

## **Strengthening the Hands of Evil Doers**

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In the Old Testament we read how Ahab made peace with King Jehoshaphat of Judah, and how they conspired to go to war together against the Arameans. Ahab and Jehoshaphat called the prophets to tell them how the battle would go. The first prophets (led by Zedekiah) promised a victory. But Jehoshaphat wanted a real prophet, and Ahab agrees to call his enemy Micaiah son of Imla to speak. Ahab explains to Jehoshaphat that Micaiah never has anything good to say. Micaiah's first message is one of victory, but when pressed by Ahab, he promises defeat and explains why the other prophets had a false message. Ignoring the message, the kings go to war, and Ahab proceeds to his death. Jehoshaphat escapes with his life and return home. In 2 Chronicles 19:2 the prophet Jehu rebukes Jehoshaphat: "*Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD and so bring wrath on yourself from the LORD?*" (2 Chron. 19:2).

Scriptures reveal that these things happened to reveal to us important truths (1 Cor. 10:11). We are told that the nation of Israel represents the church (Romans 9-11); indeed we might say that Israel is the church of the Old Testament. We might see the kingdom of Judah like the local church of the New Testament. Around the church are closely related churches that have sound members, but unsound leaders. Further out are those congregations that have an entirely committed liberal mindset, or denominations that once were the Lord's church and have strayed. Even further we might consider the denominations to be like the nations of the Gentiles.

The point is that the Lord's church is not to associate with other churches. First, there is the issue of the authority to join to work together (as Jehoshaphat did with Ahab). But secondly, this lesson teaches us that God is particularly offended when we support others who are acting contrary to God's will. Specifically, we are told in Ephesians 5:11 not to participate in the works of darkness.

When someone walks away from the Lord, they become an enemy of God in their conduct. Scriptures are very clear that we are not to have a social interaction with them (1 Cor. 5:11). This is so that they might repent and return to God (1 Cor. 5:5). Yet sometimes we fail to do what we are commanded, and we then are guilty, as was Jehoshaphat, of lifting up the hands of the unrighteous and preventing them from repentance.

God was angry with Judah later when He observed that they "*encouraged the wicked not to turn from his wicked way and preserve his life*", He would destroy them (Ezekiel 13:22-23). He said this to Jeremiah as well (Jeremiah 23:14 "*Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; And they strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one has turned back from his wickedness*"). Jehoshaphat, a righteous man, did not reply (to our knowledge) to this rebuke. But many might be tempted to tell God "this was my brother" (as Ahab had done in 1 Kings 19); God said that even our brothers must be rejected when they go into error (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). Even if our brother is suffering, we are to let their conduct's consequences take effect to affect their repentance (2 Thes. 3:10). We might believe that it is not loving to do such, but Romans 12:9 reminds us that love is without hypocrisy, and that we must cling to what is good and abhor what is evil.

When we act contrary to the will of God by aiding those who walk in sin to the degree that we enable them to sin, we have made ourselves enemies of God.