

Day Three

When trouble comes your way

Today's reading: 2 Chronicles 20

No one is immune from trouble. We face dangers from within and dangers from without. We are aware of the fact we cannot control most of the circumstances coming our way. But we can control our reaction to them.

In 2 Chronicles 17 we read about Jehoshaphat becoming king, following the death of his father Asa. In his early years, king Asa had followed God. He had led Judah through some amazing spiritual reforms.

When in trouble, king Asa sought God and God gave him amazing strength against his enemies. The Lord rescued Asa from danger when the Ethiopians came up against Judah. However, towards the end of his life, Asa turned from God and trusted the king of Aram instead. Even on his death bed, suffering from a foot disease, Asa did not seek God but sought the help of his physicians. It is a sad ending to a life that had so much to promise.

In 2 Chronicles 20, we find Jehoshaphat facing an imminent and unexpected danger. The Moabites, the Ammonites and the Meunites have united against Judah. The king is told that their united armies are already on their way. Although Jehoshaphat is a great military man, we are told in verse 3, he "was terrified."

Jehoshaphat responds to this threatening circumstance in a way that honours God and sets Judah on the path to victory. *"Jehoshaphat was terrified by this news and begged the Lord for guidance. He also ordered everyone in Judah to begin fasting. So people from all the towns of Judah came to Jerusalem to seek the Lord's help."* - 2 Chronicles 20: 3 - 4

As far as I can see, the first time fasting is mentioned in the Bible is in regards to great danger, pain and trouble. In Judges 19, the tribe of Benjamin committed a terrible sin. A man from the tribe of Levi and his concubine stopped in Gibeah, one of the towns belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. They stopped for shelter and overnight rest, thinking it is much safer than any other foreign town. However, during the night there was trouble: *"While they were enjoying themselves, a crowd of troublemakers from the town surrounded the house. They began beating at the door and shouting to the old man, "Bring out the man who is staying with you so we can have sex with him."* It is unthinkable that such sin is found among the people whom God rescued from Egypt, with a mighty

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hand. Following their lust and immorality, they killed the man's concubine. In an act of rage and brokenness, the man from the tribe of Levi, cut her body in 12 pieces and sent them to all the tribes of Israel. There was general outrage against Benjamin. We are told that the rest of the tribes tried twice to punish this sin but they failed both times. Following their failed attempts, the people of God sought His face for an answer, by fasting and prayer. *"Then all the Israelites went up to Bethel and wept in the presence of the Lord and fasted until evening. They also brought burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. The Israelites went up seeking direction from the Lord. (In those days the Ark of the Covenant of God was in Bethel)."* - Judges 20: 26 - 27

This was a dark and memorable blemish in the history of God's people. When faced with sin and difficulty, God's people fasted and prayed and God delivered them. It was exactly what Jehoshaphat did when facing trouble and difficulty. This unexpected attack could mean the end of Judah. In desperation, Israel turned to God.

Jehoshaphat called for a time of fasting and prayer

This seems to be Jehoshaphat's first and only reaction. There was no time to waste but immediate fasting and prayer. The whole nation responded to the call and gathered before God (men, women and children). They prayed and they fasted. There was great brokenness upon God's people. This was a desperate and needy time. It was in times as these, that the whole nation learnt to depend on God again.

Jehoshaphat led the nation in prayer

At this difficult time, the king assumed a very public place. *"Jehoshaphat stood before the community of Judah and Jerusalem in front of the new courtyard at the Temple of the Lord. He prayed ..."* - 2 Chronicles 20: 5

Jehoshaphat led Judah in prayer and his prayer was filled with some amazing truths: He began by praising God (v.6), then the king claimed the promises God made to Solomon at the dedication of the Temple (v.6-8), and in the end he presented the issue to God, with a sincere and desperate request for help (v. 10-12).

His prayer came straight from the heart. Jehoshaphat, like many other men and women of God, went down the memory lane and reminded God of His faithfulness in the past. God's mighty acts of redemption were the basis of Jehoshaphat's request. If God helped in the past, He will do it again because this is God. He never changes.

Jehoshaphat led in worship

The nation was united in their response to Jehoshaphat's prayer. God responded to their prayer and unity through the voice of a prophet. There was good news: *"Listen, all you people of Judah and Jerusalem! Listen, King Jehoshaphat! This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid! Don't be discouraged by this mighty army, for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow, march out against them. You will find them coming up through the ascent of Ziz at the end of the valley that opens into the wilderness of Jeruel. But you will*

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not even need to fight. Take your positions; then stand still and watch the Lord's victory. He is with you, O people of Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid or discouraged. Go out against them tomorrow, for the Lord is with you!"

Imagine what those words meant to the whole nation: *you will not have to fight*. The battle belonged to the Lord. The confirmation comes by the mouth of the prophet, Jahaziel son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite who was a descendant of Asaph. They are to stand still. This is what can happen when we pray and fast. The lesson here is that God responds to our worship

He called for faith.

Although the promise was received with joy, Jehoshaphat still needed to encourage the people of God to have faith. Faith means acting on God's Word. They would still have to march out and form the battle lines. I love the words of king Jehoshaphat in verse 20. *"Early the next morning the army of Judah went out into the wilderness of Tekoa. On the way Jehoshaphat stopped and said, "Listen to me, all you people of Judah and Jerusalem! Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be able to stand firm. Believe in his prophets, and you will succeed."*

Jehoshaphat appoints singers.

We know that praise is a spiritual weapon. When we sing the enemy gets confused. In this case the enemy started killing each other the moment Jehoshaphat's singers opened their mouths to praise God. *"At the very moment they began to sing and give praise, the Lord caused the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir to start fighting among themselves."* God's people obtained an unlikely victory. It all started with fasting and prayer. It ended in victory because of praise: *"Give thanks to the Lord; His faithful love endures forever."*

Chapter Summary

At a time of great danger, the nation of Israel responded to the king's call. They fasted and prayed, worshipping and praising God. God responded to their plea and assured them of victory. God's people still needed to be encouraged in their faith. They had to act in faith, standing firm on the promises of God. Each step forward, on the battle line, was a step done in faith trusting God to bring the promised redemption.

I can only imagine, that morning, when the Israelites woke up to the reality of their circumstances. They had to take their position, in the plain view of a ruthless enemy, who could destroy them in matter of minutes. I can only imagine how their hearts conflicted between their unshakable faith in what God had said and the small but growing grains of doubt. They could have easily asked themselves, like all of us, what if ...?

What am I to learn from today? In times of great trial and difficulty, the people of God fasted and prayed. And God showed Himself to be faithful to His word. Does that sound familiar?

Day Three

Personal Focus

Are you experiencing difficulty in your life? Maybe you are going through some troubled times in your marriage, finances or some relationship. Or maybe you know someone going through difficulty. Have you found any encouragement in the Word of God today?

Use the space below to write down those encouragements and pray through each one of them:

Public Focus

Every church goes through times of difficulty. It could be some leadership crisis, illness, apathy, strained relationships, lack of adequate finances or lack of spiritual power. Share with your brothers and sisters, in a spirit of brokenness, the difficult time your church is going through.

Following your discussion, in love and honesty, write down these issues and pray for God to address each one of them.
