

Classic Christian Writings:

In 2 Chronicles 20:1-24 is the account of the attempted invasion of Judah by the heathen nations of Ammon and Moab. It was a fearful situation. The little tribe of Judah was situated on the west side of the Dead Sea and the armies of Moab and Ammon were moving in from the east to attack. When the informants told King Jehoshaphat of the advancing forces, they were already at a place called Engedi very close to Judah. We read in verse 3, "And Jehoshaphat feared."

Jehoshaphat was a man hungry after the Lord. The Word of God says in 2 Chronicles 22:9 that Jehoshaphat "sought the Lord with all his heart." Jehoshaphat was a godly man. The Bible says, "And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim" (2 Chronicles 17:3). He not only sought not unto Baalim, the false god, but he actively resisted idolatry.

"Moreover he took away the high places and groves out of Judah" (17:6). These were elevated areas of land where idols were worshipped. We are told that licentiousness and immorality were often practiced on these high places (Hosea 4:11). Jehoshaphat was a man desirous of obeying the Lord's commandments, desirous of pleasing Him. Yet the Word says in our text, "And Jehoshaphat feared" (2 Chronicles 20:3).

Then the Bible further says he "set himself to seek the Lord" (verse 3). I wrote in the margin of my Bible next to that verse, "How to deal with fear."

How Jehoshaphat Handled Fear

How did Jehoshaphat handle his fear? He handled it by keeping his hands off of it! He handled it by not handling it! This is another glorious paradox of Scripture. How are we to handle problems and fears in our life? By not handling them. Jehoshaphat kept his hands off the problem! A careful study of God's Word reveals that God loves His needy children who know it and who don't have any answers. Jehoshaphat was in great need and he knew it and he didn't have any answers.

He could have panicked. He could have sent an emergency call to all the cities of Judah for everybody who was known to be wise and knowledgeable in a situation like this to come to his quarters and render advice and help devise a plan of resistance, an emergency defense strategy, etc.

But Jehoshaphat didn't do that. He didn't seek the advice of man. He didn't appeal to the arm of flesh. "Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man and that maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord" (Jeremiah 17:5). He didn't appeal to the court of human opinion or to human logic or reason. Jehoshaphat appealed to an infinitely higher court. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is" (Jeremiah 17:7).

Instead of sending messages to all the cities of Judah to send wise men, Jehoshaphat sent word to those cities to gather with him to seek the Lord, to appeal to Him for His help. "And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord" (2 Chronicles 20:4).

They imitated their leader. And what a leader they had--poor, "dumb" Jehoshaphat! O to be dumb (mute, silent) before God!

Watchman Nee says, "To be dumb is the Cross." We read in Isaiah 53:7, "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

Keep clearly in mind that Jehoshaphat did not know what he was going to do. Verse 12 says, "Neither know we what to do." He did not know what the immediate future held for himself and his people. He did not know how to "handle" this.

What He did know was the God who does know, the God who knows how to handle every situation. He knew the God who is never surprised, never dismayed, never frightened, never dumfounded, never worried. He knew the God who knows everything. He knew that God and he loved that God, but most importantly, he knew that that God loved him and his people.

The Bible teaches that there is great value in recognizing and confessing our own ignorance. It's a

wonderful thing to stand before an all-wise God and openly admit to Him that we know nothing and that we have no desire to know anything except Himself.

The Bible says, "Knowledge puffeth up but charity edifieth. If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know [emphasis mine]" (1 Corinthians 8:1-2). The more a man tries to convince others that he possesses great knowledge and the more in his heart he actually believes that, the more he reveals his own ignorance.

Jehoshaphat's attitude was, "My God! I and Thy people are without knowledge. We know only Thee! Nothing else! This is why I and Thy people have come to seek Thee alone. This is why our eyes are upon Thee!" Then comes that wonderful prayer that Jehoshaphat offers up to God in the presence of the congregation:

"O Lord God of our fathers, art not Thou God in heaven? And rulest not Thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? And in Thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand Thee? Art not Thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before Thy people, Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham, Thy friend, forever?" (2 Chronicles 20:6-7).

This is a beautiful approach to God. It is a review of who God is and what He's done for His people. I am convinced that good King Jehoshaphat was praying in the Spirit. That is, he was praying back to God the very thoughts and words that God placed in his heart and mind in the first place.

All true prayer originates in heaven, in the mind of the Father. Praying in the Spirit means that the Holy Spirit originates the prayer and places in the heart and mind of the prayer what God wants to hear. When a person prays in the Spirit, God hears what He desires to hear because He places in the heart of the one praying His, that is, God's desires! "He shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Psalm 37:4).

In commenting on the subject of prayer Arthur Wallis in his book, *God's Chosen Fast*, says, "Prayer must be God-initiated and God-ordained if it is to be effective. Prevailing prayer begins with God; He places upon us a burden by the Spirit, and we respond to that burden. Prayer that originates with God always returns to God."

There is a vast difference between Spiritless praying--which isn't really praying at all--and Spirit-filled praying. There's infinite difference between what C. H. Spurgeon calls "play-praying" and real praying. One time he said: "I can at the prayer meetings readily tell when the brother is praying, and when he is only performing, or playing at prayer. You know how it is with some prayers--they are like an invoice, 'as per usual,' or a list of goods with 'ditto, ditto' every here and there. Oh, for a living groan! One sigh of the soul has more power in it than half an hour's recitation of pretty, pious words. Oh, for a sob from the soul, or a tear from the heart" (*The Forgotten Spurgeon* by Iain Murray, p. 33, footnote).

There cannot be the slightest doubt that Jehoshaphat in our text was not "playing at prayer." What all the people were hearing from the lips of their king and what he himself from his own lips was hearing was the message of Almighty God to Judah. And what a message!

Look at those questions that Jehoshaphat asks. Scripture oftentimes makes use of a question as a means of making an emphatic statement. There's something about being asked a question about a subject that often impresses the truth of the answer much more indelibly on our hearts and minds than simply stating the truth.

Although the questions are directed to God they are actually for the benefit of the people. Verse 6, "O Lord God of our Fathers, art not Thou God in heaven?" I can almost hear that congregation shouting back their "Amen" and "Hallelujahs" in unified agreement. "Yes, God! We know You are God in heaven! We know that there is no other God but Thee. Thank You, Lord God, for having Jehoshaphat ask the question for it thrills our hearts and stirs our faith to overflowing to think on the question and to respond in accord that Thou indeed art our God in heaven!"

The questions that Jehoshaphat asks are what we call rhetorical questions. That is, they are questions that have an obvious answer. "Art not Thou God in heaven?" "Of course Thou art God in heaven" is the obvious answer. And there is something about the simplicity of the answer that seems to penetrate into the heart of the true child of God with a holy penetration.

Look at Jehoshaphat's next question. "And rulest not Thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen?" He is continuing to "remind" God and the people and himself of who God is and how great He is. With a mass of armies bearing down on Judah from these heathen nations from the east, Jehoshaphat reminds himself and all

others within earshot that God has control of those very heathen nations ready to attack Judah.

This is a profound thought. It alludes to God's having control over all mankind, bar none. No one tells God what He's going to do or what He's not going to do. We are all subject to God's final authority, His final rule. God moves in all the earth as He wills and none can question Him in His actions, including the heathen.

"And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" (Daniel 4:35). Those were the words of Nebuchadnezzar after his eyes were opened to see God for who He really is.

Let me remind you, Christian, that this is your God and my God. No wonder we cry out with Paul, "If God be for us who can be against us?" He is the God of Jehoshaphat, whom the Lord made "to rejoice over their enemies" (2 Chronicles 20:27). He is the God of Daniel, and Isaiah, the God of Ruth and Paul and John and James and Moses and Mary and Hannah and Elijah, the God of Abraham and Jeremiah. If I am permitted to say He is the God of any of these, I am by the same token permitted to say to any blood-washed reader, "the God of..." whatever your name is.

"But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine" (Isaiah 43:1).