

The Hebrew Corner

How important is it to inquire of the Lord in every decision that we make in life? The Tanach presents a case study in the person of a king of Judah. Jehoshaphat sometimes inquired of the Lord in his decisions and sometimes not. The results of both kinds of decisions he made are described in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles.

The name Jehoshaphat in Hebrew (יהוֹשָׁפָט, yuh-hoh-shah-FAHT) means in English, Yah judges. In fact, in the book of 2 Chronicles, we see that the Lord favored Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 17:3-5):

“And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; But sought to the LORD God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. Therefore the LORD stablished the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honour in abundance.”

However, where Jehoshaphat sometimes failed was in his making of alliances with the northern kingdom of Israel, whose kings all walked contrary to the ways of the Lord. In particular, he made an alliance with Ahab, king of Israel who had built a house of Baal and set up an altar for Baal within this house. Israel had been at war with Syria, but at

this time there had been peace for three years between Israel and Syria. Yet Ahab wanted to take the city of Ramoth in Gilead back from Syria, so Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to join him in battle, as described in the following passage (1 Kings 22:3-5):

“And it came to pass in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel. And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria. And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses. And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day.”

The word translated enquire is the Hebrew word darash (דָרַשׁ, dah-RAHSH), which also means to seek or to consult. From this root the Hebrew word midrash (מִדְרָשׁ, mihd-RAHSH) is derived, which is the ancient commentary on the Tanach found in rabbinic literature over the years. Jehoshaphat uses wisdom in his consultation of the Lord. The king of Israel in turn gathers about 400 people that he considers to be prophets, all of whom urged him to go up to battle, and told him he would be victorious. Jehoshaphat, apparently sensing that they were not true prophets, asked Ahab whether there was another prophet of the Lord that they could inquire of. Ahab, in turn, called

for Michaiah, the son of Imlah, who was known for prophesying bad tidings for him. Michaiah prophesied that Ahab would die in battle if he went up, and that the other prophets were lying. Ahab then ordered Michaiah to be put in prison and fed bread and water until he returned. Here Jehoshaphat makes the mistake of ignoring the word of the Lord spoken by a true prophet. He accompanies Ahab to Ramoth-gilead to battle the Syrians. The Lord protected Jehoshaphat but not Ahab during the battle, even though Ahab disguised himself so that he would not be recognized (1 Kings 22:31-35):

“But the king of Syria commanded his thirty and two captains that had rule over his chariots, saying, Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely it is the king of Israel. And they turned aside to fight against him: and Jehoshaphat cried out. And it came to pass, when the captains perceived that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot.”

So even though Jehoshaphat made a bad decision, the Lord was with him to protect him. However, he sends a prophet to Jehoshaphat in Jerusalem to admonish him (2 Chronicles 19:1-3):

“And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God.”

Jehoshaphat apparently learned much from this encounter. He was faced at a later time with a grave situation, with the armies of Moab, Ammon, and Edom combining forces to go up against Judah. The king gathered the people together, and prayed to God in the house of the Lord in the midst of the congregation, for his judgment against these armies (2 Chronicles 20:5-12):

“And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, And said, 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 for ever? And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying, If, when evil come upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help. And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir, whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not; Behold I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.”

Note that the Moabites and Ammonites were descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew, and the Edomites of Mount Seir were of the genealogy of Esau, Jacob's brother. The special status of these people in God's eyes is what Jehoshaphat is referring to in the passage. As this passage indicates, Jehoshaphat is not only seeking the wisdom of the Lord, but has come to a place of total reliance on him. This is clearly what God wanted from the king and from the people of Judah. In fact, God sent his Holy Spirit upon one of the Levites to tell the king and his people that they would not need to fight this battle at all, but that he would deliver them. The final outcome was that the armies of

Moab, Ammon, and Edom would fight against each other and kill each other off, leaving a great deal of riches behind which the people of Judah would take for a spoil. Thus they claimed the victory over their enemies without having to fight.

This decision of God to bring judgment upon those who came up to fight against Jehoshaphat and Judah, apparently has a broader prophetic significance referred to in the following passage (Joel 3:12-14):

“Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.”

The Hebrew word translated as valley is amek (עַמְקָה, AY-mehk). This passage is evidently referring to a future judgment of the people of Israel, possibly during the end times.

What God wanted from Jehoshaphat, he surely wants from us. He wants us not only to seek him, but to rely upon him in all areas of our life. May we learn to turn over our lives to God, and trust in him day-by-day. Blessings and shalom!

