

## Faith and Encouragement

Devotional Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1–15

Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:5–20

### 2 Chronicles 20:13–20

<sup>13</sup> All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD.

<sup>14</sup> Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.

<sup>15</sup> He said: “Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! 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. <sup>16</sup> Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. <sup>17</sup> You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.’”

<sup>18</sup> Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD. <sup>19</sup> Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

<sup>20</sup> Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.”

### Key Text

*“Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.”—2 Chronicles 20:20b*

Faith That Pleases God

## Unit 2: Learning About Faith

Lessons 6–9

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the faith actions that led to Jehoshaphat's victory.
2. Evaluate the cause-and-effect tenor of the key text.
3. Notice God's presence and help in facing his or her fears.

## Lesson Outline

### Introduction

- A. Encouragement Passed Along
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Facing a Crisis (2 Chronicles 20:13–17)

- A. Solemn Gathering (v. 13)  
*Families Together?*
- B. Inspired Messenger (v. 14)
- C. Reassuring Message (vv. 15–17)

#### II. “Faith-ing” a Crisis (2 Chronicles 20:18–20)

- A. By Worshiping the Lord (vv. 18–19)  
*Genuine Worship*
- B. By Trusting the Lord (v. 20)

### Conclusion

- A. When Uplook Changes Outlook
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

### How to Say It

Ahab	Ay-hab.
Asa	Ay-zuh.
Asaph	Ay-saff.
Benaiah	Be-nay-juh.
Cyrus	Sigh-russ.
En-Gedi	En-gee-dye.
Jahaziel	Juh-hay-zuh-el.
Jehoshaphat	Jeh-hosh-uh-fat.
Joash	Jo-ash.
Kohathites	Ko-hath-ites.
Mattaniah	Mat-uh-nye-uh.
Uzziah	Uh-zye-uh.

# Introduction

## A. Encouragement Passed Along

On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first African American to take the field for a major league baseball team in the modern era when he started in a game for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Breaking the color barrier was a milestone in moving toward an end to discrimination in baseball and in America as a whole. But it was an uphill battle to reach that point, and encouragement from others helped Robinson contribute to overcoming the racial bias of post-World War II America (with more progress yet needed today).

Robinson's success in baseball and later as an activist in the Civil Rights Movement became, in turn, an encouragement for others to succeed by overcoming prejudice and other obstacles. To offer "you can do it" words of encouragement is good as far as it goes. But to be an example of one who has been through the fire of adversity is encouragement on a whole other level! Encouragement is one of the most positive ways to use words and actions, especially when those who need to be encouraged face times of great uncertainty and challenge.

## B. Lesson Context

The book of 2 Chronicles covers the time period 970 BC to 536 BC. This period spans from Solomon, the last king of Israel as a united monarchy, to Cyrus, the king of Persia who ended the Babylonian exile. Readers of the Bible may wonder why the books of 1-2 Chronicles are useful, since their content often mirrors that of 2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. A clue is found in the titles of 1 and 2 Chronicles as appearing in the Greek version of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint. There the titles translate into English as "Things Omitted." That is certainly appropriate regarding the text of today's lesson, which focuses on events during the reign of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah (the southern kingdom of divided Israel) from about 872 BC to 848 BC. The text of [2 Chronicles 17:1–21:3](#) has much more information about him than is recorded in [1 Kings 15:24; 22:1–50](#).

Uncertainty exists regarding the author of Chronicles. As a result that person is often referred to merely as "the chronicler." The priest and scribe Ezra, who led the return from exile in 458 BC, is our best guess for being the author. This is because [2 Chronicles 36:22–23](#) is virtually identical, letter for letter, to [Ezra 1:1–3](#) in the Hebrew.

Some students propose that Ezra (if indeed he was the author) wrote 1-2 Chronicles to teach God's people to avoid sin, lest they suffer anew the consequences that led to exile in the first place. A special focus on the importance of faithfulness to the Lord can be detected in [1 Chronicles 22:13; 2 Chronicles 17:3–6; 24:20; 29:6–9; 31:20, 21; 36:15–21](#)—texts with no parallel in 2 Samuel or 1-2 Kings. Ezra would have agreed with the often-quoted statement that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (George Santayana, 1863–1952).

Jehoshaphat reigned during the period of the divided monarchy in Israelite history. He was one of the more godly kings of Judah (see [2 Chronicles 17:3–4](#)). He is noted for his efforts to rid Judah of idol worship and to promote the teaching of God's law throughout the land ([17:1–9](#)). Also noteworthy is

the respect held by surrounding people and the attention he gave to various building projects and to administrative reforms (17:10–19).

On the downside, however, Jehoshaphat entered into an ill-advised alliance with ungodly Ahab, king of northern Israel, who enlisted Jehoshaphat's aid in retaking some territory from the Arameans. At Ahab's behest, Jehoshaphat wore his royal robes into battle against the Arameans while Ahab disguised himself in an effort to keep the prophet Micaiah's prediction of his death from being fulfilled (2 Chronicles 18:1–31a). The move nearly cost Jehoshaphat his life, but “the Lord helped him” (18:31b), and he was spared.

After hearing of God's displeasure with that alliance (2 Chronicles 19:1–3), Jehoshaphat reorganized his government both physically and spiritually (19:4–11). At an unspecified time later, a coalition of enemy forces began to march toward Judah (20:1–2). This resulted in the king and country becoming unified in fasting and public prayer—prayer that confessed utter reliance on the Lord to defeat this threat (20:3–12). The Lord's response came next.

## I. Facing a Crisis (2 Chronicles 20:13–17)

### A. Solemn Gathering (v. 13)

**13. All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD.**

The phrase *all the men of Judah ... stood there before the Lord* reflects 2 Chronicles 20:4, which records that people “came from every town in Judah” to seek the Lord's help during the crisis at hand (see Lesson Context for details). They gathered at “the temple of the Lord” (20:5). It seems that representatives from every town were present. The crisis was so severe that it was not only men gathered, but *wives and children and little ones* as well. Having just heard their king's prayer (see Lesson Context), they awaited God's response.

Second Chronicles 20:5 states that the king stood in “the temple of the Lord in the front of the new courtyard.” This courtyard was perhaps a renovation undertaken during the reigns of either Asa (Jehoshaphat's father) or Jehoshaphat himself, both of whom are commended for their exemplary devotion to the Lord (14:2–6; 15:17; 17:3–6). Here is where the assembly (including families) stood before the Lord following Jehoshaphat's fervent prayer for the Lord's help against the invading forces. Jehoshaphat had closed his prayer with words expressing his and the people's complete dependence upon the Lord.

#### What Do You Think?

How do you prioritize prayer and worship time within your family?

#### Digging Deeper

In what ways can you invite your friends and neighbors to join your family in prayer and worship?

## Families Together?

When our children were small, my wife and I made an effort to keep them with us as much as possible when we attended church. We wanted to get them involved in worship service, listening to the sermon, and talking with them about both afterward. This paid off in some unexpected ways. My youngest daughter decided she liked worship songs, even the old hymns, and asked me to sing them to her at bedtime. My son watched the worship band intently, developed a love for drumming and is well on his way to becoming a world-class percussionist. My oldest daughter became enamored with missions and is going to Bible college to become a missionary to Germany. Worshipping together as a family is not the only reason they made these choices, but it's a part of a foundation of faith we tried to lay in their lives.

Seeking the Lord through worship, prayer, etc., happens both individually and collectively. For instance, the apostle Paul wrote letters to both individuals and churches. It's important not to let one aspect eclipse the other. Do you?

—A. W.

### B. Inspired Messenger (v. 14)

#### 14a. Then the Spirit of the LORD came on

The declaration of the Holy Spirit's "coming upon" someone in the Old Testament era is associated predominantly with the books of Judges and 1 Samuel. In 2 Chronicles, the occurrence is associated with King Uzziah, who spoke a message of both encouragement and warning to King Asa (15:1–7). Later "the Spirit of God" came upon a different Zechariah (see 20:14b, below), who rebuked King Joash for turning away from the Lord and leading Judah and Jerusalem into idolatry (24:20).

These instances in the Old Testament era seem to have been of limited durations for specific individuals regarding specific tasks and events. On the other hand, the gift of the Holy Spirit for the era of the New Testament is present in all Christians (1 Corinthians 6:19; Ephesians 1:13).

#### What Do You Think?

What does it look like for believers to be empowered by the Holy Spirit? Consider Ephesians 5:18–20 in your answer.

#### Digging Deeper

How will you continue being attentive to the ways that the Holy Spirit works in and through you?

**14b. Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.**

What an avalanche of names! Consternation multiplies when we discover that the 6 names are rather common, designating altogether some 67 people with one of those names in the Old Testament (compare 1 Chronicles 1–9). The chronicler has gone to a lot of work to record these *son of* connections. Being able to prove one's lineage was important to the ancient Jew (compare Ezra 2:59–62; Nehemiah 7:61–64), as it is in establishing the line of Jesus in the New Testament era (Matthew

1:1–17, lesson 3; Luke 3:23–38). Genealogies have their place, but they can be overemphasized (Matthew 3:9; 1 Timothy 1:4; Titus 3:9). In any case, for *Jahaziel* to have his pedigree traced back to the *Asaph* of King David’s era some three centuries previous is noteworthy (see 2 Chronicles 5:12; Nehemiah 11:17).

### C. Reassuring Message (vv. 15–17)

**15. He said: “Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! 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.’**

The message was not directed to all 12 tribes of divided Israel, but only to the southern kingdom of *Judah*, where *Jerusalem* was located. God intended that everyone receive his message. Therefore, it is addressed to all the people of Judah and Jerusalem, with the king referred to last. Since northern Israel was ruled by ungodly kings (see [Lesson Context](#)), the content of the message being delivered was not appropriate for them.

*This is what the Lord says* or variations on this phrase occur over 400 times in the Old Testament. Whether the message that follows is initially targeted toward an individual ([Jeremiah 27:2](#)) or a group ([4:3](#)), the expected outcome will concern the bigger picture. That is the case here, as *Jahaziel* directed his words to *all* the people who were assembled (the phrase *to you* is also plural). Interestingly, the negative phrase *do not be afraid or discouraged* also appears in [2 Chronicles 32:7](#), where it is preceded by the positive phrase “be strong and courageous” with regard to a different enemy (compare [1 Chronicles 22:13](#)).

*King Jehoshaphat*, as leader of God’s people, especially needed to hear these words. The *vast army* of the enemy coalition was already at En-Gedi, located on the western shore of the Dead Sea southeast of Jerusalem ([2 Chronicles 20:2](#)). The distance from En-Gedi to Jerusalem was about 25 straight-line miles. However, since road distances varied, the practical distance between the locations was a bit farther. An army marching at a rate of two miles per hour would be at the gates of Jerusalem in less than three days!

When in a crisis situation, there’s always the perceived need to do something as people begin to panic. Yet *Jehoshaphat* did not need to concern himself with how he and his people would overcome the enemy army, for he was not the real commander-in-chief: *the battle is not yours, but God’s* (compare [1 Samuel 17:47](#); [2 Kings 6:15–17](#)).

**16. “Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel.**

# THE BATTLE BELONGS TO THE LORD.



Visual for [Lesson 8](#). Point to this visual after reading verse [17](#) and ask for examples of ways that the Lord fights for us today.

The enemy army's location *by the Pass of Ziz* means that those troops had marched about seven miles to the north from En-Gedi (again, [2 Chronicles 20:2](#)), along the road bordering the western shore of the Dead Sea. This puts that army less than 20 miles from Jerusalem. *The Desert of Jeruel* was in this vicinity ([20:20](#)). Exactly how King Jehoshaphat was to proceed at that point is specified in the next verse.

**17.** “You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.’”

This verse essentially repeats the message of [2 Chronicles 20:15](#), above. The Scriptures witness to the Lord's defeating enemy armies in various ways (examples: [Exodus 14](#); [Deuteronomy 3:1–11](#); [Joshua 8](#); [Judges 4, 7](#); [2 Kings 19](#)). Sometimes the Lord works through human intermediaries in this regard, and sometimes not. The promise *you will not have to fight in this battle* is a strong hint that this time it will be the latter.

The commands *stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you and do not be afraid ... the*

*Lord will be with you* are remarkably similar to Moses' instructions in [Exodus 14:13–14](#) to the Israelites when being pursued by the Egyptian army during the exodus many centuries earlier: “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today.... The Lord will fight for you.” The assurance of the Lord's presence is found in numerous places (examples: [Genesis 31:3](#); [Deuteronomy 31:6](#); [Isaiah 41:10](#)).

### What Do You Think?

How can each element of the armor of God (see [Ephesians 6:10–18](#)) help you stand firm in the contexts in which God has placed you?

### Digging Deeper

How will you discern whether “battle strategies” are necessary in your context of serving the Lord?

## II. “Faith-ing” a Crisis ([2 Chronicles 20:18–20](#))

### A. By Worshipping the Lord (vv. 18–19)

**18.** Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD.

Clearly, *the Lord* had heard the king's prayer! Worship was the only proper response. The king set the example, and the people joined him. He had declared that “our eyes are on you” ([2 Chronicles 20:12](#)); now he and those same eyes were turned to the ground in reverence. They had been standing “before the Lord” ([20:13](#)); they then *fell down in worship before the Lord*.

**19.** Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

The *Kohathites* took their name from Kohath, the second of the three sons of Levi ([Genesis 46:11](#)). From the Kohathites came the priestly family of Aaron ([1 Chronicles 6:1–3](#)). *The Levites* “were responsible for the care of the sanctuary” ([Numbers 3:28](#)).

The *Korahites* refer to the sons of Korah, another Levite from the clan of Kohath, whose father was Izhar, the brother of Amram, Moses and Aaron's father ([Exodus 6:18, 21](#)). Korah is infamous for organizing a rebellion against the authority of Moses and Aaron during Israel's wanderings in the wilderness. Korah and those who joined him in his defiance were swallowed up by the earth in a terrifying demonstration of God's wrath ([Numbers 16:25–35](#)). There were, however, descendants of Korah who did not join him in his action, and those mentioned in our passage would be descendants of those individuals. Certainly the difference in attitude between these who *stood up* to join Jehoshaphat in praise and worship and their forefathers who “rose up” to defy Moses ([16:2](#)) is worth noting. As time moved on and the tabernacle gave way to the temple, the Korahites became gatekeepers ([1 Chronicles 6:22; 9:17–19](#)).

### What Do You Think?



In what ways can you worship God without fear of being distracting or disturbing others?

### **Digging Deeper**

How is your public witness strengthened when you publicly worship God?

## **Genuine Worship**

What does genuine, authentic worship look like? In Italy, day and night at regular hours of prayer, monks gather in robes and chant ancient hymns in a Gothic cathedral. In Iowa, on the stage of a tiny country church, a shaggy-headed guitarist rocks out to heavy metal before a sea of tattooed and pierced motorcycle enthusiasts, singing along to lyrics of devotion to Jesus. In India, an elderly woman prays and worships at a niche in her living room wall that once held pictures and statues of Hindu gods but now features only a cross. In Oklahoma, a well-dressed couple sit in the theater seating of a megachurch and watch a well-rehearsed drama, laughing and thinking soberly about God's gentle, persistent call in their lives.

Around the world, worship of God is as diverse as God's people. Love for Jesus can be expressed in any language, as well as by all sorts of music, art, and body language. Regardless of how amateurish various worship expressions might look, two things matter most: (1) that it is offered from a sincere heart of devotion and (2) that it is offered only to the true God, who sent his Son to die on our behalf ([John 4:23](#)). To worship with the first without the second is idolatry; to worship with the second without the first is hypocrisy. Which way might you tend most to err?

—A. W.

### **B. By Trusting the Lord (v. 20)**

**20. Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful."**

Rising *early in the morning* indicates the king and the people's anticipation to see how the Lord would work on their behalf. It's an 18-mile walk, and they need to get to *the Desert of Tekoa* before nightfall (see [2 Chronicles 20:16](#), above). King *Jehoshaphat* took the lead in encouraging his people to demonstrate faith in the Lord—a key theme of Jahaziel's message the day before. (Perhaps Jahaziel accompanied the people as they went forth, but we are not told.) As Jehoshaphat challenged the people to *have faith in the Lord* and in his messengers, the *prophets*, it appears the king accepted Jahaziel's message as prophetic.

The link between trusting the Lord and trusting his prophets should not be overlooked. If God's covenant people desired to obey him, then they must accept the words spoken by his inspired messengers, the prophets. When God's people ignored and even mocked these Heaven-sent messengers, a Heaven-sent judgment came upon them (see [2 Kings 17](#); etc.).

For the time being, King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah had chosen to heed the words spoken to them. When they raised their voices in praise to the Lord, the Lord indeed came to their rescue

and brought about a miraculous deliverance that allowed the people to plunder the possessions of their enemies (2 Chronicles 20:21–25). So the king and the people then returned to Jerusalem as they had left it—in triumphant praise and worship of the Lord (20:26–28).

**What Do You Think?**

What most challenges you about today's passage?

**Digging Deeper**

What will you do to respond to that challenge?

## Conclusion

### A. When Uplook Changes Outlook

King Jehoshaphat had offered a passionate plea to the Lord for help, admitting that neither the king nor his people had any strategy or resources to confront the oncoming threat. Perhaps as his prayer progressed, his voice grew louder, possibly even trembling as he reached the end and declared his utter dependence upon God: “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you” (2 Chronicles 20:12). Then came Jahaziel’s Spirit-empowered words. The people’s uplook changed their outlook.

All of us can probably recall a time when a passage of God’s Word was especially reassuring and helped get us through difficult circumstances. We may not have felt as desperate as Jehoshaphat did, but we experienced the energy that comes with God’s encouragement. We may not be like Jahaziel, who encouraged a king and his nation when the Spirit of God came upon him. But perhaps during the course of a day, someone will come to mind that we should share a Scripture passage with by a phone call, text message, email, or postcard.

Who might that be?

### B. Prayer

Father, our culture and our world are often characterized by speech and actions that oppose your truth. Keep our eyes on you daily, that we may escape their influence! Thank you for those who have encouraged us over the years through your promises. May we seek to pass that blessing on to others. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Let your uplook change your outlook.

## Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity*

## Into the Lesson

Invite learners to list famous battles in world history. Write the list on the board and refer to the list as you ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—What was the context of the battle? 2—Who is considered to have “won” the battle? 3—What resulted from the conflict?

*Option.* Bring a checkerboard and arrange the pieces with one piece of one color in a corner and three “kinged” pieces of another color surrounding it. Explain how this layout demonstrates one-to-three (1:3) odds. Challenge learners to develop a strategy for the one to overcome the three and win.

Say, “It is easy for us to feel overwhelmed, discouraged, and defeated when we feel the odds are stacked against us. That is how King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah felt in today’s Scripture. As we study, pay attention to what God told them and how their response reflected their faith.”

## Into the Word

Prepare for today’s Scripture reading by sharing the Lesson Context from the commentary. Ask a volunteer to read aloud [2 Chronicles 20:13–14](#). Divide the class in half. Ask one half to list the listeners mentioned in verse [13](#) and discuss why it was important for each listed group to hear the word of the Lord on that day. Ask the other half to record the lineage of Jahaziel based on verse [14](#) and discuss why he had the authority to speak. Give the two groups time to discuss and then ask for volunteers to share their group’s conclusions.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [2 Chronicles 20:15–17](#). Divide participants into pairs or triads. Distribute a sheet of paper and pens to each group. Ask each group to sketch the plan God instructed the people of Judah to follow. Invite groups to use their “sanctified imagination” to fill in the gaps in their sketches regarding strategic battle instructions and other related details. After 10 minutes, ask a volunteer from each group to share their drawing with the whole class. Discuss any conclusions and insights that groups discovered.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [2 Chronicles 20:18–20](#). Ask three or more volunteers to act out these verses before the whole class. Choose volunteers to play the roles of King Jehoshaphat, people of Judah, and Levite(s). After the performance, invite the class to discuss what behaviors demonstrated the characters’ faith in what God had told them. Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—What is significant about the people worshipping God before the battle? 2—How did Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah show their faith? 3—How does verse 20 apply to us? 4—How would you respond if God told you directly that he would fight for you?

*Option.* Allow one minute for learners to complete the “Asaph’s Psalm” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Then ask learners to pair up to discuss their results.

## Into Life

Ask participants to choose a partner. Write the following three questions on the board:

1. What things in your life cause you to experience fear or worry?
2. How does today's Scripture text encourage you and strengthen your faith?
3. What will you do this week to be attentive to God's presence in facing your fears and worries?

Allow time for the pairs to discuss their fears and worries and then pray for each other. Reconvene the class and spend the remainder of class time praying and praising God, declaring he is greater than our fear and worry.

*Alternative.* Distribute the "Your Song" exercise from the activity page to be completed individually. Encourage learners to refer to their song or poem throughout the week to remember God's deliverance and faithfulness.