

# ROYAL INTRODUCTIONS

## Kings of the Past Who Point Us to the True King

### **ATHALIAH/JOASH: The Lineage of David Preserved**

(2 Kings 11:1-12:21; 2 Chronicles 21-24)

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With the death of Jehoshaphat, we enter into a darker period of Judah's kings. We will see even darker seasons that come through the pervasive disobedience of particular kings, but this is one of note, and one that provides many lessons for us.

Let's briefly look at the complexity of this period in Judah's history. Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah for 25 good and prosperous years. Upon his death, his eldest son Jehoram took the throne. Things immediately went downhill. One of the practices of the pagan kings in the region was that the ascending king would remove all of his competitors, most often by their deaths. Brothers were typically not beloved, and they were threats, in that they stood in line to the throne if anything happened to the reigning brother. And things did happen, much of the time at the hands of those brothers. However, Judah's kings did not put their brothers to death, because the covenant called them to a different standard. There was the exception when Solomon put his brother Adonijah to death when he sought to usurp Solomon's rule, but Solomon only executed Adonijah, not the other brothers. When Jehoram took the throne, he put all of his brothers to the sword. The writer of Chronicles condemns this action by saying Jehoram did this **"in the ways of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done"** (2 Chronicles 21:6). The writer also mentions that Jehoram's wife was Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab. Undoubtedly, she exercised some malevolent influence here.

Because of his evil ways, Jehoram's reign only lasted eight years. Just as a prophet had warned him, he was afflicted with a horrible disease in his bowels, which brought about a very agonizing death. Worse yet, when he died, no one grieved. The text says that **"he departed with no one's regret"** (2 Chronicles 21:20). What a sad ending to someone's life.

Next Jehoram's son Ahaziah took the throne, and unfortunately, he was just like his father. Yahweh brought about his demise after only one year. When Athaliah, his mother and a daughter of Ahab, heard that her son was dead, she put to death all of the royal family of Judah. Why did she do this? We don't know for sure, but we do know that she took charge of the throne from that day.

Yet, Athaliah could not destroy all of the royal sons. Without her knowledge, Joash was taken by his half-sister Jehoshabeath, a faithful daughter of evil King Jehoram who was also the wife of the faithful priest, Jehoiada. She then hid Joash in the palace for six years, until the day when he was revealed as the rightful king of Judah. On that day, Athaliah's evil caught up with her, and she was put to death. Joash, the last remaining seed of David at that time, began to reign. Joash did pretty well as king, as long as his uncle Jehoiada

was guiding him. He carried out some much needed reforms. But when Jehoiada died, the weakness of Joash's faith became apparent, and he did not finish well.

What an ugly story! Yet even in the midst of so much evil, we can learn some critical lessons. First, the sins that Jehoshaphat committed in his misguided marriage alliance with Ahab were not confined to him. They had long-lasting negative effects on countless others. That poor decision brought about the deaths of many people and threatened the very lineage of his father David. Judah as a whole suffered greatly because of that one idolatrous choice to pursue security through his own efforts.

Sin is never a private affair. Neither are the effects limited to us. As much as I want to think that what I do only hurts me, the truth of the matter is that what I do has far-reaching implications. Just as Jehoshaphat's faithless alliance had so many destructive effects, our sin will also impact people far down the line from us. Therefore, we must take even small issues seriously, lest they grow and become far more than we bargained for.

Secondly, we see in Joash that faith has to be internalized. The outward restraint of Jehoiada's presence and guidance could only go so far. When that restraint was gone, the reality of Joash's heart was exposed. It is not enough just to have the exterior conditions made right. Sin and idolatry begin in hearts that trust self above all else, and outward restraints will never be sufficient to create faithfulness. As we parent our children, we can create positive and upright conditions in which they can live and move, but if we never reach their hearts, all of that positive influence will be for nothing. As a country, simply passing legislation and creating "righteous" laws will never make us a faithful people. Hearts must be reached with the realities of the Kingdom.

Thirdly, and most importantly, we see the work of Yahweh keeping His promise in the face of serious opposition. So much was done to thwart God's promise to David to keep one of his sons on the throne. The chain of events that takes place from Jehoshaphat's ill-fated alliance with the house of Ahab, through the destruction of two generations of royal sons, seriously threatened the fulfillment of that promise. Yet, Yahweh raised up a faithful woman and her husband who were used to preserve the lineage of David when all hope was thought to be lost. With all of the evil forces working against it, Yahweh's promise was kept intact. It did not fail. He would not allow it to fail.

This would have been critical for the original audience of the book of Chronicles. They had been exiles who returned from Babylon to restore the nation and people of Israel. Yet there would be so many obstacles standing in the way. People all around them were opposed to Jerusalem being rebuilt. They returned to a city that was in total ruin and had to rebuild from scratch. Their numbers were small and their resources were few. What hope did they realistically have? If they had eyes that only saw the material world, there was really no hope. But there were other forces at work. Hope was not lost. In the unseen world, Yahweh was still moving heaven and earth to fulfill His promise to His people. And He did. From that small group of returned exiles Jerusalem and the temple were restored, and out of that small despondent group, the seed of the true King was progressing. The lineage of the true King had not disappeared. It was even then being preserved until the day when the infant King was born in Bethlehem.

What hope do we have in a world where we see evil reigning everywhere, where we see the righteous oppressed and the guilty honored, where the people of God are minimalized, ostracized, and even persecuted? We have the sure hope that God has promised that He reigns over all things, and that He will one day culminate everything by revealing of the King of Glory. And, as He has proven throughout the years, His promise is firm regardless of the perceived opposition. For us it does not matter what political party is in power, what dictators are pressing their agendas around the world, or what forces stand against the church. Our God's promise is unfailing. Nothing can or will keep it from being fulfilled in totality. God has promised, and that gives us a sure hope. The true King sits on His throne without rivals. Even now He rules over all He has made. He has also promised that one day in the future the whole world will bow down to our True King and all evil will be vanquished forever. What a glorious hope! That is worth waiting for.