

Faith and Encouragement

Devotional Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-15

Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:5-20

Today's Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:13-20

I. Facing a Crisis

2 Chronicles 20:13-17

13 And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.

14 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;

15 And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.

16 To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel.

17 Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you.

13. The phrase *all Judah stood before the Lord* reflects 2 Chronicles 20:4, which records that people “out of all the cities of Judah” came to seek the Lord’s help dur-

ing the crisis at hand. The place where they gathered was “the house of the Lord” (20:5), meaning the temple in Jerusalem. It seems that representatives from every town were present. The crisis was so severe that it was not only men gathered, but whole families. Having just heard their king’s prayer, they awaited God’s response.

Second Chronicles 20:5 states that the king stood “in the house of the Lord, before the new court.” This “court” was likely a new courtyard, perhaps a renovation undertaken during the reigns of either Asa (Jehoshaphat’s father) or Jehoshaphat himself, both of whom are commended for their exemplary devotion to the Lord. Here is where the assembly (including families) stood before the Lord following Jehoshaphat’s fervent prayer for the Lord’s help against the invading forces. Jehoshaphat had closed his prayer with words expressing his and the people’s complete dependence upon the Lord.

14a. What an avalanche of names! Consternation multiplies when we discover that the 6 names are rather common, designating altogether some 67 people with one of those names in the Old Testament. The chronicler has gone to a lot of work to record these *the son of* connections. Being able to prove one’s lineage was important to the ancient Jew, as it is in establishing the line of Jesus

in the New Testament era. For *Jahaziel* to have his pedigree traced back to the *Asaph* of King David's era some three centuries previous is noteworthy.

14b. The declaration of the Holy Spirit's "coming upon" someone in the Old Testament era is associated predominantly with the books of Judges and 1 Samuel. In 2 Chronicles, the occurrence is associated with King Azariah (Uzziah), who spoke a message of both encouragement and warning to King Asa (2 Chronicles 15:1-7). Later "the Spirit of God" came upon a different Zechariah, who rebuked King Joash for turning away from the Lord and leading Judah and Jerusalem into idolatry (24:20).

These instances in the Old Testament era seem to have been of limited durations for specific individuals regarding specific tasks and events. On the other hand, the gift of the Holy Spirit for the era of the New Testament is present in all Christians (1 Corinthians 6:19; Ephesians 1:13).

15. The message was not directed to all 12 tribes of divided Israel, but only to the southern kingdom of *Judah*, where *Jerusalem* was located. God intended that everyone receive His message. Therefore, it is addressed to all the people of Judah and Jerusalem, with the king referred to last. Since northern Israel was ruled by ungodly kings, the content of the message being delivered was not appropriate for them.

The phrase *thus saith the Lord* occurs over 400 times in the Old Testament. Whether the message that follows is initially targeted toward an individual or a group, the expected outcome will concern the bigger picture. That is the case here, as Jahaziel directed his words to *all* the people who were assembled (the phrase *unto you* is also plural). Interestingly, the negative phrase *be not afraid nor dismayed* also appears in 2 Chronicles 32:7, where it is preceded by the positive

phrase "be strong and courageous" with regard to a different enemy.

King Jehoshaphat, as leader of God's people, especially needed to hear these words. The *great multitude* of the enemy coalition was already at En-Gedi, located on the western shore of the Dead Sea southeast of Jerusalem.

When in a crisis situation, there's always the perceived need to do something as people begin to panic. Yet Jehoshaphat did not need to concern himself with how he and his people would overcome the enemy army, for he was not the real commander-in-chief: *The battle is not yours, but God's.*

16. The enemy army's location *by the cliff of Ziz* means that those troops had marched about seven miles to the north from En-Gedi, along the road bordering the western shore of the Dead Sea. This puts that army less than 20 miles from Jerusalem. The *wilderness of Jeruel* was in this vicinity. Exactly how King Jehoshaphat was to proceed at that point is specified in the next verse.

17. The Scriptures witness to the Lord's defeating enemy armies in various ways. Sometimes the Lord works through human intermediaries in this regard, and sometimes not. The promise *ye shall not need to fight in this battle* is a strong hint that this time it will be the latter.

The commands *stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you and fear not . . . for the Lord will be with you* are remarkably similar to Moses' instructions in Exodus 14:13-14 to the Israelites when being pursued by the Egyptian army during the exodus many centuries earlier: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. . . . The Lord shall fight for you." The assurance of the Lord's presence is found in numerous places (examples: Genesis 31:3; Deuteronomy 31:6; Isaiah 41:10).

II. “Faith-ing” a Crisis 2 Chronicles 20:18-20

18 And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD.

19 And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.

20 And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

18. Clearly, the Lord had heard the king’s prayer! Worship was the only proper response. The king set the example, and the people joined him. He had declared that “our eyes are upon thee” (2 Chronicles 20:12); now he and those same eyes were turned to the ground in reverence. The people had been standing “before the Lord” (20:13); they then *fell before the Lord*.

19. The *Kohathites* took their name from Kohath. From the Kohathites came the priestly family of Aaron. *The Levites* were responsible for “keeping the charge of the sanctuary” (Numbers 3:28).

The *Korhites* refer to the sons of Korah, another Levite from the clan of Kohath, whose father was Izhar, the brother of Amram, Moses and Aaron’s father (Exodus 6:18, 21). Korah is infamous for organizing a rebellion against the authority of Moses and Aaron during Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness. Korah and those who joined him in his defiance were swallowed up by the earth in a terrifying

demonstration of God’s wrath (Numbers 16:25-35). There were, however, descendants of Korah who did not join him in his action, and those mentioned in our passage would be descendants of those individuals. Certainly the difference in attitude between these who *stood up* to join Jehoshaphat in *praise* and worship and their forefathers who “rose up” to defy Moses (16:2) is worth noting. As time moved on and the tabernacle gave way to the temple, the Korhites became gatekeepers (1 Chronicles 6:22; 9:17-19).

20. Rising *early in the morning* indicates the king and the people’s anticipation to see how the Lord would work on their behalf. It’s an 18-mile walk, and they need to get to *the wilderness of Tekoa* before nightfall. King *Jehoshaphat* took the lead in encouraging his people to demonstrate faith in the Lord—a key theme of Jahaziel’s message the day before. As Jehoshaphat challenged the people to *believe in the Lord* and in His messengers, the *prophets*, it appears the king accepted Jahaziel’s message as prophetic.

The link between trusting the Lord and trusting His prophets should not be overlooked. If God’s covenant people desired to obey Him, then they must accept the words spoken by His inspired messengers, the prophets. When God’s people ignored and even mocked these Heaven-sent messengers, a Heaven-sent judgment came upon them.

For the time being, King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah had chosen to heed the words spoken to them. When they raised their voices in praise to the Lord, the Lord indeed came to their rescue and brought about a miraculous deliverance that allowed the people to plunder the possessions of their enemies. So the king and the people then returned to Jerusalem as they had left it—in triumphant praise and worship of the Lord.

Involvement Learning

Faith and Encouragement

Into the Lesson

Recall a famous battle in world history. What was the context of the battle? Who is considered to have “won” the battle? What resulted from the conflict?

It is easy for us to feel overwhelmed, discouraged, and defeated when we feel the odds are stacked against us. That is how King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah felt in today’s Scripture. As we study, pay attention to what God told them and how their response reflected their faith.

Into the Word

Read 2 Chronicles 20:13-14. List the listeners mentioned in verse 13 and consider why it was important for each listed group to hear the word of the Lord.

Read 2 Chronicles 20:15-17. Write down the plan God instructed the people of Judah to follow.

Read 2 Chronicles 20:18-20. What is significant about the people worshipping God before the battle?

How did Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah show their faith?

How would you respond if God told you directly that He would fight for you?

Key Verse

Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.
—2 Chronicles 20:20b

Into Life

What things in your life cause you to experience fear or worry?

How does today’s Scripture text encourage you and strengthen your faith?

What will you do this week to be attentive to God’s presence in facing your fears and worries?

Thought to Remember

Let your uplook change your outlook.