“WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT WE SHOULD DO, BUT OUR EYES ARE ON YOU”:
THE PRAYER OF KING JEHOSHAPHAT IN 2 CHRONICLES 20:6–12

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NOTE: This will be easier to follow if read along with the attached handout.

Second Chronicles 17–20 greatly expands on the portrait of Jehoshaphat, the 9th-c. king of Judah, found in 1 Kings 22. Despite a couple illicit alliances with the house of Ahab, which result in immediate critique and judgment, King Jehoshaphat is generally presented as a model of faith and faithfulness to YHWH, whose devotion leads to YHWH’s protection. The additional materials include an account of a Moabite–Ammonite–Meunite campaign against Judah, in which the Chronicler records Jehoshaphat’s prayer for salvation as well as YHWH’s response and miraculous deliverance of his people (2 Chr 20:1–30). Both Jehoshaphat’s prayer and YHWH’s response demonstrate significant dependence on Israelite traditions and prior biblical texts concerning the promises to Abraham, the exodus from Egypt, the conquest, the building and dedication of the temple, and YHWH’s universal reign. Moreover, intertextual resonances with other biblical texts (e.g., Isa 16:14; Ps 123:2), though probably unintentional, are nevertheless illuminating. In this paper I will first analyze the prayer and response, giving particular attention to these sources and intertexts, in order to see how the encounter serves the Chronicler’s aim of presenting a foundation for hope for the postexilic Jews seeking restoration. Then I will conclude with some reflections on how Jehoshaphat’s prayer may inform the prayers of Christians today.

**Intertextual Allusions/Parallels in Jehoshaphat’s Prayer (2 Chr 20:6–12)**

When messengers come to inform Jehoshaphat that a Moabite–Ammonite–Meunite\(^1\) coalition is marching against Judah, they describe the invading armies as “a great multitude” and announce

\(^1\) In 2 Chr 20:1, the Hebrew text states that “the children of Moab and the children of Ammon and with them some of the Ammonites came against Jehoshaphat,” which undoubtedly reflects textual corruption. Along with most translations, I am following the LXX in identifying the third group as Meunites (cf. 1 Chr 4:41; 2 Chr 26:7),
that they have already reached En-Gedi, on the Judean shore of the Dead Sea (2 Chr 20:2).

Jehoshaphat’s fear immediately prompts him to “set his face to seek (דרשׁ) YHWH and proclaim a fast over all Judah” (v. 3). And the people of Judah follow his lead by gathering together so that they too may “seek (בקשׁ) YHWH” and elicit his intervention. The passage emphasizes the parallel actions of king and people by noting in the frame of a chiastic structure encompassing vv. 5–13 that both Jehoshaphat and “all Judah”—including “even their little ones, their wives, and their children”—“were standing” (עמד) before YHWH (vv. 5, 13).

1. YHWH’s Sovereign Rule: 2 Chr 20:6 // 1 Chr 29:11–12, 18

From his position in the temple Jehoshaphat offers up a prayer for deliverance. He first notes YHWH’s particular relationship with Israel by addressing him as “YHWH, God of our fathers,” but then he highlights YHWH’s sovereign rule and matchless power, beginning with a rhetorical question: “Are you not God in the heavens? And you rule over all kingdoms of the nations. And in your hand are strength and might” (v. 6).2 Here the Chronicler’s Jehoshaphat deliberately echoes David’s prayer before the assembly of Israel when he has collected materials for the

whom some scholars associate with the town of Ma’an, located twelve miles southeast of Petra (J. A. Thompson, 1, 2 Chronicles [NAC 9; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994], 293; Raymond B. Dillard, 2 Chronicles [WBC 15; Waco: Word, 1987], 155).

Later in the passage, the third party is identified as “(the inhabitants of) Mount Seir” (vv. 10, 22–23), a location that is elsewhere connected to Edom (see, e.g., Gen 36:8; Deut 2:5). When the messengers come to tell Jehoshaphat about the approaching armies, they identify them as coming from Aram (ארם, v. 2). But since that makes little sense of the other political and geographical references in the passage, most translations follow a single Hebrew manuscript and the Old Latin in reading Edom (אדום) here, despite the scanty textual evidence (see the ESV, NRSV, NIV, NLT; also Ralph W. Klein, 2 Chronicles [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012], 279; Pancratius C. Beentjes, “Psalms and Prayers in the Book of Chronicles,” in Psalms and Prayers: Papers Read at the Joint Meeting of the Society of Old Testament Study and Het Oudtestamentische Werkgezelschap in Nederland en België, Apeldoorn August 2006 [Leiden: Brill, 2007], 30). In my view, the passage aims to make a connection between this third party and Edom in order to bolster the link to Deut 2 (on which, see further below), while also maintaining distinction by pointedly avoiding identifying them as Edomites (see the reference to “the children of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir” in v. 10; cf. vv. 22–24; also Sara Japhet (1 & II Chronicles [OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993], 786). Thus I take this third party to be a people group living in the vicinity of Edom about which little is known.

2 There is debate over how far the question extends. Here I assume that only the first clause is governed by the initial הלא (see also the NIV and ESV), but some interpreters understand the question as continuing into the second clause (see the NRSV and NASB; also Klein, 2 Chronicles, 279; Beentjes, “Psalms and Prayers,” 30).
temple at the end of his reign, as recorded in 1 Chr 29:10–19. David similarly addresses his prayer to “YHWH, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers” (v. 18a), and he declares, “All that is in the heavens and on the earth belongs to you. . . . And you rule over all. And in your hand are strength and might” (vv. 11b, 12b). The Chronicler’s Jehoshaphat, however, makes two additions that apply David’s statements to his current situation. First, he specifies that YHWH’s universal rule is over the “kingdoms of the nations,” thus noting its relevance for the attacking nations. And second, he draws out one implication of YHWH’s sovereign rule that should give hope to Judah, declaring, “and no one can withstand you.” David’s words, offered in the context of a benediction, are now coopted for the purpose of Jehoshaphat’s plea for salvation. Perhaps the quotation seeks to invoke David as intercessor on Judah’s behalf. In any case, it implies that if YHWH is who David said he was, then he should have both the power to deliver Judah from the impending threat and the relational motivation to do so. And that message applies also to the Chronicler’s postexilic audience in their struggles with the people of the land.

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3 On the allusion, see also Japhet, 1 & 2 Chronicles, 789. It is impossible to know to what extent the Chronicler was dependent on oral or written sources in constructing this account and Jehoshaphat’s prayer in particular. However, given the significant connections between Jehoshaphat’s prayer and other material in Chronicles, the specific wording of the prayer seems to derive primarily from the Chronicler rather than Jehoshaphat himself (see also Steven L. McKenzie, “The Trouble with King Jehoshaphat,” in Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Hsitorioigraphy in Honour of A. Graeme Auld [ed. Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim, and W. Brian Aucker; VTSup 113; Brill: Leiden, 2007], 311; Klein, 2 Chronicles, 282; Isaac Kalimi, The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005], 27–28).

4 Sara Japhet observes that the phrase וְגוּבְרָה כָּחָה (strength and might) occurs only in these two verses in the HB (The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought [Winona Lake, Ind.:: Eisenbrauns, 2009], 44 n. 143).

5 Beentjes, “Psalms and Prayers,” 29–30, who also argues that the use of ממלכת הגוים (which appears only here in Chronicles) as opposed to ממלכת הארץ (which is found later in the same passage [v. 29] and three other times in Chronicles [1 Chr 29:30; 2 Chr 12:8; 17:10; cf. ממלכת הארץ in 2 Chr 36:23]), is intended as a contrast to “your people Israel” in v. 7.

6 Although I do not assume a specific date for Chronicles, I read it against the general background suggested by Ezra-Nehemiah, with which it shares many affinities.
2. Abraham, YHWH’s Friend: 2 Chr 20:7 // Isa 41:8

Turning to the history of YHWH’s relationship with Israel, the Chronicler’s Jehoshaphat asks another rhetorical question: “Did you not, our God, dispossess the inhabitants of this land from before your people Israel and give it to the seed of Abraham, your friend, forever?” (v. 7). Now the address has shifted from “God of our fathers” to “our God,” connecting the present generation with their forefathers and highlighting YHWH’s continued relationship with his people. The Chronicler’s Jehoshaphat draws on standard language to describe the conquest of Canaan and the gift of the land, though he accentuates YHWH’s action without noting the role that the Israelites played in “dispossessing” (hiphil ירשׁ) the Canaanites (see, e.g., Deut 9:3). Moreover, by noting the eternality of YHWH’s promise of land to Abraham’s descendants (יה דול), the prayer emphasizes its continuing relevance both to Jehoshaphat’s time and to the Chronicler’s postexilic situation.

What is most striking about this statement, however, is its description of Abraham as YHWH’s “friend” (አhänge). This expression, denoting the intimacy of YHWH’s relationship with Abraham, is found elsewhere only in Isa 41:8, and the Chronicler may be intentionally alluding to that text. Presumably addressing the situation of Judean exile, Isa 41 reaffirms YHWH’s choice of Israel and promises that he will deliver them from their enemies: “fear not, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Behold, all who are incensed against you shall be put to shame and confounded; . . . those who war against you shall be as nothing at all” (vv. 10–12 ESV). YHWH’s words of reassurance on
that occasion are also appropriate to those in the Chronicler’s audience who face threats from foreign powers. As they follow Jehoshaphat’s example in seeking protection and deliverance from YHWH, they may ground their trust in YHWH’s prior promises of salvation for his people and his repeatedly demonstrated faithfulness to those promises. Moreover, they can rest in the assurance that the exile has not created an irreparable rupture in their relationship with YHWH. YHWH’s commitment to Abraham, his friend, bridges the gulf of separation experienced during the exile and provides the basis for the reestablishment of YHWH’s promises with those who have returned to the land.

3. YHWH Will Hear

**Solomon’s Prayer of Dedication: 2 Chr 20:9 // 2 Chr 28–30, 34–35**

Jehoshaphat’s historical recital continues by jumping from the conquest to the building of “a sanctuary for [YHWH’s] name” (v. 8), which is one of Chronicles’ primary themes. Indeed, as Pancratius Beentjes observes, it seems that for the Chronicler, “the purpose of the conquest is the Temple.”

Jehoshaphat’s prayer also alludes to Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the temple found in 2 Chr 6:14–42, following the same three-part structure and using some of the same vocabulary but without direct quotation. First, he describes the problem Solomon addresses. Summarizing the list of potential threats Israel might face, Jehoshaphat includes the current crisis of danger by “sword,” as well as the perils of “judgment, or pestilence or famine” (2 Chr 20:9a).

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13 Alternatively, the verse could read “sword of judgment or pestilence or famine” (see Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 791). Klein suggests emending שׁפט (“judgment”) to שׁטף (“flood”, 2 Chronicles, 279).
Second, he notes the response of the people to their situation of distress, following Solomon in emphasizing the central importance of “this house” where YHWH’s “name” dwells as the site toward which the people direct their pleas for help (2 Chr 20:9b; cf. 6:29, 34). But whereas Solomon spoke of their “prayer” and “supplication,” Jehoshaphat uses the verb זעק, saying, “we will cry out to you from our distress.” The Chronicler may use this verb because it appears earlier in the narrative of Jehoshaphat’s ill-advised alliance with King Ahab in the latter’s attack on Ramoth-gilead. Despite the prophet Micaiah’s forewarning that Ahab will meet his doom, the two kings proceed into battle. Quoting the account found in the Deuteronomistic history, the Chronicler describes how “Jehoshaphat cried out (זעק)” when the enemy captains “turned to fight against him” (2 Chr 18:31 // 1 Kgs 22:32). But the Chronicler then adds his own interpretive gloss on the outcome of the situation: “and YHWH helped him; God drew them away from him.” Although King Ahab does indeed meet his death as a result of the battle, Jehoshaphat escapes unharmed. So his life is a testament to how YHWH responds with deliverance when his people “cry out” to him.

Moreover, whereas Solomon describes the people directing their prayers and spreading their hands toward the temple (2 Chr 6:29, 34), Jehoshaphat speaks of the people “stand[ing] before this house and before [YHWH]” (20:9b), which reflects the current posture and position of both himself and the people (vv. 5, 13). Indeed, this connection is underscored by the structure of the passage. Jehoshaphat’s summary of Solomon’s prayer stands at the center of the chiastic pattern noted on your handout, and his reference to “standing before this house and before [YHWH]” echoes the passage’s frame (A and A’).

Then following the third and final part of Solomon’s prayer, Jehoshaphat anticipates YHWH’s response. Like Solomon, he stresses how YHWH will “hear” (שמע) his people’s pleas
for help, but he uses different terminology to convey the result. Ignoring Solomon’s repeated emphasis on YHWH’s forgiveness (2 Chr 6:30; also vv. 21, 25, 27, 39), he instead focuses on his deliverance, declaring that YHWH will “save” (hiphil יָשָׁע) his people (20:9c).\(^{14}\)

**YHWH’s Response: 2 Chr 20:4 // 2 Chr 7:14**

Although Jehoshaphat does not cite YHWH’s response to Solomon’s prayer, YHWH’s promise that if his people would “seek” (шуָׁאֵל) him, he would indeed “hear” the humble and contrite prayers of his people and “heal their land” (7:14) is the basis for the Judeans’ actions in gathering at the temple to “seek” (шуָׁאֵל) YHWH (noted twice in 20:4).\(^{15}\) With its placement at the center of the passage’s chiastic pattern, this summary of Solomon’s prayer of dedication is the focal point of Jehoshaphat’s prayer and the primary grounds for his entreaty. It is interesting to note, however, that despite the Chronicler’s emphasis on Solomon (2 Chr 1–9), he is not named here as either the builder of the temple or the one who offers the dedication prayer. Instead, Jehoshaphat’s prayer democratizes these roles—it is the descendants of Abraham who built the temple and prayed that YHWH would hear their cries offered before it,\(^{16}\) which allows for an easy identification with the people of Jehoshaphat’s generation as well as the Chronicler’s audience.

4. Mount Seir/Edom, Moab, and Ammon:

2 Chr 20:10–11 // Deut 2:4–5, 9, 19; Num 20:18; Judg 11:17

From the temple dedication Jehoshaphat’s prayer moves on to the current situation, drawing YHWH’s attention to the unwelcome presence of “the children of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir” with the exclamatory וַהֲנָה הָהָה (“and now look!,” v. 10a). But rather than

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\(^{14}\) Somewhat surprisingly, the Hebrew root ישׁע never appears in Solomon’s prayer, though the idea is certainly expressed by his request that YHWH would “carry out justice for” his people (6:35).

\(^{15}\) See also Klein, 2 Chronicles, 286.

\(^{16}\) Beentjes, “Israel’s Earlier History,” 68.
immediately making his request for deliverance, Jehoshaphat adds an important parenthetical note about the history of Israel’s relationship with these people groups (or in the case of the Meunites, with their geographical region). The function of his statement is to place the blame for the current crisis on YHWH: “you did not give to Israel to enter them when they came from the land of Egypt” (v. 10b). The end of the parenthetical note is marked by a second הנה (“look”), which leads to the essential point: “they are repaying us by coming to drive us out from your possession (יְרֻשָּׁה), which you gave to us to possess (hiphil שיפש)” (vv. 10–11).

Because YHWH did not allow Israel to “enter” (בוא) their lands, these nations are now “entering” (ואז) Israel with the intent of removing YHWH’s people from their land, offering poor repayment for Israel’s prior restraint.

In contrast to Jehoshaphat’s claim in v. 10, YHWH does permit Israel to enter the territories of Edom, Moab, and Ammon according to Deut 2, though he gives the people clear orders not to “provoke them” (vv. 5, 9, 19). However, Num 20:14–21 explains that the Edomites would not allow the Israelites to pass through their land, and Judg 11:17 says the same concerning Moab. Jehoshaphat’s prayer omits the role played by the nations themselves in refusing entrance to the Israelites, thereby emphasizing YHWH’s role and thus heightening his culpability. Moreover, he also highlights the obedience of the Israelites, who “turned aside from them and did not destroy them” in submission to YHWH’s command (2 Chr 20:10).

A further connection between 2 Chr 20 and Deut 2 may be found in their shared use of יְרֻשָּׁה, which appears only fourteen times in the OT but occurs six times in Deut 2 alone.

Second Chronicles 20:11 uses יְרֻשָּׁה to describe Canaan as YHWH’s “possession” and employs

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17 As Japhet observes, the Chronicler’s Jehoshaphat glosses over the exodus, linking the conquest instead to the promise of land to Abraham and the construction of the temple (I & II Chronicles, 791).
18 The LXX and Tg. have “our possession” in place of “your possession” in the MT.
20 As noted by Beentjes, “Tradition and Transformation,” 262.
the cognate verb form יָרַשׁ (hiphil) to explain that YHWH “gave [it to Israel] to possess.”

Deuteronomy 2, by contrast, applies יָרַשׁ to Edom, Moab, and Ammon—YHWH commands the Israelites not to engage those nations in battle because he has given them each their lands “as a possession” (vv. 5, 9, 19). So YHWH’s favor and generosity in ensuring the “possession” of these nations has created a situation in which Moab, Ammon, and Edom’s neighbors—the Meunites—now have the ability to threaten both YHWH’s own “possession” and his covenant people, whom he has chosen to “possess” it.

The use of יָרַשׁ in the hiphil stem in 2 Chr 20:11 also links back to v. 7, which describes how YHWH “dispossessed (hiphil יָרַשׁ) the inhabitants of” Canaan. The ultimate aim of that dispossession was to allow Israel to “possess” the land (v. 11). But now it looks like the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the inhabitants of Mount Seir may dispossess Israel by “driv[ing] them out” (דרש) of the land, just as YHWH “drove [the Canaanites] out” (ברש) of the land during the conquest (see, e.g., Josh 24:18). And YHWH’s failure to “give” (נתן, i.e., “allow”) Israel to enter Moab, Ammon, and Edom now jeopardizes his gift of Canaan to Abraham’s seed (v. 7, also using נתן).

5. Execute Judgment/Judge: 2 Chr 20:12 // 2 Chr 6:23

Finally in v. 12 Jehoshaphat makes his request: “Our God, will you not execute judgment (שׁפט) on them?” Like the two rhetorical questions in vv. 6–7, this question also begins (after a vocative address) with הלא, and it forms the climax toward which those earlier questions were building. If their God indeed gave the land to Abraham’s descendants “forever,” then he should now act to protect that inheritance by judging the enemies of his people, who are unjustly

21 Had Israel taken the land of Edom at the time of the Conquest, the Meunites may never have settled in that region and would likely not pose a threat in Jehoshaphat’s day.
repaying good with evil.\textsuperscript{22} Jehoshaphat’s plea also forms a play on his own name, which means “YHWH has judged.”\textsuperscript{23} The king’s name serves as a witness to YHWH’s character and a basis for hope that YHWH will act on his people’s behalf.

It is also possible that the use of שׁפט intentionally echoes Solomon’s temple dedication prayer, which calls on YHWH to “carry out justice” (עשׂה משׁפט) for his people (v. 35; cf. v. 39) when they “go out to battle against their enemies” at YHWH’s bidding and pray toward the temple (v. 34). Moreover, there is another interesting, though undoubtedly unintentional, parallel to Solomon’s prayer. In 2 Chr 6:23 Solomon prays, “If a man sins against his neighbor and [the latter] makes him swear an oath [of innocence], and he comes [and] swears before your altar in this house, then hear from heaven and act, and judge (שׁפט) your servants to repay the guilty by bringing his way down on his own head and to vindicate the righteous by treating him according to his righteousness.” In some ways, the Moabite-Ammonite-Meunite march on Jerusalem is a political analogue to the interpersonal dispute reflected in Solomon’s prayer. Moab and Ammon are Judah’s neighbors and kin, and they are violating their kinship ties and thus sinning against their brother by coming to attack Jerusalem. Although the marauding nations make no oath of innocence, the Judeans come before the “house” of YHWH to bring the case before the divine judge. As already noted, Jehoshaphat highlights Israel’s innocence in its prior relationship with these nations and complains that they are offering poor repayment for Israel’s restraint by coming to dispossess the people of Judah from their land. Thus, in essence, he claims the position of the righteous and asks YHWH to judge the situation fairly by executing judgment against the attacking nations.

\textsuperscript{22} Indeed, Samuel E. Balentine sees הלא in Jehoshaphat’s prayer as “function[ing] not to introduce a question but to stress a positive assertion,” thus reflecting Jehoshaphat’s confidence in YHWH’s intervention (Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue [Overtures to Biblical Theology; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 99).

\textsuperscript{23} See also Beentjes, “Tradition and Transformation,” 262.
Jehoshaphat’s prayer, focused on YHWH throughout, now ends with an acknowledgement of the people’s utter weakness and helplessness: “For there is no strength (כח . . . אין) in us before this great multitude (המון הרב) that is coming against us, and we do not know what we should do, but upon you are our eyes” (v. 12b). The people’s lack of “strength” (כח) in the face of the enemy armies marching against them contrasts with the “strength” (כח) in YHWH’s hand in v. 6. Moreover, it echoes King Asa’s prayer when facing an attack by the vast army of Zerah the Ethiopian: “YHWH, there is no [difference] for you between helping the mighty or the one who has no strength (כח אין). Help us, YHWH our God, for we lean upon you and in your name we have come against this multitude (המון ההמון)” (2 Chr 14:10a). Although Asa begins with a general statement, he then applies it to his own situation, making it clear that “the one who has no strength” applies first and foremost to himself (or to Judah more generally). Jehoshaphat then follows in Asa’s footsteps, preparing for the onslaught of a “multitude” by acknowledging his own lack of strength and desperately relying on YHWH. And in both cases YHWH responds with deliverance. Thus for the audience of Chronicles, the connections between these narratives establish a pattern of how YHWH works among his people when they are utterly dependent on him.

Outside this passage, the only other place where “the great multitude” (המון הרב) appears in the OT is in Isa 16:14 in an oracle against Moab, which declares, “In three years . . . the glory of Moab will be brought into dishonor, with all the great multitude, and those remaining will be very few [and] not mighty.” I am not sure that the resonances are strong

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24 The syntax of Asa’s first sentence is difficult. Literally, the Hebrew reads, “YHWH, there is no one/thing with you to help between the great and the one who has no strength” (יהוה לא אירזני לך עזר בין גדול ליאן ובן). For similar translations, see the NRSV; Klein, 2 Chronicles, 208. Alternatively, it could mean, “there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak” (ESV; cf. Japhet, I & II Chronicles, 711).
enough or the phrasing unique enough to establish an intentional allusion on the part of the Chronicler. Nevertheless, reading Jehoshaphat’s prayer in light of the oracle against Moab in Isa 15–16 evokes the idea that when the Moabites exalt themselves in their pride (see Isa 16:6), YHWH stands against them for judgment. Despite the fact that they are a “great multitude,” YHWH has the power to decimate them (v. 13) and to put those who remain in their proper position of subservience to the Davidic king (vv. 3–5). So subsequent readers of Isaiah and Chronicles may recognize that Jehoshaphat’s prayer is firmly grounded in YHWH’s own purposes.

6. Eyes on/toward YHWH: 2 Chr 20:12 // Ps 123

Acknowledging YHWH’s strength and the powerlessness of his own people, the only military strategy Jehoshaphat can muster is to fix his eyes on YHWH. With this declaration of complete dependence, Jehoshaphat adopts the same posture as that modeled by the writer of Ps 123, who declares:

1b To you I lift up my eyes, [to] you who sit [enthroned?] in the heavens,
2 Look! As the eyes of servants toward the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maidservant toward the hand of her mistress, so our eyes are toward YHWH our God until he is gracious to us.
3 Be gracious to us, YHWH, be gracious to us, for we have been greatly filled [with] contempt.
4 Our soul has been greatly filled for itself [with] the mocking of those who are at ease, [with] the contempt of the proud.

The Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites preparing to attack Judah could certainly be counted among “the proud,” who demonstrate their “contempt” for Judah by their military aggression.

25 המון is found 86x in the OT, and in 2 Chr 13:8, the Judean king Ahijah describes the northern kingdom of Israel as “a great multitude” (ราม המון) during a war between the two nations (also Dan 11:11; similarly Dan 11:13). It should also be noted that some scholars see Isa 16:13–14 as a postexilic addition, perhaps dating to the time of Nehemiah (see, e.g., Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000], 300).
And the community of Jehoshaphat, like that of the psalmist, sets their eyes on the God who rules over all human oppressors from his throne in the heavens (2 Chr 20:6; Ps 123:1).

It is unlikely that the Chronicler intentionally alludes to Ps 123; nevertheless, reading Jehoshaphat’s prayer in light of the psalm suggests a couple further lines of thought. First, the psalm compares the community’s stance to the position of servants whose eyes are on “the hand of their masters” or “mistress[es]” (v. 2). In ancient Israelite society servants could expect both provision and legal protection from their masters in exchange for their faithful service. The OT frequently applies this image to the relationship between YHWH and Israel to convey the ideas of the people’s submission and service on the one hand (see Isa 43:10; also Deut 6:12–13) and their security as part of YHWH’s household on the other (see Lev 25:42; Deut 32:36; Isa 41:8–13). In Ps 123 the community of faithful Israelites is calling on their divine master to “be gracious” to them (vv. 2b–3a) by delivering them from their foes (vv. 3b–4). Thus the master-servant relationship between YHWH and his people could offer Jehoshaphat a further basis for trusting that YHWH will be gracious to Judah by saving them from the Moabite-Ammonite-Meunite coalition. If the people adopt the posture of a servant, turning to YHWH in humble submission, then YHWH should fulfill his obligations as master to protect his servant.

Moreover, although the hand image is not carried through to the final clause of the comparison—the eyes of the community are simply said to be “toward YHWH our God,” rather than “toward the hand of YHWH our God” (Ps 123:2b)—the psalm nevertheless provides an interesting comparison with Jehoshaphat’s acknowledgement, “in your hand ( Heb) are strength and might” (2 Chr 20:6). The Judeans of Jehoshaphat’s day, as well as subsequent readers of Chronicles, can look toward the hand of their divine master in the knowledge that his hand has the power to deliver them from any threat.
Second, the psalmist declares that the people’s eyes “are toward YHWH [their] God until he is gracious” to them (v. 2b). They are not simply offering a quick prayer to see if YHWH will respond before they move on to plan B. There is no plan B. Instead, they will wait with their gaze fixed on YHWH until he acts on their behalf. In the case of Jehoshaphat’s prayer, such persistence turns out to be unnecessary. YHWH’s response comes while the people are still standing before the temple, appropriately delivered through a Levite by the name of Jahaziel, which means, “one who sees God.”

By the empowerment of the Spirit Jahaziel prophesies, “Do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed before this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God’s” (v. 15b). He then offers instructions for the imminent battle, and his words are fulfilled when YHWH routs their enemies the next day. Nevertheless, Jehoshaphat also demonstrates the same complete dependence on YHWH that motivates the psalmist to wait indefinitely for YHWH’s response.

**Intertextual Allusions/Parallels in YHWH’s Response through Jahaziel (2 Chr 20:15–17)**

1. **Do Not Be Afraid—YHWH Is with You:**
   2 Chr 20:15, 17 // Josh 10:14, 25; 1 Chr 28:20; 1 Sam 17:11, 37, 47

The exhortation, “Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed” (אלו־תחתו ואלו־תיראו, v. 15b, 17b), which occurs twice in Jahaziel’s prophetic word, recalls both the conquest traditions (Josh 10:25; also 8:1; Deut 1:21; cf. 31:8) and the Chronicler’s account of David commissioning Solomon to build the temple (1 Chr 28:20; also 22:13). In Josh 10 Israel wins a decisive battle against a coalition of five Amorite kings when YHWH throws the enemy into confusion (v. 10) and makes the sun stand still (vv. 12–13). After the battle Joshua proclaims, “Do not be afraid

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27 The phrase also appears later in Chronicles in a description of Sennacherib’s campaign against Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Chr 32:7), and the two commands appear in Isa 51:7; Jer 30:10; 46:27; Ezek 2:6, though not as a single phrase (see also Jer 23:4; Ezek 3:9).
and do not be dismayed; be strong and courageous, for thus YHWH will do to all your enemies against whom you fight” (v. 25). Joshua points back to YHWH’s mighty display of power in destroying the Amorites to ground his call for the Israelites to trust that YHWH will give them success as they complete the conquest. Similarly, the Chronicler’s Jahaziel recalls YHWH’s repeated displays of power in the conquest to ground his call for the Judeans to trust that YHWH will give them success against the Moabite-Ammonite-Meunite coalition. Moreover, Jahaziel declares that this “battle” (המלחמה) belongs to YHWH (2 Chr 20:15b), just as in the battle against the Amorites when YHWH “fought” (נלחם) for his people (Josh 10:14b). So the anticipation of Judah’s deliverance is cast in terms that recall YHWH’s miraculous deliverance of Israel under Joshua, and later readers are reminded that YHWH also responded to Jehoshaphat’s prayer with miraculous deliverance.

In 1 Chronicles the exhortation, “do not be afraid and do not be dismayed,” occurs in a quite different context from Joshua. It is interesting that David would use these words when commissioning Solomon to build the temple. We might not expect that fear would be a significant factor for Solomon in this endeavor, particularly when we read the later descriptions of his extensive building projects. However, this command underscores the centrality of the temple for the Chronicler. Constructing a dwelling place for YHWH was a monumental and monumentally important undertaking, which provided the foundation for Israel’s life in the land. Like Jahaziel, David also assures Solomon of YHWH’s presence—“YHWH God, my God, is with you” (1 Chr 28:20)\(^{28}\)—and both the temple completed under Solomon and the temple of the postexilic period are enduring signs of YHWH’s presence with his people, offering hope in his continued protection.

\(^{28}\) See also the blessings in 1 Chr 22:11, 16, and the rhetorical question in v. 18.
Jahaziel’s prophetic declaration also exhibits a few intriguing connections to the account of David’s battle against Goliath in 1 Sam 17. First, whereas Jahaziel calls the Judeans not to “be afraid or dismayed (חתת)” (2 Chr 20:15, 17), “Saul and all Israel” are “greatly dismayed (חתת) and afraid (ירא)” at Goliath’s challenge (1 Sam 17:11). Indeed, Saul presents a striking contrast to Jehoshaphat. Saul’s fear leads to inaction as he listens to Goliath’s summons to single combat for forty days (v. 16) without either appealing to YHWH or accepting the summons himself—as we might expect of Israel’s commander in chief, who was also the tallest among his people (see 1 Sam 9:2). Although Jehoshaphat is also “afraid” (ירא) when he hears of the approaching armies,29 his fear prompts him to immediately “set his face to seek YHWH” (v. 3).

Second, in King Saul’s parting blessing to David when he sends him into battle, he declares, “may YHWH be with you” (v. 37b). Saul does not seem to share Jahaziel’s assurance that YHWH will be with his people as they face their enemies, and he may pronounce this blessing more out of custom or desperation than faith that YHWH will respond. Nevertheless, his words are fulfilled when David fells the giant with a single stone from his sling. David’s unlikely victory demonstrates that YHWH is indeed with him, ensuring his success.

And finally, the closest biblical parallel to Jahaziel’s statement that “the battle (המלחמה) is not yours but God’s” (2 Chr 20:17) is found in David’s speech as he approaches the great Philistine warrior, which concludes, “And all this assembly will know that YHWH saves not by sword or spear. For the battle (המלחמה) is YHWH’s, and he will give you (m. pl., i.e., the Philistines) into our hand” (1 Sam 17:47). The first two parallels offer some support for seeing

29 Here without the parallel term “dismay” (חתת).
the Chronicler’s Jahaziel as intentionally echoing David’s words here. But whether or not the allusion was intentional, this intertextual parallel highlights the fact that YHWH characteristically acts to deliver his people from enemies far larger and mightier than they—at least when his people are faithfully seeking him. So reading 2 Chr 20 in light of 2 Sam 17 should offer further encouragement to the Chronicler’s audience in their struggle with the people of the land.

2. Stand Firm and See the Salvation of YHWH: 2 Chr 20:17 // Exod 14:13–14

Jahaziel’s twofold appeal to the Judeans not to fear frames a twofold promise that they will not need to fight because YHWH will fight for them. Although these statements are not identical, they begin similarly in Hebrew:

הַמִּלְחָמָה לָכֶם ("The battle is not yours," v. 15c)

לְהִלָּחֵם לָכֶם - ("It will not be for you to fight," v. 17a)

And the concluding declaration that YHWH will be with them (v. 17c) reinforces and underscores the point. Since the people will not need to fight, Jahaziel instructs them simply to "stand firm (hitpael עָמַד), hold fast (עָמַד), and see the salvation of YHWH (יהוה את־ישׁועת וראו) on [their] behalf" (v. 17a). This language, as well as the command not to fear, intentionally echoes Moses’ command to the Israelites on the edge of the Re(e)d Sea. With the sea on one side and the Egyptians on the other, the Israelites see no way of escape and are “greatly afraid.”

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30 Thompson and Dillard both cite the parallel, but neither indicates whether or not they see it as an intentional allusion (Thompson, 1, 2 Chronicles, 116; Dillard, 2 Chronicles, 158). And Beentjes is skeptical about an allusion, given the negative formulation (“not yours, but YHWH’s”) in 2 Chr 20:15 (“Tradition and Transformation,” 265).


32 Note that the hitpael of עָמַד also appears in v. 6, where Jehoshaphat declares that “no one can withstand” YHWH.

33 Similarly Isa 52:10 and Ps 98:3 both declare that “all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

34 See also Beentjes, “Tradition and Transformation,” 265; Japhet, I & II Chronicles, 795.
So they cry out to YHWH in distress and complain to Moses (Exod 14:10–12), who responds, “Do not be afraid, stand firm (hitpael עָזַב), and see the salvation of YHWH (יְהוָה אֲחַזְיָהוּת יָעָשׂ), which he will work for you today. . . . YHWH will fight (לחם) for you, and you need only be silent” (vv. 13–14). And that salvation comes when YHWH miraculously parts the sea so that the Israelites can walk through on dry land and then makes the sea come crashing down on the pursuing Egyptian army. So YHWH’s forthcoming deliverance of the Judeans from the Moabite-Ammonite-Meunite coalition is expressed in terms that recall the paradigmatic salvation event in Israel’s history. Just as YHWH saved his people from the Egyptians at the exodus, so he is able to save Jehoshaphat and the Judeans, and so also can he save the postexilic Jews from the external threats they encounter.

**Summary**

As we have seen, the Chronicler’s account of Jehoshaphat’s prayer and YHWH’s response through Jahaziel is highly dependent on earlier biblical texts, while also displaying some interesting parallels with other biblical passages that are likely unintentional. The intentional allusions function to convey three primary messages. First, they seek to remind YHWH of his promises to Israel and demonstrate how those promises are still relevant both to Jehoshaphat’s situation and to that of the Chronicler’s postexilic audience. The Chronicler’s Jehoshaphat recalls YHWH’s eternal gift of the land to Israel, thus calling on YHWH to protect his “possession, which [he] gave to [Israel] to possess” (see 2 Chr 20:7, 11). Moreover, the allusion to Isa 41:8 shows that YHWH’s commitment to Abraham transcends even the exile, providing a basis for the Chronicler’s postexilic audience to hope in YHWH’s continued protection from

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35 The somewhat redundant עמד (“to stand,” translated above as “hold fast”) in 2 Chr 20:17—which does not appear in Exod 14:13–14—is probably used in Jahaziel’s prophecy to connect back to vv. 5, 9, and 13 (Japhet, I & 2 Chronicles, 795). The battle is fought and won by Jehoshaphat and the Judeans “standing,” first at the temple to seek YHWH and then at the battlefront to watch YHWH fight against their enemies.
their enemies. Also, by summarizing Solomon’s prayer of dedication, the Chronicler’s Jehoshaphat calls on YHWH to remember his promise to respond to the cries of his people when they “seek” him at his temple (2 Chr 7:14), as the Judeans do under Jehoshaphat’s leadership (20:3–4). And the narrative of YHWH’s deliverance in 2 Chr 20:20–30 demonstrates to a later audience that YHWH’s promises ring true.

Second, the allusion to Israel’s dealings with Moab, Ammon, and Edom at the time of the conquest places the culpability for the current situation on YHWH himself. His prior instruction that Israel should leave these nations alone paved the way for them to pose a threat to Judah in Jehoshaphat’s day. Combining these traditions with Solomon’s temple dedication prayer gives further weight to Jehoshaphat’s plea for help. If YHWH promised that he would restore his people when they suffer for their sins and repent, how much more should he be willing to protect them now when they are suffering for the obedience of their forefathers, who refrained from destroying these nations at YHWH’s command! This mixing of traditions also offers assurance to the Chronicler’s postexilic audience that YHWH will respond to the unjust persecution they face from the people in the land.

Third, many of the intentional allusions evoke memories of past instances of YHWH’s deliverance. Taken together, Jehoshaphat’s prayer and YHWH’s response recall the major redemptive events in Israel’s history—the exodus (2 Chr 20:17 // Exod 14:13–14), the conquest (2 Chr 20:7; also vv. 15, 17 // Josh 10:14, 25), and the return from exile (2 Chr 20:7 // Isa 41:8)—as well as Asa’s victory over Zerah the Ethiopian (2 Chr 20:12 // 2 Chr 14:10 [11]) and possibly David’s miraculous defeat of Goliath (2 Chr 20:15, 17 // 1 Sam 17:11, 37, 47). For the Chronicler’s audience, these recollections function as a montage highlighting how YHWH has
repeatedly and consistently delivered his people in the past whenever they turned to him, thus instilling hope that he will continue to do so for the current generation of returned exiles.

**Jehoshaphat’s Prayer as a Model for Christians Today?**

It is interesting to note that in the last decade or so the prayer of Jehoshaphat has garnered more popular than scholarly attention, though given the considerable success of the “Prayer of Jabez” movement, perhaps it is not surprising that another prayer from Chronicles would capture the imagination of the American church. A quick search on Google Books and Amazon reveals that aside from a number of references to Jehoshaphat’s prayer in various prayer guides, no less than five books are centered entirely on this prayer—*The Prayer of Jehoshaphat for America: The Power of Repentance in a Time of Crisis* (Mike Jeffress, 2005), *The Prayer of Jehoshaphat: Seeing Beyond Life’s Storms* (Stanley D. Gale, 2007), *The Jehoshaphat Prayer: The Prayer that Changes Everything* (Andrew Smith, 2013), *Prayer of Jehoshaphat: “O God Won’t You Stop Them?”* (Gabriel Agbo, 2014), and *Jehoshaphat’s Prayer: A Trail of Fears Turned to a Highway of Tears* (Tom Henslee, 2015). The front flap on the first book in that list suggests that Jehoshaphat’s prayer may hold the key to God’s “plan for winning the war on terror,” while the introduction to the second-to-last promises “established and tested principles that will permanently put you on the victorious side” of the “battles that we face whether as individuals or groups.”

Since I have not actually read any of these books, I cannot offer an informed critique. However, from my quick perusal, I suspect that some of them stumble in ignoring the

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redemptive-historical distance between the OT and today and in too quickly equating the situation of the modern church (or of America, understood as a Christian nation) with the situation of OT Israel. The promises of YHWH that provide the foundation for Jehoshaphat’s prayer derive from YHWH’s plan to establish Israel as an Edenic land, which would attract the attention of the surrounding nations and thus draw them to YHWH. It is for that purpose that YHWH promised Israel the land as an eternal inheritance. Israel was called to be “a kingdom of priests” (Exod 19:6), and its laws were intended to be life-giving instructions that would be desirable to the nations (see Deut 4:5–8). Moreover, YHWH declared that if the people of Israel kept the laws of the covenant, he would pour out on them blessings that would restore Israel to a paradise-like state (Lev 26:3–13).

But YHWH also promised curses if the Israelites broke the covenant, declaring that they would face famine, sword, pestilence, devastation, destruction, and eventually exile from the promised land. Solomon’s prayer for the dedication of the temple addresses hypothetical future situations when these covenant curses will be enacted, asking YHWH to remove the curses and restore the covenant blessings when his people repent. And although Jehoshaphat’s prayer does not arise from a situation where the people are facing judgment for breaking the covenant, his prayer is offered against the background assumption that Israel should receive the covenant blessings.

So how can Jehoshaphat’s words inform our prayers as Christians today when we are not living under the old covenant with its blessings and curses? Although God’s purposes remain unchanged—he still desires to restore his people to an Edenic land—the NT makes it clear that that will not happen until the end, when God creates a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21–22). The kingdom reign that Jesus initiated at his first coming will not be consummated until he
comes again. So when devoted Christ-followers, who live in the tension between the now and the not yet, face cancer diagnoses, violence, poverty, hunger, oppression, or other threats to their life and well-being without the assurance that God will intervene to relieve their suffering, in what ways can Jehoshaphat’s prayer serve as a model for their own cries for help?

First, Jehoshaphat’s prayer is remarkably YHWH-centered, challenging a tendency in the modern church toward more self-focused prayers. Jehoshaphat’s prayer begins by piling up descriptions of YHWH’s might and ends with the people’s gaze fixed on YHWH. Moreover, it is peppered throughout with verbal forms describing YHWH’s actions—past, present, and future: YHWH “rules” (v. 6), he “dispossessed” and “gave” (vv. 7, 11; cf. v. 10, which also states that he “did not give”), and he will “hear” and “save” (v. 9). Thus Jehoshaphat grounds his plea that YHWH would “execute judgment” on Judah’s enemies (v. 12) in YHWH’s nature and characteristic deeds, encouraging us to center our prayers for help on YHWH’s character as well.

Second, Jehoshaphat demonstrates a reliance on YHWH’s promises. Although as Christians today we cannot simply coopt the blessings of the Mosaic covenant as if they are promises that directly apply to us, we can nevertheless recognize that the deep suffering we face is not part of God’s good intention for his creation but results from living in a world broken by sin. Therefore, we can call on God’s kingdom to come in our lives now as it is in heaven. And while we cannot know how God will answer our prayers, we can trust in his promise that in the end, he will destroy all forms of suffering and even death itself so that we can experience the fullness of life he intended in the new creation.

Third, Jehoshaphat emphasizes remembrance of YHWH’s past acts of deliverance as a basis for hope that he can also bring deliverance in the present situation. Remembrance is
central to OT faith, and the Israelites’ struggle to trust is often linked to their tendency to forget what YHWH has done for them. Reciting the testimony of Israel and the NT church—and recalling our own stories of how God has been faithful to us in the past—strengthens our faith in his power and goodness and gives us hope that he will ultimately make all things right, no matter what difficulties we may currently be facing.

Fourth, Jehoshaphat models a recognition of both the people’s utter weakness and YHWH’s sovereign power over all. Jehoshaphat does not show any hint of pride or self-aggrandizement but evaluates his own strength with sober judgment. This leads him to acknowledge that on his own, he is no match for the enemy marching against him, but he also trusts that his God is more powerful than any human army. In modern American culture, which valorizes self-sufficiency, it can be difficult to admit weakness. But when we fail to acknowledge our limitations, we often wear ourselves down trying to resolve our troubles on our own. Confessing that only God has the power to help us can bring rest and relief from our futile striving.

And this leads to my final point: Jehoshaphat exemplifies a posture of absolute dependence on YHWH. As he awaits the attacking army, he pursues no military strategy aside from seeking YHWH in his temple, challenging us follow his lead by firmly setting our eyes on God when we face desperate situations. And if God does not answer our prayers right away, the writer of Ps 123 encourages us to wait with our gaze fixed on God “until he is gracious to us” (v. 2), even if we must wait until this mortal life has passed away and the splendor of the new creation has come.

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38 This may, however, seem odd in light of the claim of 2 Chr 17:14–19 that Jehoshaphat had over a million armed men at his disposal.
39 I do not mean to suggest that we should not use whatever means are at our disposal to try to overcome the challenges that face us. But sometimes there is no human solution to our struggles, and all we can do is acknowledge our utter dependence on YHWH’s intervention.