

2ND KINGS

Week 15, chapter 11

As we continue our study of 2nd Kings 11 today, we're going to paint with a few very broad brush strokes and also some very fine detail. And we begin by finding that Athaliah, the equally wicked daughter of the recently (and violently) killed Queen Jezebel, realized that her moment of opportunity had arrived and decided to seize upon it. Rather than do what might be expected of any normal mother and that Athaliah would thus bitterly mourn over the recent death of her son **Achazyah** King of Judah, her response was to go on a killing rampage of all remaining members of her own family who could claim some legitimate right to the throne of Judah. To be clear, this primarily meant males since they were only ones entitled to be kings; the females were generally safe from her homicidal intentions. Since many of the royal family also carried King David's bloodline in them, then wiping out the royalty (including her own flesh and blood grandchildren) would also serve to bring a resounding end to David's dynasty and prove that Yehoveh's ability to follow through with His promises (especially that David would have a ruling remnant forever) could be undone with some clever planning of a Ba'al worshipper.

Recall that while Athaliah's heritage was a mix of the pagan Jezebel's genes with those of her father **Achav** (who was a member of the northern Israelite tribes), the father of Athaliah's son **Achazyah** was **Y'horam**, who was a descendant of David. So **Achazyah** was a legitimate member of David's dynasty, which means that so were his biological sons. Essentially, from Athaliah's point of view, if she was going to wipe out David's dynasty so that she could replace it with her mother and father's dynasty (represented by herself), then all of her own children and grandchildren would have to be disposed of. This reality did not seem to deter her, but rather it merely charted out the only possible path to her goal: the illegitimate rise to the throne of Judah. It worked.....almost.

Fortunately there were other clever women in the palace besides Athaliah (women devoted to the God of Israel), and so **Achazyah's** sister **Y'hosheva** immediately understood what Athaliah was up to and why. So she took her little nephew, the infant son of **Achazyah**, and rushed to hide him before Athaliah's servants could kill him. Little **Yo'ash**, no more than a few months old, was suddenly the sole survivor of David's ruling family line. Verse 4 tells us that she hid him away for 6 years, and all during this time Athaliah was the de facto Queen of Judah. There is no evidence she was ever coronated as Queen; rather she used her army and those in the royal court who didn't want to lose their lofty positions to keep her in power. In fact, there is no record of her being called a Queen, and she is not even recorded among the various lists of rulers of Israel and Judah. Other than the fact that we know it happened, and we see her story here in 2nd Kings, it's as though she never existed.

Let's re-read all of chapter 11 as there is a great deal of information to digest.

RE-READ 2ND KINGS 11 all

Athaliah reigned over Judah from 842 – 836 B.C. In her 7th year of rule **Y'hoyada** (Jehoiada) the High Priest of Solomon's Temple, took steps to remedy this untenable situation. Apparently **Y'hosheva** had either taken the High Priest into her confidence, or perhaps even originally acted upon his instruction to steal baby Joash away to safety since she had access to the royal palace; the latter is the more probable since as it turns out, **Y'hosheva** was married to **Y'hoyada**.

Even more, verse 3 says that the infant was kept hidden in the **Beit-YHWH**, meaning house of Yehoveh; in other words, the Temple. This does NOT mean the sanctuary itself, but rather one of the complex of many rooms that was attached to and surrounded the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place. It seems that the Levite Priesthood was still very powerful and thriving at this time, despite Athaliah and her determination to make Judah a Ba'al worshipping kingdom. The Priesthood was still the keeper and teacher of the Law and the Torah, still counted on by the people of Judah as central to their daily lives, and they were still the guardian of Israel's YHWH religion as given to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

The two Hebrew names that we find at this point of our narrative allow me an excuse to give you a brief insight into Hebrew names that invoke the divine; some points that you might not have yet noticed. Please pay close attention, because this is especially important for those of us who are part of the Hebrew Roots movement in Christianity and it ought to also be important for you Christian Bible scholars that are listening. We see a number of names in Hebrew that begin with the Hebrew letters **yud-heh**, and are vocalized as ye-ho as in ye-hosheva and ye-ho yada like here in the 2nd Kings 11. Ye-ho is a shortened form of God's formal name, Ye-ho-veh. And all Hebrew scholars agree with this. Thus **Y'hosheva** means Yehoveh has vowed, and **Y'hoyada** means Yehoveh is aware or Yehoveh knows.

Notice that ye-ho is 2 syllables (or at times it sounds like a very extended single syllable). On the other hand, when a Hebrew word begins only with **yud** or at times adds a very soft **heh**, and is vocalized as Yeh or Yah (only 1 very abrupt syllable), then the word is God and NOT Yehoveh. Thus, for instance, Moses' sidekick's name, Joshua, is in Hebrew **Y'hoshua** and it means **Yehoveh** saves (NOT God saves). A variant of that name is **Yeshua** (sometimes thought to sound like **Yahshua**, but I don't think that's correct) that means **God** saves (NOT Yehoveh saves). So we have a subtle but important difference in the meaning of these names: one uses the generic word for the Lord of Heaven (God) and the other uses the specific formal name for the Lord of Heaven (YHWH).

I tell you this because if you are grasping it, it helps you to understand the Biblical meaning behind these names that often invoke the God of Israel; but also because more than a few take me to task for vocalizing God's name as Yehoveh and not the more accepted Yahweh. But what I just explained gives you the reason why there is disagreement over exactly how to pronounce God's formal name that is spelled yud-heh-vav-heh. Do we vocalize it like in Y'hoyada and Y'hoshua (Joshua), and thus say that the Lord's name is Yeho-veh? Or do we vocalize it like in Yeshua or Yah, and say Yeh-weh or Yah-veh? My personal research convinces me that Yehoveh easily makes the most sense grammatically and historically, and even explains why the earliest Greek and then English translation of His name is Jehovah, and not Jah-veh or something like that. In other words, the oldest translations from Hebrew to Greek seem to explain that God's formal name consists of 3 syllables (however one might pronounce them), not 2, just as in the Hebrew when you take any name that begins with the vocalization of Ye-ho (like in the two names in our Kings lesson), there must be at least 3 syllables in order to complete a name that begins that way. In the end, however, there is no reason for this disagreement over the right way to pronounce God's name to be divisive since there is no way to prove it. And in fact it may turn out that none of these ways are correct!

So here in Torah Class whether you (or I) choose to say Yah-weh, Yah-veh, Yehoveh, or Jehovah it is perfectly acceptable, just as it is to say Yeshua, Yashua, or Jesus. Transliterating ancient Hebrew words and names are very problematic to begin with, and there is no single surviving Hebrew dialect that can claim to be the original since the Hebrew language evolved greatly from the time of Moses to the time of Christ, and it has continued to evolve, just as do all human languages. Back to our story.

Joash is now about 7 years old (notice the number 7 here, the ideal divine number that indicates the Lord's involvement) and while symbolic the timeline shows the number 7 in this case to be precise as well. Interestingly, as in our little detour regarding Hebrew names, there is disagreement over the meaning of Joash's name. In Hebrew it is either **Yo'ash** or **Y'ho'ash**. In the first case his name then means **given by God**, or in the 2nd case means **given by Yehoveh**. The name does begin with yud-heh so very likely the latter rather than the former is correct, and his name is invoking God's formal name Yehoveh. But we can't be certain.

The child didn't remain hidden as a shut-in for all those years. We hear of no concern by Athaliah that any remnant of David's dynasty still lived, and unlike her detail oriented mother Jezebel, Athaliah apparently never missed her grandson Joash and merely assumed he was among the dead. Rather, in short time he would have lived in plain sight and masqueraded as one of the Levite children. That would have been rather easy to accomplish since the child wouldn't have had any memory to think of himself otherwise, and no one else would have known what he looked like when he lived at the palace since he had disappeared as a tiny infant and no one but his wet nurse had had much contact with him.

We're told in verse 4 that apparently **Y'hoyada and Y'hosheva** had done a good job of keeping **Yo'ash's** identity a secret. So when the time was ripe, the High Priest called for the leaders of the people and of some soldiers and guards to come to him so that he could reveal that indeed the dynasty of David was not extinct after all. It was the soldiers who were first called, and they are given the interesting designations of **Kari** and **ratsim**. The **Kari** were primarily foreign bodyguards; they were the equivalent of the earlier group of Philistines that David employed as his own personal body guards. The **ratsim** are a different group than the **Kari**. **Ratsim** better translates as runners than guards. They probably were used as messengers who were also trained to fight since messengers often encountered bandits and foreign enemies. Obviously these 5 groups of 100 each were loyal to the Davidic dynasty, and since the High Priest sought to protect that dynasty (even if everyone thought it was now extinct) he was the de facto leader of that contingency. **Y'hoyada** swore them to allegiance at the Temple, invoking God's name, and it must have been a very powerful and exciting ceremony that affected those men deeply because upon their vow of allegiance, the High Priest revealed that God had sealed away and protected a child of the House of David and it was time to put him on the throne and for Judah to resume being ruled by a member of David's dynasty. Little Joash stood before them as the Davidic King-in-waiting, and I can't even imagine the range of emotions that erupted within this crowd of people.

At this point the High Priest **Y'hoyada** began issuing instructions to those in attendance. But what we get is just part of the story; several other details are added in 2nd Chronicles 23.

CJB 2Chron. 23:1-3

¹ *In the seventh year Y'hoyada took courage and formed a conspiracy with certain captains of hundred-man platoons- 'Azaryah the son of Yerocham, Yishma'el the son of Y'hochanan, 'Azaryah the son of 'Oved, Ma'aseiyahu the son of 'Adayahu and Elishafat the son of Zikhri.*

² *They canvassed Y'hudah and gathered the L'vi'im from all the cities of Y'hudah, together with the clan heads of Isra'el, and came to Yerushalayim.*

³ *The whole assembly made an agreement with the king in the house of God. [Y'hoyada] addressed them: "Here! The king's son will reign, as ADONAI said in regard to the descendants of David!"*

Here we get the names of the captains of the 5 units of the **Kari**, each unit consisting of the standard 100 man platoon. And even though these units consisted mostly of foreigners, we see nothing but Hebrew names of the leaders meaning Israelites were in charge and no doubt that was to help assure allegiance to Israel. They were sent throughout Judah to secure the loyalty of the important clans and families, and of the Levites. They were to all come to Jerusalem to attend a holy convocation.

This convocation was naturally held at the Temple, led by **Y'hoyada**, and it carried immense gravitas due to the intensely holy place it was held and the very nature of its purpose, which was to re-establish the throne of David after a nearly 7 year absence. The group was ready to put their lives, that of their families, and their personal wealth on the line in order to uphold God's commandments. They were prepared to fight to revive the house of David. Thus we have the Priesthood, the military, and the civilian leadership all working together for this dangerous undertaking against Athaliah. And the reality is that there was no practical way for Joash to claim the throne unless the military was on board.

In verses 5 -8 we get a rather detailed explanation of what is to happen next to dethrone Athaliah and to ensconce Joash. We won't go through it step by step as only the overall strategy is important for us. The plan revolved around what the Bible in earlier and later chapters will call the "courses" of Levites and priests who served shifts at the Temple. Long ago Samuel and David had organized the Levites and priests into shifts (courses). The change of shifts would always occur on Shabbat. Thus, for a short time on every Shabbat double the number of Levites would be present on the Temple grounds as one shift was in process of replacing the other. This was the ideal time to pull off a coup because the royalty would normally be at ease and resting at the palace, and because the many extra personnel gathered at the Temple would seem normal and not raise suspicion or alarm. It's not unlike the reason that the Japanese decided to attack Pearl Harbor on a Sunday; psychologically people just don't expect things to happen on a day that is holy to them. And further, they understood that our military forces on that day tend to be less alert and more relaxed with only a skeleton crew on watch so that everyone else can have the day to themselves and go to church or synagogue services. Bottom line: this coup was going to happen on Shabbat.

The idea was also that there would be sufficient manpower available to be able to deal with Athaliah's loyal bodyguard if necessary, and to keep the new king safe. So after some detailed plans about which course of Levites and which platoon of soldiers would be stationed where, **Y'hoyada** makes it clear what their ultimate goal is: protect the child-king at all cost with their very lives. I cannot stress enough that the High Priest and all those who had come to the Temple understood the gravity of the situation. Joash was the sole survivor of the House of David. If the coup failed, Athaliah would not hesitate to kill Joash and this would utterly end the Davidic dynasty. I'm sure that on the one hand the faithful were reminded by **Y'hoyada** of God's promise that there would always be a survivor of the House of David and **Yo'ash** was it. On the other hand, there was but one and his death meant extinction; and he was about to be placed in the greatest danger, from which there was no backing down. How could anyone not have doubts and fears at a moment like this?

Was **Y'hoyada** wrong to do such a risky and bold thing that had the most devastating long term consequences if he was wrong? Have we heard of a direct oracle from God with instructions to attempt this coup? We don't hear even a hint of **Y'hoyada** consulting the Urim and Thummim for God's guidance (although perhaps that is a given considering who he was

and the Lord didn't think it necessary to have it recorded for us). Was now really the best time to attempt this when the new king would only be the equivalent age and maturity of a 1st grader in Western society? I really doubt that this was necessarily the optimum time or conditions, nor was it necessarily in the Lord's perfect will or timing, nor did it come about in the exact way that the Lord would have it (especially since it was on Shabbat, which seems good from a human strategic standpoint, but not so good from a spiritual standpoint).

But maybe there is a lesson here for us; doing the Lord's general will in our lives usually isn't a precisely discernable thing complete with spiritual purity or maturity that includes all the unmistakable signs from God, and supernatural urgings, a consensus from our believing friends and family, and a guarantee of success that we might hope for. There are no guarantees of success. Most of the time we are left to our knowledge of the Lord's written principles and commandments, occurring under circumstances that are somehow invisibly orchestrated by God's providence and thus unknown to us and not necessarily sensed by us, and typically accompanied with a great deal of doubts and anxieties that are only slightly or momentarily soothed when bathed in prayer. Perhaps this is where heart-motive and purity of intention matters most when our course of action plays out; when it seems as though it would be wrong NOT to do what we seem so led to do but at the same time we can't put our finger on a moment when we just knew that God spoke to us and told us to proceed. My father once told me that his constant prayer was, "God help me. And if I'm wrong, help me more." Perhaps this is where God's immeasurable grace plays its largest role in our lives, eclipsed only by the grace of our salvation in Messiah. Because if we wait for perfection of circumstance, unmistakable timing, and the peaceful release from all doubts and fears, we might remain frozen in place forever and never accomplish that which God set us on this planet to do for His people and His Kingdom. I can't think of anything sadder, or of a greater personal failure than that for a worshipper of the God of Israel.

Verse 10 speaks of the very moment when the arsenal of spears and shields that King David had persuaded the priests of his day to be stored at the Temple would serve their heretofore unknown purpose. These weapons had been captured from foreign enemies by David's troops, and not wanting to profit from them he gave them to the Temple. They had been consecrated for a holy purpose and so one has to ask if what they were about to be used for was appropriate? Was re-establishing the House of David on the throne of Judah a holy enough purpose? I think yes.

As the tension rose, and each unit of soldiers and Levites went to their assigned posts, **Y'hoyada** brought the royally robed Joash out into the open and laid the crown of Judah upon his tiny head. A copy of the Torah was placed into his hands to fulfill God's commandment in Deuteronomy 17.

^{CJB} Deut. 17:18-20

¹⁸ "When he has come to occupy the throne of his kingdom, he is to write a copy of this Torah for himself in a scroll, from the one the cohanim and L'vi'im use.

¹⁹ It is to remain with him, and he is to read in it every day, as long as he lives; so that he will learn to fear ADONAI his God and keep all the words of this Torah and these laws and obey them;

²⁰ so that he will not think he is better than his kinsmen; and so that he will not turn aside either to the right or to the left from the mitzvah. In this way he will prolong his own reign and that of his children in Isra'el.

Well, the secret was out and it didn't take long for the people inside Athaliah's palace whose courtyard led directly into the courtyard of the Temple to know something big was going on. The citizens of Judah couldn't contain themselves any longer as the throngs shouted "long live the King" and clapped and blew horns and banged on drums that attracted curious onlookers who had no idea what was going on until that moment. However Athaliah's reaction was somewhat different. As she and her entourage approached the Temple and she saw the young boy, robed in purple, scepter in hand and a crown on his head, her shock and disbelief turned to outrage as she shouted "treason!"

The High Priest, though, held all the cards; the military was on his side as were the people and the people's leaders. Everybody had had enough of Athaliah. From a human point of view **Y'hoyada** had played his hand perfectly. He didn't even have to send soldiers to fight to extract Athaliah from her heavily defended palace where there would have been great loss of life on both sides. Instead she virtually and unwittingly presented herself to the rebels. Remembering that a) this was the hallowed Temple grounds, and b) this was Shabbat, and c) he was the High Priest and could be nowhere near death, **Y'hoyada** ordered that Athaliah be taken, led outside the city walls through a gate called the Gate of the Horses and there she was quickly executed. No trial, no opportunity for mercy, no fanfare; only death for the daughter of Jezebel (and I say justice was done).

The era of Ahab and Jezebel was finally over, but nearly at the cost of the entire House of David. A new covenant was made between the High Priest and the people; likely it was merely a reaffirmation of the Covenant of Moses as had been done in the Mountains of Moab just before Israel's entry into the Promised Land, and then again at Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim immediately after Israel crossed the Jordan River.

Religious fervor spread throughout the land and as word reached the population of Judah that Athaliah was dead and David's descendant was on the throne, thousands of people came to Jerusalem and the surrounding area to tear down every last vestige of Ba'al worship. They

took Ba'al's High Priest Mattan and killed him by Ba'al's altar.

Next the High Priest appointed officers to go and protect the Temple from the many shocked and angry Ba'al worshippers who were sure to seek vengeance. A large contingency was then used in a procession to bring the young king from the Temple to the palace, his new home.

I cannot help but wonder about the mental and emotional condition of this 7 year old child who now supported the weight and hopes of a Kingdom upon those slight shoulders. Did he have any understanding of what had just happened to him? Not only that but from a spiritual standpoint he was several years away from the age of accountability. I doubt he could read the Torah scroll that was handed to him by the High Priest. And even if he could, what could he possibly take from it? What value did the vows to God actually have that he would have spoken as he accepted the crown of Judah before the cheers of the thousands? Of this I cannot say with any certainty, but I think we can look to another somewhat similar situation with another very young boy who took on far more earthly and spiritual responsibility than he had a right to. That child's name was Samuel.

And what we can learn from Samuel is that a young child can instinctively know more about the Lord than his mind can consciously discern. A child can know God, and have a relationship with God, in a very intimate way; in fact we see in Samuel that a child can make a commitment to God that can lead to a lifetime of service, even if from a human perspective it hardly seems possible or fair.

No doubt Joash was but a figurehead king for his first several years; but an important figurehead nonetheless. And his health and welfare would have been paramount, since until he was old enough to marry and father children, he would remain as the sole living member of the House of David. It was most fortunate that **Y'hoyada** was a High Priest who possessed great faith and merit. He, no doubt, was the power behind the throne and the real decision maker, and this is reflected in what happened in Judah for the next many years as Judah pulled back from the brink of God's wrath because of a newfound zeal for His Torah.

Could America, even the rest of the world today, be pulled back from the brink if we could but find a newfound zeal for God's Torah that would, I'm convinced, lead us to a newfound depth of spiritual understanding for all of God's Word, which would then lead us to rediscover our first love for Yeshua, Jesus the Christ?

Oh how I pray that this is the case. For I see no other hope for mankind.