

A Lesson In Prayer

2 Chron. 20:1-30

Intro: Anyone who studies the Scriptures soon finds that the New Testament is filled with tremendous truths which are only found partially in the OT. And then there are other truths which are found in the NT alone.

This has led many to say that the OT was only a preliminary record of God's dealings, and that we need not pay much attention to it now.

Two verses in the NT will keep us from this mistaken idea:

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope"

(Rom. 15:4).

And the other is:

"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come"

(1 Cor. 10:11).

Tonight I want to take you back into the OT with me to learn a lesson in prayer.

It has to do with a time during the reign of Jehoshaphat, who was a king over Judah. He was Judah's fourth king. He began to reign when he was 35 years old, and he was king for 25 years. His dates were 873-849 B. C. (approx.).

The record of his reign is given in 2 Chron. 17-20 and in 1 Kings 22:41-50.

"He evidently felt that a nation's character is determined by its religion" (ISBE, Vol. III, p. 1582), and consequently you read in 2 Chron. 19 of all that he did to keep his people walking in purity of fellowship with God.

It is against this background that you have the report coming to him which is recorded in 2 Chron. 20:1, 2.

The first reaction of Jehoshaphat was in connection with

I. PRAYER (vv. 3-13).

~~But was this the time to pray? Should he not have started to move his troops into position, and to have prepared for actual warfare?~~

Regardless of what we might feel, this is the record of what he did--and the outcome will certainly show whether or not he was wise.

NOTE: Jehoshaphat first "set himself to seek the Lord", and then he "proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah" (v. 3).

And then as he gathered them together, he began to pray.

He addressed God as, "O Lord God of our fathers" which implied that he was going back to what they had learned from their fathers about God. The question is now: Were the things the fathers taught really true?

So, first, Jehoshaphat considers what he knows about

A. The character of God (v. 6).

This is in the form of three questions which he asked God:

1. "Art not thou God in heaven?" That is, is God really INCOMPARABLE when you consider Him along with the other gods of men.

Solomon had said, "Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or in earth beneath" (1 Kings 8:23).

No less than seven times does Solomon ask the Lord to "hear from heaven" in his prayer of dedication.

Cf. Deut. 4:39, what Moses had said, "Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath; there is none else".

Jehoshaphat's mind goes back to this truth and he reminds God of what He is.

Behind this question is the idea: COULD GOD HAVE PREVENTED THESE NATIONS FROM COMING AGAINST JUDAH? Obviously, the answer is, YES!

2. The second question: Is He sovereign? Does He in reality rule over all the kingdoms of the heathen?

What had David said? Cf. 1 Chron. 29:11, 12.

What did Daniel preach at a later date? Cf. Dan. 4: 17, 25, 32, 35.

Therefore, must this be a part of His purpose since He has not seen fit to prohibit it?

Again, the answer is, YES!

3. The third question: Is He omnipotent?

If He allowed it, is He still able to deliver us?

Again, remember David in 1 Chron. 29:12, "thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all."

In our text and in 1 Chron. 29:12 you have the same Heb. words for "power" and "might".

(1) Power (אֲזַק) is strength to act and to endure.

(2) Might (אֲזַק) is ability to do the right thing (strategy) and to prevail.

David said that God had these qualities, and Jehoshaphat is just asking Him if He really does.

But then Jehoshaphat's praying takes on a new aspect.

- B. The personal relationship of God to Judah (vv. 7-13):
"Art thou not our God?"

1. Our God--who has given us this land, so that we are where we are by the will of God (v. 7)?

What confidence there is in being able to pray in the will of God!

2. Our God--in making the provision for worship and fellowship in the sanctuary, and in declaring through Solomon, "My name shall be there" (1 Kings 8:29).

So much of Jehoshaphat's prayer goes back to David and to Solomon.

In 1 Kings 9 God had agreed to hear from heaven when His people called upon Him.

Did He really mean it? Does it make a difference when we pray?

3. Our God--who in the past directed His people to spare these very nations (vv. 10, 11).

Did God make a mistake?

What was his reason for sparing them?

Did He not know that this would happen?

"Behold, I say, how they reward us" (v. 11).

Oh, yes, God knew what He was doing. Even in judgement His grace is evident. Cf. 2 Pet. 3:8, 9, "But, beloved, . . . The Lord is not slack . . ."

Then followed

C. The appeal (v. 12): "O our God!"

1. For God to work: "Wilt Thou not judge them?"
2. The confession of weakness: "We have no might", no power, the very word לֹא which Jehoshaphat used in v. 6 of God. We do not have what God has, and we cannot do what He can do.

"The helplessness is always a fact, though most of us manage to get along for the most part without discovering it" (Maclaren, Vol. 2, p. 171).

3. The confession of ignorance: "Neither know we what to do." How God must love for us to come to Him before all of our plans are made!

But this has to be coupled with

4. A declaration of their dependence upon God:

~~"But our eyes are upon Thee."~~

~~And then the people just stood waiting for God to answer.~~

And suddenly it came!

II. THE ANSWER (vv. 14-17).

This man Jahaziel is not mentioned any other place in Scripture, but what a way to be remembered!

Does this not indicate that Jahaziel must have prayed every word of the King's prayer just as though it has been his own?

What unusual mouthpieces God uses! He was probably a member of the Levitical singers, and not even he could have suspected how God was going to come upon Him by the Spirit and speak through Him.

But suddenly he spoke, and he told the people what they were to do, and what they could expect God to do.

And this was enough!

III. THE SEQUEL (vv. 18-30).

A. The whole nation worshipped (v. 18).

B. The Levites began to sing praises (v. 19).

C. Jehoshaphat became an exhorter (v. 20).

D. Appointed singers led the army to battle (v. 21).

E. The Lord overthrew their enemies as they began to kill each other (vv. 22-24).

F. It took the people of Judah three days to collect the spoil (v. 25).

G. They praised the Lord all of the way back to Jerusalem (vv. 26-28).

H. The nations heard what God had done, and so the people of Judah had rest (vv. 29, 30).

What a story!

(Over)

Concl: What an illustration of Phil. 4:6, 7!

And remember, our God is the same God that the people of Judah had, and He remains just the same today.

"The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT

"In the Spirit." As carnal weapons do not prevail in spiritual warfare, neither will prayer that is in the flesh have any power. There may be a form of prayer without reality; even a use of all the accepted terms of prayer warfare, but without point or power. Prayer to be effectual in warfare needs to start with God, who sees the whole battlefield, who knows the devil's plan of campaign, who decides the place and part of every wrestler, and who directs the movement of the entire army of the Lord with the definite objective of carrying out His eternal purpose. God Himself must give us the prayer to pray. It must come straight from His heart to ours with a deep sense of conviction, urgency and assurance. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. We do not see Satan's hidden ambush, his ingeniously concealed snare. But the all-wise, ever-watchful Spirit sees every danger and pitfall, and will so inspire prayer within us that we are forewarned and fore-armed. How can we every remember all the things for which we know we should pray? We cannot, but the Holy Spirit will bring them to our remembrance, and we should never disregard any impulse of the Spirit to pray. The Holy Spirit praying in us will determine both the character and the content of our prayer. Prayer in the Spirit must be Spirit-inspired, Spirit-inwrought, Spirit-taught, Spirit-directed, and Spirit-energized.

-- The Wealth, Walk, and Warfare of the Christian, pp. 216, 217.

If any level of prayer can be higher, it is when, to all these—sincere desire, the filial spirit, and the claim of discipleship—is added a conscious inward groaning of the Holy Spirit (Romans viii:26, 27). In this case it is God, the Spirit, Himself, who is pleading in us. He guides our desires, He shapes our utterance, if indeed the yearnings He awakens do not transcend all language; He displaces carnal by spiritual motives; He teaches us, in conscious sonship, to cry "Abba, Father"; and Himself practically does the praying. How mighty in prayer must the believer become when these fourfold conditions all meet in Him! Then is that verse made real—the only one in which all three persons of the godhead are linked in relation to prayer: "Through Him (the Lord Jesus Christ) we have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Ephes. ii:18). We pray in the Spirit for the Spirit prays in us.

-- The Bible and Spiritual Life, p. 285.