



Second Chronicles - Chapter Seventeen

III 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23 - The Kingdom of Judah Down to the Exile (continues)

Summary of Chapter Seventeen

Following the death of Asa, his son Jehoshaphat became the king of Judah. He was basically a good king following the ways of the Lord. He continued to build the defences of Judah and had a strong standing army. As well as continuing the work of his father to eradicate pagan worship, Jehoshaphat sent out teachers of the law into all the towns and cities of Judah so that the people might have a better understanding of the ways of the Lord. Neighbouring nations such as the Philistines and the Arabs paid tribute to Jehoshaphat for the nation was strong both militarily and spiritually.

III.d 2 Chronicles 17:1-20:37 - Jehoshaphat

Jehoshaphat's reign (872-848 BC) probably included three years as co-regent with Asa during his illness; refer to 2 Kings 3:1 and 8:16, and 2 Chronicles 20:31. The Chronicler's account of his reign is much longer than that given in Kings, where Jehoshaphat plays a subordinate role to the northern kings Ahab (1 Kings 22:4-5 and 22:29-33) and Jehoram (2 Kings 3:4-27). The Chronicler passes over the Jehoram narrative and assigns Jehoshaphat a central significance in his own right, as one who strengthens his kingdom spiritually and militarily (vv.1-19), organises its system of courts (2 Chronicles 19:1-11), and demonstrates exemplary faith and leadership in the face of a terrible military threat (2 Chronicles 20:1-29). At the same time, Jehoshaphat is criticised for his alliances with the apostate northern kingdom (2 Chronicles 19:1-3 and 20:37). Like his predecessors, Jehoshaphat is thus a mixture of good and bad qualities, with a preponderance of good.

III.d.i 2 Chronicles 17:1-19 - Jehoshaphat's Reign

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ His son Jehoshaphat succeeded him, and strengthened himself against Israel. ² He placed forces in all the fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim that his father Asa had taken. ³ The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the earlier ways of his father; he did not seek the Baals, ⁴ but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments, and not according to the ways of Israel. ⁵ Therefore the Lord established the kingdom in his hand. All Judah brought tribute to Jehoshaphat, and he had great riches and honour. ⁶ His heart was courageous in the ways of the Lord; and furthermore he removed the high places and the sacred poles from Judah.

2 Chronicles 17:1-6

His son Jehoshaphat succeeded him. Asa was generally a good king, although he did not finish well, and Jehoshaphat his son followed in his footsteps and the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the earlier ways of his father [[David]].

David is included in the Hebrew Scriptures and included in other English translations but is omitted in the NRSVA. Asa had been a generally good king for much of his reign but David is always considered the benchmark for all subsequent kings to be compared with.

And strengthened himself against Israel. Jehoshaphat recognised that the northern kingdom was a danger to Judah militarily, politically, and especially spiritually. He therefore strengthened the defences against this threat and his actions were specifically not according to the ways of Israel.

He placed forces in all the fortified cities of Judah. Jehoshaphat's actions at the start of his reign are directed towards reforming the nation's religious life and strengthening its military capabilities, no doubt in view of the border conflicts with the northern kingdom that marked the previous reigns. As long as he continues in this attitude of faith in God and loyalty to the ways of David (vv.3-6), his kingdom will enjoy security and prosperity. On later occasions, however, Jehoshaphat will be drawn into alliances through marriage or military and commercial arrangements with the northern kingdom, and all of these will lead to potentially disastrous consequences.

The Chronicler's characteristic theme of 'seeking God' is accompanied by obedience to God's commandments.

This is the first mention of the Baals in Chronicles. Under Ahab and his Tyrean wife Jezebel, who were contemporaries of Jehoshaphat, the northern kingdom adopted

Canaanite Baal worship (1 Kings 16:31), leading to conflict with Elijah; refer to the detailed account of this in 1 Kings Chapter 19.

The Lord established the kingdom in his hand, continuing the promise made to David. God acts in and through his people's obedience to fulfil his word. This was no small accomplishment. In those days kings and kingdoms were fragile and under constant threat. Yet if the descendants of David would seek God first, he promised to take care of their security - and God makes the same promise to his people today: <<***But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well***>> (Matthew 6:33 NIV).

All Judah brought tribute to Jehoshaphat, and he had great riches and honour. Because Jehoshaphat trusted God, God lifted him up and exalted him as a king. As his heart took delight in the ways of the Lord, the Lord gave him the desires of his heart: <<***Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart***>> (Psalm 37:4).

His heart was courageous in the ways of the Lord. Reform of worship is characteristic of faithful kings in Chronicles; refer to 2 Chronicles 14:3-5, 15:8 and 34:4.

Furthermore he removed the high places and the sacred poles from Judah. First Kings 22:43 records that Jehoshaphat did not remove the high places. The discrepancy comes because there were two types of high place: those that were used for pagan worship, which Jehoshaphat did remove; and there were those that were dedicated to the Lord, which he did not remove, although he should have because the people should have been bringing their offerings to the temple and not their local high places.

⁷ In the third year of his reign he sent his officials, Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah.

⁸ With them were the Levites, Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tob-adonijah; and with these Levites, the priests Elishama and Jehoram. ⁹ They taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord with them; they went around through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people.

2 Chronicles 17:7-9

In the third year of his reign was probably the first year of his reign alone, circa 870 BC, following a three-year co-regency with his father; refer to 2 Chronicles 16:12 and 20:31. Jehoshaphat's reforms were not limited to worship but also included a mission by his officials, along with a number of Levites and priests, to instruct the nation in the Law of Moses. It was God's intention from Israel's beginning that his people should be thoroughly conversant with the law: <<***Keep***>>

these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates>> (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Besides administering sacrifices, it was the duty of priests in particular to instruct the people in the law; refer to Leviticus 10:11, Deuteronomy 33:10, Jeremiah 18:18 and Malachi 2:7. On the role of the Levites in teaching the law, refer to Nehemiah 8:7-9.

To teach in the cities of Judah. These ‘teaching priests’ have been mentioned by the Chronicler before in 2 Chronicles 15:3. They had the important role of bringing the Word of God to the people, especially those who lived outside of Jerusalem.

They taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord with them; they went around through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people. This was the wisest and best policy a security conscious king of Judah could promote. Because Jehoshaphat sought God first, God sent fear upon the neighbouring kingdoms, so that <<*they did not make war against Jehoshaphat*>> (v.10).

¹⁰ The fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands around Judah, and they did not make war against Jehoshaphat. ¹¹ Some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and silver for tribute; and the Arabs also brought him seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred male goats.

2 Chronicles 17:10-11

The fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands around Judah, and they did not make war against Jehoshaphat. The blessings of peace with the neighbouring nations, and tribute from them, are presented as a consequence of the people’s faithfulness to the law. The significance of this for the Chronicler’s own relatively weak and impoverished community is clear. Refer also to 1 Chronicles 14:17 and 2 Chronicles 14:14.

Some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and silver for tribute; and the Arabs also brought him seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred male goats. Jehoshaphat’s commitment to personal and public godliness meant that God exalted his kingdom above the neighbouring nations, even as God had promised in Deuteronomy 28:1-13. The Arabs probably refers to tribes living to the south and southwest of Judah, close to the Philistines; refer to 2 Chronicles 21:16-17 and 26:6-7.

¹² Jehoshaphat grew steadily greater. He built fortresses and storage cities in Judah. ¹³ He carried out great works in the cities of Judah. He had soldiers, mighty warriors, in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ This was the muster of

them by ancestral houses: Of Judah, the commanders of the thousands: Adnah the commander, with three hundred thousand mighty warriors, ¹⁵ and next to him Jehohanan the commander, with two hundred and eighty thousand, ¹⁶ and next to him Amasiah son of Zichri, a volunteer for the service of the Lord, with two hundred thousand mighty warriors. ¹⁷ Of Benjamin: Eliada, a mighty warrior, with two hundred thousand armed with bow and shield, ¹⁸ and next to him Jehozabad with one hundred and eighty thousand armed for war. ¹⁹ These were in the service of the king, besides those whom the king had placed in the fortified cities throughout all Judah.

2 Chronicles 17:12-19

Jehoshaphat grew steadily greater. The description of Jehoshaphat's military forces looks forward to the account of his alliance with Ahab in Chapter 18. Large armies are regularly a sign of God's blessing in Chronicles, but the author will show that they are no certain defence if priorities are wrong and faith is misplaced: *<<A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save. Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine>>* (Psalm 33:16-19). The details seem to be drawn from a military census list.

Thousand may be the actual numbers, or they may indicate military units of which the actual size uncertain; refer to the comment made on 1 Chronicles 12:23-37.

These were in the service of the king. The true treasure of Jehoshaphat's kingdom was not numbered only in security or material things, but also in the dedicated and courageous men he had surrounding him, these mighty men of valour.