

# Fearful, Powerless, and Clueless

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[ 0 : 00 ] After a time of prayer like we've just finished, we sometimes need to remind ourselves that God honors and answers prayer.

! We'll focus tonight on the results of prayer during an episode from King Jehoshaphat's reign in Judah. And before we get to the main passage, let's take some time to reacquaint ourselves with King Jehoshaphat.

In 2 Chronicles 17, verses 3-6, his reign started very well. Those verses say, The Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he walked in the earlier ways of his father David.

He did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments, and not according to the practices of Israel. Therefore the Lord established the kingdom in his hand. And all Judah brought tribute to Jehoshaphat, and he had great riches and honor. His heart was courageous in the ways of the Lord. And furthermore he took the high places and the ashram out of Judah.

[ 1 : 10 ] Remember that part about being courageous in the ways of the Lord. We'll see that in other areas he was anything but courageous. Then still in chapter 17 of 2 Chronicles, verses 7-9 go on to tell us that Jehoshaphat sent his leaders and priests to teach the book of the law to all the people of Judah.

Verse 9 says, And they taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord with them. They went about through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people. However, when Jehoshaphat aligned himself with King Ahab of Israel, he made a mistake.

2 Chronicles 18 and the early part of 2 Chronicles 19 document the nearly tragic results of that alliance. During that time, Jehoshaphat narrowly escaped being killed in battle.

After his poor judgment in that episode, the latter part of 2 Chronicles 19 describes how Jehoshaphat resumes his reforms. He likely expected then that he would have continued peace and prosperity like what he had before.

God had something else in mind though. In chapter 20, we'll see Jehoshaphat become fearful, powerless, and clueless. From his actions and then the results, we'll be reminded how and why we should trust God when we face difficult situations.

[ 2 : 37 ] We'll also see that God answers and honors prayer. So let's read 2 Chronicles 20, verses 1 through 30. It's a long passage, but we will get through all of it tonight.

It says, 1 Chronicles 20, verses 1 through 30.

1 Chronicles 20, verses 1 through 30.

And now behold, 1 Chronicles 20, verses 1 through 30.

Meanwhile, all Judah stood before the Lord with their little ones, their wives and their children. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jehoshaphat, the son of Zechariah, son of Benaniah, son of Jael, son of Mataniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly.

[ 5 : 08 ] And he said, Listen, And the inhabitants of Judah and inhabitants of Judah and inhabitants of Judah and King Jehoshaphat. Thus says, Do not be, And do not be, And do not be, And do not be, Tomorrow, And do not be, Behold, And do not be, At the end of the valley, The wilderness of Jeruel.

You will not, Stand firm, Hold your position, And see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid, And do not be dismayed.

Tomorrow, Go out against them, And the Lord will be with you. Then Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshipping the Lord.

And the Levites of the Kohathites and the Korahites stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice. And they rose early in the morning and went out into the wilderness of Tekoa.

And when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established.

[ 6 : 32 ] Believe his prophets, and you will succeed. And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the Lord and praise him in holy attire, as they went out before the army, and say, Give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever.

And when they began to sing in praise, the Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come up against Judah, so that they were routed.

For the men of Ammon and Moab rose against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, devoting them to destruction. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they all helped to destroy one another.

When Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, they looked toward the horde, and behold, there were dead bodies lying on the ground. None had escaped. When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take their spoil, they found them, in great numbers, goods, clothing, and precious things, which they took for themselves until they could carry no more.

They were three days in taking the spoil. It was so much. On the fourth day, they assembled in the valley of Barakah, for there they blessed the Lord.

[ 7 : 53 ] Therefore, the name of that place has been called the Valley of Barakah to this day. Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem and Jehoshaphat at their head, returning to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had made them rejoice over their enemies.

They came to Jerusalem with harps and lyres and trumpets to the house of the Lord. And the fear of God came on all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel.

So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around. From this passage, we see that God will do whatever it takes to make his people recognize their total dependence upon God.

That's the main idea from the passage. God will do whatever it takes to make his people recognize their total dependence upon God. God will do whatever it takes to make his people recognize their total dependence upon God.

God will do whatever it takes to make his people recognize their total dependence upon God. We'll break tonight's passage into five sections, starting with the first four verses. And in those verses, we see fearful dread. Fearful dread is what we'll look at first.

[ 9 : 08 ] Here are those verses again. They say, Then Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek the Lord and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

And Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord. From all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord. Because the invasion followed Jehoshaphat's religious and judicial reforms, it wasn't an instance of divine punishment, but instead it was an opportunity to exercise their faith.

Did Jehoshaphat see the invasion as a chance to exercise his faith? We can see pretty much from how he reacted that he didn't see it that way.

It says he was afraid. Verse 3 is that text from which we get the reference to fearful dread. That verse says, Then Jehoshaphat was afraid.

So like us, when we face trials, Jehoshaphat would have preferred a less stressful opportunity to exercise his faith. However, the fear caused Jehoshaphat to do something positive.

[ 10 : 36 ] It also says there that Jehoshaphat sought the Lord. Isn't that the way we are a lot of times too? We're a lot more likely to seek the Lord when we're facing a difficult situation than when things are going well.

And we see from verses 3 and 4 that the people followed Jehoshaphat's lead. People from all of Judah gathered to ask God for his help. The second major section of the chapter tells us about Jehoshaphat's prayer.

And in that prayer, Jehoshaphat reminds himself and his listeners of God's characteristics.

Jehoshaphat also points out impending doom if God fails to act.

And impending doom is the second thing that we need to notice. Jehoshaphat's prayer comes in verses 5 through 12. And we'll look at those verses again.

They say, And Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem in the house of the Lord before the new court and said, O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven?

[ 11 : 46 ] You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might so that none is able to withstand you. Did you not, our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham, your friend?

And they lived in it and have built for you in it a sanctuary for your name, saying, If disaster comes upon us, the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before you, for your name is in this house, and cry out to you in our affliction, and you will hear and save. And now behold the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom you would not let Israel invade when they came from the land of Egypt, and whom they avoided and did not destroy, behold, they reward us by coming to drive us out of your possession, which you have given us to inherit.

O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.

So we'll look at six things about this prayer, and these points paraphrase Matthew Henry's commentary on this passage. The first thing we see about the prayer comes in verse 6, and that is where Jehoshaphat acknowledges the sovereign dominion of divine providence.

[ 13 : 12 ] He gives God the glory for it, and then he takes comfort in it. The second thing he does comes in verses 6 and 7, and that's where Jehoshaphat remembers Judah's covenant relationship with God.

Jehoshaphat recalls the people's interest in God and God's concern for the people. Think about those questions that Jehoshaphat asked, where he was saying, Oh God, did you not do this? And Oh God, did you not do that? At first, when I looked at it, I was thinking that Jehoshaphat was trying to remind God of, Hey, wait a minute, you promised us something. You better make sure you follow through.

But the more I looked at it, and the more I looked at some commentary on it, most people think that Jehoshaphat was reminding himself of what God had promised to do. And because he knew he could count on God, when he reminded himself of what God had promised to do, he was starting to get comforted, and his fear was starting to lessen a little bit.

The third thing we see from that prayer is that God is reminded by Jehoshaphat that Judah holds the title to the land. That comes in verses 7 through 11.

[ 14 : 25 ] The fourth thing is that Jehoshaphat makes mention of the temple that they had built for God's name, and that comes in verses 8 and 9. And Jehoshaphat likely mentioned the temple because it served as a reminder of God's favorable presence in the past.

Verse 9 is where he said, Notice there he didn't say, You might hear and save.

He says, You will hear and save. So he's starting to get some more confidence as he continues his prayer. The fifth thing we see is that Jehoshaphat pleads the ingratitude and injustices of his enemies, and that comes in verses 10 all the way through the first part of verse 12.

That goes back to Deuteronomy chapter 2 verses 5, 9, and 19. And in those verses, God had told the Israelites not to meddle with the Edomites, the Moabites, and the Ammonites.

He told them to leave them alone. And now those nations have joined together to threaten Judah. Jehoshaphat makes sure God notices that, and Jehoshaphat makes sure to remind God that they obeyed God in the past, and now the people that they were kind to are the ones that are a very threat to them.

[ 15 : 52 ] In fact, if you notice that Jehoshaphat actually reminds God twice that God told Israel to leave the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites alone, listen to those verses again.

These are verses 10 through 12a. They say, And now behold, the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom you would not let Israel invade when they came from the land of Egypt, and whom they avoided and did not destroy, behold, they reward us by coming to drive us out of your possession, which you have given us to inherit.

O God, will you not execute judgment on them? So he's saying, We treated them exactly like you told us to treat them, so now they deserve to get your judgment, because they are treating us so poorly.

The last thing we see in the prayer is that Jehoshaphat professes complete dependence upon God for deliverance. And that comes in the end of verse 12.

Think how we would feel if one of our leaders got up and said this, that Jehoshaphat said, For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us, nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.

[17:08] So does this statement sound like what most people would want to hear from their ruler? Probably wouldn't be good for Jehoshaphat's re-election campaign if he had to try to get re-elected again.

It was a good thing for him that he was a king rather than an elected official. But verse 12 is where we see that Jehoshaphat is powerless and clueless about how to deal with the invaders. He's not quite as fearful, perhaps, as he once was, but he still realizes that he doesn't know what to do. And he acknowledges that any salvation will be up to God. We do need to give Jehoshaphat some credit, though.

He may not fit the stereotype of a good leader, but Jehoshaphat is actually doing the best thing he could. He's asking God for help. It would be nice if more of our leaders felt the same way. So, so far we have seen the fearful dread and the impending doom. At this point, things are looking pretty bleak. And that's when we hear an unexpected declaration.

[18:13] Unexpected declaration is the next part of the lesson. And in verses 13 and 14, that declaration gets set up. Verses 13 and 14 set up that declaration by telling us what the people were doing while the king was praying.

We see that the rest of the country again followed the king's lead. Here are verses 13 and 14 again. They say, Meanwhile, all Judah stood before the Lord with their little ones, their wives, and their children.

And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jehoshaphat, the son of Zechariah, son of Benaniah, son of Jael, son of Mataniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly.

So think about if anybody outside the nation was watching this scene. Can you imagine what they were thinking? They would see just a large group standing there while invaders were coming closer and closer.

Can you imagine that if they were talking to each other? Well, what are all those people doing down there? Well, they appear just to be standing there. Well, what are they doing while they're standing there? Well, they're just standing there.

[19:27] But while the crowd was standing before God, God sent the answer, and Jehoshaphat provided that unexpected declaration from the middle of the people. Listen to verses 15 through 17 again.

And he said, Notice the detail in that prophecy.

Jehoshaphat tells the people what they should do and when they should do it. He also tells them what the enemy will do. Twice the prophecy tells the group not to fear.

So it's almost as if God is answering the two times that Jehoshaphat pointed out that God had told Israel to leave the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites alone. The wording of the prophecy likely would have made the people recall two other significant events in their history.

Look again at the quote at the end of verse 15. It says, Consider how that compares to David's words to Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, verse 47.

[21:26] When he was getting ready to fight Goliath, David said, And that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand.

And of course we know how David's battle with Goliath turned out for Israel. The first part of 2 Chronicles 20, verse 17 has the other phrasing that would have caused the people of Judah to recall a major historical event.

The first part of 20, verse 17 says, You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.

Moses had said similar words to the people at the Red Sea when they were being chased by the Egyptians. I don't want to give away Willard's next few lessons, but here are Exodus 14, 13 and 14. They say, And Moses said to the people, Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, for which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again.

[22:38] The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent. And of course we also know how the predicament turned out for Israel when they were stuck at the Red Sea.

So whether because of the detail in Jehoshiel's prophecy, or because of the similar wording to statements before other national victories, or maybe even for another reason, Jehoshaphat and the people were convinced that Jehoshiel's prophecy was true.

Look at verses 18 and 19 of 2 Chronicles 20. They say, Then Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshiping the Lord.

And the Levites of the Kohathites and the Gorahites stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice. Consider the change in Jehoshaphat and the people.

A short while ago, they'd been fearful, powerless, and clueless. Now all of a sudden, that mood has changed to worshiping and praising God. Had their physical circumstances changed any?

[ 23 : 50 ] They hadn't seen any change yet. At this point, the enemy was still bearing down on them, and they hadn't done anything but stand there. And of course, Jehoshaphat did something too.

That's most important. He prayed. But for people who weren't expecting that kind of strategy, they'd still be wondering what the people were up to. So their physical circumstances remained the same. They were still facing that huge invading army, but their focus had changed. Instead of being focused on their problem, they were now focused on God. And that changed their perspective. So after the fearful dread, the impending doom, and the unexpected declaration, we are about to see an amazing deliverance. That amazing deliverance is the fourth section of the lesson, and we see that in verses 22 and 23.

And actually, it goes all the way back to verse 20. So before we look at 22 and 23, let's read 20 and 21 first. Starting in verse 20, it says, And they rose early in the morning and went out into the wilderness of Tekoa.

[ 25 : 01 ] And when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established. Believe his prophets, and you will succeed.

And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the Lord and praise him in holy attire as they went before the army and say, Give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Notice that verse 20 starts with the morning of the next day, yet the optimism and confidence that we first saw in verses 18 and 19 still is persisting. Jehoshaphat made a great speech at the end of verse 20, and that speech was based upon what God had previously said through Isaiah.

Back at the end of Isaiah 7-9, God had said, If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all. Jehoshaphat actually rephrased that statement positively, and he said, Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established.

Notice again how definite he is with that statement. He doesn't say, Believe in the Lord your God, and let's hope we'll be established, or you might be established.

[ 26 : 19 ] He says, Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established. When Jehoshaphat told the nation to believe, he was talking about the kind of faith God rewards, and we see that type of faith defined in Hebrews 11.6.

Hebrews 11.6 is where we see, And without faith it is impossible to please him, talking about God, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who seek him.

Along with Jehoshaphat, the people also believed. Verse 21 says that Jehoshaphat arranged the group after he had taken counsel with the people. So he didn't do this all on his own.

He sought some advisors, and they agreed with him on what the right strategy was. And before we leave verse 21, let's consider the military strategy. It says, The people who could sing went out before the army.

That's actually a great comfort to me, since I can't sing. I like that strategy myself. But that's probably not a strategy that people would recommend. Think about what a military strategist would say to that.

[ 27 : 33 ] Well, put your singers out in front, and then everybody else can follow behind them. So let's read on to see how that strategy works. Look at verses 22 and 23.

They say, And when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed.

For the men of Ammon and Moab rose against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, devoting them to destruction. And when they had made an end to the inhabitants of Seir, they all helped destroy one another.

So we see that all groups threatening Judah were destroyed, and they actually destroyed themselves. That's why it was such an amazing deliverance.

So let's read now the rest of the narrative in verses 24 through 30, and we'll see that everyone recognizes an obvious deliverer. So obvious deliverer is your last section.

[ 28 : 37 ] Starting in verse 24, it says, When Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, they looked toward the horde, and behold, there were dead bodies lying on the ground.

None had escaped. When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take their spoil, they found among them in great numbers goods, clothing, and precious things, which they took for themselves until they could carry no more.

They were three days in taking the spoil. It was so much. On the fourth day, they assembled in the valley of Barakah, for there they blessed the Lord.

Therefore the name of the place has been called the valley of Barakah to this day. Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat at their head, returning to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had made them rejoice over their enemies.

They came to Jerusalem with harps and lyres and trumpets to the house of the Lord. And the fear of God came on all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel.

[ 29 : 44 ] So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around. Similar to God's intervention in Gideon's day, back in Judges chapter 7, God caused confusion among the enemy who mistakenly turned upon themselves and slaughtered each other.

Some think this may have been done by angels who appeared and set off this uncontrolled and deadly panic, but regardless, the destruction was complete before Jehoshaphat and the army of Israel and Judah never actually had to meet the enemy.

So we said this section is about an obvious deliverer. Who is that obvious deliverer? Notice how many times the writer gives credit to God in this section.

Starting in verse 22 in the previous section, we see that the Lord set an ambush. Then in this section in verse 26, we see that the people blessed the Lord.

Verse 27 says, the Lord had made them rejoice over their enemies. And perhaps the most amazing reference to the Lord is in verse 29. Look at verse 29 again.

[ 31 : 00 ] It says, and the fear of God came on all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel. Even the pagan nations realized that the Lord fought for his people.

So everyone recognized the obvious deliverer. Remember the main idea. We said that is that God will do whatever it takes to make his people recognize their total dependence upon God.

When we read an account like this, we can sometimes fall into the trap of thinking, that's great for those people. God helped them out of a bad spot, but he would never do something like that for me.

That's when we need to remember this main point of application. And the main point of application is this. Being dependent upon God is the best place to be.

Being dependent upon God is the best place to be. Let's talk about why we can say that. Well, for believers, God already has done something even better than what God did for Jehoshaphat and Judah.

[ 32 : 08 ] Tonight's passage is more than just a historical account of deliverance. It is that, but it's also a picture of our salvation. When the Holy Spirit convicted us of sin, we were filled with fearful dread because of impending doom.

Listen to David's words in Psalm 31, verse 10. David said, For my life is spent with sorrow and my years with sighing.

My strength fails because of my iniquity and my bones waste away. Ezekiel was told to express a similar feeling in Ezekiel 33, verse 10.

Ezekiel 33, 10 says, And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said, Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them.

How then can we live? So do you get the sense of the fearful dread and the impending doom in those verses? And then after the Holy Spirit convicted us of our sin, God enabled us to make a

previously unexpected declaration of faith.

[ 33 : 17 ] Like the leper in Luke 5, 12, we cried out in some form or another, Lord, if you will, you can make me clean. So recognizing our sin and crying out to God in faith led to an amazing deliverance from an obvious deliverer.

Remember Romans 5, verses 8 through 11. Those verses say, But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. We also see similar results from our deliverance to what Jehoshaphat saw. Listen again to 2 Chronicles 20, verses 25 and 26. That's where it said, When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take their spoil, they found among them in great numbers goods, clothing, and precious things which they took for themselves until they could carry no more.

[ 34 : 43 ] They were three days in taking the spoil. It was so much. On the fourth day, they assembled in the valley of Barakah, for there they blessed the Lord. Therefore the name of that place has been called the valley of Barakah to this day.

So after they experienced God's blessing and protection in the wilderness, the Judeans renamed Ziz the valley of Barakah, which actually means blessing, and they did that to remind themselves of God's goodness.

So Barakah means blessing, and as believers, we have abundant blessings too. Listen to Ephesians 1, 3. Ephesians 1, verse 3 says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

And in 2 Chronicles 20, verse 30, showed us that Jehoshaphat experienced another result after this episode. That verse said, So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around.

Because of our salvation, we also experience rest and peace. Listen to Jesus' words in John 14, 27. Jesus said, Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you.

[ 36 : 06 ] Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. In the narrative we studied tonight, God delivered the people of Judah for a time.

For true believers, God has delivered us for eternity. And so that's why we can say that God already has done something better for us than what we see in 2 Chronicles 20.

We always need to remember that no matter what happens to us here on earth, we have ultimate deliverance. However, let's think about the application on a different level.

Does this passage we've studied tonight show us how to deal with the day-to-day struggles of this life? Well, the answer to that is yes as well. We were pretty hard on Jehoshaphat.

We said that he was fearful, powerless, and clueless. He was all those things, but he also did something right. Remember how he shifted his focus to God.

[ 37 : 05 ] Regardless of whether God answers our prayers as dramatically and decisively as he did for Jehoshaphat, we can learn from Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah. They showed us to take our problems to God, to worship God, to trust God, to obey God, and then to worship God even more.

Here's why we should worship God no matter what happens. It's pretty simple. Because we can trust God with our eternity, we can also trust him with whatever comes our way here on earth.

Because we can trust God with our eternity, we also can trust him with whatever comes our way here on earth. When we're faced with a situation that makes us fearful, powerless, and clueless, remember that we serve a God who is fearless, powerful, and omniscient.

Jehoshaphat prayed a great prayer, but his last phrase would have been enough. Those words remind us to focus on God during difficult situations. Remember the last phrase of his prayer.

That's where he said, We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this reminder in the Old Testament that you are with your people even when circumstances may appear otherwise.

[ 38 : 30 ] Help us when we get into difficult situations to remember what you've already done for us. Help us be even more willing than to trust you in those current circumstances.

And please use those circumstances to grow our faith even more. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.  
Amen. Amen.