

(1986 Prairie Series) 7 - Asa Hostile: Jehoshaphat Humbled

by Major Ian Thomas

Jehoshaphat's story is a warning to us all about the danger of seduction and the importance of recognizing the enemy, Satan, who comes as an angel of light.

Duration: 43:30

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 17:7

Topics: "Prairie Series"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Jehoshaphat, a king who experienced both prosperity and downfall. Despite his initial success, Jehoshaphat was seduced by Satan and lost everything. However, he humbled himself, sought God, and was ultimately restored. Jehoshaphat sought to eliminate idolatry and promoted the study of God's law among his people. The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a perfect heart and letting God be God in one's life.

Transcript

But I told you yesterday that I'd bring you good news this morning. And the good news is this, that although Asa was a good man and Asa was a fool and Jehoshaphat was a good man and Jehoshaphat was a fool, Jehoshaphat wasn't quite as big a fool as Asa. That's the good news.

I hope it brings you a measure of comfort. You see, Asa became hostile because he was numbered amongst those men who forgot to remember. A wonderful thing to learn a principle that you never knew, a tragic thing to forget, a principle that once you've known.

And Asa forgot to remember, and he became hostile because he was too proud to be reminded. Jehoshaphat forgot to remember, but he was humbled and set his heart, prepared his heart to seek God. You see, Asa defected in the hour of crisis.

Jehoshaphat was seduced at the peak of his prosperity. And I suppose the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, the true Bible-believing fellowship of evangelical Christians worldwide, has seldom been faced with so great a danger as it is today. Not the devil as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, but today Satan as an angel of light deceiving the very elect in the biggest seduction that is taking place throughout our evangelical constituencies worldwide.

You see, it was at the peak of his prosperity that seduction began. And the danger we are confronted with, especially in our western civilizations, and in particular in the North American continent and those prospering nations of Europe, is that ignoring all the suffering and deprivation, danger, persecution, imprisonment, impoverishment of countless hundreds of thousands of our fellow believers, today health, wealth, and prosperity has become equated with spirituality. This is the day of signs and wonders, of positive confession, name it and claim it.

Visualize yourself into success, think, and grow rich. That's the new gospel. And it's seducing hundreds of thousands of Bible-believing evangelical Christians, and not the least many whose names have long since been known as leaders of the Christian Church.

That's what happened to Jehoshaphat. Not in the hour of crisis did he defect, he was seduced when he was mesmerized by his own prosperity. But Jehoshaphat was a good man.

Let's look at it in the 17th chapter. Asa was dead. The man who forgot to remember, too proud to be reminded, became hostile to God and to those whose good advice he proudly ignored.

He hobbled to his death in the last six wasted years of an otherwise good reign and finally buried in a grave that he dug for himself. And Jehoshaphat, his son, reigned in his stead. He strengthened himself against Israel.

And we're told in verse three the Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he walked, notice this, in the first ways of his father. And there should be a conjunction there, strictly translated, his father Asa, in the first ways of his father Asa. And of his father David, his great-great-great-grandfather David.

And he sought not unto bail him. In other words, here Jehoshaphat, too, learned the principle from the first ways of his father, dad, until he defected in the hour of crisis. And he learned the principle from all that he had heard of his great-great-great-grandfather David.

He sought to the Lord God of his father and walked in his, God's commandments. He obeyed God, not after the doings of Israel. And it was for that reason the Lord established the kingdom in his hand, and his heart was lifted up, verse six we're told, in the ways of the Lord.

He, too, sought insofar as possible to eliminate idolatry wherever it was to be found. And in the third year of his reign, recognizing the desperate need of this people in their time of spiritual decline to get to know God's ways and God's law. Knowing that that is the only solid basis upon which any true spiritual awakening can take place, the exegesis of God's law.

Finding your roots deep in the divine revelation of that faith once delivered to the saints. In the third year of his reign, he sent to his princes to Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethaniel, and Micaiah to teach in the cities of Judah. In other words, he sought to remedy the lack which was mentioned in the earlier chapters that we considered yesterday by providing teaching priests.

Those who would take the word of God and give a solid biblical basis for the truth that they unashamedly proclaimed. And they taught, verse nine, in Judah. And they had the book of the law of the Lord with them.

And they went about throughout all the cities of Judah and they taught the people. And the result was that Jehoshaphat and his people earned the respect of the ungodly. The fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat.

Not only that, obeying God, lifting up his heart toward the Lord, sending teaching priests, delighting that his people are coming to know what God had to say. Earning the respect, not coveting it or seeking it, but deserving it. The respect of the ungodly.

He surrounded himself with good men. He enlisted God-fearing people to be his associates and aides. In the 16th verse, the next him was Amasiah, the son of Zichri, who willingly offered himself unto the Lord.

And the result, in verse 12, Jehoshaphat waxed exceedingly great. He built in Judah palaces and cities of store. Jehoshaphat was a good man and he prospered.

But it was at the peak of his prosperity that he fell, seduced. Satan is so subtle. It isn't always as a roaring lion.

He comes as an angel of light. You see, Asa was confronted with a crisis that he could not himself have avoided. For the enemy marched against him.

Jehoshaphat foolishly got involved in something that was none of his business. But the enemy, you see, in this case employed flattery. For Jehoshaphat, we're told in verse 1 of chapter 18, had riches and honor in abundance, and he joined affinity with Ahab.

Can you believe it? He was a man twice by God sentenced to death. The first time because he spared Ben-Hadad, God's enemy, who himself had been sentenced to death, and who finally himself was the author of Asa's downfall, who made an unholy alliance with him, whom Ahab had spared, and whom God had sentenced to death. And then Ahab was sentenced to death because he connived with that evil plot, having its origin in the wicked heart of that painted hussy Jezebel, who engineered the death of Nabab, so that Ahab could steal his vineyard.

A man, we're told, who set his heart to do evil, sentenced to death, Ahab. Twice condemned. And yet Jehoshaphat, blinded now by his prosperity, lost his sense of perspective.

He no longer could discern who Ahab was. You see, in a nutshell, the problem that confronted Jehoshaphat was that he tried to avoid Israel's ways without rejecting Israel's king. That's the heart of the matter.

And that has been the heart of the matter all down the centuries, you see, because we talk about sins, and it's easy to be sorry for your sins, and we call that sometimes repentance. And of course, you should be sorry. If you've done something wrong, you should be sorry that you've done it, but that isn't true repentance.

That's baby repentance. And almost anybody can repent and be sorry for what they've done if it's wrong, especially if they've been found out. But more often than not, they're not sorry for their sin, they're sorry for themselves.

They're sorry they've lost status, that they've earned the disapproval of those whose respect they want. You see, it isn't so much sins that is our problem, it's sin. That's the king of Israel.

His works simply derive from his reign. Jehoshaphat failed to recognize that everything that Israel did was the result of everything that Ahab was. See, Adam didn't fall when he took the fruit.

He took the fruit because he had fallen. Because a new principle had been introduced to his way of life. He believed the devil's lie.

He fell to the satanic fraud that he could be man without God, and ultimately in the absence of God become his own God, the very heart of humanism. In other way, whatever way it may express itself, whether in the secular world or today in our evangelical constituencies, it's all a question now of self-realization, self-image. Making yourself your own God.

You see, Adam took the fruit, that was the act, because of a new disposition that he had learned to adopt, an attitude. The moment he was persuaded by the satanic fraud that he could be a man without God, then God ceased to be indispensable to his humanity, and therefore he could be disobedient to God. So that the act of disobedience was simply the evidence of a new attitude of independence.

That sin whatsoever is not of faith. That activity that derives exclusively from our disposition toward God that recognizes that apart from who he is as the creator within the creature, we are nothing, have nothing and can do nothing. Any activity on your part or mine that derives other from the Lord Jesus himself being given that place of sovereignty within our hearts, that place of preeminence that allows him alone to be the origin of the act, what we do and say are, that is sin.

What's the difference between a Christian trying to live the Christian life apart from Christ and a man like Adam trying to be a man apart from God? What's the difference? No difference at all, except Satan in his subtlety has managed to perpetuate, you see, the satanic fraud in evangelical humanism, where everybody is busy doing their best for Jesus, ignoring the fact that he said to us, without me you can do nothing. So if without him we can do nothing, that a Christian is somebody who cannot possibly happen apart from Jesus Christ, how much is that worth that you do that isn't Christ doing it? Nothing. It's amazing how busy you can be doing nothing.

That's why people on the mission field, in the pastorate, in Christian ministry, mums and dads get burned out in their noble, sincere, sacrificial desire to flex their muscles, grit their teeth, clench their fists and do something for God. And the evangelistic trail is littered with their wreckage. Good men, earnest men, hard-working people, brave people who persevere in spite of a sense in their own hearts of despair, baffled at their own impotence, because so long they've been trying to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.

What Adam and Eve did was the result of a disposition, a change of attitude. Sins are simply those activities in which we engage because of a principle called sin that has weaned us of our dependence on God and made us proudly independent of God. And you cannot avoid Israel's ways if you avoid Israel's king and refuse to reject him.

Any more than you can deal with sins unless you recognize the root from which they come. 1 John chapter 3 verse 8, he that commits sin takes his character from the devil. Every act of sin is the evidence of his activity.

Man was created that God in man might be incarnate so that by everything man does says and is they might be given a valid expression of God's righteousness. Righteousness is God behaving. Sin is Satan behaving.

Our minds, emotions, and wills instead of being united under the supreme unchallenged sovereignty of Jesus Christ become the workshop of the devil himself to produce that ugly list called the works of the flesh. Greed, lust, pride, hate, lasciviousness, drunkenness, drug addiction, all the things from which the world all down the centuries has been bleeding. And until we recognize the nature of the foe, the source from which it flows, we will battle in vain.

That's why you can't legislate righteousness. Christianity without Christ is a dead religion. Holiness apart from God is a legalistic straitjacket.

And spirituality apart from God the Holy Spirit is a nauseating fraud. But long since, you see, we've substituted religion for God, Christianity, evangelical Bible-believing Christianity for Christ, and all our manifold rituals for genuine reality in a man's relationship to God. This is where Jehoshaphat fell.

After certain years, we're told in verse 2 of chapter 18, and I want you to notice the direction in which he went when he made this unholy alliance with Jehoshaphat. Down. After certain years, he went down to Ahab.

That's always the direction that you go. When you make an unholy alliance with that carnal nature that is hostile to God, not subject to its laws. But Ahab was very smart, subtly seducing a man who's mesmerized by his own success.

He killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance for the people that he had with him. And he persuaded him to go with him to Ramoth Gilead. That was no business of Jehoshaphat.

But you see, when in trying to avoid Israel's ways, you fail to repudiate Israel's king, you'll get involved fighting Israel's battles. And when you do that, you're fighting at all times a battle already lost. When God has given us the incredible privilege of celebrating at all time a victory, already won.

Ahab, king of Israel, said to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, wilt thou go with me to Ramoth Gilead? He answered, I am as thou art. My people is thy people. We will be with thee in the war.

What's happened to Jehoshaphat? He's lost all spiritual discernment. He doesn't even now recognize the enemy when he's looking in straight in the face. For Satan is subtle enough to deceive the very elect.

But in God's goodness, you know, when you make an unholy alliance with the enemies of God, the Holy Spirit is there to give you an uneasy conscience. And Jehoshaphat tried desperately to reconcile a false affinity with a bad conscience. There was something uneasy about this.

So said he, inquire I pray thee at the word of the Lord today. Let's get confirmation from God himself. It was a pious utterance for a man who was deliberately doing something which was patently wrong.

Therefore, the king of Israel gathered together of prophets, 400 men and said to them, shall we go to Ramoth Gilead to battle or shall we forbear? And of course, with one mind, one voice, go up, said they, God will deliver it into the king's hands. You cannot but prosper. Well, that seemed overwhelming enough by popular acclaim.

And this was a course of action that had earned the approbation of God and his smile of blessing was upon it. But still there was that uneasiness in Jehoshaphat's heart. He said, is there not here a prophet of the Lord beside that we might inquire of him? One might have imagined that the overwhelming verdict of

400 prophets of the Lord might have been adequate.

Said the king Jehoshaphat, there is yet one man by whom I may inquire of the Lord, but I hate him. I hate him. He'd never prophesied good unto me, but always evil.

Micaiah, the son of Immanuel, one of God's servants upon whose lips God could make articulate what he wanted to say. And that's why, of course, Ahab had deliberately avoided consulting him. The lonely voice amidst the clamor of the crowd, when all those who professed to be prophets of the Lord were acclaiming the project, one lonely voice.

I believe that in these last days before our Lord Jesus comes, in the great final seduction of the church, we're going to be lonely voices, even amongst those who will claim to be evangelical believers. The king sent for him. Fetch quickly Micaiah, the son of Immanuel, and the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, sat either of them on his throne.

In the meantime, all the prophets, of course, prophesied good. But the messenger that went to call Micaiah, verse 12, spake to him saying, Behold, the words of the prophets declare good to the king with one assent. Let thy word, therefore I pray thee, be like one of theirs.

Speak thou good. Don't stick your neck out. Don't be a sore thumb.

Don't rock the boat. And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, whoever it does please, whoever it does not. Even what my God saith, that will I speak.

That's the voice of truth. And sometimes it's a very lonely voice. And when he was come to the king, the king said to Micaiah, Shall we go to Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And he said, Mockingly, Oh yes, of course.

I mean, you've heard what your prophets have said. You're going to prosper. You've got it made.

You're the kind of king who's got what it takes. But full well knowing that he was being mocked, said the king to Micaiah, How many times shall I adjure you that thou say nothing but the truth to me in the name of the Lord? Oh, Micaiah said, I imagine quite quietly, you want to know the truth. I see.

You mean you really want to know the truth? Well, he said, I see all Israel scattered upon the mountains, sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, These have no master. Let them return therefore every man to his house in peace, King Ahab.

You're going to die. You're going to die. You're under sentence.

And that sentence is going to be executed. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Did not I tell thee that he would prophesy no good unto me, but evil? And of course, the false prophets chided with Micaiah. Said Micaiah, the son of Tanana, verse 23, came near, smote Micaiah upon the cheek, said, Which way went the spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto you? And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see on that day when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide yourself.

Said he to Zedekiah, Time is on my side. And I'm prepared to give God time and give God room to vindicate the truth. And the king of Israel, verse 25, said, Take him, Micaiah, carry him back to Ammon, the governor of the city, and to Joash, the king's son.

Say thus, Thus shall saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, feed him with bread of affliction, with water of affliction, until I return in peace. And threw him into jail. Micaiah said, If thou certainly return in peace, then hath not the Lord spoken by me.

You're right, I'm wrong. But God is the final arbiter. And then he looked around at the crowd and he said, Hearken, all you people.

Then the king of Israel did something pretty smart. He said to Jehoshaphat, Now you dress yourself in your royal robes, I don't want to detract anything from your glory. I mean, you're the king.

And I want everybody to recognize who's really in charge. So I'd like to bow myself. I'm just going to disguise myself as a common soldier.

Oh, so humble, so nice. Flattery, but with murder in his heart. You enter into an alliance with the flesh, make peace with it and be kind.

But it'll never make peace with you. It'll only be bent on destroying you. It will use you only to bury you.

Capitalizing upon your most noble ambitions and deep dedication to God, only to bury you. So the king of Israel disguised himself and they went for the battle. And the king of Syria had commanded the captains of the chariots, as King Ahab well foreknew, that they were with him, saying, Fight you not with small or great, save only with the king of Israel.

And it came to pass when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, Naturally, it's the king of Israel. And therefore they compassed about him to fight. And Jehoshaphat, stripped of everything in the moment of despair on the threshold of death, cried out, God, help me.

And the Lord helped him. And God moved them to depart from him. You see, at the peak of his prosperity, he was seduced in all the subtlety of Satan and God had to strip him of everything he had until he was within an air's breadth of destruction.

Then he humbled himself and set his heart to seek God, recognized his folly, and God in his infinite compassion, as he has in your life and mine again and again, moves in at the last moment. And then, verse 33, a certain man drew a bow at a venture. He wasn't aiming at anything.

He was just a little bored. So he took an arrow and shot it into space. But the relentless finger of God guided that arrow and it smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness, found the one chink.

You see, God's judgment is relentless. King Ahab, you're going to die. Turn thine hand, he said, that thou mayest carry me out of the host I'm wounded.

The battle increased that day. However, the king of Israel stayed himself up in his chariot against the Syrians until the evening and about the time of the sun going down. He died.

It was sunset. And for Jehoshaphat in his folly, it might well have been sunset too for him. Except that although Jehoshaphat was a good man and Jehoshaphat was a fool, he wasn't.

And prepared his heart again to seek God. Chapter 19, Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, verse 2, and he said to King Jehoshaphat, shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is God's judgment upon you. Nevertheless, there are good things found in thee in that

thou hast taken away the groves out of the land and thou hast prepared thine heart to seek God.

And God knows. And we're told that Jehoshaphat in the end of verse 4 brought his people back to the Lord God of their fathers. He returned to home base.

He got back to where he belonged in that sublime simplicity of faith that lets God do it. Fear the Lord, he said, and do it. Verse 9, with a perfect heart.

That perfect heart that God seeks for is his eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth looking for any boy, girl, man, or woman anywhere out of any nation, kindred, tribe, or tongue, or race, or creed, who's prepared to let God be God and show himself strong on their behalf. Jehoshaphat's back at home base. And it came to pass in chapter 20 in verse 1, it came to pass after this also that the children of Immoab and the children of Ammon and with their mother beside the Ammonites came against Jehoshaphat to battle.

Soon his restoration to that relationship that lets God be God in his life and that of his people is being tested. There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea. On this side Syria came they with the message.

Behold they be in Hazos and Tamar which is in Gedi and Jehoshaphat feared and set himself to seek the Lord. And he proclaimed a fast throughout Israel throughout the whole of Judah. He feared.

All his bravado now has gone. No long to Ahab, my people, your people, I'm as you are, we'll be with you in the battle and we'll prosper with you. Now he feared.

And the Bible tells us that the fear of God is just the beginning of wisdom. Now Judah gathered themselves together to ask help of the Lord even out of all the cities of Judah. They came to seek the Lord and Jehoshaphat begins to pray.

And you can nearly always recognize a man's relationship, his spiritual standing by the way he talks to God. Remember prayer isn't a gun at God's head. It's your need at his feet.

You don't tell God what to do. He's the creator, you're the creature. He's your maker, you're the man he made.

Oh Lord God of our fathers said he, verse six, art not thou God in heaven? Rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen in thine hand is there not power and might so that none is able to withstand thee? Where did he begin? With the bigness of the God to whom he had returned. Hebrews in chapter 11 and verse six, he that comes to God must first believe that God is. Unchanging, eternal, timeless, the same yesterday, today and forever, the eternal, immutable, unchanging truth in whom there's no shadow of turning, neither any variable illness.

The God who is, the God of his fathers. And then that identification, for he that cometh to God must first believe that God is, but that he more than that, he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Or in other words, all that God is, is available to the man who is available to all that God is.

That's a disposition. That is not now arrogant independence, I've got what it takes, I can handle it on my own. This is a recognition, I cannot, God never said I could, but he can and always said he would.

And if you can't and he can, what's the smartest thing to do? Let him. Art not thou our God who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people? Israel gavest it to the Abraham thy friend forever. Abraham thy friend.

Behold I say, verse 11, how they reward us to come to cast us out of thy possession which thou hast given us to inherit. What we inherit is your possession. All that we are and have derives from who you are and all you have.

This is the sole source of our true wealth. Oh our God, wilt thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do. But our eyes are upon thee.

Something's happened to Jehoshaphat. He's got back to where he belongs. To the principle that he learned from the first ways of his father Asa and his great great great grandfather David.

Who as a little shepherd boy learned that God is bigger than bears, bigger than lions, and bigger than giants. If only you'll let him be God. Abraham thy friend.

I wonder why Jehoshaphat mentioned Abraham. Well I think you see he was remembering. For Abraham too you see had get back to home base.

It wasn't that Abraham lacked sincerity, verve, enthusiasm, or sense of deep dedication to God. But we're told in Galatians chapter 4 that Abraham had two sons. One who was born of the flesh, Ishmael.

And the only needed explanation for Ishmael was Abraham in committee. His best for God with the utmost dedication and God said thanks for nothing. And when he tried to twist God's arm and said make him a great nation, God finally gave him what he wanted.

And there's nothing quite so pathetic when you get what you want instead of letting God give you what you need. He said I'll make him a great nation and he will be a wild man and he will cause trouble wherever he goes. That's why they found a bomb this morning in the baggage of a passenger of Israel Airlines in Heathrow Airport London.

Just in time to save a lot of people's lives. Because Ishmael's a wild man. Isaac was born of promise.

The only possible explanation for Isaac was God. But once God had given him the blessing, when at last having called him after many weary years, God found his heart and God could choose him. God said do you love Isaac? Yes man, he said do I love Isaac? That smiling cheery face every time his shrew voice comes into the house or the tent, my heart begins to beat a little faster.

And God said great. Now take him up the mountain with a knife in one hand and fire in the other and slay him. Slay him.

Can you imagine how Abraham must have felt? The one in whom God had promised him his seed should be as the stars of heaven and as the sand by the seashore innumerable in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. Slay him. Something in his heart which said hang on to hang on to Isaac you got the blessing keep it.

But another little voice was saying in Abraham's heart keep moving, keep moving, keep moving. And Isaac said I see the knife and the fire where's the offering? And I think Abraham said don't ask awkward

questions. And his heart was heavy but he kept moving until he finally on Mount Moriah.

As we're told in the 11th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews. Unable to explain it to himself, totally unable to explain it to anything anybody else, completely baffled in this moment of truth he said God I made a fool of myself when I produced Ishmael and now you tell me to kill the one in whom alone I have any hope of all the fulfillment of your promises and you tell me to kill him. If kill him I must then kill him I will.

Even if you have to raise him from the dead. Which Hebrews 11 in a figure got dead. For when he saw the knife flash in the sun God said that's all I needed to know.

Abraham throw the knife away. Now I realize that to you God is bigger than his gifts. And the blessing greater than his blessings.

Because you've done this thing in blessing I will bless you. Your seed shall be as the stars of heaven and as the sand by the seashore innumerable. And Abraham became God's friend.

At home base. Dead to the blessing. Alive alone to God.

Such then and now and always will be. Our God's friends. Now let's pray.

Thank you dear Lord for Jehoshaphat. Thanks for telling us what you have about him. That we might learn for we know our own hearts.

Thank you for the compassion that saved him in the 11th hour. In the last moment of despair. From the calamity that he brought upon his own head.

How kind you are. Grant that the Holy Spirit this morning may examine our hearts. That we may recognize the enemy for who he is.

Deliver us from the great seduction. And precious as may have been every experience of the past. Every gift that we have received from your gracious hand.

Every blessing that we have known. We want you Lord Jesus this morning to know that you're greater than them all. And whatever no matter how legitimate.

That would become as a substitute for yourself the object of our idolatry. We want you to know that the knife is flashing in the sun. We want to be numbered among your friends.

For your namesake. Amen. You've been listening to a sermon by Major Ian Thomas.

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