

Where Are You Looking? II Chronicles 20:1-30

Most of you know that we live in a very old house. The original owner purchased the property the same year Michigan became a state in 1837. We believe the house was built somewhere between that year and 1850. As you can imagine, a house that old comes with challenges. We're not entirely sure how old some of the wiring is, but our guess is that some of it dates back to the 1940's. Some of the plumbing is still the old, galvanized pipes. As we do work or it starts to show wear, we have to call licensed plumbers and electricians to bring it up to code.

When we need a plumber, we don't call an auto mechanic.

When we need an electrician, we don't call a brick layer.

When we need a roofer, we don't call a landscaper. We call someone who is skilled in that particular area of need.

You do the same thing. You call someone you can trust to do the job right. You call an expert. If you don't, things don't go so well.

We find that in our passage today in **II Chronicles 20:1-30**. Let's back up a moment and set the stage by reviewing **chapters 18-19**.

In **chapter 18** we learn that King Jehoshaphat had aligned himself with King Ahab, who was probably the most godless king in Israel. This alignment happened when Jehoshaphat married the daughter of Ahab. Ahab wanted to go to war and asked Jehoshaphat to join him. Now, let's give Jehoshaphat some credit for at least inquiring of the Lord whether they should march against Ramoth Gilead and the king of Aram. His error was in not listening to the advice of Michaiah who warned them of impending defeat. Centuries later Paul would give us some sound advice when he writes in **I Corinthians 15:33** that **"bad company corrupts good morals."** That was a lesson Jehoshaphat should have known and heeded. It would have saved him a lot of grief. For his bad choice, Jehu came with a word of chastisement from God asking

why the king had joined up with Ahab to help him in a battle he was told would not end well for the army of Israel and result in the death of Ahab. But God still saw some good in Jehoshaphat because of some positive reforms in Judah. **Chapter 19** notes that he turned the people back to the Lord and then appointed judges who were instructed to **"consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for man but for the Lord...now let the fear of the Lord be upon you (v. 6-7a)."**

In **verses 8-9** we learn that he appointed Levites, priests, and family heads to **"administer the law of the Lord...faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the Lord."**

In other words, seek the Lord and follow Him in all your decisions. He carried that desire into **chapter 20** as he faced a major test of faith. **Where will he turn?** It's a question we need to ask ourselves when we face major challenges in our lives. Consider then first that the problem was urgent.

I. THE PROBLEM WAS URGENT – vv. 1-4

The setting for Judah is dire. We read that the Moabites, the Ammonites and the Meunites, all parasites, joined together to attack Judah. With the news we see that their fear was understandable.

A. Their Fear Was Understandable – vv. 1-3a

These three armies had a long history. Not much is known about the Meunites other than they lived in the area of Edom, which was south of the Dead Sea. The people of Edom were descendants of Esau who was fathered by Isaac along with his twin brother Jacob. When Israel left Egypt, we learn from **Deuteronomy 2:1-5** that they were instructed not to take the land of Edom because that had been given to Esau as an inheritance by God. Moses asked permission to pass through (**Numbers 20:14-21**), but were denied entrance into the territory, so the people of Israel had to go around. From that point on, Scripture tells us that they became enemies. In **verse 10**, it says that one of the armies was from Mt. Seir, which was in Edom, so most likely, the Meunites were descendants of Esau.

Both the Moabites and the Ammonites were descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew. After Sodom was destroyed by God and Lot's wife died while fleeing the city, his daughters got him drunk and had an incestuous relationship in which they both became pregnant. His older daughter had a son named Moab who fathered the nation of the Moabites, while the younger daughter's son was named Ben-Ammi who fathered the nation of the Ammonites. We learn from such passages as **I Samuel 11:12** and **Amos 1:13** that the Ammonites were a cruel people. In **I Samuel 11** Nahash was offered a treaty, the terms of which he proposed gouging out the right eye of every Israel male. Amos says they would rip open pregnant women.

These three armies had aligned themselves to attack Judah. In **verse 2** we read that some men came and told Jehoshaphat that this enemy was already at Hazazon Tamar or En-Gedi. If that's not familiar to you, it's located in the southeast corner of the Dead Sea. In other words, they were already in Judah marching toward Jerusalem, which was less than 30 miles away. They were in the backyard, so to speak.

It is no wonder they were alarmed. The KJV says they "feared." That's a normal human reaction when something undesirable unexpectedly happens to us. We might say they were shaking in their boots, which is akin to panic wondering what to do next. It can throw you into confusion.

Have you ever felt that way?

The doctor's office calls with some bad news. You hit a patch of ice and the car starts to spin out of control. You're called into the office and told you no longer have a job.

Those and so many other things can cause you to be like the king and be alarmed and begin to panic and fear. **What was Jehoshaphat's response?**

B. Their Faith Was Unmistakable – vv. 3b-4

Joni Eareckson Tada knows a lot about life challenges. She wrote "The greatest good suffering can do for me is to increase my capacity for God."

We can either allow events to move us away from or toward God. We read that Jehoshaphat chose the latter. He **"resolved to inquire of the Lord, and proclaimed a fast for all Judah."** This imminent attack wasn't just on Jerusalem. It was going to affect all Judah, so he sought the Lord and told the whole nation to fast. Not everyone could line up for battle if it came to that, but they could all seek God and fast while appealing to Him. Their fast was a way of showing sincerity as they sought the Lord.

In my study time this week, I discovered a beautiful hymn that is a good reminder for all of us when we face trouble.

If the world from you withhold of its silver and its gold,
And you have to get along with meager fare,
Just remember, in His Word, how He feeds the little bird
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.

If your body suffers pain and your health you can't regain,
And your soul is almost sinking in despair,
Jesus knows the pain you feel, He can save and He can heal
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.

When your enemies assail and your heart begins to fail,
Don't forget that God in Heaven answers prayer;
He will make a way for you and will lead you safely through
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.

When your youthful days are gone and old age is stealing on,
And your body bends beneath the weight of care;
He will never leave you then, He'll go with you to the end
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.

Leave it there, leave it there,
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there;
If you trust and never doubt, He will surely bring you out
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.

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That's what Jehoshaphat did. **How about you?**

Again, this wasn't just a city crisis. They all came together. They all fasted. They all sought the Lord. It was a national appeal for God's intervention and reminds of me of the time God appeared to Solomon after he dedicated the Temple in which God said **"If my people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin**

and heal their land.” (II Chronicles 7:14)

To humble yourselves and seek God is to see Him as He is in character, to search for His presence, to strive to become intimate with Him. The nation had waived in its pursuit of God and had fallen into idolatry. Jehoshaphat came into power and began spiritual reform, they began to seek God, now their faith as a nation was being tested. Would they falter or would they follow in faith by trusting God that He had a purpose for good as we learn from **Romans 8:28** that **“All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”**

Listen to the questioning agony of Israel in their plea to God of another time in their history, but be encouraged in their remembrance of God’s mighty hand to save.

Psalm 77:1-15

When we face adversity and wonder where our help will come from, don’t wallow in despair, remember that **“God is an ever present help in time of trouble.”** (Psalm 34:17) and that when His people cry out, He saves from trouble (Psalm 34:6). Their faith in God is unmistakable. Matthew Henry writes that **“faith should be their answer.”** How about you?

Their problem was urgent, but their prayer was unifying.

II. THEIR PRAYER WAS UNIFYING – vv. 5-13

We see first, in **verses 5-6** that the prayer acknowledged God’s power over people.

A. The Prayer Acknowledged God’s Power Over People – vv. 5-6

You might expect that the person leading in prayer would be the priest or Levite or some other religious leader, but here it was the king. He reminded the people that there is only one God and that He alone is the God of heaven, the one who rules over all the nations. He reminded them that all power and might are in His hands and no one can stand opposed to Him.

I listened to the speech given by the newly elected Speaker of the House, Mike Johnson. He reminded all those serving in that chamber that they were all given their positions of leadership because God had ordained it. He put them there. In effect, he was saying that the sovereign hand of God rules over them and that they have no power apart from Him.

Whatever problems we are facing, when we pray, remember that God is in control of those situations and over the people involved. If God is in power over people, He is in power over your problems. They don’t take Him by surprise. The Israelites were facing a daunting enemy, but they knew God was in control. **How do we know that?** Look at **verses 7-9.**

B. Their Prayer Acknowledged God’s Provision For His People – vv. 7-9

In his prayer, Jehoshaphat gave them a little history lesson. Just in case they had forgotten, it was God who drove out the peoples of the land when their ancestors, led by Joshua, came to possess their inheritance dating back to Abraham.

He then reminded them of a portion of the prayer offered by Solomon at the dedication of the Temple. **“If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in Your presence before this Temple that bears Your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and You will hear us and save us.”** It was as much a reminder to the people as it was a cry for God to remember His promise that He would hear from heaven and heal their land.

Deuteronomy 7:9 **“Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments.”**

Psalm 71:22 **“I will praise You with the harp for Your faithfulness, O my God.”**

I Thessalonians 5:24 **“The One who calls you is faithful and He will do it.”**

Hebrews 10:23 **“Let us hold unswervingly to the**

hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.”

Catastrophe was on their doorstep, and they called on God reminding Him of what He said. Never forget that what God promises, He provides. Their prayer ends with an acknowledgement of God’s possession for His people.

C. Their Prayer Acknowledged God’s Possession For His People – vv. 10-13

In their past, God promised deliverance and protection and now in their present they were facing an enemy in which they needed God to make good on His promise. They had possessed the land since coming out of Egypt and that possession was being threatened.

Again, from the pen of Matthew Henry **“The justice of God is the refuge of those that are wronged.”**

In his prayer, Jehoshaphat reminded God (not that God needed a reminder, so it was more for the people) that when Israel came out of Egypt, God didn’t allow them to invade that area even though they had been denied the ability to pass through. Now they were repaying the good Israel had shown with evil of their own.

How he ended his prayer is something that I have been claiming for the past year. **“We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You.” (v. 12b)**

“We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You.”

What have you faced in the past where you felt the same as Jehoshaphat and all Israel that you don’t know what to do?

What are you facing right now where you feel like you don’t know what to do?

Be assured that there will be days ahead when you will not know what to do.

Are your eyes on the Lord?

Hebrews 12:2-3 “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such

opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Psalms 121:1-4 “I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip – He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.”

Where are you looking when the storms come on you? Facing a raging storm, Peter climbed out of the boat at the Lord’s bidding and walked on water by faith, but as soon as he took his eyes off Jesus the storm overwhelmed him.

Israel was facing a storm and chose to walk in faith by looking to the Lord. They looked to the Lord. If we want to overcome our storms keep your eyes on the Lord. Their prayer was unifying.

Next, we see that their prophecy was unusual.

III. THEIR PROPHECY WAS UNUSUAL – vv. 14-21

First, the prophecy called for fearlessness.

A. The Prophecy Called For Fearlessness – vv. 14-15

When the odds seem stacked up against us, God sends a word of hope and encouragement, either through His Word or by His servant. In this case it was a word through Jahaziel who was filled with the Holy Spirit and given a message. **“Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.”** It is the same message that God gave Joshua and all Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land: **“be strong and very courageous” (Josh. 1:8-9)**. Even though it was a physical army, it was a spiritual battle. Let’s not forget that. The enemy we face is one we don’t see, so the battle is spiritual, and God has given us the weapons we need to defeat the enemy. We have been given the Word of God; we have been given the Spirit of God; and we have been given the armor of God.

Isaiah 59:19 “When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against Him.”

Ephesians 6:10 “Finally, brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might?”

The battles you face are not yours, they are God’s. They had to rest on the same promise of God that we do as seen in **Hebrews 11:1, 6** “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see...And without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”

Are you facing your battles in faith or fear? Jahaziel was calling Israel to have faith in God.

B. The Prophecy Called For Faith – vv. 16-19

Through Jahaziel, God gave them a plan. To say the least it was an unusual plan, an unorthodox plan on how the enemy would be defeated. They were to march out in battle position, but then just stand there and watch God deliver them.

Here's the key to when we are faced with an enemy, when we have difficult circumstances: **verse 17b** “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.”

Don’t fear what you’re facing. Trust God because He is with you. Faith acts on the promises of God. God hadn’t even done anything yet, but they had such confidence in the Word of God that the whole assembly bowed and worshipped God. “**They praised God with a loud voice.**”

Paul tells us to give thanks to God in all things, for this is His will. (**I Thessalonians 5:18**) Praise comes from a life of faith even before we’ve seen the answer because it was God who said it.

But let’s remember something important. Let’s remember that faith has feet. God would be faithful to do His part, but they had to be faithful in doing their part. The prophecy called for faithfulness.

C. The Prophecy Called For Faithfulness – vv. 20-21

Faith requires feet. Faith requires action. Yes, God was going to fight the battle, which didn’t mean they could just sit at home and wait for it to be over. They were to go out and face the enemy. But did you notice who led the way. It wasn’t who we would normally expect to see leading the battle formation. It wasn’t the army. It was the choir. Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing, not a battle cry that might rouse the troops, but to sing about the splendor of God’s holiness. They led the troops. That would be like us sending out Elaine and Randy to lead. Now Elaine may have served in the army back in the day and Randy may have been the Michigan skeet shooting champion, but they wouldn’t be carrying weapons. They took as their weapons sheet music and instruments and songs of praise: “**Give thanks to the Lord, for His love endures forever.**” **How about that for a battle cry?**

When God asks you to step out in faith to do something that doesn’t make sense against an enemy you can’t see or something that has you overwhelmed, can you be faithful to do what He asks? Put feet to your faith and be faithful in doing what God tells you to do.

The next four verses remind me of **Ephesians 3:20** “**Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.**”

This is where we see their plunder was unexpected.

IV. THEIR PLUNDER WAS UNEXPECTED – vv. 22-25

First of all, the ruin was tremendous.

A. The Ruin Was Tremendous – vv. 22-24

When they acted in faith, God began to work. God didn’t do a thing until they began to sing. At that point He set up ambushes against the enemy and they were destroyed. However it happened, the Moabites and Ammonites turned on the Meunites and then they turned on each other until the armies

were totally annihilated. Jesus once said that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

Matthew Henry once said that “it is dangerous fighting those who have God with Him.”

Romans 8:31 “If God is for us, who can be against us.”

In my estimation, the destruction of the enemy would be good enough. But as **Ephesians 3:20** tells us, He went far above their expectations because the reward was tremendous. That’s the second thing we see about their unexpected plunder.

B. The Reward Was Tremendous – v. 25

God didn’t just defeat the enemy; He gave Israel much more than they asked for. He gave them the spoils of war for their faithfulness. The plunder was tremendous: equipment, clothing and articles of value – more than they could carry away. There was so much stuff it took them three days to carry it all back to Jerusalem. Remember from **Heb. 11:6** that God rewards those who walk by faith. **What was their response?** This brings us to our final point.

V. THEIR PRAISE WAS UPLIFTING – vv. 26-30

In **verses 26-28** they were giving praise to God.

A. They Were Giving Praise To God – vv. 26-28

If it had been written back then, I think they would have bust out in singing the Doxology:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.
Praise Him, all creatures here below.
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host.
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

They didn’t even wait to get off the battlefield. On the fourth day after all the plunder had been carried out, they gathered in the Valley of Beracah and praised the Lord. Beracah means blessing or praise. The motto of Barakel is “Where God has blessed.” It comes from the same Hebrew root word for praise. There is power in praise, folks. When you’re facing overwhelming odds, sing praise. When my Mom faced her battles with cancer, and in the final

months of her fought that would take her life, her strength came in singing praise to the Lord.

Warren Wiersbe writes “Even a valley can become a blessing if we learn how to praise the Lord. ‘Prayer changes things’ is a familiar saying that is certainly true. But it is also true that ‘praise changes things.’ Why? Because true praise changes people, and God can work in and through people who praise Him.”

When you're up against a struggle
That shatters all your dreams
And your hope's have been cruelly crushed
By Satan's manifested schemes
And you feel the urge within you
To submit to earthly fears
Don't let the faith your standing in
Seem to disappear

Praise the Lord
He can work through those who praise Him
Praise the Lord
For our God inhabits praise
Praise the Lord
For the chains that seem to bind you
Serve only to remind you
That they drop powerless behind you
When you praise Him

Now Satan is a liar
And he wants to make us think
That we are paupers
When he knows himself
We're children of the King
So lift up the mighty shield of faith
For the battle must be won
We know that Jesus Christ is risen
So the works already done

Praise the Lord
He can work through those who praise Him
Praise the Lord
For our God inhabits praise
Praise the Lord
For the chains that seem to bind you
Serve only to remind you
That they drop powerless behind you
When you praise Him
Praise Him

When you praise Him
When you praise, the Lord

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When you face your enemies, grab hold of God and don't let go and while you're holding on in faith, give Him praise. The Israelites carried their praise back to Jerusalem and continued it in the Temple, the place of God's abiding presence.

We notice one final thing that comes when we trust God and wait on Him and give Him our praise. It's found in **verses 29-30**.

B. They Were Given Peace By God – vv. 29-30

Praise results in peace. The surrounding nations saw what God had done for Judah who fought for them, and they wouldn't dare raise a hand against them. They feared what God would do to them and so God gave Judah peace.

I Peter 5:10 “And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast.”

God knew about the enemy marching against Israel and allowed them to get inside the land. But in it, Israel walked by faith trusting in God's promises.

As trouble comes your way, are you walking in faith or in fear?

As trouble comes your way, are you facing your problems with worship or worry?

As trouble comes your way, are you trusting or trembling?

“We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You...the battle is not ours, but God's...Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you...Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.”

Learn to trust the Lord with all our heart instead of leaning on our own understanding so that He can direct our paths.