

What's the Message – Lesson 62

Today we see how failing to heed God's Word led to the decline and eventual destruction of Judah.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. We pray today that since we live in the midst of so many dangers that threaten our faith, dangers that we cannot manage because of our own weakness, that You would grant to us Your strength and protection to help and carry us through all temptations. Amen.

Last time we saw how following false gods led to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom. It was destroyed completely, never to rise again as such, with the ten tribes disbursed throughout the Assyrian empire, and becoming known in history as The Lost Tribes of Israel.

Today we resume our account of the Kingdom of Judah at the point where sweet Athaliah had all of her grandsons killed – at least, she thought she had killed them all - in the attempt to eliminate the family of King David, and usurped the throne, becoming the only Queen to sit on the throne of David. But, as we saw in the last lesson, the infant Joash was hidden from Athaliah, and was saved. Reading in 2nd Kings chapter 11, and 2nd Chronicles chapters 22 and 23, Joash was raised in the House of the Lord, under the watchful eye of the faithful priest, Jehoiada. When the boy Joash was 7 years old, Jehoiada brought him out and presented him to the captains of the guards as the rightful king, the only living direct descendant of King David.

Then they assembled the people to see, and we read, beginning in verse 12: *Then (Jehoiada) brought out the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and gave the testimony; and they proclaimed him king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, "Long live the King." When Athaliah heard the noise of the guard and of the people, she went into the House of the Lord . . . and when she looked, there was the king standing by the pillar, according to the custom, and the captains and the trumpeters beside the king, and all of the people of the land rejoicing and blowing trumpets. And Athaliah rent her clothes, and cried, "Treason! Treason!"*

Jehoiada had the guards take her outside, where she was executed, bringing to fulfillment the final act of the Word of the Lord through the prophet Elijah about the house of Ahab. And so the rule of Judah returned to the house of David, but since Joash was so young, Jehoiada instructed the young king, and all the years that Jehoiada lived, Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord and the temple of Baal was torn down.

But the reform of Joash was not complete. Chapter 12, verse 3 of 2nd Kings tells us: *Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away; the people continued to sacrifice and burn incense on the high places.*” But when Jehoiada died, 2nd Chronicles, chapter 24, verse 17 tells us: *After the death of Jehoiada the princes of Judah came and did obeisance to the king; then the king hearkened unto them. And they forsook the House of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols.*

Reading on, we see then the son of the old priest, Jehoiada, speaking out against this disobedience of the Lord. Joash didn't like this criticism, and had the man who spoke of God's judgment killed. In turn, God used the King of Damascus to punish Judah.

Joash was wounded in the battle, but the king's own servants finished the job, and the throne was passed to the next generation. But this king did no better, and in due time he, too, had turned away from Yahweh, and was assassinated by his own people. He was followed by Uzziah, who at the age of 16 was made the king of Judah. In political and economic ways he was very successful, and it was a brief golden age of prosperity for Judah. But this time of prosperity, shared with King Jeroboam the Second of Israel, was not to last, and it ended in disaster.

As we have already seen, Jeroboam the Second was one of the last kings in Israel, but the prosperity he brought about was actually the beginning of the rapid fall of the nation. In contrast, Uzziah started out well, and had the priest Zechariah to guide him. And we read in 2 Chronicles, chapter 26, verse 5, that as long as Uzziah *sought the Lord, God made him prosper.* Then in verse 16 we read: *But when he was strong he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was false to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar.*

This was an act of blatant disobedience, for only the priests were to burn the incense there. And so God struck him with leprosy, and being a leper he could not re-enter the House of the Lord, or function with other people. So his son reigned in his stead. With that, Teacher, we approach the final stage of the fall of Judah, and will pursue those closing days next time. But even with this short summary of Judah, a history that is full of uncommon names, and ups and downs theologically, it is difficult to absorb and comprehend. So, Teacher, how does this relate to our day, and what's the message for us?

Let's compare this history of the Children of Israel to the history of the United States of America. Depending on which source you use, the timeline will vary, but in round numbers it was around 500 years from the time of Saul to the destruction of Jerusalem, and roughly half of that time it was a divided kingdom, with Judah surviving another 130 years or so after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Now let's compare that time-pattern with our own. The first English settlement on the American mainland was at Jamestown, Virginia in 1607. There was a period of growth, and the establishment of the original 13 colonies, but within 164 years the tension between the colonies and the King of England became so strong that a Continental Congress was called to meet in Philadelphia to protest our rights.

In less than a year, that protest turned into the American Revolution, and in 1776 our Declaration of Independence was published. Within 9 years, Britain formally accepted our independence, and we had a brief time of peace and growth through troubled economic times. But just 78 years later we were back fighting again, this time among ourselves, with the Civil War. That was less than 150 years ago. In total, since the first settlement in Virginia until today, it has only been less than 400 years. The period of the monarchy in Israel was about 100 years longer than our own history as a colony and a nation, which makes these two periods of history somewhat similar. But what do we see in this broad picture? Can we apply any of the lessons the Children of Israel had to learn to ourselves? It is so easy for us to look at them and criticize, saying "Why were they so stupid? Why couldn't they learn? The example of a failed nation was right there with them. Couldn't they see it?"

Then we have to ask ourselves: Have we done any better? Do we still consider ourselves a Christian nation, attempting to live lives that give witness to the love of God? Do we see that without God we can do nothing? Or do we put our trust in our own strength and alliances, pushing God out of our lives completely?

Next time we will contrast the lives of the apostate King Ahaz, and the faithful King Hezekiah.