

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

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The Reign of Jehoshaphat, part 5: Closure of Jehoshaphat's Reign (2 Chronicles 20:31–21:3)

Closure of Jehoshaphat's Reign (20:31-21:3)

The Chronicler closed his record of Jehoshaphat's reign with a summary of his life, a brief narrative, and reports of his death and successor. This material reminds the readers that Jehoshaphat's reign was a mixture of infidelity and fidelity.

Comparison of 20:31-21:3 with 1 Kings 22:41-50

Much of this material stems from the book of Kings. The following comparison indicates a number of variations (see figure 36).

2 Chr		1 Kgs
20:31a	Synchronization with North (abbreviated)	22:41
20:31b-33	Summation (closely parallel)	22:42-43
20:34	Records of Jehoshaphat (loosely parallel)	22:45
-----	Male Prostitution (omitted)	22:46
20:35-37	Maritime Venture (expanded)	22:44,48-49
21:1	Closure of Reign (closely parallel)	22:50
21:2-3	Jehoram's Brothers (added)	-----

Comparison of 2 Chr 20:31-21:3 with 1 Kgs 22:41-50 (figure 36)

As the comparison above indicates, a number of typical changes are evident. First, the Chronicler omitted the synchronization with the North as he normally did (20:31a // 1 Kgs 22:41). Second, he shifted attention to the prophetic records of Jehoshaphat's reign as he did elsewhere (20:34 // 1 Kgs 22:45; see *Introduction: 15) Prophets*). Third, once again the mention of male cultic prostitution is omitted (1 Kgs 22:46).

An important shift takes place in the notice that "the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense" (1 Kgs 22:43). The Chronicler turned attention away from the acts themselves to indicate the source of the problem: **the people still had not set their hearts on the God of their fathers** (20:33).

The most significant variation in this passage appears in the expansion of Jehoshaphat's maritime venture (20:35-37 // 1 Kgs 22:44,48-49). The Chronicler added that Jehoshaphat entered an alliance with the Israelite king Ahaziah (20:35). He also added a prophetic rebuke directed toward Jehoshaphat because of his alliance and indicated divine judgment destroyed the king's ships (20:37). These themes fit well with the Chronicler's opposition to alliances with the North (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*) and with the important role prophets played in his history (see *Introduction: 15) Prophets*).

Structure of 20:31-21:3

As a result of his changes, the Chronicler's ending to Jehoshaphat's reign divides into three parts (see figure 35). A summation of Jehoshaphat's reign (20:31-34) is followed by an expanded record of the king's maritime alliance (20:35-37). It is difficult to understand why the Chronicler chose to introduce this story among the final notices of Jehoshaphat's life. It may be that he wanted to leave the symmetry of the main portion of the king's reign intact. Whatever the motivation, this story forms an afterword to the main account of Jehoshaphat's reign. The third element in this section is a typical record of the king's death and burial (21:1-3).

Summary of Jehoshaphat's Reign (20:31-34)

In his usual fashion, the Chronicler summarized Jehoshaphat's reign by noting a number of facts about the king. He recorded that the king ruled **twenty-five years** (20:31). The book of kings reports "twenty-two years" (2 Kgs 3:1; 8:16). In all likelihood, the Chronicler included three years of co-regency with Asa during his severe foot disease (16:10-14).

The Chronicler's summary of Jehoshaphat's reign compares him with Asa (20:32-33). Both kings **did what was right in the eyes of the Lord** (20:32 // 1 Kgs 22:43). The Chronicler's record of the king includes times of obedience and disobedience. Positive

evaluations were not withheld from kings who had serious failings. On the whole the Chronicler wanted his readers to evaluate both kings positively.

20:33, however, raises two negative considerations. The Chronicler noted that **the high places, however, were not removed**. Like Asa (see 14:3,5; 15:17), Jehoshaphat both removed and did not remove high places (17:6; 20:33). Apparently, Jehoshaphat was not entirely consistent in this matter throughout his reign. Nevertheless, the Chronicler also indicated that the resilience of worship at the high places was not due to the king himself, but to the people. As we have seen, the book of Kings reads at this point that "the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there" (1 Kgs 22:43). The Chronicler substituted his own characteristic concern with wholehearted devotion. He noted that **the people still had not set their hearts on the God of their fathers** (20:33). Although Jehoshaphat served God from his heart (see 19:3), the lack of inward devotion among the people caused trouble in the future. Here the Chronicler focused on the heart motivations of the people as he did in many other passages (see *Introduction: 16) Motivations*).

The Chronicler closed his summary of Jehoshaphat's reign by adding that more information appeared in **the annals of Jehu son of Hanani** which are themselves in the larger work of **the book of the kings of Israel** (20:34). The reference here is not to the canonical book of Kings. Jehu only appears in 1 Kgs 16:1,7,12 which hardly constitute **annals of Jehu** (20:34). In his typical fashion, the Chronicler indicates his keen interest in the prophetic records of Judah's kings (see *Introduction: 15) Prophets*).

Jehoshaphat's Maritime Alliance (20:35-37)

As noted above, the record of 1 Kgs 22:47-50 has been transformed into a story of alliance with the North. This change drew attention to a theme already mentioned in the king's reign. Earlier Jehoshaphat allied himself with Ahab and received a sharp prophetic rebuke (19:1-3). At this point, the text indicates that Jehoshaphat fell into the same problem again.

Structure of 20:35-37

This brief narrative divides into three steps (see figure 35). Jehoshaphat began to build with Ahaziah (20:35-36a). A prophet condemned the action (20:36b-37a). Jehoshaphat's plans were spoiled in fulfillment of the prophetic word (20:37b).

Jehoshaphat Builds Ships with Ahaziah (20:35-36a)

The first step of this episode describes how Jehoshaphat constructed **a fleet of trading ships** (20:36a). This action in itself was an acceptable, if not admirable. The ideal king Solomon had established an extensive maritime trade system (see 8:17-18).

Nevertheless, he accomplished this end by making **an alliance with Ahaziah king of Israel** (20:35). Solomon had cooperated with Hiram in his ventures into sea trade (see 8:17-18). It would appear that the Chronicler did not consider cooperation with other nations in such efforts as infidelity (see *Introduction: 3) International Relations*). Jehoshaphat's error was that he allied himself with a Northern Israelite king **who was guilty of wickedness** (20:35). A similar rebuke came to Jehoshaphat earlier for his alliance with Ahab (see 19:1-3). Northern Israel was in rebellion against God and consequently alliances were forbidden (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*).

Prophetic Condemnation (20:36b-37a)

As it happened earlier in Jehoshaphat's reign (see 19:1-3), a prophet appeared to rebuke the king for his infidelity. **Eliezer son of Dodavahu** is otherwise unknown (20:37a), but his message followed the standard form of an oracle of judgment. He first brought an accusation: the king had **made an alliance with Ahaziah** (20:37a). As the reigns following Jehoshaphat will illustrate, this practice proved to have severe consequences for Judah in future generations (see 21:1-24:27; see also *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*). The prophet then followed his accusation with a sentencing: **the Lord will destroy what you have made** (20:37a). The judgment was appropriate for the sin.

Jehoshaphat's Ships are Destroyed (20:37b)

In contrasting balance with the king's initial plan, the Chronicler ended this scenario by adding that the prophetic word was fulfilled. Jehoshaphat's ships **wrecked and were not able to set sail to trade** (20:37b). The king's dependence on the wicked instead of God proved to have serious consequences. The implications for the post-exilic readers were evident. Disaster comes to those who turn to the wicked of the North for help. Trust in God is the way of success for Judah.

Jehoshaphat's Death, Burial, and Successor (21:1-3)

Having finished his version of Jehoshaphat's failed attempt to establish sea trade, the Chronicler returned to following the text of 1 Kgs 22:50 very closely. He noted that Jehoshaphat was succeeded by his son Jehoram.

Following this straightforward notice of succession, the Chronicler added an historical report explaining how Jehoshaphat had prepared the way for his son. Jehoshaphat had treated all of his sons well. He **had given them many gifts ... as well as fortified cities** (21:3). Yet, Jehoram received **the kingdom ... because he was the firstborn son** (21:3). It is difficult to determine if the Chronicler praised Jehoshaphat for his actions. They certainly provided for a smooth transition of power. Yet, it may also have been the case that the choice of Jehoram was simply due to his firstborn status. In other words, Jehoshaphat may not have considered the character of sons as he made his choice of successor. As we will see, Jehoram proved to be the cause of many troubles for Judah. The Chronicler may have been suggesting that Jehoshaphat's choice was the cause of this turn for the worse. In all events, Jehoshaphat's reign came to an end and his son Jehoram took the throne of Judah.