

2 Kings 11-12

The Rise of "Maleficent"

What started as cooperation between Israel and Judah was moving toward unification. The Omride Dynasty (family of Ahab) was secure in Israel and began to work together with Jehoshaphat of the family of David. As a result of their cooperation, Jehoshaphat, a righteous king, received a woman as his wife or daughter in law from the family of Ahab. This woman was Athaliah and she becomes the Queen mother of the next couple of Davidic kings. God did not want the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel divided, but he wanted them to be united under the family of David in Jerusalem not the family of Ahab and their worship of the Baals in Samaria.

When her son, Ahaziah, was wounded and then died in the uprising of Jehu and Joram, her family member and king of Israel was killed, she makes a mad grab for power of the southern kingdom. She takes advantage of the untimely death of her son, Ahaziah, and murders all of the royal princes of the house of David so that there would be no potential heirs from the ruling family, then she sits on the throne for about six years. She elevates the worship of Baal and there is a temple in Jerusalem to Baal while the temple of the Lord is neglected.

Jehosheba, the sister of Ahaziah, took her nephew (Ahaziah youngest child – one year old) – Joash, and hid him away so that he would not be killed in the purge. She took him and his nurse to the temple of the Lord and hid him there with the high priest for 6 years. It reminds us a bit of the story of Samuel, who during a very dark time was brought up by the high priest in the tabernacle of the Lord (in Shiloh). He would bring the people back to God, as will Joash. Jehoiada, the high priest, calls together the royal guards and other military units that would be loyal to the house of David and he secretly reveals the identity of Joash in the temple. A plan is developed and the soldiers are deployed around the temple and the representatives of the people are called together and the king is crowned and anointed there in the temple and the people cheer and shout "Long live the King!"

Athaliah hears the commotion and realizes that her time is up. She is captured and immediately executed outside of the gate to the temple. She is killed quickly before any of her supporters can organize resistance. Jehoiada makes a covenant between the people and the Lord and the people and the King. The crowd then goes to the temple of Baal and tore it down and killed the main priest. Then the people took the king in procession to the Palace where he took his place on the throne – at 7 years old. But it will be the high priest who will be the power behind the throne until his death. Joash will rule for 40 years and was eventually assassinated by his own officials.

The writers of the book of Kings say that Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the days while Jehoiada was his counselor, but he did not remove the other high places and the people continued to use them. It is not completely clear if these were pagan worship centers or unauthorized worship sites for the Lord outside of the temple. Joash begins a campaign to repair the neglected temple. He was raised in the temple compound so he had a love for the place and he was being influenced by the godly high priest. The king leaves the collection and repairs in the hands of the priests but they did not take their offerings and allocate them to the repair work. So the

king takes control and an offering box is set up in the temple and when it became full, the royal administrator and the high priest count the money together and it is used to repair the buildings by paying skilled craftsman. The note in 12:16 about the guilt and sin offerings refers to the money generated for the priests. When people brought their offerings, certain portions were dedicated to the priests according to the Law of Moses. Since the on-duty priest could not consume all of that meat and it could not be saved, it was sold to the other priests who were not serving in the temple. This became a revenue stream for the temple priesthood. Joash did not touch this money because it was destined for the priests according to the Law.

2 Kings 12:17 transitions to a major defeat for Joash and leaves the reader wondering what happened. 2 Chronicles 24 fills in the gaps. Joash was faithful to the Lord for the first half of his reign while under the influence of the high priest but when the priest died, he went to the nobility of Jerusalem and they influenced him away from the Lord and he began to have conflicts with the priesthood – eventually calling for the execution of Jehoadah's son who spoke out against him.

It is at this time that the Assyrian are beginning to rise in the East and they are pressuring the Syrians (Arameans) in Damascus and this gives Israel and Judah a bit of peace. But during a time of Assyrian weakness, Hazael of the Arameans turns his attention back to oppressing Israel and making a play for Judah. His objective is to seize control of the trade route that runs through the Jezreel Valley and then down the Mediterranean coastal plain. Hazael conquered Gath which stands at the entry point up into the hill country of Judah and eventually to Bethlehem and Jerusalem. With the Arameans at his door and a broken relationship with the Lord, he takes the treasures from the house of the Lord and gives them as tribute/bribe to Hazael to leave him alone. Which he does, for now. Joash reminds us of Solomon, who started out so promising – wise, dedicated to the Lord and focused on the Temple but both were lured away by sin and paid the price for it.