

THE POWER OF THE WOMAN BEHIND THE THRONE  
2 CHRONICLES 21-22

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

In what was regarded as a groundbreaking work at the time sixteen female anthropologists compiled a book entitled *Women, Culture, and Society*. In one chapter University of Chicago PhD anthropologist Sherry Ortner wrote, **“On any or all of these counts, then, I would flatly assert that we find women subordinated to men in every known society. The search for a genuinely egalitarian, let alone matriarchal, culture has proved fruitless.”** (p. 70)

Why is this the case? Ultimately the reason can be traced back to our Divine Manufacturer. God created us different. In recent years many feminists have tried to attribute the differences to socialization. Boys and girls are raised differently, and this accounts for the main difference in the roles which they have in society. The reality is that we are wired differently. British scientists Anne Moir and David Jessel write in their book *Brain Sex*, **“The truth is that virtually every professional scientist and research into the subject has concluded that the brains of men and women are different. ...The nature and cause of brain differences are now known beyond speculation, beyond prejudice, and beyond reasonable doubt. .... There has seldom been a greater divide between what intelligent, enlightened opinion presumes--- that men and women have the same brain--- and what science knows--- that they do not.”**

So this brain wiring has something to do with the leadership role that men have assumed. Differences in physical strength between the sexes may have something to do with it. Then there is the role of mothering. For most of history the job of bearing children and mothering them has required a tremendous amount of time and energy. Food collection and preparation has been involved with that job also. Modern technological advances have given women more freedom and opportunities to become involved in society and the workplace, including leadership positions.

It is also true that down through history women have had great influence in society. At times they have had official positions of power. The issue from a divine perspective is how that power has been used--- for good or evil. The story before us this morning provides a negative example of how feminine power can be used for evil. Hopefully we will find lessons in that. We will also see how a heroine can change the course of history in a positive direction.

We have been looking at lessons which can be learned from the kings of Judah. Our textbook is the Book of 2 Chronicles. The time is the ninth and tenth century BC. (PROJECTOR ON--- DIVIDED KINGDOM) The geographical setting is the nation of Israel, which was divided after the time of Solomon into the northern kingdom, which

retained the name Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah. The northern kings are all characterized in the Scriptures as evil. The kings of Judah are a mixed lot.

Last week we looked at King Jehoshaphat, who is characterized in the Bible as a good king who sought the Lord. He still had slip ups. At a couple of points he tried to ally himself with the evil kings of Israel. But he got back on track with the Lord when he was confronted by prophets of God. Last week we saw how King Jehoshaphat displayed great faith in God when confronted with an overwhelming enemy force. Today we will see how the next generation fares after he passes from the scene.

I. A.

(I. THE NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF A WIFE) In the first twenty verses of 2 Chronicles #20 (which is p. 373 in the black Bibles) we learn about THE NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF A WIFE. In the first seven verses of that section we find out about ATHALIAH AND JEHORAM'S COMMITMENT. (I. THE NEGATIVE... A. ATHALIAH AND...)

The story begins in vv. 1-3: **“Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David, and Jehoram his son reigned in his place. 2 He had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariah, Michael, and Shephatiah; all these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. 3 Their father gave them great gifts of silver, gold, and valuable possessions, together with fortified cities in Judah, but he gave the kingdom to Jehoram, because he was the firstborn.”**

Putting the historical information together it appears that Jehoram began ruling with his father in 853. His father died in 848. Jehoram took over sole rule of Judah then. Following the example of his great grandfather Rehoboam Jehoshaphat spread his sons out through the kingdom. In #11 v. 23 this strategy on the part of Rehoboam was called good and wise. It extended the royal power throughout the kingdom. It also avoided challenges to the brother who was put in power in Jerusalem.

The term “Israel” is used in v. 2 to refer to the kingdom of Judah. There is perhaps in this usage a reminder that it is Judah, rather than Israel, which carries on the true spiritual heritage of the Jews.

Verses 4 & 5: **“When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father and was established, he killed all his brothers with the sword, and also some of the princes of Israel. 5 Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem.”**

In #17 v. 1 we were told that Jehoram's father also got his rule established on a solid foundation. But the way in which he did that was to allot money to his defense budget and to seek the Lord. Jehoram seeks to make his rule strong by eliminating any possible contenders for his job. He kills his own brothers.

That way of being was common in the Ancient Near East. It has also been done in other monarchies throughout history. Although there was some basis for this practice in

culture and tradition, it was evil. It was certainly not something taught in God's word. Jehoram's father Jehoshaphat was a man who followed God's directions, for the most part. How did Jehoram stray so far from the right path?

We learn in v. 6: **"And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord."** The problem began when Jehoshaphat married Jehoram off to Athaliah, the daughter of King Ahab. (2 CHRONICLES 18:1) Back in #18 v. 1 we were told, **"Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor, and he made a marriage alliance with Ahab."** All the kings of the Ancient Near East made these marriage alliances. Everyone was doing it. But God told His people not to do it. The Old Testament law instructed the Hebrews not to marry into families who followed other gods. That is what got King Solomon into trouble.

King Ahab from Israel was evil in his own right. But he compounded his evil by marrying a bad woman. In 1 Kings #16 v. 31 (1 KINGS 16:31) we are told, **"And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him."** He followed royal tradition by forming a marriage alliance with a city-state to the northwest of Israel. Ahab's wife was the daughter of a pagan priest. She brought with her worship of the Canaanite god Baal.

In 1 Kings #18 v. 4 (1 KINGS 18 4) we learn about one of the wonderful contributions she made to the northern kingdom: **"...when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water."** In other words, Queen Jezebel was responsible for killing a bunch of prophets of YHWH, the true God of Israel. Later she tries to have the prophet Elijah killed. Still later she arranges the death of a guy who has a vineyard next to the palace of the king.

Jezebel is either the mother or the step-mother of Athaliah, the woman whom Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat marries. It is this Athaliah who introduces the evil ways of the northern kingdom into the palace in Judah. Not only does a false religion come with this but also a mindset. One projects an evil way of thinking upon others. I would try to kill off other rivals to gain power. Your brothers, King Jerhoram, are probably like that. So you need to kill them before they take you out.

King Jehoram is responsible for his own evil actions. But a powerful, evil woman has had a very bad impact upon his thinking. All of this is the result of a violation of God's standards about marriage. In Deuteronomy #7 v. 3 (DEUTERONOMY 7:3) Moses described the danger that the native Canaanites posed to the Hebrew people. He explained God's law, saying, **"You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons..."** Such is the standard that God's people should follow today. Followers of Jesus today should likewise not marry others who are not followers of Jesus. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In v. 7 of our passage we have this gracious note: **“Yet the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and since he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever.”** The implication is that Jehoram is deserving of death because of what he had done and what he has allowed to happen. But God is gracious and committed to His promise to keep a descendant of David upon the throne of Israel.

B.

In vv. 8-20 of #21 we learn about THE RESULTS OF JEHORAM'S COMMITMENT. (I. A. B. THE RESULTS OF JEHORAM'S COMMITMENT) According to vv. 8-10, **“In his [King Jehoram's] days Edom revolted from the rule of Judah and set up a king of their own. 9 Then Jehoram passed over with his commanders and all his chariots, and he rose by night and struck the Edomites who had surrounded him and his chariot commanders. 10 So Edom revolted from the rule of Judah to this day.”**

(DIVIDED KINGDOM) Edom had been under the control of Judah. Now it becomes independent of Judah. The implication is that this can be traced to the waywardness of Jehoram. The sovereign God of Judah is working against the king. Jehoram is involved in a cavalry attack against the Edomites. He is surrounded but manages to escape.

In the second part of v. 10 we are told, **“At that time Libnah also revolted from his rule, because he had forsaken the Lord, the God of his fathers.”** (LIBNAH MAP) Libnah was a city state to the southwest of Judah. It was perhaps part of the larger Philistine kingdom. King Jehoram is thus dealing with enemies on two fronts.

(PROJECTOR OFF) Verse 11: **“Moreover, he made high places in the hill country of Judah and led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into whoredom and made Judah go astray.”** Jehoram's father fought against idolatry. Jehoram is promoting it. This is described as spiritual adultery. Behind the throne is an evil woman who has encouraged all of this.

There is a warning which comes in vv. 12-15: **“And a letter came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father, “Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, or in the ways of Asa king of Judah, 13 but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel and have enticed Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem into whoredom, as the house of Ahab led Israel into whoredom, and also you have killed your brothers, of your father's house, who were better than you, 14 behold, the Lord will bring a great plague on your people, your children, your wives, and all your possessions, 15 and you yourself will have a severe sickness with a disease of your bowels, until your bowels come out because of the disease, day by day.””**

Elijah was the famous prophet who confronted King Ahab on Mt. Carmel. The focus of his ministry has been upon the northern kingdom. But Jehoram has brought that bad influence into Judah through his marriage with Ahab's daughter. So Elijah sends a letter to him. It is a harsh message. The things which Jehoram has sought to protect and

promote--- his wives, his children and his possessions--- will all be taken away from him. Furthermore the king is going to experience a painful, humiliating bowel disease. Such is the judgment of God.

The previous kings of Judah sometimes strayed from the right path, but they responded properly when they were confronted by God's prophets. This is not true with Jehoram. That is the danger we humans face when we get wrapped up with evil. We can become so engrossed in it that it becomes almost impossible to get out of it.

The story continues in vv. 16 & 17: **“And the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the anger of the Philistines and of the Arabians who are near the Ethiopians. 17 And they came up against Judah and invaded it and carried away all the possessions they found that belonged to the king's house, and also his sons and his wives, so that no son was left to him except Jehoahaz, his youngest son.”** The Philistines were to the southwest of Judah. It is unclear where these particular Arabs were located.

But such is the fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy which we find. A sovereign God is taking away everything which Jehoram has sought to preserve and gain. Normally the oldest son follows the previous king to the throne. Now the oldest son is taken away and only the youngest son is left. His name is Jehoahaz.

The judgment continues in vv. 18 & 19: **“And after all this the Lord struck him in his bowels with an incurable disease. 19 In the course of time, at the end of two years, his bowels came out because of the disease, and he died in great agony. His people made no fire in his honor, like the fires made for his fathers.”** This heir to the promises of God concerning his family did not seek God. He sought the Baals. He listened to an evil wife. He met a painful fate.

The fire was apparently some kind of memorial fire which had been fired up for many of the previous kings of Israel. This king was not missed by his people. Thus the chapter ends with this sad epitaph: **“He was thirty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he departed with no one's regret. They buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.”** Jehoram was accountable for his own sins. Yet we also see in his life the negative influence of an evil wife.

II. A.

(PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF A MOTHER) In the first nine verses of #22 we encounter THE NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF A MOTHER. In the first four verses of this section we deal with ATHALIAH AND AHAZIAH'S COMMITMENT. (II. THE NEGATIVE... A. ATHALIAH AND AHAZIAH'S...) According to v. 1, **“And the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah, his youngest son, king in his place, for the band of men that came with the Arabians to the camp had killed all the older sons. So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned.”** In #21 v. 17 Ahaziah is called Jehoahaz. It is the same person. In Hebrew the first and second part of his name are simply switched.

The year is 841 BC. Ahaziah is the only one in the line of David who is left. The men with the Arabians are probably the Philistines, who have been the long time enemies of the Jews.

Verse 2: **“Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri.”** So this guy is just a kid, and he is going to rule for only one year. His father is the king who killed all of his brothers and who promoted idol worship. His mom is Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel, and promoter of all things bad from the northern kingdom. How are things going to go for this guy?

Verse 3: **“He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counselor in doing wickedly.”** I pointed out last week that the queen mother often had considerable influence in the palace. This woman’s influence is evil.

According to v. 4, **“He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as the house of Ahab had done. For after the death of his father they were his counselors, to his undoing.”** Apparently it was not just Athaliah who was influencing Ahaziah. There were additional advisors brought in from the northern kingdom of Israel. It reminds me about how the Venezuelan government brought in advisors from Cuba to help them run their government. Cuba was an economic disaster. Now Venezuela is an even worse basket case, although it is known for having the greatest oil reserves in the world.

B.

In vv. 5-9 we learn about THE RESULTS OF AHAZIAH’S COMMITMENT. (II. A. B. THE RESULTS OF AHAZIAH’S COMMITMENT) Ahaziah has committed himself to the horrible advice of his mother and her advisors. Now we learn about the results of that commitment.

According to v. 5, **“He even followed their counsel and went with Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel to make war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead. And the Syrians wounded Joram...”** Grandpa Jehoshaphat got into trouble when he joined with King Ahab to fight the Syrians at Ramoth-gilead. Now Ahaziah is joining his uncle, the son of Ahab, in fighting the Syrians.

In 1993 archaeologists working at Dan in northern Israel discovered a basalt stone inscription on a stele written by Syrians which makes reference to this battle in Ramoth-gilead.

(RAMOTH GILEAD MAP) Ramoth-gilead was a border town between Israel and Syria. It was given by God to the tribe of Gad, which was part of the northern kingdom.

(RAMOTH GILEAD 2) It was also a major stop on an ancient caravan route known as the King’s Highway. Thus the town had strategic commercial and political significance. But now Joram is seriously wounded just like his father Ahab was when he fought against the Syrians.

Verse 6: **“...and he returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds that he had received at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was wounded.”** (JEZREEL MAP 2) Jezreel was the summer palace of Israel’s kings. It was also at the foot of Mt. Gilboa where King Saul was earlier killed in battle.

Verse 7 adds, **“But it was ordained by God that the downfall of Ahaziah should come about through his going to visit Joram. For when he came there, he went out with Jehoram to meet Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom the Lord had anointed to destroy the house of Ahab.”** A parallel account in 1 Kings tells us that the prophet Elisha went to this army officer Jehu and told him that he would be responsible to destroy the house of Ahab because of its rebellion against God. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verses 8 & 9 describe how he carried out that mission: **“And when Jehu was executing judgment on the house of Ahab, he met the princes of Judah and the sons of Ahaziah's brothers, who attended Ahaziah, and he killed them. 9 He searched for Ahaziah, and he was captured while hiding in Samaria, and he was brought to Jehu and put to death. They buried him, for they said, ‘He is the grandson of Jehoshaphat, who sought the Lord with all his heart.’ And the house of Ahaziah had no one able to rule the kingdom.”**

Ahaziah is the grandson of Ahab through his mother Athaliah. So he suffers the same fate as Joram. Because he is also the grandson of Jehoshaphat, Jehu sees that he at least gets a decent burial. Such is the result of Ahaziah’s commitment to evil and to the advice of his evil mother.

As a result of this judgment, what will happen to the line of promise, to the direct descendants of David, who have been promised that they will rule over Israel forever?

III.

In vv. 10-12 of #22 we encounter THE SAVING INFLUENCE OF A DAUGHTER. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE SAVING INFLUENCE OF A DAUGHTER) Just as our story has been dominated by the evil influence of a villainous woman, now a virtuous woman intervenes to save the day.

According to v. 10, **“Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal family of the house of Judah.”** It is amazing to learn about the evil of which people are capable. This is what a continuous journey away from the true God and His principles produces. Now Athaliah is trying to kill all of her own grandchildren. The first century Jewish historian Josephus says, **“...she endeavored that none of the house of David might be left alive, but that the whole family might be exterminated that no king might arise out of it afterward.”** (*Antiquities* 9.7.1)

If the story ended here, we would be left thinking that the promise of God had been thwarted. For the Lord had promised the right to rule Israel would remain among David's male descendants. If all of these male descendants in the line of David have now been wiped out, then God's plan has been thwarted.

But there is a heroine who intervenes to save the day. Notice v. 11: **“But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king [probably King Jehoram], took Joash the son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the king's sons who were about to be put to death, and she put him and his nurse in a bedroom. Thus Jehoshabeath, the daughter of King Jehoram and wife of Jehoiada the priest, because she was a sister of Ahaziah, hid him from Athaliah, so that she did not put him to death.”**

Jehoshabeath grew up in the same household as King Ahaziah did. Her father killed off all of his brothers. Athaliah was probably her stepmother. She thus would have been encouraged to worship Baal and the other Canaanite gods. She saw Athaliah kill off all of her male grandchildren. How is it that she stepped in to rescue the one remaining son of Ahaziah? She was risking her life in doing this. If she got caught, I have no doubt but that Athaliah would have had her killed.

How is that she developed good moral character? We are not told. She married Jehoiada the priest. He turns out to be a godly guy. But how was it that she developed a godly character such that the godly priest Jehoiada would agree to marry her? We do not know.

Verse 12 concludes this part of the story: **“And he [the son of Ahaziah] remained with them six years, hidden in the house of God, while Athaliah reigned over the land.”** Thus Jehoshabeath becomes the heroine of the story. We will learn next week about what happens to this young son who was hidden away.

Last week in our study of King Jehoshaphat we saw how this ruler of Judah faced an overwhelming enemy force in a decisive battle in his reign. He trusted God, and the Lord intervened in a miraculous way to bring a great victory to Judah. As a more recent illustration of that kind of trust in God by a godly ruler who faced overwhelming odds in the face of a great battle I pointed to the life of Queen Elizabeth I. (ELIZABETH I)

King Philip II of Spain was the most powerful ruler in the world. He had the most powerful navy in the world. He set out with the Spanish armada to invade England and to put a Catholic ruler back on the throne. Queen Elizabeth was a genuine follower of Jesus. She trusted God in the face of this battle. The English navy had some success in fending off the Spanish armada. But then God seemed to intervene with a south wind and a series of storms that wiped out the Spanish navy.

Like Jehoshabeath in our story today Elizabeth grew up in a very difficult household. Her father was Henry VIII who had a series of six wives in his desperate search to acquire a male heir. The mother of Elizabeth was Anne Boleyn. Henry had her killed



when Elizabeth was not yet three years old. Historian Eric Ives describes Henry as **“lustful, egotistical, paranoid, and tyrannical.”** (*History Today* 56:28-36)

Elizabeth’s sister was Mary. She grew up to be a Catholic and an evil woman. She reigned as queen from 1553-1558. Mary was cruel toward everyone who was not a Catholic. She had many Protestants executed. She acquired the name among many of her subjects as “Bloody Mary.” Because Elizabeth was born to Anne Boleyn she was regarded in her early life as an illegitimate child.

In spite of this difficult background Elizabeth came to the throne of England and proved to be a great and godly ruler. Her forty-five year reign became known as the Golden Age of Elizabeth. Some historians regard her as the greatest queen of England.

How was it that she developed such great character? As with Jehoshabeath it is not clear--- at least not to me. She had a series of different tutors. Perhaps there was some great godly influence from one or more of them. Elizabeth also read widely. She was fluent in about seven languages. Clearly she read and studied the Scriptures. In the end she had a great and godly influence upon the world.

Some of you women have perhaps come from a difficult background. Maybe you did not have very godly parents. Maybe you have had the experience of being abused in some way. Maybe you have been denied a good formal education. Perhaps you came from a difficult economic background. But the lesson from Jehoshabeath and from Elizabeth is that a choice to seek God can make you a heroine. You can be a positive power behind the throne. You can have a positive part in the plan of God for your family, for your church, for your neighborhood, for your work, for your friends. May God motivate us all to pursue Him.