

2ND KINGS

Week 16, chapter 12

We'll study 2nd Kings 12 this week, which continues the story of Joash, the latest King of Judah who was publically coronated at the tender age of only 7 years. Our previous lesson in chapter 11 told us why it was that this extraordinary action took place, as well as how it took place. The "why" was because **Yo'ash** was the sole survivor of the ruling class of the House of David. This child was all that stood between continuation and extinction of the Davidic dynasty.

Chapter 11 explained this complex web of intrigue and murder that had become standard operating procedure within Judah's and Israel's monarchies. We're told that the now-deceased Queen Jezebel of Israel had a daughter named Athaliah, and she had married into the monarchy of Judah. Athaliah's son **Achazyah** eventually became the king of Judah, but he was assassinated by Jehu (who became King of Israel), as part of the Lord's demand upon Jehu to rid the land of the wicked dynasty of **Achav** (Ahab).

However Athaliah was a bit of a megalomaniac, and had high ambitions, and so upon her son's death, she saw an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. First, as a Ba'al worshipper who was inherently anti-Yehoveh, she wanted to destroy the Lord's promise that a descendant of the House of David would rule Judah forever. And second, she wanted the throne of Judah for herself. However since she was not of the tribe of Judah, not of the family of David, and not a male, she was legally disqualified at every level. The single stone needed to solve all this was merely to kill every male descendant of King David and of King **Achav** (the ruling dynasty of Judah and the ruling dynasty of Israel). Since family members of the two dynasties had intermarried, then doing one also accomplished the other.

Thus Athaliah went on a homicidal spree and killed every last male who might have had a legal right to the throne of Judah; except that she missed one. That one was a male infant, but a few weeks old, named Joash, who was a descendant of King David. His aunt, a loyalist of the Davidic dynasty and wife of the current High Priest **Y 'ho'yada**, stole into the Palace nursery, grabbed up the infant and his wet-nurse, and took them into hiding. Athaliah seemed not to notice, and so the child was housed in the Temple complex, only yards from her own living quarters, and right under her nose the boy lived there for over 6 years with the families of Levites and Priests, apparently no one aware of his true identity. It's doubtful that **Yo'ash** had any idea that he was of royal blood. All during this time Athaliah ruled over Judah and did all in her power to rid Judah of Yehoveh worship and convert her kingdom to Ba'al worship.

And this brings us full circle back to why **Y'ho'yada** would actually believe it prudent to lead a full scale rebellion against the erstwhile Queen of Judah, with the intention of replacing her with a 7 year old boy. The thought process was that a 7 year old member of the Davidic dynasty who had been trained by Levites was a far better option as a legitimate king than an idol worshipping daughter of Jezebel, as an illegitimate queen. The choice before Jehoiada was impossibly narrow; neither option being particularly attractive. But, as goes the quote from that famous Indiana Jones movie, "he chose wisely". Thus as we grasp the circumstances we can understand why Judah suddenly had a child-king when on the surface it in many ways seems so irrational and wrong. This is probably another good practical example of the rabbinic principle of **Kal-V'homer**, the principle of light and heavy. For those who might have forgotten this principle, it is that often times, as worshippers of the God of Israel, we are going to find ourselves in situations whereby any choice we make is going to violate a God-commandment or God-principle to some degree. Thus our task is to discern which of the not-so-good choices is the least bad. So we put these choices on God's balance scales (His Holy Word) and use the most fundamental God-principles that carry the greater weight as the deciding factor.

In this case, the High Priest determined that it was better to have a child on the throne, who was still more than 5 years away from being of the age of accountability, who had only the most limited understanding of his responsibilities, and who had utterly no way in his immature youth to personally make the countless weighty decisions that a king must make on a daily basis. Could a 7 year old lead a nation to war against an aggressor? This was one of a king's chief jobs in that era. Would having a 7 year old as their king merely invite an invasion of a foreign power that saw this as an opportunity to expand their territory? This choice was viewed as more spiritually pragmatic than to leave Athaliah in place several more years and wait for Joash to at least come to the age of Bar Mitzvah.

So as we each face situations in our lives that appear to have no good answer, let us remember how the High Priest of Judah took courage for his bold choice, and apply the principle of light versus heavy based on the Lord's laws and commandments. This does not mean that what we decide upon will be God's ideal. And as we study Joash's life, we'll discover that he turned out to be a mixed bag of good and evil; of promise and of disappointment. But the harsh reality is that we are fallen creatures living in a corrupted world, and nothing operates as God has ordained it from the standpoint of heavenly ideals. Thus rather than us remaining frozen, unable to made a decision, it is important for Believers to know God's Torah, which is our source of knowledge of His heavenly ideals, and then learn which of these ideals carries more weight than another when a circumstance brings them into conflict.

That is what the totally dedicated and righteous High Priest of Israel, **Y'ho'yada**, did in crowning young Joash, and in deposing and killing Queen Athaliah. He was right and just in doing it, but at the same time there were significant negative consequences.

Let's read 2nd Kings Chapter 12.

READ 2ND KINGS CHAPTER 12 all

Verses 1 and 2 use the Biblical way of giving us the timing of what is being recorded; it uses the synchronization of the reigns of the Kings of Judah and Israel. Thus it is repeated that Joash was but 7 years old when he began his rule, and that it happened when **Yehu**, King of Israel, was in his 7th year of ruling over Israel. Notice the “coincidence” of the 7's: the new King of Judah was 7 years old, and the King of Israel at that time had been king for 7 years. This leaves us no doubt that what happened here was of divine plan, even if that divine plan was at least partly to bring about the Lord's punishment on both Israel and Judah. We also find out that Joash's mother (she was one of **Achazyah's** wives) was a woman named **Tzivyah**, which translates as roe (a roe is a kind of small deer). It points out that she was from Beer-Sheva that lies at the southernmost border region of Judah, so while not conclusive, it almost certainly means she was of the tribe of Judah. And let me point out that while it is certainly a good thing that she was a Judahite, in this era the familial association was according to the blood lines of the father, NOT the mother. So if Joash was to be counted as of the tribe of Judah, technically his father would have to be a Judahite (which he was).

Then in verses 3 and 4 we get an interesting statement that is worth discussing; it says that on the one hand Joash did what was right from God's perspective; but on the other hand the high places were left intact and the people of Judah who favored them still sacrificed and worshipped at those private altars and King Joash sanctioned it. What we see in verse 3, however, is that the things that **Yo'ash** did right occurred at the time when the High Priest **Y'ho'yada** was still living; with the implication that Joash made a turn towards the bad when the High Priest's influence ended upon his death.

There is a deep spiritual lesson for us to learn from this chapter that revolves around the life of Joash, if we have the ears to hear. It is a spiritually fatal mistake (in any religious revival or movement) to merely abolish or denounce or destroy the errors of our thinking and our false practices of the past, without at the same time affirming and observing what is right and true and holy. Nature abhors a vacuum; thus something is going to fill up the space and purpose of that which has been removed or abolished. Especially for Christians, when it comes to our faith doctrines, if we negate or abandon what the Holy Spirit has clearly revealed through God's Word as being false and having no merit in our lives, without at the same time replacing it with what is Biblically right and pure, then we have really achieved little.

As we have seen in the last couple of chapters, King Jehu (for instance) did exactly as God commanded him to do and destroyed Ba'al worship in the northern kingdom. On the other hand, in order to replace the Ba'al worship with something else, he didn't lead the people back to the Torah, which would have been the right thing to do. Rather he led them into the

same Golden Calf cult that Jeroboam had instituted. It is true that the Golden Calf cult taught that these calf-images were but images of Yehoveh. But to make graven images of Yehoveh is specifically prohibited in the 10 commandments (and to do it by using the Egyptian religion's calf god image makes it all the more terrible); and this is the case no matter if some good intent was involved.

Thus now we read that while Joash honored the Temple and the Levitical Priesthood on the one hand, on the other he allowed the people to do something that was specifically forbidden in the Torah: to sacrifice at places other than the Temple in Jerusalem. What's so bad about that if at least it was God who was being honored? Even beyond breaking of a specific commandment, these high places (***bamot***) were essentially private family altars. Individual families performed sacrifices without the required officiating of the Levitical priesthood, and instead did it in ways that seemed good to them. As with the Golden Calves, the god that was theoretically being honored at these high places was YHWH, God of Israel. These were not altars to Ba'al. But in reality, the sacrifices on these private altars weren't accepted by the Lord because this practice was an affront to His holiness.

So it is insufficient for us merely to replace one bad doctrine with a dubious new one. God may well commend us for turning away from something that is abhorrent to Him. But have we actually done good when we only turn around and adopt another doctrine or observance in its place (even if it is fun, joyful, and meaningful for us) that is NOT truth or light, even if it is not quite as wicked and wrong as that which we practiced before? In the end, we are only deceiving ourselves and tempting God to act against us.

At this time, I'd like for us to turn to a parallel account of what we are reading in 2nd Kings 12. There is much more detail here about ***Y'ho'yada*** and the actions of Joash and his subsequent assassination, and now would be the best time for us to get this information.

Turn to 2nd Chronicles 24. Some of this is redundant, but there is much new and pertinent information here.

READ 2ND CHRONICLES 24 all

We'll weave some of these details into what we're studying in 2nd Kings 12 as we go along.

What we need to notice (and it is obvious) that a 7 year old was not actually making decisions of state, judging civil and criminal matters, nor running the kingdom. Rather ***Yo'ash*** was a figurehead as he obtained on the job training. ***Y'ho'yada*** was the real power behind the throne, and I'm sure it was no secret even to the common citizens. But since he was the High

Priest, and he acted in a righteous manner, the people seemed to have no problem with this arrangement; they trusted him.

We found out in 2nd Chronicles that **Y'ho'yada** lived to be 130 years old; a rare, rare occurrence in those days. Thus he was over 100 years old when he led the coup against Athaliah and installed Joash as king. So as verse 3 of 2nd Kings 12 explains, as long as **Y'ho'yada** lived he had the perceived authority and power, and the support of the people, to guide King Joash to make decisions that were in accordance with God's will and for the benefit of the people of Judah. However, the High Priest also was clearly an astute politician (as his strategy for developing support to overthrow Athaliah demonstrated), and so it must have seemed but a pragmatic decision to not rile the more powerful clan leaders by insisting that they abandon their private high places that were also important status symbols for them. **Y'ho'yada** was a godly man, but not a perfect man. And in reality, it was **Y'ho'yada** who allowed the **bamot** to remain.

Verse 5 explains that the Temple was in disrepair if not dilapidation. Joash, as he grew older, noticed this and felt that this shouldn't have happened. Considering **Y'ho'yada's** advanced age, the High Priest probably had little energy to spearhead the effort to make the repairs. The Temple was now about 150 years old and though made largely of stone, there was a lot of timber and fabrics used, and they were bound to need replacing. But 2nd Chronicles 24 also reveals that Athaliah had directed her sons to literally scavenge the Temple for building materials to take and use for her Temple to Ba'al. The Temple treasury might have been able to make repairs, but she had looted the funds. Therefore King Josiah would now jump in and use his position to force the issue.

Verse 5 tells us something fascinating; it tells us the sources of funding for operating the Temple and the Priesthood, and there are 3 named categories: 1) from those who "pass through", 2) money from personal evaluation, and 3) voluntary contributions given from the heart. Let's address each of these in turn.

"Those who pass through" means the annual half-shekel tax that is expected of all Israelites as a communal offering to the Temple. The CJB uses a dynamic translation and actually says ½ shekel tax. This is a direct Torah commandment as found in Exodus 30.

CJB Exodus 30:13

¹³ Everyone subject to the census is to pay as an offering to ADONAI half a shekel [one-fifth of an ounce of silver]- by the standard of the sanctuary shekel (a shekel equals twenty gerahs).

“Money for personal evaluation” (the CJB again uses a dynamic instead of literal translation and says “taxes on persons in a man’s household”) is referring to a table of values set up in Leviticus 27 that provides a standard for people to vow money to the Temple. The table is set up based on gender, age, and a couple of other factors.

CJB **Leviticus 27:1-8**

¹ ADONAI said to Moshe,

² "Tell the people of Isra'el, 'If someone makes a clearly defined vow to ADONAI to give him an amount equal to the value of a human being,

³ the value you are to assign to a man between the ages of twenty and sixty years is to be fifty shekels of silver [one-and-a-quarter pounds], with the sanctuary shekel being the standard,

⁴ if a woman, thirty shekels.

⁵ If it is a child five to twenty years old, assign a value of twenty shekels for a boy and ten for a girl;

⁶ if a baby one month to five years of age, five shekels for a boy and three for a girl;

⁷ if a person past sixty, fifteen shekels for a man and ten for a woman.

⁸ If the person is too poor to be evaluated, set him before the cohen, who will assign him a value in keeping with the means of the person who made the vow.

One could argue if the use that the Priesthood was making of this passage in Leviticus by collecting money in this manner was what God originally intended or not. But the point is, whether it was or it wasn't, this was indeed what they were doing and what they based their rationale upon.

The 3rd source is called “money that comes from a man’s heart”, and the CJB calls them voluntary offerings. This is money of no set amount that a person can donate whenever they feel led to do so.

King **Yo'ash** ordered that all the money from these 3 sources was to be used only for repairs of the Temple. But, in his 23rd year of reigning (when he was only 30 years old), the Temple still wasn't being repaired and he ran out of patience. Verse 5 in 2nd Chronicles 24 says that

King Joash had even ordered the Priests and the Levites to go out among the people of Judah and solicit funds for rebuilding. But this was to no avail; no progress was being made.

In verse 8 the king institutes a new system to get the Temple repaired. He calls in **Y'ho'yada** and the lesser priests, dresses them down for ignoring his decree, and tells them that from here on he was taking charge. The king suspected that the Priests were simply collecting the money and keeping it for themselves. They would no longer get to receive the funds and then disperse them. Rather, a wooden chest with a hole in the top was fashioned and placed in the Sanctuary area. As the priests who were stationed around the Temple courtyard collected money from the people, they were to bring that money at the end of the day to this chest, and deposit it all there. Once it looked pretty full, the king's accountant together with the High Priest would take it, bag the money, and then turn all of it over to the work crews who had been hired to repair the Temple. Let's be clear that coins were not collected; rather it was silver and gold. Until we begin to approach the Greek and Roman times, coins were not used by the Hebrews. So the gold and silver would be separated into bags, weighed, the king's accountant no doubt would record the amount of money, and then turn it over to the king's overseers whose sole task was to make Temple repairs.

Verse 14 is kind of a parentheses that explains that "repairing the Temple" should not include such things as making new gold and silver furnishings for the Temple. The money was for structural repairs, not lots of expensive ornaments and ritual vessels. And this can only mean that the Priests must have preferred having expensive gold and silver doo-dads to show off, instead of dealing with the more mundane matters of maintenance of the Temple structure. That said, 2nd Chronicles 24 says that there WERE silver vessels made from some of these funds. The Sages explain this by saying that while Temple repairs were the priority, some of the leftover funds could be used for this purpose.

However even though the king had an accounting of how much money was taken in, the men who were put in charge of repairs were so trusted that they did not have to make an accounting of how they spent the money that was given to them.

All that said, the Priests still needed some money to live on, and so there was an arrangement whereby they could keep some of the money collected for certain kinds of offerings and sacrifices. Although obscured by our English texts, the kinds were the **Asham** and the **Hatta'at** offerings.

Verse 18 suddenly shifts course and explains how the last part of Joash's reign came to a bloody close. And it seems that Haza'el, King of Aram (Syria) once again turned his sights upon Israel and Judah as a means to either expand his territory, or increase his treasury, or both. It must be noted that very few foreign armies invaded another nation for the purpose of conquering the territory and adding it to their kingdom. More usual was to conquer the people,

making them a vassal state, and then allowing them to be governed by their own king, with the understanding that a set amount of tribute would be paid regularly. The amounts were invariably huge and tended to economically devastate the conquered nation, while enriching the victor.

Haza'el invaded from the north, and then marched down the Mediterranean Seacoast to Gath. Gath was at one time a Philistine city (one of the 5 city Philistine Pentapolis), but almost 200 years earlier David conquered it and it had remained under the control of Judah until Haza'el took it. Once he had subdued those areas he set his sights on Judah's capital city, **Yerushalayim**.

Y'ho'yada was dead, and Joash was on his own; his flawed character immediately surfaced. When news came to him that the army of Aram was on its way to his capital, he immediately turned to appeasement instead of beseeching the God of Israel for help. Instead of praying and sacrificing at the Temple, he looted it. He took every gold and silver item, every sacred object and furnishing, and sent them to Haza'el in order to buy him off. Yehoveh's Temple was decimated by the King, but he got to keep his job and his sovereignty and apparently that's all that mattered to him. Politicians don't seem to have changed over the centuries, nor do they seem to vary significantly from culture to culture. In the end, it is usually about themselves and their personal agendas. This is why the Bible goes out of its way to congratulate the few kings of Israel and Judah who at times seem to put politics momentarily aside to do what is right for the nation and the people.

Interestingly, 2nd Kings 12 left out some important points that are recorded in 2nd Chronicles 24, starting at verse 17. It seems that upon the High Priest's death, many leaders in Judah came to Joash, and fell at his feet, and begged him to abandon Solomon's Temple and the worship of Yehoveh, in favor of rebuilding Ba'al's Temple and worshipping him. Joash agreed.

But the Lord God in His mercy sent prophets to warn the people that they were headed for sure disaster by their decision to change gods. Zechariah, son of the deceased High Priest Jehoiada, stood before the people and chastised them and warned them what they were in for, and he was killed for his efforts. In fact, the passages make it clear that Joash was personally involved in having Zechariah executed.

And this is what led God to open the floodgates of punishment upon Judah; up to now Aram had been Israel's problem. No more; now Haza'el marched upon Jerusalem due to Judah's idolatry.

Verse 21 of 2nd Kings 12 says that Joash's servants (meaning his own royal court) turned on him and assassinated him. The reasons are because he had led Judah into ruin, personally led

the people into Ba'al worship, personally looted the Temple to avoid a fight with Aram, and personally executed God's prophet Zechariah. Although he was buried in the City of David, 2nd Chronicles explains that he was denied the honor of being buried in the tombs of Judah's kings.

His son **Amatzyah** took over the throne of Judah. We'll read his story in 2nd Kings 13, next time.