

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

6

PRAISE AND WORSHIP: WEAPONS FOR SPIRITUAL WARFARE

2 Chronicles 20:1—30

By John Ebert

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name”

Hebrews 13:15

AIM OF STUDY

- To learn that in spiritual warfare, we must rely on God to fight for us, and that worshipping God is one of our weapons for battle.

KEY VERSE

“This is what the Lord says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours but God’s.’ ” (2 Chron. 20:15b)

PREPARATION

Read over the notes on “**how to teach the Bible in small group**” and “**some practical suggestions for leading a small group discussion**” in Vineyard Church of Columbus’ *Small Group Leadership Training Manual*. Before you read over the Scripture, pray that God would give you direction for leading your group and teach you something relevant. Then read the passage and the Bible study below. **You will need to go over the questions and choose which ones you want to emphasize and which you could eliminate if your time is limited.** Note that the application questions are marked with an asterisk (*). Rather than leaving these to the end of the study, ask one or two as you work through the passage so people are being confronted by Scripture’s truths and applying them to their own lives. If you find you are falling behind schedule and need to move ahead, you could summarize some of the passage and then go to the final questions.

These studies contain more background material and information on the passages than any group will cover in a meeting. The authors are providing this for the leaders’ benefit—to help reduce your study and preparation time; to help resource you for possible questions group members may raise; and to clarify some gray areas of doctrine that may be in your mind as you prepare. Obviously we cannot exhaust any one subject in a document like this, so you may want to do further reading and discuss doctrine with your pastor. We highly recommend *The New Bible Dictionary* or *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* as excellent resources for study.

For this study, you may want to have a map of the Middle East during the Old Testament times of the kings to show your group members. This can help make the characters and events more real to them.

OPENERS

Frank Fortunato of Heart Sounds International reports that at the beginning of the twenty-first century “...the African nation of Sudan continues as one of the worst places of suffering on the planet. This biblical land of the Cushites is also Africa’s largest landmass, containing an area equal to Western Europe. The government based in the North has waged jihad/war on the Christian and animist South, resulting in two million dead. Civil war traces back over decades but greatly intensified in

recent years. The devastation in the South has included pillage, rape, people sold into slavery, whole villages burned – all the markings of a scorched earth policy by the militant government. Many of those that have survived have huddled into refugee camps at the borders of Uganda and Kenya, while millions more have melted into the outskirts of greater Khartoum, the tri-city capital complex. Of all the tribes undergoing persecution, none have been more devastated than the Dinka tribe of Southern Sudan” (Fortunato).

Heart Sounds International (HSI) is “a fellowship of volunteer musician/recording engineers who take ten-day mission trips to an area to teach on biblical worship, train believers in various music skills as well as record indigenous worship songs” (Fortunato). On a trip to Sudan, an HSI team spent a whole day recording songs sung by a choir from a Dinka church. The choir “sang with vigorous abandon ... oblivious to their surroundings, to the recording equipment, and to the four strangers doing the audio and video taping and snapping all the photos” (Fortunato). On their last medley of songs, the choir began dancing and jumping and marching, overflowing with such joy and exuberance that one of the engineers had to hold the microphone stands to keep them from falling over. When the choir finished, the HSI team asked the choir leader about the meaning of the songs. “He mentioned that the songs spoke of their difficult situation in life, but also expressed hope, faith, joy and trust in the Lord. These were the very people whose kids were abducted, sold into slavery, women raped, houses burned, crops and cattle destroyed, etc. To see these persecuted believers overflow with worship was one of the highlights of the entire trip, even if the dancing/celebration disrupted the recording of that last song a little bit” (Fortunato).

The HSI team reported that through this encounter, they “realized afresh that through worship God keeps his people strong in times of difficulty and persecution” (Fortunato). The Dinka church’s “deep grappling with suffering has resulted in a theology expressed not in books but in more than 2,000 new songs with rich, biblical lyrics. The Dinka church continues to proclaim its faith in adversity. Typical of the Dinka strong faith through times of trial is a contemporary Dinka hymn by Mary Alueel Garang, “Let us praise the Lord. Let us praise the Lord in the Day of Devastation and in the Day of Contentment” (Fortunato).

Pray and invite the Holy Spirit to come and teach you through this study.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1 and 2 Chronicles originally formed one book. Together they cover a history of Israel from Adam through the time when King Cyrus decreed that the first group of exiles in Babylon could return to Israel to rebuild the temple. The author may have been Ezra, the priest, who also seems to have written the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The purpose of this history is to tell how God dealt with His covenant people, especially King David and his son, Solomon. Because David planned the temple and Solomon built it in Jerusalem, these topics and worship in the temple receive special attention. Likewise, the religious reforms under a few of Judah’s kings who look back

to the days of David and Solomon are also emphasized (see Dillard, *NIV*, pp. 578–669 and Hasel, pp. 666–673).

Study the Passage: 2 Chronicles 20:1-30

The golden age of Israel took place during the reigns of King David and his son, King Solomon. God made Israel strong under David and blessed them with peace and great wealth under Solomon. King Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem to honor God. After Solomon died, his son Rehoboam became king, but the ten northern tribes of Israel rebelled and chose a different king, Jeroboam. From that time on, Israel was split into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

Although the northern kingdom of Israel soon turned away from God and worshipped idols, the southern kingdom of Judah stayed faithful to God for some time. There were a few lapses when they failed to trust or obey God, but Judah did not turn away from God during the time covered in this study. The events in this chapter took place during the reign of King Jehoshaphat, the great great grandson of King Solomon who became king of Judah about sixty years after Solomon died. This passage describes how he reacted when an invading army threatened his kingdom.

1. Let's read the passage. Read aloud vv 1-5; 6-13; 14-19; 20-24; 25-20.

Look at 2 Chronicles 20:1-2. What is the situation that Jehoshaphat faces?

It is reported to Jehoshaphat that a vast army of Moabites, Ammonites and some of the Meunites are invading his land.

Moab and Ammon were both neighbors of Judah to the east, over the Jordan River. It is not clear who the Meunites were. The Hebrew text literally says “some of the Ammonites”, but that seems redundant since the Ammonites have already been mentioned. Some scholars suggest that the Meunites are related to the city of Ma'an which was also somewhere east of the Jordan. Later in the passage, this third group in the invading army is connected with Mount Seir. Mount Seir is associated with Edom, another neighbor of Judah east of the Jordan. Regardless of exactly who these people were, they had gathered together to invade Judah. Today, all these people would be from modern day **Jordan**. The report to Jehoshaphat places them at En-Gedi, about midway on the western shore of the Dead Sea, only twenty-five miles southeast of Jerusalem.

2. Imagine yourself in Jehoshaphat's place. How do you think you would react to this situation?

The most obvious reaction would be fear. Even if you thought you could defeat the invading army, there might be many casualties and you would risk your life to fight them. Given the size of the invading army, it was not clear that Judah could prevail against them, and the consequences of defeat would

be terrible. Fear, uncertainty, doubt, feeling paralyzed, etc. would all be natural reactions.

*** Think of a crisis situation in your own life, for example, losing a job, being told you have a serious disease, or something else beyond your control or that you didn't know how to handle. How did/would you react?**

4. What was Jehoshaphat's very first reaction (v. 3)?

According to the NIV translation, Jehoshaphat was "alarmed" when he heard the report of the attacking army. The original Hebrew is stronger than this; it says that he was afraid. That seems like an appropriate first reaction for someone who had just heard that an invading army was coming to kill him and take his land.

5. What did Jehoshaphat do next (vv. 3-12)?

First, he "resolved to inquire of the Lord." He called for a fast and gathered all the people of his country, Judah, to seek the Lord as well. Verses 3 and 4 mention three times that he and the people were inquiring of or seeking the Lord. So Jehoshaphat took his fear and turned to the Lord for help.

In verses 5-12, Jehoshaphat offered a prayer in the assembly, speaking for all the people.

6. Look at Jehoshaphat's prayer in verses 6-12. Where did he begin?

First, in verse 6, he recalled for God, the people, and himself who God is. God is the God of heaven and rules over "all the kingdoms of the nations," including the kingdoms of the invading army. God also has power and might and no one, not even the invading army, can withstand Him. Note that Jehoshaphat used LORD, God's covenant name, in the beginning. It's because God's faithful to keep His covenant with them that Jehoshaphat can turn to Him for help.

***How did Jehoshaphat structure (or organize) his request for God's help?**

Next, in verse 7, Jehoshaphat recalled God's **promise to Abraham** that the land should belong to Abraham's descendents. This promise is first recorded in Gen. 12:7 and God repeated the promise to Abraham in Gen. 13:14-17, Gen. 15:7, Gen. 15:18-21 and Gen. 17:18. Since Jehoshaphat and his people were the descendents of Abraham, the invading army had no right to take the Promised Land away from them.

In verses 8 and 9, Jehoshaphat recalled the building of the **temple** by King Solomon. King Solomon offered a long prayer in 2 Chron. 6:14-42 in which he asked God to hear the people if they came to the temple and asked for his

help in time of danger, famine, or whatever calamity might befall them. In 2 Chron. 7:12-16, God promised Solomon that he would answer his prayer and would hear prayers from the temple calling on Him for help. Jehoshaphat summarized Solomon's prayer, implicitly asking God to remember His promise to Solomon and to hear the current king's prayer to save him and his people.

In the first part of his prayer, Jehoshaphat focused on God's **promises**. One might say that he called on God to show mercy to him and his people. He did not claim that he and his people deserve to be delivered from the enemy army, but asked God to do it because of God's character and God's promises.

The last part of the prayer appealed to God's **justice**. The nations that were coming to attack Judah are nations that God refused to allow the Israelites to attack or destroy when they came into the Promised Land. In Deut. 2:1-8, God told the people of Israel on their way to the Promised Land to bypass Seir, and they did. (Note that this assumes, as the rest of this passage does, that the Meunites were from Mount Seir.) They were told not to bother the people of Seir because they were descendents of Esau, Jacob's brother and one of Abraham's grandsons. Num. 20:14-21 also records that Israel bypassed Edom (another name for Seir). In Deut. 2:9 and Deut. 2:19, Israel was also told to leave Moab and Ammon alone because they are descendents of Lot, Abraham's nephew. Deut. 2:9, 2:12, 2:22, 2:19 and 2:21 mention that God gave Moab, Seir and Ammon their own lands to possess, just as He gave the Promised Land to Israel. Judg. 11:15-18 also recalls that the people of Israel bypassed these three lands when they came into the Promised Land.

In verses 10-12, Jehoshaphat reminded God that God protected those nations from Israel when they came to the Promised Land. Now these same nations were returning evil for good by threatening to destroy the very people who did not destroy them. Jehoshaphat asked God to treat them with justice, not mercy, returning their evil intentions upon them.

Finally, in verse 12, Jehoshaphat admitted that he and his people did not have any power or ability to defeat the attacking army or to solve this problem. They looked to God for **help** because they didn't know what to do. It is interesting that 2 Chron. 17:12-19 reports that Jehoshaphat had a strong army and had made preparations to defend his land from attack. It seems possible in human terms that he could have repelled the invaders. Nevertheless, he did not rely on his own ability or the strength of his army, but looked to God to help.

***Who or what do you usually rely on in a crisis?**

7. What happened after Jehoshaphat prayed (vv. 13-19)?

Verse 13 simply records that the people were standing there. Since it had already been mentioned that all the people had assembled to seek the Lord,

this seems redundant, except perhaps this indicates the wives and children were there, too. One interpretation might be that they were waiting for a response from God. God may not have immediately answered Jehoshaphat's prayer; there might have been a delay before God responded.

Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel, one of the people standing in the assembly, and he prophesied and spoke the word of the Lord to the people. Notice that God did not choose one of the known leaders or recognized prophets to speak His word. Someone like Jehoshaphat would not need any further introduction because everyone would know he was the king. In contrast, Jahaziel's ancestors have to be traced back five generations to connect with Asaph, one of the chief worship leaders from King David's time (1 Chron. 15:16-21, 16:4-7, 25:1-9).

8. What did the Lord tell the people through Jahaziel? Note in particular anything that was repeated or emphasized.

At the beginning (verse 15) and at the end (verse 17), the people were told "do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." This was particularly significant because Jehoshaphat's first reaction to the threat was fear, as one might expect. We could imagine that anyone who heard the message shared the king's worry, too.

Also at the beginning (verse 15) and at the end (verse 17), the people were told to go out and face the invading army. This was a command from God for them to obey.

God also assured the people that the battle was not theirs, but His—that they would not have to fight, and that they would see their deliverance (verses 16 and 17). Finally, God assured them that He would be present with them as they go out in obedience to His command.

9. How did the people respond to the word of the Lord? Look at what they did, but also think about what they didn't do (2 Chron. 20:18-19).

They fell down and worshipped God, and then some of them stood up and praised God in a loud voice. They did not complain about their situation or doubt God's promise, but they celebrated that God has spoken to them and promised to be with them.

***Think of the times when you have entrusted your trials to the Lord without complaining, worrying or frantically taking action in your defense. What was the outcome?**

10. The next morning, the people obeyed God's command by going out to face their enemies. Why do you think Jehoshaphat stopped the people and said what he did? Why did they appoint men to lead the army with songs and praise to God (2 Chron. 20:22-24)?

The day before, it might have been easier to feel confident in God's word. The people were gathered in the relative safety of the fortified city of Jerusalem. They were all together at the temple, praying to God and hearing His word. We often find it easier to trust God when we are at church or in our small groups and we can feel the Spirit's presence in us and in the people around us.

However, it was the next day and the people have left the fortified city. They were not fleeing from their enemies, but going towards them, even though they knew they couldn't defeat their enemies in their own power. We often find that when we leave the safety of our church or small group and go back out into the world, our faith and closeness to God that we felt in our group leaves us. Our problems seem to get bigger and God does not seem so near. So we might expect that the euphoria the people felt the day before when God spoke to them might have been wearing off and that they might have begun to question God's promise to them. It is much easier to stay in the temple or in church and praise God than to leave the safe place and march toward the enemy you fear.

King Jehoshaphat's words were an encouragement to the people not to forget what God has promised. Only by trusting in God and the word God spoke through His chosen prophet would the people succeed.

Appointing men to lead the people in praise and worship may have also been intended to remind the people that God is with them and to encourage them to trust in God.

11. What happened when the people began to praise God as they were going out in obedience to God (2 Chron. 20:22-24)?

Although God had already promised to defeat the enemies of Judah, it is interesting that God did not act on this promise until the people began to worship Him.

12. After God defeated their enemies, what did Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah do (2 Chron. 20:25-28)?

They gathered so much spoil that it took them three days! Then they worshipped God, returned to Jerusalem, and worshipped some more.

***How quickly does your thanks and praise taper off after God has done something wonderful for you? Why?**

13. What did God do afterwards (2 Chron. 20:29-30)?

First of all, the nations around Judah became afraid of the awesome power of God, whom they heard fought on Judah's behalf. As a result, God gave them rest and peace. This is a beautiful picture of the benefit of being under the Lordship of Christ. We not only are safe from the enemies around us, but we also get to experience the blessings of the kingdom—peace with God, others, and ourselves, and freedom from trying to earn God's favor or fight spiritual battles alone.

APPLYING THE TEXT

*** Look back through the whole passage. How much contact did Jehoshaphat's army have with their enemies?**

Note that Jehoshaphat and his people did not fight with the invading army nor even engage or communicate with it in any way.

If they didn't participate in face to face combat, what things did Jehoshaphat and his people do? With whom do they interact?

Verse 3

- Resolved to inquire of the Lord
- Proclaimed a fast

Verse 4

- Came together
- Sought the Lord

Verses 5-12

- Prayed to God for help

Verse 13

- Stood and waited for God

Verses 14-17

- Jahaziel prophesied by the Spirit of God

Verse 18

- Bowed down
- Fell down in worship

Verse 19

- Stood and praised God "with very loud voice"

Verse 20

- Went out (in obedience to God's command)
- Jehoshaphat encouraged the people to trust God

Verse 21

- Appointed men to sing and praise God at the head of the army
- Gave thanks to the Lord

Verse 24

- Looked and saw

Verse 25

- Carried off plunder

Verse 26

- Praised the Lord

Verse 27

- Returned joyfully to Jerusalem

Verse 28

- Went to the temple with musical instruments (to praise and worship the Lord)

Instead of fighting, they sought the Lord, prayed to Him, praised and worshipped Him. Depending on exactly what you count, there are six to eight references to the people praising God. The people were in contact with God and focused on their relationship with Him. Their deliverance did not come through their own power, but through God's intervention on their behalf. God began to defeat the enemy when His people began to obey and praise Him (2 Chron. 20:22).

***Jehoshaphat and his people praised God—when God spoke to them; while they were going out in obedience to God; and after God delivered them from their enemies. Think about your life. When do you usually worship God? Why?**

***When you face difficulties, do you concentrate on your problems and what you can do to solve them, or do you use worship to turn your attention to God and His provision for you?**

***How did this entire threat from three different ethnic groups turn out to be a great blessing to the people of Judah? How can this incident help you face severe trials more confidently?**

***Let's take time to worship and praise God. Call to mind His unchanging, perfect character that alone makes Him King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We can pray that God would send the Holy Spirit to give us hearts to worship Him, not only during our small group time, but each day.**

***Let's pray for anyone facing difficulties, using the pattern Jehoshaphat followed. Remember God's promises, pray for God's help, wait and listen for God's direction, praise and worship God, and pray for encouragement and strength to obey God's commands.**

Pray for any who are suffering difficulties that God would teach them worship and trust Him daily. Perhaps members of the group will want to write notes or make calls between meetings to encourage them.

WRAPPING IT UP

As Christians, we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by the good deeds that we do. When faced with a difficult problem, Jehoshaphat might have been tempted to solve it on his own with the resources he already had. However, he didn't do that. Instead, he turned to God through prayer, waiting and listening for God to speak. Then he and the people worshipped and obeyed. The king and his people received salvation from their enemies, not by their own works, but by God's grace. They had learned the secret that we are not only saved by grace, but also we live each day by that same grace. Worship and praise helped them turn their attention to God and put their faith in Him. In the same way, worship and praise can help us rely on God more and more each day and gratefully receive more of God's gracious provision for us. Worship is a powerful weapon in spiritual warfare because it gives glory and honor to God, and it also turns our attention away from ourselves, our problems, our works, and our enemies towards God and His saving grace for us.

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