

Judah During the Divided Kingdom (2 Chronicles 10:1 – 28:7)

by Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

<p>The Reign of Jehoshaphat, part 2: Jehoshaphat's Earlier Years, part 2: Jehoshaphat's Earlier Battle (2 Chronicles 18:1–19:3)</p>
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Jehoshaphat's Earlier Battle (18:1-19:3)

The first battle of Jehoshaphat's reign is an intricate account which reveals a complex portrait of the king. On the one hand, Jehoshaphat seems pious and devoted to the Lord (18:6; 18:31). On the other hand, he appears foolish and is rebuked for his folly (18:29; 19:2-3).

In many respects this episode mirrors the Chronicler's earlier account of Asa's battle against northern Israel. At least three points of contact appear. 1) In both records, the kings of Judah made alliances with other kings. Asa relied on Syria against Israel (16:1-6); Jehoshaphat allied himself with Israel in opposition to Syria (18:1-19:3). 2) In each story a prophet of God was imprisoned. Asa jailed Hanani (16:10); Ahab imprisoned Micaiah (18:25-26). 3) In both passages, the Chronicler reserved explicit judgment on the events until after the battles had taken place. Hanani rebuked Asa (16:7-9); Jehu, son of Hanani rebuked Jehoshaphat (19:1-3). The common element of both rebukes was that the king of Judah should not have formed an alliance with another human power.

Comparison of 18:1-19:3 with 1 Kings 22:1-40

For the most part, the Chronicler copied this material from 1 Kgs 22:1-40. A few stylistic differences occur here and there. Also, problems in textual transmission lie behind some minor differences. Nevertheless, the Chronicler himself made several omissions and additions that reveal his outlook on these events.

First, the Chronicler modified the beginning of the narrative (18:1 // 1 Kgs 22:1). This new opening connected this story with the preceding focus on Jehoshaphat's wealth and security.

Second, the Chronicler added 18:2 to highlight Ahab's extensive effort to gain Jehoshaphat's cooperation.

Third, 18:31 (// 1 Kgs 22:33) presents a special textual problem (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*). The traditional Hebrew text of 1 Kgs 22:33 does not mention the Lord responding to Jehoshaphat's cry. At first glance, Chronicles seems to add ... **and the Lord helped him. God drew them away from him ...** (18:31). Yet, some ancient manuscripts of 1 Kgs 22:33 suggest that these words may have been original to the book of Kings and therefore simply copied by the Chronicler. Whatever the case, the concept of God answering Jehoshaphat's prayer fit well with the repeated theme of divine judgment and blessing found elsewhere in Chronicles.

Fourth, the Chronicler substituted his own ending for the finale in Kings. 1 Kgs 22:35b-40 ends the record in Kings with the announcement that the prophetic judgment against Ahab had been fulfilled. 19:1-3, however, replaces this ending with a scene depicting Jehoshaphat's return to Jerusalem and the prophetic rebuke he received. This final prophetic rebuke of Jehoshaphat unveiled the Chronicler's chief concern in this narrative.

Structure of 18:1-19:3

Jehoshaphat's battle in alliance with northern Israel divides into four symmetrical parts (see figure 35). The chapter begins with Jehoshaphat visiting his ally, King Ahab of Northern Israel (18:1-2a). While visiting Ahab, Jehoshaphat agreed to join in battle against Syria after consulting with prophets (18:2b-27). Jehoshaphat then traveled to Ramath-Gilead and carried out Ahab's battle plan (18:28-34). In balance with the beginning of the story, Jehoshaphat returned to Jerusalem to encounter another prophet who rebuked him for his alliance with Ahab (19:1-3).

Jehoshaphat Visits Ahab (18:1-2a)

The Chronicler replaced the opening of this story in Kings (1 Kgs 22:1-2) with his own beginning to provide a different setting for the events that follow. 1 Kgs 22:1-2 simply notes that war began between Syria and northern Israel. The Chronicler, however, paused to give more extensive historical background.

The background information of 18:1 reports two important facts. First, these events took place at a time when **Jehoshaphat had great wealth and honor** (18:1). These words repeat the language of 17:5 and draw a connection between this narrative and the entire preceding chapter. As we have already seen, the Chronicler added the preceding chapter to demonstrate that Jehoshaphat was blessed during his early years for his loyalty to God (see *Introduction: 26) Prosperity and Poverty*). As the Chronicler pointed out on a number of occasions, it was precisely when some kings enjoyed great blessings from God that they turned away from him. For the Chronicler's warning against infidelity after blessings see comments on 1 Chr 5:24.

Second, the Chronicler added that Jehoshaphat had entered an alliance **by marriage** with Ahab (18:1). This marriage was between Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram and Ahab's daughter Athaliah (see 21:6; 22:2). In the ancient Near East, marriage was typically viewed as more than the union of two individuals; it was a bond between two families. In the case of royal families, such marriages also formed political alliances between nations. Though this practice was common, God had prohibited his people from intermarrying with idolaters because they would inevitably lead his people into apostasy (see Dt 7:3-4; Josh 23:11-13; Neh 13:23-27; see also *Introduction: 3) International Relations*). Jehoshaphat's marriage proved to be a serious problem for Judah in later generations. Athaliah led Jehoram into the sins of Ahab (see 21:5-6), and led Ahaziah into the same sins (see 22:2-3). Moreover, Athaliah usurped the throne by killing nearly all of the royal offspring of Judah (see 22:10-12). At this point, however, the Chronicler introduced the marriage alliance to explain why Jehoshaphat gave his support to northern Israel.

Jehoshaphat **went down to visit Ahab in Samaria** (18:2). The Chronicler did not explain Jehoshaphat's motivations for this journey. His interest was primarily in what Ahab did once Jehoshaphat arrived.

Jehoshaphat Agrees to Fight with Ahab (18:2b-27)

Jehoshaphat and Ahab deliberated extensively before waging war against Syria. These deliberations create a mixed characterization of Jehoshaphat.

Structure of 18:2b-27

This lengthy portion of the narrative divides into three main sections (see figure 35). The first verses of this material (18:2b-3) summarize the negotiations between the kings. This summation is followed by two rounds of prophetic inquiries (18:4-5, 6-27), both of which were initiated at Jehoshaphat's insistence (18:4,6).

Synopsis of Royal Deliberations (18:2b-3)

At the meeting of the kings, Ahab went to great lengths to have Jehoshaphat join him in battle. He **slaughtered many sheep and cattle** for a great feast to honor Jehoshaphat and his men (18:2b). Moreover, he **urged Jehoshaphat to attack Ramath Gilead** (18:2b).

The term translated **urged** sometimes occurs with the connotation of "entice" or "seduce" (see 1 Chr 21:1; 2 Chr 32:11,15). It is likely to have this meaning here (see NAS, NRS). By

opening this portion of the story in this manner, the Chronicler subtly gave his own evaluation of the events taking place. Jehoshaphat was about to be enticed into something evil.

The long process of establishing an agreement (see 18:4-27) is reduced to a simple request and response in 18:3. Ahab asked, "**Will you go with me ...?**" and Jehoshaphat replied, "**We will join you in the war.**" As the verses that follow make clear, Jehoshaphat did not immediately agree to join Ahab. Lengthy deliberations took place, but in the end the king of Judah agreed to fight.

First Prophetic Inquiry (18:4-5)

After the synopsis of negotiations between Ahab and Jehoshaphat, the text describes the process by which this agreement came about. The Chronicler followed 1 Kgs 22:5 and reported that Jehoshaphat complicated matters by insisting that Ahab **first seek the counsel of the Lord** (18:4 see also 18:6). This insistence revealed Jehoshaphat as one still committed to "seeking" God. He was a man who desired the wisdom and blessing of God (see *Introduction: 19) Seeking*). At the end of this narrative the Chronicler's addition praises Jehoshaphat for his abiding devotion (see 19:3). Ironically, however, as this chapter progresses Jehoshaphat did not take to heart the prophetic word that his seeking evoked. He disregarded the warning of the prophet (18:18-22,28).

In response to Jehoshaphat's insistence, Ahab **brought together the prophets** (18:5 // 1 Kgs 22:6). It was customary in the ancient Near East for kings to surround themselves with professional prophets when they prepared for warfare. The practice is also well attested in the Old Testament (see 1 Kgs 12:21-24 // 2 Chr 11:1-4; 1 Kgs 20:13,28; 2 Kgs 3:11-19; 6:12-22; 7:1-7;13:14-20; 2 Chr 20:14-19; Isa 7:3-25; Jer 21; see also *Introduction: 15) Prophets*). Ahab asked these professional prophets if he should go to war and the prophets answered in the affirmative.

Second Prophetic Inquiry (18:6-27)

Although Ahab's prophets had promised victory, Jehoshaphat was not convinced. He asked specifically for **a prophet of the Lord** (18:6 // 1 Kgs 22:7). The prophets that gathered by Ahab very likely claimed to be the prophets of Israel's God. Note that they use the Lord's name in their prophecies (see 18:10-11 // 1 Kgs 22:11-12). It is not altogether clear why Jehoshaphat did not accept Ahab's professional prophets as "of the Lord." It is possible that he was asking for a prophet who remained faithful to the throne and temple of Jerusalem. From Jehoshaphat's Judahite outlook only such prophets would have been legitimate. Moreover, the positive response of the prophets may also have raised doubts in Jehoshaphat's mind. Frequently in the Old Testament, false prophets were characterized as only giving positive oracles in favor of the king (see 36:16; 2 Kgs 17:13-15; Neh 9:26; Jer 25:4; 26:4-5;

28; 29:24-32). The fact that these prophets spoke so enthusiastically in favor of royal plans caused Jehoshaphat to be suspicious. So, in effect he asked for a prophet not on Ahab's payroll.

Ahab admitted that there was one man "**through whom we can inquire of the Lord ... Micaiah son of Imlah**" (18:7 // 1 Kgs 22:8). Micaiah appears nowhere else in Scripture but here and in the parallel section of Kings. Yet, he was well-known to Ahab. As Ahab complained, "**he never prophesies anything good about me**" (18:7 // 1 Kgs 22:8). Micaiah served as God's spokesperson and said only what God commanded. Ahab blurted out, "**I hate him,**" but Jehoshaphat rebuked him for his insolence (18:7). As a result, Ahab conceded to Jehoshaphat's wishes and ordered that Micaiah be brought before them (18:8 // 1 Kgs 22:9).

In 18:9-11 (// 1 Kgs 22:10-12) the text turns momentarily from the main action of the narrative to elaborate on the earlier scene of false prophets before the kings (see 18:5). All the verbs in this section should therefore be translated as previous events (e.g. "...had been sitting..." [18:9]). These verses provide a striking counterpoint to Micaiah's upcoming prophecy (see 18:18-22). The two kings had been sitting **on their thrones ... by the gate of Samaria** and **all the prophets** (400 of them [18:5]) had been **prophesying before them** (18:9). To enhance the scene even further, the passage focuses on one prophet, **Zedekiah** who **had made iron horns** and had announced that Ahab would **gore the Arameans** (18:10). Such symbolic acts are well-known from the rest of the Old Testament. Prophets often accompanied their prophecies with symbolic displays (see Jer 27:2; 28:1-17; Ezek 4:1-17; 5:1-17; 12:1-7). This dramatic scene ends with the words of **all the other prophets** in unanimous agreement that Ahab and Jehoshaphat would be **victorious** (18:11). Without exception, the professional prophets had urged war and had promised success.

The main action of the story continues with a **messenger** of the royal court looking for Micaiah and instructing him to agree with the false prophets (18:12). Micaiah, however, answered with an oath that reflected his character as a true prophet. He swore only to say what **God says** (18:13 // 1 Kgs 22:14).

The scene of Micaiah before Ahab and Jehoshaphat (18:14-27 // 1 Kgs 22:15-28) consists of interactions among four main characters: Ahab, Jehoshaphat, Zedekiah and Micaiah. The sequence of action may be summarized as follows: 1) Ahab invited Micaiah to prophesy (18:14). 2) Micaiah agreed with the false prophets (18:14). 3) Ahab challenged Micaiah to speak truth **in the name of the Lord** (18:15; see *Introduction: 11) Name of God*). 4) Micaiah reversed himself and predicted disaster (18:16). 5) Ahab complained to Jehoshaphat (18:17). 6) Micaiah explained his reversal (18:18-22). 7) Zedekiah, the false prophet, rebuked Micaiah (18:23). 8) Micaiah responded to Zedekiah (18:24). 9) Ahab ordered Micaiah's imprisonment (18:25-26). 10) Micaiah responded to Ahab (18:27).

The most perplexing aspect of these interactions is how a true prophet of the Lord could first predict victory (18:14) and then disaster (18:16). Micaiah himself explained his actions in his description of a heavenly vision (18:18-22). Although Micaiah's description of the

heavenly court scene is unusually detailed, it is a common Old Testament theme that prophets viewed and participated in the activities of the court of God. They later reported the deliberations of the divine assembly to people on earth (see Isa 6:1-13; Dan 7:9ff; Amos 7:1,4,7).

In effect, Micaiah explained his actions on the basis of divine purposes behind these events. The Chronicler frequently appealed to divine intentions to explain earthly events (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). This passage reveals heavenly purposes in great detail. Micaiah had seen the Lord ask for a volunteer from the **host of heaven** (18:18) to **lure** Ahab to his death (18:19). An unnamed **spirit** had agreed to do so by becoming **a lying spirit in the mouths of all** [of Ahab's] **prophets** (18:20-21). God had agreed to the plan and guaranteed success (18:21). Simply put, Micaiah gave his first message of success to Ahab in order to comply with the divine desire to see the king lured into death. His second message of judgment was actually the expected outcome of the battle.

Micaiah's two oracles were designed to seal Ahab's fate. While prophets usually warned to encourage repentance, occasionally their role was to insure destruction (see Isa 6:9-13). Jesus spoke in parables for a similar reason (see Luke 8:9-10). Although the Chronicler omitted the record of Ahab's apostasy in 1 Kgs 16:29-22:40, Ahab's rebellion against God led him into a terrible condition. Ahab had turned so far from God that prophecy became a means of confusing him and luring him to his death.

After Micaiah delivered his message to Ahab, the king ordered that he be put **in prison** (18:26). The Chronicler mentioned a similar reaction from Asa (see 16:10). The prophet was to be incarcerated until the king returned in safety. Micaiah remarked that if Ahab returned safely it would prove that his prophesy was not from God (18:27). Then he turned to the crowd and defiantly shouted, "**Mark my words, all you people**" (18:27). Of course, as events soon proved, Micaiah's words were from God (see 18:33-34).

Jehoshaphat Fights with Ahab (18:28-34)

With deliberations out of the way, the story proceeds to the actual battle at Ramath Gilead. As expected, events unfolded as Micaiah predicted.

Structure of 18:28-34

This segment of the narrative divides into three symmetrical steps (see figure 35). The passage begins with Ahab's two-sided plan (18:28-29a). The battle ensues (18:29b), and a twofold outcome occurs (18:30-34).

Ahab's Twofold Plan (18:28-29a)

Ahab and Jehoshaphat **went up to Ramoth Gilead** to make war against the Syrians (18:28 // 1 Kgs 22:29). No record is given of the entire battle strategy; just one aspect of the plan is reported. Ahab proposed that he enter battle **in disguise** while Jehoshaphat wore his normal **royal robes** (18:28 // 1 Kgs 22:29).

The reasoning behind Ahab's plan is not altogether clear. He may have anticipated the plan of the king of Syria (see 18:30). Or like Josiah (see 35:22), he may have tried to foil the prophecy of Micaiah by hiding himself in the crowd. Whatever his intentions, Ahab's plan did not succeed.

Ahab Enters Battle (18:29b)

Just as he had planned, Ahab entered the battle only after he **disguised himself** (18:29b // 1 Kgs 22:30b). No explicit mention is made of Jehoshaphat's actions because he simply remained clothed as usual.

Twofold Results of Ahab's Plan (18:30-34)

This episode of battle closes with two scenarios depicting the outcomes of Ahab's plan. The first outcome focuses on Jehoshaphat (18:30-32); the second concerns Ahab (18:32-34).

The result for Jehoshaphat was great danger and deliverance (18:30-32 // 1 Kgs 22:31-33). A central goal of Syria's strategy in this battle was to kill Ahab. As a result, the **chariot commanders** were ordered to concern themselves with no one **except the king of Israel** (18:30). Nevertheless, Jehoshaphat was mistaken for the king of northern Israel and the chariots **turned to attack him** (18:31).

In response to this threat, **Jehoshaphat cried out and the Lord helped** (18:31). As mentioned above, the traditional Hebrew text of the parallel verse in 1 Kgs 22:22 simply reads "Jehoshaphat cried out" (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*). The terminology **cried out** is somewhat ambiguous in itself. It can mean that Jehoshaphat merely shouted from fear (see 1 Sam 4:13; 5:10; 28:12; Esth 4:1) or it can mean that he prayed with intensity (see Jdg 3:9; 6:6; 10:10; Ps 107:13,19; 142:1; Jonah 1:5). The expressions **and the Lord helped him** and **God drew them away from him** (18:31) clarified this ambiguity. The language of the traditional Hebrew text of Chronicles makes it clear that Jehoshaphat prayed and God **helped** by intervening on his behalf (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). Once again, the Chronicler presented an event in the divided monarchy that fulfilled the hopes of Solomon's temple prayer (see 6:34-35; 7:14; see also *Introduction: 17) Prayer*). Jehoshaphat's alliance

with Ahab had brought him to a dreadful situation of military defeat. Yet, he turned to God in prayer and received a merciful deliverance (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*).

While the king of Judah was rescued from death by divine intervention, Ahab did not fare so well (18:33-34 // 1 Kgs 22:34-35). He had done his best to protect himself (see 18:29), but his plan was ineffective. The text describes an ironic occurrence. **Someone drew his bow at random** (18:33). An unnamed archer shot an arrow into the crowd and it struck Ahab **between the sections of his armor** (18:33). Had the arrow fallen slightly to the right or left, it would have caused no harm. But the arrow struck Ahab and **at sunset he died** (18:34). The implication is plain; the random arrow striking a precise target was an act of God which fulfilled the prophecy of Micaiah (see 18:22,27; see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). Just as Jehoshaphat was shown mercy, Ahab suffered divine judgment.

Jehoshaphat Returns to Jerusalem (19:1-3)

The Chronicler added a new ending to the story of Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab. These verses balance with the opening scene in which Jehoshaphat traveled to Samaria (18:1-2a) (see figure 35). He now returns to Jerusalem.

Besides this, the Chronicler added this ending to give his theological interpretation of the event. As with Asa's battle in alliance with Syria against Israel (see 16:1-10), a prophet confronted the king of Judah after battle. Without this prophetic reflection, readers may have the impression that this narrative depicts Jehoshaphat in a positive light. Up to this point, the text has not clearly denounced Jehoshaphat for his actions. Moreover, his prayer and deliverance sharply contrasted with the fate of Ahab. Yet, the Chronicler closed his record with an interpretative prophetic word to clarify matters.

Jehoshaphat **returned safely to his palace** (19:1). All seemed well until **Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani** approached him (19:2). As in other passages, a prophet stepped forward to warn of judgment (see *Introduction: 15) Prophets*). The mention of **Hanani** alludes to the parallel scene where Hanani rebuked Asa upon his return from Ramah (see 16:7-9).

Jehu first accused Jehoshaphat (19:2a). His accusation was similar and dissimilar to his father's words to Asa (see 16:7-9). Both prophets condemned the alliance of Judah with another power, but their reasons were not the same. Jehu challenged Jehoshaphat with two questions. He asked if the king of Judah should **help the wicked** or **love those who hate the Lord** (19:2). The term **help** often appears in Chronicles to describe God's assistance to those whom he favored (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). It also appears as a description of what sinful kings hope to get from sources other than God himself (see 2 Chr 28:16,21,23). Here, however, we see the one time the Chronicler used the term to denote the assistance a king of Judah gave to someone else. Jehu not only accused Jehoshaphat of offering **help**, but

also **love** (19:2). The term **love** frequently occurs in the ancient Near East to indicate a political loyalty. Jehu rebuked the king for what he had given to Ahab.

The Chronicler frequently encouraged an irenic outlook toward the northern kingdom. Here, however, the prophet denounced them as **wicked** and **those who hate the Lord** (19:2). Just as **love** often connoted political loyalties, **hate** suggested political or covenantal disloyalty. As the record of Kings indicates clearly, Ahab led northern Israel into severe apostasy (see 1 Kgs 20-21). The northern kingdom was in flagrant rebellion against God. Jehu therefore reprovved Jehoshaphat for aiding them in their rebellion. The implication for the Chronicler's readers was plain. While they were to work toward the ideal of a unified Israel, this goal was not to be pursued at the cost of aiding those who were in flagrant violation of Israel's covenant with God (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*).

Following his accusation, the prophet announced Jehoshaphat's sentence (19:2b-3). He first said that **the wrath of the Lord** was upon the king (19:2b). In other words, disasters would come to Jehoshaphat's kingdom. Yet, this harsh condemnation was mollified by the words that followed. God recognized **some good** in Jehoshaphat (19:3). A similar expression occurs in 12:12 where **some good** remained in Rehoboam's kingdom after Shishak's invasion (see also 10:7). The king of Judah was not a flagrant covenant breaker like his northern counterpart. For this reason, God's anger was not in full force against Judah.

This **good** in Jehoshaphat is described in two ways. First, he **rid the land of Asherah poles** (19:3). Here the Chronicler alluded to 17:6 where the king's devotion showed itself in extensive reforms. For the meaning of Asherah poles, see 14:3-5. Second, Jehoshaphat had given his **heart to seeking God** (19:3). These words touch on two of the Chronicler's central concerns. Jehoshaphat served God from his **heart**. His devotion was not merely outward; it stemmed from deep within (see *Introduction: 16) Motivations*). Moreover, Jehoshaphat was **seeking God**. "Seeking" God's help occurs five times in Jehoshaphat's reign (see 17:4; 18:4,6; 19:3; 20:3). As one who sought God from his heart, the king could expect to receive divine blessings even though troubles would come his way (see *Introduction: 19) Seeking*).

This event in Jehoshaphat's life had many implications for the post-exilic readers of Chronicles. Perhaps one of the most important lessons to be learned was its counterbalance to the Chronicler's encouragement toward an irenic attitude toward the North. Despite the need for the post-exilic community to expand its vision of Israel to include northern tribes, Jehoshaphat's experience taught that reunion must not be done in a manner that supports the wickedness of Judah's northern neighbors. Unity at the expense of covenant loyalty to God was unacceptable (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*).

Beyond this, these events also provided a word of hope for those who had failed to remain faithful. Jehoshaphat was delivered from the consequences of serious failure by seeking God through prayer. The Chronicler's readers could take hope in their own experiences of failure that seeking God would deliver them from trouble as well.