

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

by Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

<p>The Reign of Jehoshaphat, part 4: Jehoshaphat's Later Years, part 2: Jehoshaphat's Later Battle (2 Chronicles 20:1-30)</p>
--

Jehoshaphat's Later Battle (20:1-30)

The Chronicler added a second battle in the reign of Jehoshaphat which contrasts with his previous battle in 18:1-19:3 (see figure 35). Instead of forming an alliance to help the wicked (18:1-19:3), Jehoshaphat faced the challenge of war with complete fidelity to God.

Comparison of 20:1-30 with Kings

The Chronicler continued to add material which had no parallel in the book of Kings. These verses display a number of motifs characteristic of the Chronicler's theology.

Structure of 20:1-30

The story of Jehoshaphat's later battle forms a symmetrical seven step narrative (see figure 35). This passage begins with enemies attacking Jehoshaphat (20:1). In the end, however, the king enjoyed peace and rest (20:29-30). In response to the threat of enemies, Jehoshaphat held an assembly in Jerusalem (20:2-19); this material balances with the king's return to the city and the worshipful praise at that time (20:27-28). Judah's army marched into battle (20:20-21); the army collected plunder after battle (20:24-26). The turning point of the drama is God's intervention on Jehoshaphat's behalf (20:22-23).

Jehoshaphat's Enemies Attack (20:1)

This episode opens with a list of Jehoshaphat's enemies. They consisted of **Moabites**, **Ammonites**, and **Meunites** (20:1). The first two groups of people are well-known from Scripture and archaeology. The identity of the **Meunites**, however, is problematic. In the first place, the traditional Hebrew text of 2 Chr 20:1 does not read "Meunites." Instead, it

repeats "Ammonites" twice. The reading of **Meunites** in the NIV is probably correct, but it stems from the Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*). Later in this passage, these **Meunites** are identified as people **from Mount Seir** (20:23), a southwestern mountain range traditionally associated with the Edomites (see Gen 36:8,9; Num 24:18; Judg 5:4; Ezek 25:8; 35:15). Another related difficulty is the reading of the traditional Hebrew text in 20:2. There the attacking armies are said to come "from Aram" (NAS, NKJ). Some modern translations assume that this reading is an error that entered through textual transmission and emend to read **Edom** (NRS, NIV). The words "Edom" and "Aram" look very similar at several stages in the development of Hebrew script (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*). In favor of the NIV emendation is the fact that Aram (Syria) is in the north, but these armies were from the southern regions of **Mount Seir** (20:23). Therefore, it is likely that the Chronicler's text originally read **Edom** (20:2). The Chronicler mentioned the **Meunites** two other times in his history, always in association with the southern regions near Edom (see 1 Chr 4:41; 2 Chr 26:7). It would appear, therefore, that Jehoshaphat was attacked by a coalition originating in the south and east.

Jehoshaphat Holds an Assembly in Jerusalem (20:2-19)

The Chronicler turned next to Jehoshaphat's actions in Jerusalem. In the overarching structure of this chapter, these verses balance with the king's return to Jerusalem and the assembly of praise (see 20:27-28; see figure 35).

Structure of 20:2-19

This section divides into two parts, each of which divides into three symmetrical steps (see figure 35). This portion of Jehoshaphat's fidelity in battle focuses on two events. First, Jehoshaphat called an assembly in response to the threat of his enemies (20:2-4). Second, the text reports the ceremony of the assembly (20:5-19). The Chronicler gave much attention to detail, showing how very interested he was in the specific actions taken by Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah.

Calling of the Assembly (20:2-4)

These verses describe the calling of Judahites to Jerusalem. In 20:5,14,26 this gathering is called an **assembly**. This terminology was the Chronicler's way of noting the sacred character of the meeting. Throughout his history he pointed to such religious assemblies as particularly important events. Each incident of an assembly displayed activities that the post-exilic community should have followed in its day (see *Introduction: 5) Religious Assemblies*).

Structure of 20:2-4

This material divides into three steps (see figure 35). Jehoshaphat realized his problem (20:2), called for an assembly (20:3), and the assembly convened to deal with the problem (20:4).

This assembly was initiated because Jehoshaphat heard about his enemies. His men told him that a **vast army** was approaching (20:2). In his usual fashion, the Chronicler prepared his readers for a great victory of God by describing the enormous size of Judah's enemies (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*). In this chapter the enemies are described as a **vast army** four times (see 20:2,12,15,24). This massive army had come from beyond **the Sea** (i.e. the Dead Sea) and had reached **En Gedi**, a location halfway along the western shore of the Dead Sea (20:2). This route of approach was somewhat unusual and may have taken Jehoshaphat by surprise. Thus the Chronicler enhanced the emotional tension of the story.

The second step of this segment describes how Jehoshaphat was **alarmed** by his enemy's approach (20:3). To have such a large army so near by (approximately 25 miles southeast of Jerusalem) threatened Jehoshaphat. As a result, he **resolved to inquire of the Lord** (20:3). The Chronicler emphasized "inquiring of" or "seeking" God as necessary for those who wished to receive God's blessing (see *Introduction: 19) Seeking*). Jehoshaphat is praised a number of times for seeking God (see 17:4; 18:4,6; 19:3; 20:3). In this difficult situation Jehoshaphat did precisely what Solomon hoped his own readers would do in their troubles (see 7:14). He sought help from God.

Jehoshaphat **proclaimed a fast for all Judah** (20:3). The biblical record reports many fasts in connection with a time of war or other trouble (see 1 Sam 7:6; Ezr 8:23; Neh 1:4; Est 4:16; Isa 58:6; Jer 36:6; Dan 9:3; Joel 1:14). Even so, Jehoshaphat is the only king in Chronicles who called a national fast. The Chronicler exalted Jehoshaphat by reporting his extraordinary religious devotion.

The third step of this segment was Judah's response to the king's call. The Chronicler already reported that the king invited **all Judah** to the fast (see 20:3). At this point, he made it very clear that the **people of Judah ... from every town** joined the king (20:4). This description fit well with the Chronicler's ideal of the unity of all Israel (see *Introduction: 1) All Israel*).

Beyond this, the Chronicler reported that the people came with a clear motivation. They assembled **to seek help from the Lord ... to seek him** (20:4). Not only did the Chronicler point to his frequent theme of divine help (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*), he also repeated the motif of "seeking." Repeating this theme so near the similar description of Jehoshaphat (see 20:3) highlighted the exemplary character of this event. Jehoshaphat's

assembly conformed to the conditions for blessing set forth to Solomon (see 7:14; see also *Introduction: 19) Seeking*).

Judah's response to Jehoshaphat modeled the kind of actions which were incumbent upon the post-exilic readers of Chronicles. As they faced hardships, they too should have joined together in fasting and seeking God.

Ceremony of the Assembly (20:5-19)

Having elucidated how Jehoshaphat called an assembly, the Chronicler continued with a focus on the ceremonies performed at the gathering (20:5-19).

Structure of 20:5-19

As the outline above indicates (see figure 35), this material divides into three parts: the prayer (20:5-13), the divine response (20:14-17), and the praise (20:18-19). The opening and closing sections of this material balance each other. The opening prayer (20:5-13) begins with the note that **Jehoshaphat stood up** (20:5); it ends with the fact that all the people attending also **stood there before the Lord** (20:13). The closing praise (20:18-19), however, notes that **Jehoshaphat bowed ... and all the people ... fell down in worship before the Lord** (20:18). The juxtaposition is evident and sets the boundaries for this material.

This passage reflects a common pattern in Israel's worship known as a liturgy of lament. It opens with a prayer of lament followed by a priestly/prophetic announcement of deliverance, and closes with a response of praise. This basic pattern appears many times in the Old Testament (see 1 Sam 1:3-20; Joel 2) and lies behind a number of Psalms of lament (see Ps 22, 44, 60, 74, 79, 83, 89).

Jehoshaphat and Assembly Pray for Help (20:5-13)

The first step consists of Jehoshaphat's prayer (20:5-13). The king's prayer is introduced (20:5) and a closing remark follows it (20:13). The prayer itself contains the elements typical of laments. It divides into a recital of past blessings (20:6-7), a statement of innocence and trust (20:8-9), a complaint about trouble (20:10-11), and a petition (20:12).

Jehoshaphat's prayer took place **at the temple in front of the new courtyard** (20:5). This description oriented the readers to the prayer as an example of the temple's significance in the life of Israel. As Solomon prayed (see 6:14-42) and God promised (see 7:12-22), the temple served as the place of prayer in this time of trouble (see *Introduction: 17) Prayer*).

This is the only appearance of the designation **the new courtyard** and its referent is not altogether clear. It is likely, however, that the Chronicler had in mind "the large court" as opposed to the inner court of the priests (see 4:9; see also *Introduction: Appendix B -The Structures, Furnishings and Decorations of Solomon's Temple*).

Jehoshaphat began with praise for God's blessings in the past. His praise first affirmed that God was "**the God of our fathers**" (20:6). The king then immediately moved to a more general descriptive praise of God. He praised God because he is **in heaven** and therefore rules **over all the kingdoms of the nations** (20:6). God has such **power and might** that **no one can withstand** him (20:6). Jehoshaphat's words were very similar to the prayer of David (see 1 Chr 29:11-12). Both prayers exalt God by focusing on his power over all kingdoms.

After a general description of God's supremacy, Jehoshaphat's praise narrowed to a particular demonstration of divine power that was relevant to his situation. He mentioned the conquest of Canaan (20:7). God used his power on behalf of his people at that time, and Jehoshaphat was about to call on him to do the same in his day. Moreover, the king urged that God gave the land of Canaan **forever to the descendants of Abraham** (20:7). Jehoshaphat's reference to the permanent bestowal of the land to Israel fit well with his situation. The approaching armies threatened Judah's possession of the land, but God had given it to them **forever**. The king intensified his perspective by describing Abraham as **your** (God's) **friend** (20:7). Only Isa 41:8 refers to Abraham in this manner (see also James 2:23). The intimate relationship between God and Abraham pointed to the importance of God protecting Judah's rights to the land of promise.

Jehoshaphat's praise not only suited his situation, but the post-exilic readers' circumstances as well. Just as Jehoshaphat hoped for deliverance because God had power over the kingdoms of the earth, the post-exilic community had to rely on divine power over the nations for security in its day. Moreover, the Chronicler held firmly that the patriarchal promise of the land applied to his day as well (For the Chronicler's geographical hopes see comments on 2:42-55.)

As is typical for prayers of lament, Jehoshaphat's opening praise was followed by a declaration of fidelity and trust (20:8-9). He mentioned that Israel had built **a sanctuary for** [God's] **Name** (20:8). The king referred to Solomon's construction of the temple. As Solomon declared in his dedicatory prayer (see 2 Chr 6:18-20,34,38), the temple was built not for God himself, but for his **Name**. The Name of God is his accessibility, his invocable presence on earth (see *Introduction: 11) Name of God*). Solomon built the temple in hopes that God would bless the building as the place at which Israel could find help from God in the generations to come.

To draw this connection to Solomon more explicitly, Jehoshaphat paraphrased Solomon's dedicatory prayer in 20:9. Solomon demonstrated trust in God by asking God to hear prayers offered in the temple. Jehoshaphat alluded to 6:28,34, but he shaped his summary of

Solomon's words to suit his own circumstances. Judah now faced the threat of war and appealed to Solomon's hopes in the temple as a basis for his petition.

Jehoshaphat's declaration of fidelity led to his complaint (20:10-11). In the Psalms of lament petitioners often complain about their personal suffering, their opponents, and their God. Here Jehoshaphat complained about the approaching armies. His complaint consisted of two main thoughts. First, he recalled how God did not **allow Israel to invade** the lands of **Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir** in the days of Moses and Joshua (20:10; see 20:7). The armies of Israel **did not destroy them** as they could have (20:10). Jehoshaphat referred to the well-known events recorded in Nu 20:14-21 and Deut 2:4-6,9,18-19.

Second, Jehoshaphat reflected on the fact that the people spared by God and Israel were **now repaying** [them] **by coming to drive** [them] **out** (20:11). Instead of reciprocating Israel's kindness, the Ammonites, Moabites, and Meunites attacked. They intended to drive Israel out of her **inheritance** (20:11). The terminology of **inheritance** derived from Mosaic legal language which indicated a permanent bestowal of land from God (see Lev 25:23-24; Dt 11:8-12; 1 Kgs 21:3; 1 Chr 28:8). As Israel's King, God gave the land of Canaan to his people in perpetuity. (For the Chronicler's geographical hopes see comments on 2:42-55.) For this reason, when these enemies attacked Israel, they defied God himself. Jehoshaphat's complaint was not only designed to express his own frustration with the ingratitude of these nations, but also to incite divine wrath against them.

Jehoshaphat's prayer reached its high point in 20:12. Here he offered his petition and support for his request. Simply put, the king asked God to **judge them** (20:12). His request was in the form of a question fully expecting a positive response: "**Will you not judge?**" (20:12). Jehoshaphat felt he had every reason to believe God would destroy his enemies. He explained that his confidence rested on the fact that Israel had **no power to face this vast army** (20:12). As we have already seen, this battle narrative emphasizes the inadequacy of Judah's army (see 20:2). The superiority of Judah's enemies is a repeated theme in several of the Chronicler's battle narratives (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*). In this case, however, the motif not only points to divine power as the source of victory. It also expressed Jehoshaphat's humble dependence on God. He and the Judahites did **not know what to do** except to **turn** [their] **eyes upon** God (20:12).

Just as the Chronicler described the setting of Jehoshaphat's prayer (20:5), he also closed the prayer with another look at the scene (20:13). This passage does not focus on the king, but on the people involved in the assembly. **All the men of Judah** stood with Jehoshaphat as he prayed (20:13). This fact highlighted another exemplary aspect of this event. All the people joined Jehoshaphat in prayer (see 20:3,4). The text states explicitly that **wives and children and little ones** were present as well (20:13). On a number of occasions the Chronicler mentioned the participation of women and children. His repeated references suggest that these segments of society were important aspects of his concept of the people of God. Although we can be sure that not every individual Judahite came to Jerusalem, the vast majority of the citizens of Judah attended the assembly (see *Introduction: 1) All Israel*).

Jehoshaphat's prayer was reported so that it spoke directly to the needs of his post-exilic readers. As we have already seen, this story portrays Jehoshaphat as a positive example. His prayer of lament was exemplary as well. His humility and dependence on God was precisely what the first readers of Chronicles needed to imitate. The attendance of all of Judah, including women and children, encouraged unity and widespread participation in such humility.

Jehoshaphat and Assembly Receive Response (20:14-17)

As often happened in liturgies of lament, God responded to his people through an oracle. In this case, the response came through a Levite in the assembly. The Chronicler first described the scene of the oracle (20:14) and then summarized the message (20:15-17).

The messenger of God was **Jahaziel ... a Levite** (20:14). A number of times, the Chronicler mentioned that Levites served a prophetic function. (For the Chronicler's outlook on Levitical prophecy see comments on 1 Chr 25:1; see also *Introduction: 15) Prophets*.) **Jahaziel** stood in the assembly and **the Spirit of the Lord came upon him** (20:14). We do not know precisely how the special descent of the Spirit effected the human recipient. Perhaps some kind of ecstatic experience took place (see 1 Sam 10:5-6,9-10). In all cases where the Spirit of God came on people, his inspiration authorized their outlooks. Jahaziel did not speak on his own, but under the power of the Holy Spirit. (For a summary of the Chronicler's outlook on the Spirit see comments on 1 Chr 12:18.)

Jahaziel's message is typical of prophetic oracles of salvation given in response to laments (see Jer 28:2-4; Isa 43:1-4; 44:1-5). Even so, it is clear that the Chronicler reported Jahaziel's speech in such a way as to connect it closely with Deut 20:2-4. In this passage, Moses ordered that priests were to assure the people of victory as they prepared to fight in the conquest of the land. Moses himself had done the same at the Red Sea (see Ex 14:13-14). The Chronicler had already connected this battle with Israel's earlier conquest (see 20:7,10). By modeling Jahaziel's speech after Moses and his instructions, the Chronicler demonstrated that the battle in Jehoshaphat's day followed the pattern of the earlier ideal holy war battles of Israel.

Jahaziel's speech divides into three parts. After an introductory address (20:15a), he spoke a word of encouragement (20:15b). He then instructed Jehoshaphat and Judah on the battle plan (20:16-17a). This instruction is framed in by another encouragement (20:17b) which is very similar to the openings words (20:15b).

Jahaziel addressed **King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem** (20:15a). The word that followed was not just for the king's hearing. It was to be received by the assembly representing the entire nation of Judah (see 20:3,4,13; see *Introduction: 1) All Israel*).

Jahaziel began his speech with an exhortation for Judah not to be **afraid or discouraged** (20:15b). Similar language appears in the Mosaic passages of preparation for battle (see Ex 14:13-14; Deut 3:22; 7:17-19; 20:1-4; 31:6,8; see also Josh 1:9; 1 Chr 22:13; 28:20; 2 Chr 32:7). These words assured the listeners that they had nothing to fear.

The Levite continued with a reason for confidence: "**for the battle is not yours, but God's**" (20:15b). This motif points once again to the connection with Moses and his instructions for priests (see Ex 14:13-14; Deut 7:19-22; 20:2-4; see also 1 Sam 17:47). In these passages as well, the reason for confidence is that God will fight on behalf of his people.

The Chronicler expressed this theme on several other occasions (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). From his point of view, when God fought on behalf of Judah, victory was inevitable.

Instructions for Jehoshaphat and Judah followed the initial encouragement (20:16-17a). Judah's army must **march down against** the approaching enemies (20:16), but they **will not have to fight this battle** (20:17a). To one degree or another, every exemplary holy war battle in the Bible downplays the human factor and exalts the action of God. In this case, however, the passivity of the army of Judah is emphasized beyond normal. All Judah had to do was to **take up ... position and stand firm and see** (20:17a). Jehoshaphat and his army did not need to fight at all. The allusion to the crossing of the Red Sea is evident (see Ex 14:13). There Israel simply watched God destroy the Egyptian army. In this battle, the army of Judah would do much the same (see 20:24).

Jehaziel closed his speech as he began it (see 20:15b). He exhorted the people not to be **afraid or discouraged** (20:17b). He supported his exhortation once again. This time, however, he simply said "**the Lord will be with you**" (20:17b). That God was "with" his people was the same as saying he would lead them into battle (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*).

Jehoshaphat and Assembly Respond with Praise (20:18-19)

The Chronicler's account of Jehoshaphat's assembly closes with the reaction to Jehaziel's oracle (20:18-19). In effect, two things happen. First, there is humble bowing before God. The king **bowed with his face to the ground and all the people fell down** (20:18). Note once again that the participation included **all the people** (see *Introduction: 1) All Israel*). The act of bowing demonstrated the humility of the king and the entire assembly in response to the kindness of God.

Second, as with most laments in the Old Testament (for exceptions see Ps 44 and 88), the oracle of salvation led to joyous praise. The people of Judah prepared to march into battle full of confidence and grateful praise to God. The Chronicler noted that some **Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the Lord** (20:19). The Chronicler identified these divisions

of Levites a number of times in his history (see 1 Chr 6:22-23,33-38,54-61,66-70; 9:19,31-32; 12:6; 15:5; 23:12-20; 26:1-19; 2 Chr 29:12-14; 34:12-13). They honored God **with a very loud voice** (20:19). The enthusiasm of the musicians reflected the joyous celebration in the hearts of all who attended the assembly (see *Introduction: 8) Music*).

This scene of overwhelming joy expressed in song recalls a number of similar scenes throughout the Chronicler's history. The description of celebration before God was designed to inspire the post-exilic readers to emulate the attitudes and actions that led to these joyous results (see *Introduction: 27) Disappointment and Celebration*).

Jehoshaphat's Army Marches to Battle (20:20-21)

The next day Jehoshaphat led his army to meet the enemies (20:20-21). This report of departure divides into three simple scenes: the departure (20:20a), the exhortation (20:20b), and the marching order (20:21).

The Chronicler began this section by noting that the departure was **early in the morning** (20:20a). This temporal reference indicates that Jehoshaphat did precisely as he was commanded. Jahaziel had ordered him to leave **tomorrow** (20:16). As soon as tomorrow came, Jehoshaphat left for battle. Once again, Jehoshaphat's behavior was presented as exemplary.

After noting when the army left, the Chronicler turned to Jehoshaphat's exhortation (20:20b). The king exhorted his army **as they set out** (20:20b). Speeches before battles take place on several occasions in Chronicles (see 1 Chr 19:12-13; 2 Chr 13:4-12; 25:7-9; 32:7-8). Jehoshaphat's speech divides into three parts noted by three imperatives: **listen ... have faith ... have faith** (20:20b).

Jehoshaphat gave these final instructions because the outcome of battle was still uncertain. As with many prophecies in the Old Testament, implicit conditions applied to the prophecy of victory. In this case, the Levite's instructions for battle formed an implicit condition which Judah still had to meet (see 20:16-17).

The language of the first sentence in Jehoshaphat's exhortation alludes to the speech of Jahaziel in 20:15-17. The Levite addressed the king and **all who live in Judah and Jerusalem** (20:15). Jehoshaphat spoke to **Judah and the people of Jerusalem** (20:20b). As he sent his people into battle, Jehoshaphat addressed the same people as the Levite before him.

The second sentence exhorts the people to **have faith in the Lord** (20:20b). Unlike Asa before him (see 16:1-9), Jehoshaphat relied entirely on God to give him this victory. As the king and his army went out to battle, Jehoshaphat wanted to make sure that his army met the

condition of trusting God to fight for them. If they trusted God, they would **be upheld** (20:20b).

In much the same way, the third sentence of Jehoshaphat's exhortation tells the people to **have faith in his prophets** (20:20b). In all likelihood, the use of the plural referred not simply to Jehaziel who had just prophesied the day before (see 20:15-17), but to all of the Levites who confirmed the message of Jehaziel with their music and praise (see 20:19). They would soon lead the army into battle (see 20:21). Jehoshaphat insisted that his army follow the directions of the Levitical prophet(s). If they did so, they would **be successful** (20:20b).

Jehoshaphat's call to listen to the prophets fit with a motif that appears many times in Chronicles. On a number of occasions blessings and judgments occur as a result of reaction to prophets (see *Introduction: 15) Prophets*). Undoubtedly, this theme encouraged post-exilic Israelites to pay attention to the prophetic word in their day.

After exhorting the people, Jehoshaphat arranged the army in marching formation (20:21). The Chronicler noted, however, that Jehoshaphat did not act until **after consulting with the people** (20:21). By doing so, the Chronicler drew attention to the importance of leadership making decisions with the consensus of the people. For the Chronicler's use of this motif see comments on 1 Chr 13:1. The Chronicler's repetition of this theme may have been motivated by political realities in his day.

Jehoshaphat then **appointed men to sing to the Lord** (20:21). It seems most likely that these appointments were from within the Levitical musical clans. They sang a Psalm that the Chronicler elsewhere attributed to the Levitical singers (see 5:13). These Levitical musicians went forward **at the head of the army** (20:21). In yet another way, the Chronicler emphasized Jehoshaphat's exemplary actions. Here he made it clear that the king followed the marching directives of Moses by putting Levites at the head of the army (see Nu 10:33-35).

Levitical music played an important role in the holy wars of Israel (see *Introduction: 8) Music*). Priests and Levites often led into battle with music (e.g. Josh 6:4-20; 2 Chr 13:11-12). This feature of Israelite warfare should be understood in light of its symbolic nature. Israel's army was only an earthly reflection of the great army of heaven led by God himself (see Deut 33:2-5, 26-29; Josh 5:13-15; Judg 5; Ps 68:8-13; 2 Kgs 6:15-19; 7:6; Isa 13:1-13; Joel 4:9-12; Hab 3). As such, the work of Israel's musicians corresponded to the spiritual, heavenly music that accompanied the appearance of God in battle. His march into battle was marked by the blast of a heavenly trumpet (see Ex 19:16,19; Isa 18:3; 27:13; Am 2:2; Zeph 1:14-16; Zech 9:14; Matt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52; Rev 8-9; 10:7; 11:15). The music of Israel's earthly army symbolized that heavenly reality.

God Intervenes for Jehoshaphat (20:22-23)

With Judah moving toward her approaching enemies, the Chronicler came to the turning point of this story: divine intervention (20:22-23). The record consists of a summary of the event (20:22) which is followed by more details (20:23).

The Chronicler set the time for divine intervention as the beginning of singing (20:22). This chronological reference indicated that the defeat of Judah's enemies occurred before Jehoshaphat even reached the site. By this means the Chronicler stressed the supernatural character of the event.

The Chronicler simply stated that **the Lord set ambushes** (20:22). The chronological reference at the beginning of 22:22 rules out a Judean ambush. For this reason, some interpreters have suggested that the Chronicler meant that a small contingent from one of the opposing armies began a series of ambushes. This point of view cannot be ruled out (see 20:23). On the other hand, the Chronicler may have meant that the heavenly army of God ambushed the enemies of Judah. Elsewhere in the Old Testament the army of heaven moves ahead of the army of Israel (see 2 Sam 5:24; 2 Kgs 7:5-7; 19:35; Isa 13:4; Ezek 1:24). The Chronicler's understanding of this event was probably along these lines (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). In all events, the enemies of Judah **were defeated** by God (20:22).

After attributing the defeat of Jehoshaphat's enemies to God's intervention, the Chronicler explained how the defeat took place in two steps (20:23). The armies of **Ammon and Moab rose up** against the Meunites (20:23a). Then, after **slaughtering the men from Seir** (the Meunites), the Ammonites and Moabites turned on each other (20:23b). God caused confusion among the enemies of his people so that they actually destroy themselves. An enemy's self-defeat appears frequently in the Old Testament and depicts one way in which supernatural intervention is recognized (see Judg 7:22; 1 Sam 14:20; 2 Kgs 3:23; Ezek 38:21; Hag 2:22; Zech 14:13). When enemies become so confused that they destroy themselves, it demonstrates that God was behind their defeat. The Chronicler described these events in this manner to make it clear to his readers that God had intervened on behalf of Jehoshaphat (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*).

In a political environment that held threats on every side, post-exilic Israel needed God to intervene for them as well. Through Jehoshaphat's example, the Chronicler taught his readers how this kind of divine help was possible in their day.

Jehoshaphat's Army Gathers Plunder (20:24-26)

In balance with the marching of Judah's army into battle (20:20-21; see figure 35), the Chronicler described the aftermath of divine intervention (20:24-26). This portion divides into three scenes: the arrival of the army (20:24), the collection of plunder (20:25), and praise on the battlefield (20:26).

Once again, the Chronicler stressed the passivity of Judah's army (20:24). When the army came to the place of battle, they looked toward **the vast army** (20:2,12,15). Yet, the preceding divine intervention was so complete that **they saw only dead bodies; ... no one had escaped** (20:24). The Chronicler recorded a number of battles in which the people of God were victorious (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*). Yet, at no other place did he depict the defeat of Israel's enemies in such categorical terms. Not only did Judah's army have nothing to do with the battle; the entire opposing force was destroyed.

Moreover, the Chronicler increased his readers' astonishment at Judah's victory by describing the plunder of battle (20:25). The army of Judah found **a great amount ... more than they could take away**. In fact, **it took three days to collect it** (20:25). The plunder of this battle is greater than any other battle in Chronicles. The Chronicler wanted his post-exilic readers to look with amazement at Jehoshaphat's victory.

After three days of collecting plunder, the Judahites assembled and **praised the Lord** (20:26). The place of this praise was **the Valley of Beracah** (20:26). **Beracah** derives from a Hebrew word often translated "praise." The Judahites had no doubt as to who deserved credit for the defeat of these enemies. God had won a great victory for his people.

The Chronicler also added the note that the name of **Beracah** was used even **to this day** (20:26). Here he referred to the days of his post-exilic readers to draw a connection between these events and their own times. For a fuller discussion of his use of this terminology see the comments on 1 Chr 4:41.

The spectacular victory experienced in Jehoshaphat's day certainly encouraged the Chronicler's readers to take Jehoshaphat's example to heart. Tremendous victories could be theirs as well.

Jehoshaphat Returns and Holds an Assembly (20:27-28)

In balance with Jehoshaphat's earlier assembly of fasting (20:2-19; see figure 35), the Chronicler depicted another assembly in Jerusalem (20:27-28). In this case, however, the mood is very positive; here the Chronicler continued his focus on the joy resulting from Judah's victory. Although the term "assembly" does not appear in this passage, it is clear that this gathering was a religious assembly because it took place at **the temple of the Lord** (20:28). As such, the actions here also contribute to the Chronicler's emphasis on the importance of religious assemblies in Israel's history (see *Introduction: 5) Religious Assemblies*).

Jehoshaphat led the army back to Jerusalem. They **returned joyfully ... for the Lord had given them cause to rejoice** (20:27). Instead of fear which characterized the initiation of

Jehoshaphat's first assembly (20:2-3), the Judahites were full of joy because of God's intervention (see *Introduction: 27) Disappointment and Celebration*).

Their victory parade reached Jerusalem and **went to the temple of the Lord with harps and lutes and trumpets** (20:28). This passage demonstrates the Chronicler's continuing interest in the music of worship (see *Introduction: 8) Music*). As in many other passages, the splendor of Judah's joyful experience is described as a time of playing many musical instruments. The music of this scene recalls the musical response to the oracle of Jahaziel (see 20:19). Liturgically, it may be seen as an extension of that earlier praise. Now that victory had come, the people of Judah returned to the temple to honor God for fighting on their behalf. A number of Psalms probably represent the kind of songs employed at times of victory celebration (see Ps 24, 68, 118, 136). In these Psalms, God was celebrated as the incomparable Divine Warrior.

The Chronicler filled this story with the wonder of Judah's praise not only to instruct his readers, but to give them positive motivation for imitating the ways of Jehoshaphat in this narrative. If they desired to experience this kind of joy, they had to follow the example of Jehoshaphat (see *Introduction: 27) Disappointment and Celebration*).

Jehoshaphat Has Peace and Rest (20:29-30)

Jehoshaphat's second battle closes with a hopeful report. In contrast to the beginning of this story (20:1; see figure 35), Judah was no longer threatened by foreign powers. The nations around Judah **heard how the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel** (20:29).

Word spread far and wide that Judah had victory over her innumerable foes. As a result, **the fear of God came upon all the kingdoms** (20:29). The Chronicler spoke of the nations fearing God and Judah on several occasions (see *Introduction: 3) International Relations*).

In this passage, the fear of God over the nations resulted in **peace and rest on every side** (20:30). The terms rest and peace imply military security and economic prosperity. A number of times Chronicles indicates that the people of God received these blessings from God as reward for their fidelity (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*).

The Chronicler's outlook becomes clear when we remember that the same motif appears earlier in Jehoshaphat's reign. Because of Jehoshaphat's fidelity to God, the nations feared God and they did not make war with Judah (see 17:10). By ending this narrative with the same motif, the Chronicler held out a great hope to his post-exilic readers. Jehoshaphat had failed to be loyal to God in his alliance with Ahab and was condemned to the wrath of God (see 19:2). Nevertheless, all was not lost for Jehoshaphat. After his failure, he served God faithfully (see 19:4-11) and was exemplary in battle (see 20:1-30). As a result, he received another portion of peace and rest later in his reign. The Chronicler's readers could take hope from this series of events. Although they had failed God, all hope was not lost for them.