

# Unequally Yoked

By Jim Davis

In the last article we considered some of the challenges that come with the command to “perfect holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1). Maintaining the balance between the command to love our neighbors and to cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh and spirit is not an easy task in our present culture. But it has never been easy in any culture. Last time we addressed separation as it is commanded in Scripture. Separation does not mean isolation and complete withdrawal by association from the unbeliever. It is to be balanced with the command to love your neighbor as yourself. We should differentiate between a healthy and proper association with our neighbor and a spiritually unhealthy alliance with one whose purpose in life is not to seek the glory of Christ.

In this article we will look at an example of a godly king in the Old Testament that violated the principle of being unequally yoked or bound together with an ungodly king. The principle stated in the New Testament says:

**“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God...” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).**

The word bound means to be put into a double harness or yoked. The metaphor is of two mismatched animals being yoked together for work. It represents the problems that will be encountered when a believer enters into a close relationship or alliance with an unbeliever. There will inevitably be conflict that inhibits labor and restrains direction or purpose. Harmony will be compromised and consistency in the Christian walk will fail. As we make our sojourn through life there must be unity of purpose with those to whom we are closely associated. Otherwise the strength of our focus becomes diffused and we are diverted from God’s best for our lives. This Biblical principle would apply to personal relationships, business partnerships, unhealthy associations in our churches or other religious organizations, the union of marriage, and any other association that would involve being bound or making an alliance with anyone whose chief pursuit is not the glory of God. The Old Testament account of the life of King Jehoshaphat serves as a good example of the principle of being unequally yoked. Jehoshaphat was a king of Judah of the lineage of David and he was a good king. In fact, four chapters are dedicated to his life and exploits. 2 Chronicles 17-20 record the account of this king’s life. Most of the things recorded are good. We read of his religious and political reforms and his military victories. It is said that he “did not seek the Baals [idolatrous worship] but sought the God of his father, followed His [God’s] commandments, and did not act as Israel did” (2 Chronicles 17:3-4). But then in chapter 18 we read, “Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor; and he allied himself with Ahab.” Ahab was the wicked king of Israel who formed an alliance with Phoenicia. Political alliances in those days were sealed with marriages between the Princes and Princesses of the royal families. So it was that Ahab’s father Omri arranged the marriage of his son with the infamous Jezebel. If you know a little about the biblical history of Israel you know that it was Jezebel who effectively promoted the idolatrous worship of Baal throughout the nation of Israel. It was Ahab and Jezebel’s daughter Athaliah whose marriage in turn sealed the alliance between Jehoshaphat, king of Judah and Ahab, king of Israel. Without going into the his-

torical details I would like to make some comments as to the consequences of this alliance. This will help us to pull some good principles concerning the consequences of being unequally bound with unbelievers.

The Bible reads that Ahab induced Jehoshaphat to go up with him to war against the Arameans in order to take back the city, Ramoth-Gilead. In this battle the armies of Israel and Judah were defeated and Jehoshaphat almost lost his life. King Ahab did lose his life. Upon Jehoshaphat's return to his house in Jerusalem he was confronted by the prophet Jehu who said, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord and so bring wrath on yourself from the Lord?" (2 Chronicles 19:2). His alliance with Ahab was judged as helping the wicked. Ramoth-Gilead was an important city on Israel's northwest border. The Arameans had taken it by force and were oppressing the people. It would have seemed a good cause to any person's sense of justice and yet it involved an alliance with Ahab. Ahab and Jezebel had broken covenant with Yahweh and were worshiping the false God Baal. It was for this that the prophet contended with Jehoshaphat that he should not love those who hate the Lord and bring wrath on himself. The point is that Jehoshaphat had used the power and the influence that God had given him to promote Ahab's error. This is exactly the point made in 2 Corinthians 6: "What agreement has the temple of God with idols?" We should beware of all associations that would involve promoting wickedness. We must trust our security and hope for the future in the Lord. Believers must learn that true security comes within the confines of obedience to God's word.

Later in Jehoshaphat's life he makes another alliance with Ahab's son Ahaziah. The Bible comments that "he acted wickedly in doing so" (2 Chronicles 20:35). Jehoshaphat and Ahaziah constructed large merchant ships in Ezion-Geber for trade with Tarshish. Although the details are not given, their ships were destroyed, ending any hope of economic gain for either country. Economic gain seemed to be the motivation for this alliance. Our business ventures should not be motivated by greed for wealth. For the believer the over-riding value for every quest in life should be the glory of God.

In the military alliance Jehoshaphat almost lost his life. In the business alliance he suffered great financial loss. But it was in the marital alliance between his son Jehoram and Athaliah, (Ahab & Jezebel's daughter) that the greatest damage was done. After Jehoshaphat's death when Jehoram had taken over the kingdom and made himself secure the Bible says, "he killed all his brothers, with the sword, and some of the rulers of Israel also" (2 Chronicles 21:4). The biblical commentary on Jehoram's life is that "he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab did (for Ahab's daughter was his wife), and he did evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 21:6). So the political alliance of Jehoshaphat played a major part in the death of all of his sons but the story does not end here. After Jehoram's death his son Ahaziah reigned for one year and was killed in battle. His mother Athaliah (Ahab's daughter) seized power and had all of the royal offspring of the house of Judah destroyed (2 Chronicles 22:10). After Jehoram's and Athaliah's massacres all that was left of Jehoshaphat's offspring was one great-grandchild. All of his other children grandchildren and great grandchildren were murdered.

The teaching of Scripture is that alliances with wicked people can have devastating consequences. So Christians are commanded to love their neighbors and be a friend to sinners but beware being unequally yoked. This is not to suggest that all unbelievers will act as wickedly as Queen Athaliah did.

One closing comment should be made for those who may already have entered into a marriage with one who does not believe. The command in Scripture is that a Christian

brother who has an unbelieving wife or the Christian sister who has an unbelieving husband that consents to live with them should not send them away (1 Corinthians 7:12-14). The presence of the believer sets the home apart to have a Christian influence on both the unbelieving spouse and their children. Since the marriage covenant involves a public oath, "till death do us part," the Christian should abide by their promise before God and man. In fact every oath taken in the name of the Lord is binding, whether business, personal or otherwise. This would be the policy for any contractual agreement.