

JEHOSHAPHAT ... who was known by his prayer
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(2 CHRONICLES 18: 31)

Superb magnificence overshadowed the scene. King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah were seated upon their thrones, and a vast crowd of people were keenly excited, for a matter of great import was about to be decided. Intent on going to war against Syria, Ahab desperately needed Judah's help ; but Jehoshaphat seemed reluctant to cooperate. The enterprise was extremely hazardous, and it was not at all certain that the project was according to the mind of God. Speculation, mistrust, and doubt clouded the eyes of the royal guest. It was true that many prophets were promising victory, but they were Ahab's " yes men." The cheering crowds, the excited orators, the coaxing Ahab were unimpressive, and finally Jehoshaphat said, " Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we may enquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, by whom we may enquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil: the same is Micaiah the son of Imla " (2 Chron. 18: 6-8).

The Man who was Sure

"And when Micaiah was come to the king, the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?" (v. 14). And as the prophet replied, the watchful eyes of Jehoshaphat were focused upon his face. The answer was both ominous and certain, and although its delivery resulted in the preacher's imprisonment, at least the king of Judah had received his guidance. He was certain that the venture would end in disaster; that all who went forth to meet the enemy would be utterly vanquished. Ahab's chin betrayed the stubbornness of his heart, however, and the crowds encouraged his folly. The false prophets were dancing with glee. Victory seemed assured, and false enthusiasm impaired their better judgment. The cheering mobs, the shining eyes, and the shouts of excited people failed to cheer the doubtful Jehoshaphat. Everything was wrong. No battle could be won when a prophet was in prison!

The Man who was Scared

"So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and will go to the battle; but put thou on thy robes. So the king of Israel disguised himself ; and they went to the battle " (vv. 28, 29). Why did the king of Judah go to the battle when he had already ascertained that it would be unwise to do so? There can only be one answer-he was afraid. It is truly significant that this valiant warrior preferred to fight against an army than to stand against the criticisms of men. Ahab was brave and resourceful. He would go alone, and the nation would know that Jehoshaphat had turned back in an hour of danger. And Jehoshaphat trembled. Only a forthright declaration of his allegiance to God would help him. He could demand the liberation of the preacher, but would that help? Micaiah would repeat his ominous prediction. The situation demanded a royal prophet, but, alas, Jehoshaphat had lost his voice-and his vision-and his courage. The ancient scene reminds us that it takes far more courage to be Christian than to be a warrior on the field of battle. Sometimes tongues are sharper than swords!

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The Man who was Saved

"And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him; and God moved them to depart from him. For it came to pass, that, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back again from pursuing him." Even heathen people recognized a man who prayed, and Ahab was not of that category. Three vital thoughts are expressed in this gripping story. (i) A great danger. Inexcusable folly had placed the king in a position of extreme danger. Alone, and comparatively helpless, he was hemmed in by vicious heathen who would not hesitate to take his life. (ii) A grievous distress. ". . . but Jehoshaphat cried out." His prayer was heard immediately, yet it would have been better had he prayed earlier! (iii) A glorious deliverance. ". . . and the Lord helped him. . . . And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem " (2 Chron. 19: 1). Surely he was a wiser man. A fence on the top of a cliff is better than an ambulance at the bottom. It is better to pray for guidance before a calamity, than to ask for help after it.

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