

“Faith and Encouragement”

Lesson Text: 2 Chronicles 20:13–20 **Background Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 20:5–20

Devotional Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1–15

2 Chronicles 20:13–20 (NIV)

¹³ All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the Lord.

¹⁴ Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.

¹⁵ He said: “Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.

¹⁶ Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. ¹⁷ You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.’ ”

¹⁸ Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord. ¹⁹ Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

²⁰ Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.”

TODAY’S LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Facts:** To summarize the faith actions that led to Jehoshaphat’s victory.
- **Biblical Principle:** To evaluate the cause-and-effect of having faith in God.
- **Daily Application:** To notice God’s presence and help in facing your fears.

INTRODUCTION

Encouragement Passed Along

On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first African American to take the field for a major league baseball team in the modern era when he started in a game for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Breaking the color barrier was a milestone in moving toward an end to discrimination in baseball and in America as a whole. But it was an uphill battle to reach that point, and encouragement from others helped Robinson contribute to overcoming the racial bias of post-World War II America (with more progress yet needed today).

Robinson’s success in baseball and later as an activist in the Civil Rights Movement became, in turn, an encouragement for others to succeed by overcoming prejudice and other obstacles. To offer “you can do it” words of encouragement is good as far as it goes. But to be an example of one who has been through the fire of adversity is encouragement on a whole other level! Encouragement is one of the most positive ways to use words and actions, especially when those who need to be encouraged face times of great uncertainty and challenge.

LESSON CONTEXT

The book of 2 Chronicles covers the time period 970 B.C. to 536 B.C. This period spans from Solomon, the last king of Israel as a united monarchy, to Cyrus, the king of Persia who ended the Babylonian exile. Readers of the Bible may wonder why the books of 1-2 Chronicles are useful, since their content often mirrors that of 2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. A clue is found in the titles of 1 and 2 Chronicles as appearing in the Greek version of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint. There the titles translate into English

as “Things Omitted.” That is certainly appropriate regarding the text of today’s lesson, which focuses on events during the reign of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah (the southern kingdom of divided Israel) from about 872 B.C. to 848 B.C. The text of 2 Chronicles 17:1–21:3 has much more information about him than is recorded in 1 Kings 15:24; 22:1–50.

Uncertainty exists regarding the author of Chronicles. As a result that person is often referred to merely as “the chronicler.” The priest and scribe Ezra, who led the return from exile in 458 B.C., is our best guess for being the author. This is because 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 is virtually identical, letter for letter, to Ezra 1:1–3 in the Hebrew.

Some students propose that Ezra (if indeed he was the author) wrote 1-2 Chronicles to teach God’s people to avoid sin, lest they suffer anew the consequences that led to exile in the first place. A special focus on the importance of faithfulness to the Lord can be detected in 1 Chronicles 22:13; 2 Chronicles 17:3–6; 24:20; 29:6–9; 31:20, 21; 36:15–21—texts with no parallel in 2 Samuel or 1-2 Kings. Ezra would have agreed with the often-quoted statement that “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (George Santayana, 1863–1952).

Jehoshaphat reigned during the period of the divided monarchy in Israelite history. He was one of the more godly kings of Judah (see 2 Chronicles 17:3–4). He is noted for his efforts to rid Judah of idol worship and to promote the teaching of God’s law throughout the land (17:1–9). Also noteworthy is the respect held by surrounding people and the attention he gave to various building projects and to administrative reforms (17:10–19).

On the downside, however, Jehoshaphat entered into an ill-advised alliance with ungodly Ahab, king of northern Israel, who enlisted Jehoshaphat’s aid in retaking some territory from the Arameans. At Ahab’s behest, Jehoshaphat wore his royal robes into battle against the Arameans while Ahab disguised himself in an effort to keep the prophet Micaiah’s prediction of his death from being fulfilled (2 Chronicles 18:1–31a). The move nearly cost Jehoshaphat his life, but “the Lord helped him” (18:31b), and he was spared.

After hearing of God’s displeasure with that alliance (2 Chronicles 19:1–3), Jehoshaphat reorganized his government both physically and spiritually (19:4–11). At an unspecified time later, a coalition of enemy forces began to march toward Judah (20:1–2). This resulted in the king and country becoming unified in fasting and public prayer—prayer that confessed utter reliance on the Lord to defeat this threat (20:3–12). The Lord’s response came next.

Facing a Crisis: 2 Chronicles 20:13-17

The phrase *all the men of Judah ... stood there before the Lord* reflects 2 Chronicles 20:4, which records that people “came from every town in Judah” to seek the Lord’s help during the crisis at hand. They gathered at “the temple of the Lord” (20:5). It seems that representatives from every town were present. The crisis was so severe that it was not only men gathered, but *wives and children and little ones as well*. Having just heard their king’s prayer (see Lesson Context), they awaited God’s response.

Second Chronicles 20:5 states that the king stood in “the temple of the Lord in the front of the new courtyard.” This courtyard was perhaps a renovation undertaken by Jehoshaphat himself (2 Chronicles 17:12, 19). The reason why the assembly (including families and their little ones) stood before the Lord following Jehoshaphat’s fervent prayer was because they needed 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.

1. What kind of crises took place in Judah at this time? (2 Chronicles 20:13)

What Do You Think?

How do you prioritize prayer and worship time within your family?

Digging Deeper

In what ways can you invite your friends and neighbors to join your family (or church) in prayer and worship?

Here the Holy Spirit came upon *Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of...*etc. What an avalanche of names! The chronicler has done a lot of work to record these sons of connections. Being able to prove one's lineage was important to the ancient Jew (compare Ezra 2:59–62; Nehemiah 7:61–64), as it is in establishing the line of Jesus in the New Testament era (Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38). For Jahaziel to have his pedigree traced back to the Asaph of King David's era some three centuries previous is noteworthy (see 2 Chronicles 5:12; Nehemiah 11:17).

Furthermore, 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 Uzziah, who spoke a message of both encouragement and warning to King Asa (15:1–7). Later "the Spirit of God" came upon a different Zechariah (see 20:14b, below), 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).

2. What's the significance of the Holy Spirit's intervention? (2 Chronicles 20:14)

What Do You Think?

What does it look like for believers to be empowered by the Holy Spirit? Consider Ephesians 5:18–20 in your answer.

Digging Deeper

How will you continue being attentive to the ways that the Holy Spirit works in and through you?

God always has a special word for those who turn to Him for help. When you face a battle, spend much time in His Word and in prayer, for then He will give you that needed word of encouragement. Jahaziel directed his words from God and told King Josaphat and all of Judah and Jerusalem to *listen*, and *do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's*.

King Josaphat, as leader of God's people, especially needed to hear these words. The vast army of the enemy coalition was already at En-Gedi, located on the western shore of the Dead Sea southeast of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 20:2). The distance from En-Gedi to Jerusalem was about 25 straight-line miles. However, since road distances varied, the practical distance between the locations was a bit farther. An army marching at a rate of three miles per hour would be at the gates of Jerusalem in less than two days!

When in a crisis situation, there's always the perceived need to do something as people begin to panic. Yet Josaphat 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" (compare 1 Samuel 17:47; 2 Kings 6:15–17).

The enemy army's location by the *Pass (cliff) of Ziz* (verse 16 of today's lesson) means that those troops had marched about seven miles to the north from En-Gedi (again, 2 Chronicles 20:2), along the road bordering the western shore of the Dead Sea. This puts that army less than 20 miles from Jerusalem. The *Desert of Jeruel* was in this vicinity near Tekoa (20:20, see map#58). Exactly how King Josaphat was to proceed at that point is specified in the next verse.

Verse 17 of today's lesson essentially repeats the message of 2 Chronicles 20:15, above. The commands *stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you and do not be afraid ... 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: "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today.... The Lord will 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).

3. What did the Holy Spirit say through Jahaziel? What specific message can you personally take away from it? (2 Chronicles 20:15-17)

What Do You Think?

Do you think the people maintained their faith nervously, courageously, or both while not knowing exactly how God would intervene in the war? (2 Chronicles 20:17).

Digging Deeper

How can each element of the armor of God (see Ephesians 6:10–18) help you stand firm in the contexts in which God has placed you?

"Faith-ing" a Crisis: 2 Chronicles 20:18-20

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 on you" (2 Chronicles 20:12); now he and those same eyes were turned to the ground in reverence. They had been standing "before the Lord" (20:13); they then *fell down in worship before the Lord*.

The *Kohathites* took their name from Kohath, the second of the three sons of Levi (Genesis 46:11). From the Kohathites came the priestly family of Aaron (1 Chronicles 6:1–3). The Levites "were responsible for the care of the sanctuary" (Numbers 3:28).

The *Korahites* 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 Korahites became gatekeepers (1 Chronicles 6:22; 9:17–19).

4. How did king Jehoshaphat and the people respond to God's promise and instructions? (2 Chronicles 20:18, 19)

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you worship God without fear of being distracting or disturbing others?

Digging Deeper

How is your public witness strengthened when you publicly worship God?

Rising *early in the morning* indicates the king and the people's anticipation to see how the Lord would work on their behalf, and they needed to get to the desert before nightfall (see 2 Chronicles 20:16, above). 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. Jehoshaphat went on to challenge the people to have faith in the Lord's prophets as well.

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 (see 2 Kings 17; etc.).

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 (2 Chronicles 20:21–25), so much that it took three days to gather all the valuables. So the king and the people then returned to Jerusalem as they had left it—in triumphant praise and worship of the Lord! (20:26–28).

5. What did the people do the next day? (2 Chronicles 20:20)

What Do You Think?

What most challenges you about today's passage?

Digging Deeper

What will you do to respond to that challenge?

CONCLUSION

King Jehoshaphat had offered a passionate plea to the Lord for help, admitting that neither the king nor his people had any strategy or resources to confront the oncoming threat. Perhaps as his prayer progressed, his voice grew louder, possibly even trembling as he reached the end and declared his utter dependence upon God: "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you" (2 Chronicles 20:12). Then came Jahaziel's Spirit-empowered words. The people's uplook changed their outlook. All of us can probably recall a time when a passage of God's Word was especially reassuring and helped get us through difficult circumstances. We may not have felt as desperate as Jehoshaphat did, but we experienced the energy that comes with God's encouragement. We may not be like Jahaziel, who encouraged a king and his nation when the Spirit of God came upon him. But perhaps during the course of a day, someone will come to mind that we should share a Scripture passage with by a phone call, text message, email, or postcard. Who might that be?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, our culture and our world are often characterized by speech and actions that oppose Your truth. Keep our eyes on You daily, that we may escape their influence! Thank You for those who have encouraged us over the years through Your promises. May we seek to pass that blessing on to others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Let your uplook change your outlook.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is "Faith and Transformation" where we learn how to utilize the *different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us*. Study Romans 12:3–8.