

## **Dr. August Konkell, Chronicles, Session 18, God Fights for Us, Holy War**

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This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the Books of Chronicles. This is session 18, God Fights for Us, Holy War.

We now come to one of the more notable kings that we hear about in the scriptures.

This is King Jehoshaphat. King Jehoshaphat is presented very positively in Chronicles as the king who, in a unique way, demonstrated that God is the victor in war and that war is not won by the power of your own armies. Now, the story of Jehoshaphat as we know it in the Book of Kings has much more to do with his relationship with Ahab, that he was an ally with Ahab in some of his wars against the Arameans and that it was through all of those wars that Ahab came to his ultimate judgment.

But that's not the point in Chronicles. In Chronicles, rather, we come to the concept of holy war. Holy war in Chronicles is one in which God fights for us.

Now, we need to note that point very, very carefully because the holy war in our context and particularly in Islamic context these days is one when I fight for God and so I sacrifice my life in my war for God. But that's far removed from the Christian concept. You can't do anything for God that's going to help God out.

Rather, it is God who can do something for you. And so, that point is demonstrated most prominently in the life story of Jehoshaphat. The reign of Jehoshaphat starts off in the most positive way in the presentation of the Chronicler.

He tells us about the way in which Jehoshaphat led in the instruction of the Torah. So this would have meant that something of the teaching of Moses is available. It's in written form and they know what it is that they need to do in terms of the worship of God and they know what they need to do in terms of the relationship of the community.

Furthermore, we see the goodness of Jehoshaphat in his ability to fortify the cities and prepare for the defenses. Here is again where we see something of that tension. Relying on God to win your battles for you doesn't mean you don't do the human practical things like being careful to protect yourself and to fortify your cities and to be aware that there is an enemy and the enemy must know that you are ready so that they can't simply take over.

And then, of course, the Chronicler refers to Jehoshaphat's collection of tribute and the way in which he supported all these projects of his kingdom. Now, here we come



in Chronicles to what is so prominent in Kings, namely his alliance with Ahab. Now we remember Ahab, especially in relation to Jezebel and the conflict that they had with Elijah.

Jezebel was determined that all of Israel was going to worship Baal, and the prophets of God and the prophets of Yahweh were all put to death except for those few like Elijah and a couple of others mentioned who managed to hide and managed to escape. Now Ramoth-Gilead was an Israelite fortification on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, as the name implies, and along the Jabbok River, which we have seen earlier on the map. And, of course, the east side of the Jordan River was always under threat from the Arameans.

The Arameans dominated in Damascus, and they were always extending their territory from Damascus down along the east side of the Sea of Galilee and down towards the river Yarmouk and then beyond that towards the Jabbok River. And so, in this case, the Arameans had taken over Ramoth-Gilead, which was distinctly a city that was to belong to Israel in the hills of Gilead. Now we remember there the conflict between Elijah and the prophets of Ahab.

The prophets of Ahab all said you should go to Ramoth-Gilead, and it's going to be given to you in victory, which, of course, is not the way that it turned out. Ahab was very fearful, and he knew that this might be the outcome. So, you remember the story of how Ahab disguised himself. Normally, the king is the chief warrior.

He's the one who's visibly present. He's the inspiration to the other soldiers so that they carry on with their warfare and keep on fighting. But Ahab was fearful that if he was that prominent he could become the target.

So, he asked that he be disguised and not known as the king, and Jehoshaphat was the one who was to be exposed. But it didn't work out well for Ahab because the word of the true prophet were very much true. Ahab would die in battle even inadvertently just killed by the arrow as a regular soldier.

So, we have the story of the death of Ahab, but we also have the warning of Hananiah here because, of course, Jehoshaphat was really engaging here in a way that was quite inappropriate. He was serving as an ally to Ahab and serving as an ally in order to, by the power of human armies, defeat the Arameans. But Jehoshaphat is positive in terms of his own reign and his own rule in Judah, and we are told how he exercises judicial reform in his own kingdom.

We've talked about how the Levites have one of their functions as being a judge, and so the fortified towns were no doubt many of them Levitical cities, and Jehoshaphat appoints judges so that the Torah of Yahweh can be exercised and followed the way that it should. And Jehoshaphat gives his sermon on how as citizens, they need to be



loyal to their king, they need to be loyal to society, and they need to be loyal to God. So, what happens then at the end of the reign of Jehoshaphat is that he faces another challenge.

This is a challenge to the south. The challenge to the north really was Ahab's issue, and in Kings, we see it was the way in which Ahab was judged for all of his sins again in his own kingdom, especially the one about Naboth's vineyard and stealing a man's own inherited property which was to be in his family perpetually. So, Jehoshaphat is involved loosely as an adjunct and as an ally there.

Not positive, not good, but his reign ends in a very positive way, according to the chronicler. Now Moab and Ammon were to the east and they have formed an alliance against Jehoshaphat. Very powerful kingdoms, which are very distressing.

So, we have Jehoshaphat's lament, and this very much exemplifies what the chronicler is about. You need to seek the Lord, and that is precisely what Jehoshaphat does. He says there are these armies, and Lord, we seek you.

What is it that you want to do in relation to this threat against your nation and your kingdom? And here we have a prophet, Ezekiel, who says the battle belongs to God. This is what we call holy war. God is the one who's going to fight for you.

So here we have the way in which Jehoshaphat prepares for battle. He does so by assembling not soldiers but the Levites. And there are the Levites and the priests who formed this great professional and Levitical choir.

Now, in and of itself, that's not such an unusual thing. Music actually often plays a role in warfare in terms of directing soldiers and in terms of conducting the course of battle. But the way that Jehoshaphat does it is entirely to present God as the head of the army.

So here you have the Levites and this choir going down towards Edom to fight against Moab and against Ammon. It seems like a most unusual sort of thing. But of course, as the chronicler presents the story, what happens here is that the armies defeat themselves in terms of their own conflict, and Jehoshaphat is the one who demonstrates the fact that a reliance upon God and seeking the Lord is the way in which we will have victory.

So, this is probably one of the most exemplary cases of God fighting for us. We could go back to Jericho and the Israelites surrounding Jericho and the priests leading with the ark as they marched around Jericho. That's certainly a prime example of God fighting for us.



And then, when the final day comes, and they shout, the walls fall, and the city becomes vulnerable to the Israelites. That's without question a primary example of God fighting for us. But Jehoshaphat has to be almost a close second in showing how God fights for us.

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