

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Dave Smith

The Life and Times of King Joash

(2 Chronicles 21-24)

Introduction: Now playing...

Good actors and actresses have a chameleon-like capacity to transport themselves into the role they are playing so convincingly that we who watch actually believe that they are what they are portraying.

Of course, it's fun to watch character actors like John Wayne and Bruce Willis simply play themselves in different roles.

But it's an altogether different experience to see Meryl Streep play Julia Child to a tee, or Dustin Hoffman or Claire Danes portray someone with autism with sensitivity. It's magic when, mid-way through the movie, we think that Daniel Day Lewis IS Abraham Lincoln, that Helen Mirren IS Queen Elizabeth, that Jamie Foxx IS Ray Charles.

This morning we are going to talk about acting - but not of the Hollywood variety. The actors in this drama may or may not be familiar to you. The stars of the show are Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Athaliah, Ahaziah, Joash¹, Jehoiada, and Zechariah.

They are all characters from the Old Testament who lived about 2900 years ago. But, the plot-line comes with a warning and a self-exam that makes this story 2013 cutting edge.

The setting for the story is the land of Israel, specifically the southern part, known as Judah.

In the days of the Jewish kings, Judah was always ruled by one of the descendants of Israel's greatest king, David. David was succeeded on the throne by his son, Solomon.² Then came Rehoboam, Abijam, and Asa.

Following Asa, Jehoshaphat came to the throne. [Jumpin'] Jehoshaphat was a righteous King who brought spiritual revival to Judah.³ Sadly, Jehoshaphat and spiritual revival are not our "*themes for the day.*"

After Jehoshaphat died, Judah went into a tailspin of wickedness, led there by wicked kings who didn't follow the Lord.

The Reign of Wickedness in Judah (2 Chr. 21-23)

The Wicked Reign of King Jehoram (21:1-20)

Jehoram, next in line after Jehoshaphat, was the exceedingly wicked son of a righteous father. After his father (Jehoshaphat) died, Jehoram killed all six of his younger brothers, to ensure that they couldn't usurp the throne from him.

Here is the Bible's summary of the rule of Jehoram: *[6] 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.*

Pretty sad summary! And did you catch the parenthetical comment about his wife? Jehoram married the daughter of King Ahab.

King Ahab was the most wicked king of the northern kingdom (Israel), and Ahab's wife was Jezebel, an immoral, idolatrous, and cruel woman. And Jehoram took Ahab's and Jezebel's daughter as his wife. That probably tells us as much as we need to know about Jehoram!

So, no doubt, thanks in some measure to the wife he had chosen as a life partner, Jehoram *[11] caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot and led Judah astray.*

¹ As you read through 2 Kings, you will note that Joash is called "Jehoash."

² David and Solomon reigned over the united monarchy of Israel. Following Solomon, Israel divided into the northern (Israel - always more apostate) and southern (Judah - which saw some brief seasons of spiritual health) kingdoms.

³ Read about Jehoshaphat in 1 Kings 22 and in 2 Chronicles 17-20.

King Jehoram lived badly and died worse, suffering from a painful disease that took his life.

And here is the epitaph written on Jehoram's tombstone, [20] *He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years; and he departed with no one's regret.*

Quite a legacy, huh?

Well, with Jehoram dead and gone we say, "Good riddance!" and hope for better days ahead for Judah.

The Wicked Reign of King Ahaziah (22:1-9)

Sadly, Judah goes from bad to worse with Jehoram's youngest son, Ahaziah. Only nine verses in 2 Chronicles 22 are devoted to Ahaziah, and with good reason: [4] *He did evil in the sight of the Lord.*

How did Ahaziah get so corrupted? Well, the Bible tells us that "*his mother was his counselor to do evil.*" Remember, his mother was Jehoram's wife, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Not a great text for a Mother's Day message - and we will see more of this mother today than we really want to see.

Wicked King Ahaziah was finally killed by a man named Jehu, relieving Judah of another miserable King.

While we might hope for some righteous relief, none is forthcoming. In fact, the situation turns from very bad, to very much worse.

After the death of a king, protocol held that one of the king's sons should reign in his place. So, after the death of Ahaziah, his son *should have* become king.

But, here is where we get a better view of that daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, that wife of Jehoram, the mother of Ahaziah.

The Wicked Reign of Queen Athaliah (22:10-12)

Her name is Athaliah, and when she saw that her son, Ahaziah, was dead, she decided that she would like to rule as queen of Judah.

There was a problem with this plan, though. Ahaziah had sons. So, one of those sons *should have* become king. So, Athaliah had to think up a plan, and think it up quick.

The plan she came up with was clever and efficient. She decided that she would kill all of the royal offspring. That's right, Athaliah ascended to the throne of Judah as queen by killing all of her grandchildren. Again, not a great text for a Grandparents Day sermon. (23:10)

Well, her plan succeeded in getting to the throne, but it was not quite a perfect plan. One of the grandsons - the infant, Joash - was spared by the heroic efforts of a nurse (Jehoshabeath) and a priest (Jehoiada).

Athaliah's reign continued the spiritual wreckage of Jehoram and Ahaziah. She led the nation into the worship of the Baals (false gods of Canaan), into immorality, into violence, and away from the Lord.

Yes, Judah is in a mess.

Can you imagine what would have been the thoughts of a God-fearing Jew in that desperate time? Certainly grief over the nation's sin, a fear of God's coming judgment, and a cry for revival.

Well, help is on the way!

We continue reading and watch as the godly old priest, Jehoiada, works to overthrow Queen Athaliah and to put the rightful King, Joash, in place.

The RIGHTEOUS Rule of King Joash (23:16-24:14)

The Overthrow of Athaliah (23:1-15)

Orchestrating a coup

Jehoiada orchestrated a masterful military and spiritual coup to get rid of Athaliah.

He gathered warriors who would back him, militarily, along with priests and Levites who would right things, spiritually.

He knew how to get the right King on the throne - and he laid out the battle plan to his co-conspirators. Jehoiada stationed men at strategic places around the city. And with these armed men scattered all over Jerusalem, Jehoiada led King Joash from the palace where he had been kept in hiding for years, to the Temple, the house of the Lord.

[11] Then they brought out the king's son and put the crown on him, and gave him the testimony, and made him king. And Jehoiada and his sons anointed him and said, "Long live the King."

Obviously, a takeover is not complete until the usurper is overthrown. We next read of Athaliah's last stand.

Athaliah is killed (vv. 12-15)

[12] When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came into the house of the Lord to the people. [13] She looked, and behold, the king was standing by his pillar at the entrance, and the captains and the trumpeters were beside the king. And all the people of the land rejoiced and blew trumpets, the singers with their musical instruments leading the praise. Then Athaliah tore her clothes and said, "Treason! Treason." [14] Jehoiada the priest brought out the captains of hundreds who were appointed over the army, and said to them, "Bring her out between the ranks; and whoever follows her, put to death with the sword." For the priest said, "Let her not be put to death in the house of the Lord." [15] So they seized her, and when she arrived at the entrance of the Horse Gate of the king's house, they put her to death there.

This reminds us of the scene in the Wizard of Oz, where the wicked witch of the west was killed. There, in fiction, all of the witch's henchmen were thrilled that the witch was dead.

Here, in a true historical account, the people are even more thrilled that Queen Athaliah is dead. In the same breath they cheer, "*The Queen is dead. Long Live the King!*"

The whole thing was orchestrated by Jehoiada. But he had not simply wanted to get rid of the bad queen. He wanted to pave the way for the new king to have a righteous reign. So, with Athaliah out of the way and Joash on the throne, the old priest did just that.

Preparations for a Godly Reign for Joash (23:16-21)

[16] Then Jehoiada made a covenant between himself and all the people and the king, that they would be the Lord's people. [17] And all the people went to the house of Baal, and tore it down, and they broke in pieces his altars and his images, and killed Mathan the priest of Baal before the altars.

And with the negative is removed, Jehoiada moved to re-institute the positive as sacrifices were again offered on the altar of the Temple, as prescribed in the Mosaic Law (vv. 18-19).

When Joash was actually crowned King, the people rejoiced. Why? Because they were optimistic for a return to righteousness in their nation. And, as we will see, their expectations were well-founded.

The righteous reign of Joash began like gangbusters. **REVIVAL** is not too strong a word to use to describe the changes that occurred during the early years of his reign.

Joash's Righteous Acts (24:1-14)

The summary of Joash's reign is found in 2 Chronicles 24:2 - "***And Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord...***" That, in and of itself is different from anything we have seen thus far this morning!

What I haven't told you yet, but what you should know is that Joash began to reign as king when he was seven years old (sort of makes you nervous, huh?). He had been hidden in the palace by Jehoiada for the first seven years of his life, to protect him from his grandmother, Athaliah!

After he had been King for some time (maybe into his teen years), he decided to restore the house of the Lord. So, he gave the command to the priests to repair the Temple. (vv. 4-5)

Well, the priests didn't exactly respond immediately. Maybe they were so shocked that a king would order them to do something righteous that they didn't believe him.

So, he had to reissue the command. (v. 6)⁴

You can almost hear him saying, “*I am serious about this now, guys. Do it.*” Well, they finally “got it”, hopped to, and repaired the Temple.

Then he re-instated the tax of Moses for the on-going support of the Temple. (vv. 8-10)

These reforms allowed for Temple restoration and put the nation back on the right track of obedience to the Lord. (vv. 12-14)

So, Joash was leading the nation the way the king was supposed to lead the nation. Sacrifices offered. The priesthood supported. The Temple taken care of. Righteousness exalted. The Law of God revered.

And these reforms weren’t just flashes in the pan, either! Check in with Joash at age 47 and he is still on the same track. A generation into his reign (forty years) and he is still leading the people of God in the ways of God.

But, at about the forty year mark, a fly gets in the ointment. Joash’s lifelong mentor, Jehoiada, the old priest, dies.

The WICKED Rule of King Joash (24:15-27)

The Death of Jehoiada (24:15-16)

Now, think with me about Joash’s life. All of his siblings had been killed by his grandmother. His father was dead, as was his mother (likely killed along with all of her other children), as were his grandparents.

Joash’s primary adult model has always been Jehoiada, the priest. Jehoiada died at one hundred and thirty years of age, which means that he must have been about ninety when he orchestrated the coup to overthrow Athaliah and arranged for Joash’s ascension to the throne. (We don’t know how active he was as a one hundred and thirty year old.)

So, we’re not surprised that Joash arranged for an elaborate funeral and burial for Jehoiada. They even buried him among the kings of Judah, a very special honor, because **[16] he had done well in Israel and to God and His house.**

We can certainly understand why Joash would want to honor Jehoiada. Just think about what Jehoiada had done for Joash:

- He saved him from certain death as an infant.
- He protected him for seven years from his wicked grandmother, Athaliah, by hiding him in the palace.
- He saw to it that Joash got to the throne.
- He provided him with the infrastructure to restore Judah to God’s ways.
- He gave him spiritual nurture and direction all of his life.

But, now that Jehoiada is gone and off the scene, Joash finds himself at a major life crossroads. What will he do? At age forty seven, where will he go?

How will he act, now that the long, protective shadow of Jehoiada the priest has been swept away? Two actions, one building upon the other, answer those questions.

The Apostasy of Joash. (24:17ff....)

Marching to the beat of a new drummer (vv. 15-18)

All of his life, Joash had listened to Jehoiada tell him about God’s ways. He had his ear tuned to God’s frequency. He had grown up listening to K-LOVE and KSLR.

But, shortly after Jehoiada’s death, some of the officials of Judah came up to him to have words with him. They recommended a different station.

The conversation is not recorded for us, but it isn’t too tough to imagine what they had to say to the king.

Just watch the actions that follow.

⁴ The command was re-issued in the 23rd year of his reign when he was 30 years of age according to 2 Kings. Some have attributed this slowness of Joash in moving to restore the Temple as a sign of spiritual apathy.

[17] But AFTER THE DEATH OF JEHOIADA, (emphasis added) *the officials of Judah came and bowed down to the king, and the king listened to them. [18] They abandoned the house of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols.*⁵

Joash changed spiritual loyalties as easily and thoughtlessly as we might punch a button on the car radio to tune to a different station. Without so much as a moment's hesitation, he abandoned the house of the Lord, and allowed the nation to revert to idolatry. Wow!

Not surprisingly, his actions brought the wrath of God upon Judah.

Instead of the peace and serenity that had prevailed for the first forty years of his reign, there is now a debased worship system, child sacrifice, the grossest immorality, and Temple prostitution.

What happened? We'll address that question in a moment, but we have to finish this sad story first.

Joash's final hypocrisy (vv. 19-22)

Despite Joash's apostasy, God didn't abandon him. Instead, He warned the king through the prophets to return to the righteous path.

One of the prophets God sent his way was Zechariah (NOT the prophet who wrote the book by the same name). This Zechariah just happened to be the son of Jehoiada, the priest.⁶

Listen to Zechariah's bold words, [20]... ***“Thus God has said, ‘Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, He has also forsaken you.’”***

Now, what would you expect Joash's response to be? What would you hope that he would do when he heard the words of Zechariah? I would like to see him kneel in genuine repentance.

I would like to see him in sackcloth and ashes, mourning, and pleading for forgiveness. But, that is not at all what we find him doing.

Instead, Joash responded to the word of God from Zechariah, by instigating a conspiracy against Zechariah, and having him stoned to death.

Do you follow this? Can you believe this? He killed the man whose father had saved his infant life.

According to verse 11 of this chapter, Zechariah was there when Joash was crowned king. He was one of those shouting, *“Long live the King.”* When Athaliah was overthrown.

Talk about ingratitude! Talk about biting the hand that feeds you! (Many scholars believe that this Zechariah is the one referred to in Luke 11. There, Jesus lambasted the Pharisees for their *hypocrisy*, finding a parallel between their treatment of Himself, with Joash's treatment of Zechariah. Thus, Joash is a “model hypocrite - or what I am calling, an *externalist*.)

In the space of a very few verses, we have watched Joash crash and burn. What began as a sterling opportunity to serve the Lord ended in a disgusting abuse of power. To use Todd's words from last week, Joash has shipwrecked.

He started so well. He looked so good. He had so much going for him. But, at year forty of his reign, he did an abrupt 180. What changed?

Let's ask a different question...

Understanding Externalism

In the Life of Joash...

Possible motivators of Joash

Let's ask, *“What was it that really motivated Joash to do good for the first 40 years of his reign?”*

⁵ The text never actually says that he personally engaged in idol worship. But, the task of the king of Judah was to ensure that the **nation** followed the Lord's ways. He is completely culpable for his capitulation.

⁶ The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible identifies 31 men in the Bible who are named “Zechariah.” The Zechariah here in 2 Chron. 24 is not the same one who wrote the biblical prophecy of Zechariah.

Was it unswerving commitment to God? Was it unquestioning loyalty to God? Was it undying gratitude to God for His grace? Was it his submission to the recognized sovereignty of God?

After seeing him fall so hard and so far, so fast, we have reason to doubt.

So, is there a clue somewhere that would tell us what had prompted Joash to live and lead righteously for a loooong season and to then quickly turn to embrace wickedness?

In fact, there is.

A few minutes ago, I read only the first part of 2 Chronicles 24:2. Now, listen as I read the entire verse.

What actually motivated Joash to do right?

[12] And Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord ALL THE DAYS OF JEHOIADA THE PRIEST. (emphasis added)

And we hear the same idea later, **[14] And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the Lord ALL THE DAYS OF JEHOIADA.** (emphasis added)

Here is the point. The fact that his early life was marked by obedience to God was, unfortunately, nothing more than a happy coincidence. It was serendipity, not intentionality.

The motivating force in Joash's life was a desire to please Jehoiada, not God.

And, it was even more than that. After Jehoiada was off the scene, it is clear that Joash wanted to please those who surrounded him. Having no internal compass himself, he was willing to follow anyone who offered any direction.

If you had examined the life of Joash in the twentieth year of his reign, you would have assumed certain things.

You would have believed that he was a man of God. You would have thought you were looking at a spiritually minded man.

And you would have been wrong. He was neither. He was a man blown by the winds of peer pressure, eager to please, not firmly rooted in God.

Now, so far today, all we have done has been to look through the window the Old Testament provides of the life and times of King Joash. And we have rightly thrown stones. We have thumbed our noses at his gross externalism.

But now it is time to turn the window into a mirror, and ask, *“What about me? Are there hints of a latent Joash within ME?”*

In Your Life and In Mine...

What are the symptoms of externalism?

You wouldn't ever have known Joash was an externalist by watching him in his early life. His lifestyle and his leadership were above reproach.

But, the absence of a genuine commitment to God eventually became obvious. It always does. Life's pressure cooker will reveal our true commitment and loyalties.

Joash was more concerned with the praise of man, than with the praise of God. So, when the external prop that had supported him for his whole life went away (Jehoiada), he capitulated to idolatry, threw the true God off like an out of style garment, and followed after those neat new gods of Canaan.

In 2013, Christians who do not nurture their inner life, their own personal relationship with the living God, end up as Joashes.

Perhaps the props will remain in place and the “fall” will not be as public as it was for Joash. But, on the inside, they will wither away, until the last spark of spiritual vitality cools to a barely glowing ember.

I know. I've been there. Recently.

Following the Christmas season this year, I was pretty spent. A combination of multiple worship services, lots of activity and busyness, some church stuff, and a few personal challenges left me drained. I was flat, out of gas, out of touch with the Lord - and I knew it.

Maybe you've been there. Maybe you are there now. I'd like to close our time together by asking three somewhat pointed questions that I hope will help you get rid of Joash and lead to spiritual vitality.

On what "props" are you leaning?

First, it appears that Joash was depending on a man - Jehoiada - to prop him up. On what "props" are you leaning?

Are you depending on your spouse's walk with God to carry you through life? Is the life of the church what you are counting on to keep you vibrant and alive?

When the crowd says, "Let's follow the gods of the land." "Let's not get too fanatical about this 'Jesus' stuff." "You don't really believe the Bible, do you?", will you be able to answer, "I have a settled heart. I have decided to follow Jesus. Period."?

It is time to own your own faith. Send your roots down deep through worship, community, and service.

Joash's life prompts another question. He lived to please those around him. Who are you trying to please?

Who are you living to please?

Many of us know the temptation to be concerned for the esteem of our peers. We feel compelled to conform to the standards of the popular group.

But, the Bible calls believers to fear God rather than man, and to live for the praise of God rather than for the praise of man. Joash felt compelled to fit into a mold - and that is moldier than God wants His children to be. Don't be moldy!

The apostle Paul wrote to his child in the faith, Timothy, [2 Timothy 2:15] ***Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.***

The greatest safeguard against becoming a Joash is to adopt as your life goal to be "***approved by God***" - not a friend, not a parent, not a leader. God.

Finally, Joash' repeated hypocrisy and his long-term externalism tells us that he was unwilling to get out the mirror of self-examination. He did not lead a reflective life.

Are you willing to invite the Holy Spirit to search you and to reveal to you if there is any hint of externalism within so that you might repent of it and turn to back to God?

Will you invite the Spirit of God to search you and cleanse you of "externalism"?

In Joash, we have the tragic story of a person who had every opportunity to truly walk with God - and never actually did.

God calls you and me, today, to a spirituality that is more than skin deep. To settle for anything less is to welcome spiritual shipwreck.

The key to my own revitalizing was some focused time last week with God in worship and prayer and asking the Spirit to search me.

Might it be that the key to your revival will be the same? Seek the Lord. Get alone with God. Ask Him the tough questions. He will gladly cleanse and purify anyone who comes to Him with a sincere desire to grow in grace.

Come to Jesus today and ask Him to do a deep work in your heart.