knowing that the victory was theirs. They were instructed once again, by Jehoshaphat to not fear but believe in the LORD God.

Lesson Summary

2 Chronicles 20 offers valuable insights into faith, prayer, worship, and dependence on God in the face of challenges. This week's lesson illustrates:

1. **Seeking God in Times of Trouble:** Jehoshaphat's immediate response to the news of the approaching enemies was to seek God. He proclaimed a fast throughout Judah, and the people gathered to seek God's guidance. This teaches the importance of turning to God in times of trouble and seeking His wisdom.
2. **Acknowledging God's Sovereignty:** In Jehoshaphat's prayer, he acknowledged God's sovereignty and power. He recognized that the battle was not theirs but God's. This highlights the importance of acknowledging God's control over situations and trusting in His ability to deliver.
3. **Remembering God's Promises:** Jehoshaphat reminded God of His promises to the descendants of Abraham. Remembering and standing on God's promises can strengthen faith and confidence in difficult times.
4. **Worship and Praise in the Midst of Challenges:** Jehoshaphat appointed singers to go out before the army, praising God. This unconventional strategy demonstrated the power of worship and praise even in the face of adversity. It teaches the importance of maintaining a spirit of worship in challenging circumstances.
5. **Unity and Community:** The people of Judah came together to seek God and face the common enemy. Unity and community played a crucial role in their victory. This underscores the importance of unity among believers when facing challenges.
6. **Listening to God's Guidance:** God responded to Jehoshaphat's prayer and provided specific instructions for the battle. The passage emphasizes the importance of listening to and obeying God's guidance, even when it might seem unconventional.
7. **The Battle is the Lord's:** The ultimate lesson is that victory comes from God. Jehoshaphat and the people did not have to fight the battle themselves; God intervened on their behalf. This teaches dependence on God and recognizing that the ultimate victory belongs to Him.