

Who was King Jehoshaphat in the Bible?

King Jehoshaphat was the fourth king of Judah under the divided monarchy, the son of Asa. We are first introduced to him in 1 Kings 15:24 but are told nothing more than that he succeeded Asa. Later, 1 Kings 22:42 tells us that he was 35 years old when he began his reign and that he reigned 25 years (from 873 to 848 BC). First Kings 22 gives a brief account of his reign with 2 Chronicles 17-22 giving a more comprehensive account.

Spiritually, Jehoshaphat began his reign in a positive way. Second Chronicles 17:3-6 gives this commendation: “The Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the ways of his father David before him. He did not consult the Baals but sought the God of his father and followed his commands rather than the practices of Israel. The Lord established the kingdom under his control; and all Judah brought gifts to Jehoshaphat, so that he had great wealth and honor. His heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord; furthermore, he removed the high places and the Asherah poles from Judah.” In addition, Jehoshaphat sent men throughout the kingdom to teach the people the Law of God (2 Chronicles 17:7-9).

Militarily, Jehoshaphat fortified his defenses, primarily against the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Chronicles 17:1-3). The surrounding nations feared Judah and brought tribute (2 Chronicles 17:10-19).

After making peace with Israel, Jehoshaphat apparently tried to reach out to Ahab, the king of Israel. Ahab was one of the wickedest kings of Israel, and Jehoshaphat could not have been ignorant of his character. First Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18 relate the following account: Ahab asks Jehoshaphat to help him attack Syria. Jehoshaphat wisely requests that they consult the LORD on the matter. Ahab gathers 400 of his prophets who

encourage the attack. Jehoshaphat recognizes that these are not genuine prophets of the LORD, and the exchange that follows between Jehoshaphat and Ahab is almost comical: “But Jehoshaphat asked, ‘Is there no longer a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?’ The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, ‘There is still one prophet through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah.’”

So, Micaiah is summoned, and the question is posed. Micaiah responds with high irony: “Attack and be victorious, . . . for the Lord will give it into the king’s hand.” This answer exasperates King Ahab: “How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?” Micaiah then tells Ahab the hard truth: “I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, ‘These people have no master’” (1 Kings 22:15-18).

In spite of what seems to be an acknowledgement that Micaiah speaks for the LORD, Jehoshaphat joins Ahab in the attack. Ahab is killed, and Jehoshaphat narrowly escapes. When Jehoshaphat returns home, he is reprimanded by a prophet of the Lord for his collaboration with Ahab: “Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani, went out to meet him and said to the king, ‘Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, the wrath of the Lord is on you. There is, however, some good in you, for you have rid the land of the Asherah poles and have set your heart on seeking God’” (2 Chronicles 19:2-3).

Jehoshaphat continues to make reforms, appointing judges throughout the land to handle disputes and charging them to make righteous judgments and to fear the Lord (2 Chronicles 19:4-11).

In 2 Chronicles 20, an alliance of nations decides to march against Judah. Jehoshaphat seeks the Lord and asks all Judah to fast (verse 3). Through a man named Jahaziel, the Lord tells Jehoshaphat that He will deliver Judah without a fight (verses 14-17). Jehoshaphat goes out to battle with singers leading the way, singing praise to the Lord. The alliance of nations turn against each other and begin to kill each other (verses 22-23). The men of Judah spend three days collecting the spoils of war that were abandoned by their enemies (verse 25).

Although Jehoshaphat started his reign by removing the idolatrous high places, at the end of his reign, there were still high places that had not been taken away (1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 20). Jehoshaphat started well, but his diligence flagged, and the idol-worship returned. First Kings 22:41-50 and 2 Chronicles 20:35-37 record a joint ship-building venture that Jehoshaphat attempted with the wicked king Ahaziah of Israel. Jehoshaphat, who had already been chastised for an alliance with Ahab, is once again confronted by a prophet with a warning. It seems that Jehoshaphat heeded the warning and did not allow Ahaziah's men to sail with the Judeans, but the judgment still came to pass: the fleet was wrecked, and Jehoshaphat's foolish investment with Ahaziah proved futile.

Jehoshaphat is still considered a good and godly king, but his reign ended rather badly. He kept trying to build an alliance with Israel, even though the kings of Israel were obviously wicked. Jehoshaphat worshiped the Lord and led his people in seeking the Lord, but the hearts of the people were never fully changed. They reverted to pagan practices. King Jehoshaphat was unable to pass his faith on to his son Jehoram who reigned after him. Jehoram started by killing all of his brothers, and then he married

the daughter of Ahab (2 Chronicles 21:4-6).