

July 31, 2022

“Jehoshaphat Makes Judicial Reforms”
Lesson 5 of Unit

2 Chronicles 19:4-11

Intro

Jehoshaphat was one of the more godly kings during the divided kingdoms period. Second Chronicles 17:3-4 says that “The Lord was with Jehoshaphat because in his early years he walked in the ways his father David had followed. He did not consult the Baals but sought the God of his father and followed his commands rather than the practices of Israel.”

At one point, he enters an alliance with King Ahab of Israel, a notably evil king. He escapes the battle with his life, but Jehoshaphat is confronted by a seer named Jehu, who rebukes him for trying to “help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord” (2 Chron. 19:2). The seer then pronounces that the wrath of God will be upon Jehoshaphat because of his alliance with Ahab.

Jehu also commended Jehoshaphat for the good he had done and for setting his heart on seeking the Lord. The next thing Jehoshaphat does after hearing these things is the setting up of just judicial practices, the focus of our lesson text for today.

Read 2 Chronicles 19:4-11

1. vs. 4: Jehoshaphat goes around the whole of Judah
 - Beersheba is the most southern part of Judah
 - The hill country of Ephraim is 12 miles north of Jerusalem
 - It’s actually at the southern end of Israel’s territory
 - His father Asa had captured this area during his reign
 - He has already provided military defenses
 - Now he is going to provide Ephraim with spiritual assistance as well
 - The total distance between the two extremes is about 60 miles, a fair distance then
2. vs. 5: Jehoshaphat appoints judges in the land and the fortified cities
 - This is exactly what Israel was commanded to do in Deut. 16:18 as well
 - First, Jehoshaphat defended the citizens from military attack
 - Now he is defending them from injustice
3. vs. 6: Jehoshaphat’s words to these judges are both wise and sobering
 - “Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for man but for the Lord”
 - If the judges see their decisions as reflecting God’s standards, they provide God’s justice
 - They will apply God’s standards of right and wrong
4. vs. 7: He adds two things that should help the judges make fair decisions
 - First, they are to judge in “the fear of the Lord”
 - This means they are to remember God’s standards and judge by them
 - No perverting the cause of justice for any reason

Second, the judges are reminded of God's character, which they should use in judging
"The Lord our God (has) no injustice or partiality or bribery"
There are multiple verses that describe God as not showing partiality
There are multiple verses that forbid bribes
There are at least 3 NT verses that say that God does not show favoritism

5. vs. 8: In vs. 4, Jehoshaphat went to all the areas in Judah, appointing judges
Now he comes back to Jerusalem to do the same thing
He appoints three groups: Levites, priests, and heads of families
The priests and Levites are involved primarily in the religious life of Israel
Likely, they are called to judge in cases of religious questions
The family heads likely address challenges that are not religious in nature
Israel was formed by God to be His special people
Jerusalem is where the temple is, the place of God's special presence
It should be a model of following God's laws faithfully
It therefore makes sense that this judicial system would have a Godly connection
6. vs. 9: Jehoshaphat gives the same admonition in Jerusalem as he did to the judges throughout the land
They are to judge "in the fear of the Lord"
They are also to serve (not lord over the people)
They are to serve faithfully and wholeheartedly
Both of these qualities are to be done "in the fear of the Lord"
7. vs. 10: Jehoshaphat gives an additional instruction here
In all cases they are to judge well and wisely
In all cases dealing with God's laws, they are to warn the people not to sin
They are to judge in a way consistent with God's holy character
If they judge in this way, they will avoid sinning against God themselves
8. vs. 11: Finally, Jehoshaphat sets up a responsibility flow-chart of sorts, in three groups:
Religion: Amariah the chief priest is the chief official
He will oversee any disputes relating to religious matters
Secular Life: Zebadiah, leader of the tribe of Judah
He will oversee any disputes not related to religion (property, etc)
Overall: the Levites are "officials over you"
Our text suggests that the Levites might settle a concern over which place a dispute
belongs—religion or secular
Their specific duties / areas of oversight are not mentioned.
- Jehoshaphat issues a final challenge—"Act with courage"
Courage may be required at times to stand for what is right
This could be especially true if an evil king comes to power in years to come
He tells them "the Lord be with those who do well"
If the judges follow God's standard for justice, God will be with them

Application: In our world, we think of justice primarily in light of the courts and the judicial system. But that's not the only place justice can come from. We are called to be salt and light, meaning we can provide justice at times in the worlds we move in. This idea of doing what is right is repeated many times in the New Testament: in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:13-16); in Paul's letter to Titus (7 references to goodness in 3 chapters); and in I Peter (ch. 2 and 4). We wish and pray for judges in our world today who will act in the fear of the Lord. But even if they don't, we are still called to act justly to our worlds, in the fear of God.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for Godly leaders like Jehoshaphat who encouraged faithfulness to You. We pray for our leaders and judges to look to You for guidance and wisdom. And we pray that we might be Your instruments of righteousness and justice to our worlds. In Jesus' name, Amen.