

The Child King – Joash
People of the Word Lecture – Lesson 11
2 Kings 11:1-12:21 and 2 Chronicles 22:10 – 24:27
By Dellen Ludwig

Happy New Year! I hope your Christmas was full of joy and happy times with your friends and family. This is a little story about Christmas that I heard recently:

“Thank you for my new harmonica, Uncle Rodney! It's the best present I ever got!”, said little Johnny the first time he saw his uncle after Christmas.

“Did you learn to play any songs on it?” asked Uncle Rodney.

“Oh no, I don't play it. Mommy gives me a dollar a day not to play it all day. Daddy gives me five dollars every week, not to play it at night! It's the best present I ever had!”

Now, I spent Christmas with two adult guys, my husband and my son. We didn't have the joy of little children running around and making noise at our house. But I'm sure some of you were with the little ones and totally understand the reality of this story! But imagine a time when children were to be “seen and not heard.” Then imagine a time when it could mean the life of the child, if he were to be heard! That was the time when our lesson took place in the nation of Judah. It was truly a very dark time.

Remember back to our last lecture, about Jehu who executed all of the heirs of wicked king Ahab in Israel. He killed Ahab's

son, Joram and Ahaziah king of Judah who had ridden out to help him. Now our lesson today will discuss the ramifications felt in Judah because their king was killed in this same war. In 2 Kings 11:1, the mother of Ahaziah had just heard the news that her son was dead, as the soldiers brought his body to Judah for burial.

“When Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family.” [2 Kings 11:1] She was truly a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Ahaziah, her son, had become king at the age of 22, and had ruled only one year. [2 Kings 8:26, 27] In Israel, a man became of age when he was 30, and so his mother had played a strong role during his reign as queen-mother, advising him in evil choices. 2 Kings 8:27 reads, “He followed the ways of the house of Ahab and did evil in the eyes of the Lord, as the house of Ahab had done, for he was related by marriage to Ahab's family.”

When Athaliah realized that her son's rule was over, she was not willing to accept that her influence was now over too. She decided to place herself on the throne as Queen rather than have one of her sons or grandsons usurp her as Judah's king. But God had promised King David that the scepter would never leave his descendants until the King of Kings would rule over all nations. How could that prophecy come true if all the legal heirs of David were murdered? Big Problem! But God had it covered.

“But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram and sister of Ahaziah, took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from the royal princes, who were about to be murdered. She put him and his nurse in a bedroom to hide him from Athaliah; so he was not killed.” [2 Kings 11:2] Ahaziah's sister from another mother, Jehosheba was working in the palace and heard the order to murder all of the royal heirs. She ran to the nursery and snatched Joash, who was then only around 1 year old, and hid him and his nurse in a closet where they kept unused bed mats and blankets. Can you imagine the horror they experienced listening behind closed doors as soldiers obeying the Queen's orders were massacring all of the young princes from Ahaziah's wives? But the women cared for little Joash and kept him quiet, until it was safe to sneak him out of the palace.

Now, Aunt Jehosheba was married to the priest, Jehoiada. So, they found a safe place in one of the rooms in the temple courtyard, where the priests who were on duty at the temple could sleep while they served. Why was the temple a safe place? Queen Athaliah had proven since she first came from Ahab's house to marry Jehoram, that she despised Jehovah. She worshiped Baal, like her mother Jezebel. She had even been building a temple to Baal, right there in Jerusalem. She would never enter the grounds of the temple, where the small group of faithful priests and Levites

continued their ceremonies to worship Jehovah.

MacLaren commented on this dark time and evil queen, saying, “She had Jezebel's force of character, unscrupulousness, and disregard of human life.... God seemed to depend for fulfillment on one little feeble life.” As the high priest Jehoiada and his wife Jehosheba worked daily for six years to keep little Joash quiet and protected, this responsibility was never far from their minds.

This critical account reminded me of another young couple, who against all odds also cared for a little child, a gift from God. We celebrated the birth of Jesus this last month. But remember, Satan had evil servants to do his bidding in every era. He used Athaliah to try to defeat God's promises of succeeding heirs to David. He used Herod to try to destroy the Messiah when he was born too. Fragile little baby boys were placed in the arms of seemingly insignificant family members to fulfill God's promise to send the Savior of all mankind. Never underestimate our seeming insignificant role in life. God may have placed us at this time, as relatives and friends to our particular little ones so they might learn about Him, in their youth, and be used by Him in a mighty way when they grow up.

It had been six years. Joash had been protected and trained all this time in the shadow of the temple. When did Jehoiada know

it was time to present Joash as king? 2 Chronicles 24:7 revealed, “Now the sons of that wicked woman Athaliah had broken into the temple of God and had used even its sacred objects for the Baals.” Perhaps Jehoiada knew, because of this wholesale disregard of the sanctity of the temple, it was only a matter of time before the young boy would be discovered.

But Jehoiada had not been cowering in fear. Rather, during the six years of Joash's childhood, the high priest had been taking note of those who remained true in their worship of the one true God. He knew the priests, Levites, elders and even the guardsmen who were loyal to David's legacy. So, now he began with the men who were faithful members of the army, and their commanders. “In the seventh year Jehoiada sent for the commanders of units of a hundred, the Carites and the guards and had them brought to him at the temple of the Lord. He made a covenant with them and put them under oath at the temple of the Lord. Then he showed them the king's son.” [2 Kings 11:4]

Jehoiada then sent out five captains into the land of Judah. “Azariah son of Jeroham, Ishmael son of Jehohanan, Azariah son of Obed, Maaseiah son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat son of Zikri. They went throughout Judah and gathered the Levites and heads of Israelite families from all the towns. When they came to Jerusalem, the whole assembly made a covenant with the king at

the temple of God.” [2 Chronicles 23:1-3]

The guards with the Levites were divided into companies. Jehoiada's plan was to retain the current division just about to go off duty, with a faithful commander, while adding to them the next division and Levites, also under the command of a faithful man. The “off duty” troops would protect the young king during his coronation at the temple court, while the next division would go to their assigned places to protect him from there.

Jehoiada ordered the priests and Levites who were not serving in the temple to keep watch at the palace, the Fountain gate and the courtyard. The serving Levites and priests were to primarily surround and protect the king. Those protecting the king were issued any weapons that had been stored at the temple by David. How remarkable that in dedicating these captured weapons during his life time of wars, David was actually providing protection for his lone heir in his most desperate hour.

This was orchestrated on the Sabbath, so as not to arouse Athaliah's suspicion. The troops then divided in thirds to stand in ranks and guard all the main entrances into the temple courts, including the gate that was closest to the palace, the one behind the guard's gate.

Their orders read: “No one is to enter the temple of the Lord except the priests and Levites on duty; they may enter because they

are consecrated, but all the others are to observe the Lord's command not to enter.” This would keep Athaliah and her sons and cohorts from coming in during the coronation in a mind to destroy any more of the temple or disrupt the anointing of Judah's new king.

Long ago in the court yard of the temple, King Solomon had erected a platform from which he could come and worship at the temple. Jehoiada led young Joash up onto this platform and the ceremony began. “Jehoiada and his sons brought out the king's son and put the crown on him; they presented him with a copy of the covenant and proclaimed him king. They anointed him and shouted, “Long live the king!” [2 Chronicles 23:11]

It was this cry of celebration that informed “Queen” Athaliah that something unauthorized was going on. She also may have seen all the people who heard the cry also, running toward the temple, cheering. So she hurried out of the palace, toward the temple. When she came near, she saw the new King Joash standing up on the platform, wearing a crown! “Then Athaliah tore her robes and shouted, 'Treason! Treason!'” [2 Chronicles 23:13]

Jehoiada ordered the guards not to let Athaliah enter the temple courts because death in the temple courtyard would defile the temple. So the guards stopped her, filed around her and ushered

her back toward the Horses' gate of the palace. There she was put to death for her idolatry. Matthew Henry said, about Athaliah, "She herself was the greatest traitor, and yet was the first and loudest in crying, 'Treason, treason!' The most guilty are commonly the most forward to reproach others."

The coronation continued. Jehoiada next renewed the special covenant God had with his people. Before everyone present, the guards, the priests, the Levites and the elders representing the people, he reminded them of the Law, that we call the ten commandments, and Moses's covenant with Israel just as they were ready to cross into the promised land: In Deuteronomy 4:1&2 Moses said, "Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land the Lord the God of your ancestors, is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you."

The young king was also given a copy of this covenant and in this way Jehoiada, representing God, made a three way contract. The people were to obey God's commands and laws learned through the priests, the King was to honor God's laws in his life and rule, and God would bless them all. This sacred contract centered around God's commandments embodied in the first ten

commandments. This covenant would keep Judah strong and safe. But consequentially, breaking this covenant by breaking God's commandments would remove God's hand of protection on the nation.

In their zeal from pledging their commitment to this covenant, “All the people went to the temple of Baal and tore it down. They smashed the altars and idols and killed Mattan the priest of Baal in front of the altars.” [2 Chronicles 23:17] This idol Baal demanded sacrifices for favors. Many had offered their own children to this idol as a sacrifice. Matthew Poole commented, “They killed Mattan before the altar – to which possibly he fled for refuge; or rather, he was brought thither as a fit sacrifice to his god.” His idol could not save him and would no longer stand to interfere with the worship of the one true God.

As this cleansing finished, the people of the covenant escorted the new King Joash to the palace, through the upper gate, to be seated on the throne. Verse 21 of 2 Chronicles 23:21 states, “All the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was calm, because Athaliah had been slain with the sword.” The people breathed a sigh of relief that they now had a lawful king, from the line of David. The city contained no one who desired to fight for Athaliah's heirs and was calm. There were no reprisals.

2 Kings 12:3 sums up Joash's reign stating, “Joash did what

was right in the eyes of the Lord all the years Jehoiada the priest instructed him. The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.” Joash reigned 40 years. During most of that time Jehoiada continued to act as his chief counselor and as a father. When he was old enough, Jehoiada arranged Joash's marriage to two wives and he began to have heirs. There are only two incidences about these forty years that are recorded in scripture. One that was positive, and one negative. The first began early in his reign. And the second was after Jehoiada's death. But both defined Joash's faith before the Lord.

Having grown up for six years in the court of the temple, King Joash noticed how dilapidated it had become. So, “Joash decided to restore the temple of the Lord.” [2 Chronicles 24:4] The word restore here means “renew” in the Hebrew. Remember, Athaliah's sons had “broken up the house of God.” So, the first step was to collect enough money to get the project started.

At first, Joash asked the priests and Levites to go out to the different areas of Judah and collect the money that used to be brought to Jerusalem regularly. One wicked affect of the reign of Athaliah's husband, son and herself, was that these offerings were no longer being brought in to the house of the Lord as they had been before. Their support of Baal worship may have converted

some of the people and the rest stayed as far away from Jerusalem as possible because of the wicked things happening there. So, as the priests would go back to their homes between service in the temple, they asked their neighbors to give their temple tax and gifts.

But by the time Joash reached his 23rd year of reign, the refurbishing project had not yet begun. Now, commentators gave various opinions about what had happened. Some felt the priests and Levites had kept the funds for themselves. After all, it had been so long since the worship of Jehovah had been popular, that they had barely made a living, and that was farming their own land.

Another commentator suggested that the little money they did receive only covered the costs of doing weekly minimal services. Finally, perhaps too many of the people had given up the full practice of Judaism and just went to the high places for their sacrifices. Those high places in Judah were established by King Saul, David and Solomon to worship Jehovah, before the temple was built and had never been taken down. So, people could rationalize that they could still worship there, but this never brought them to the temple where they could face the priests and Levites who would remind them about their responsibility to give money for the temple.

So, now that Joash was 30, he issued a royal proclamation: “A proclamation was then issued in Judah and Jerusalem that they should bring to the Lord the tax that Moses the servant of God had required of Israel in the wilderness.” [2 Chronicles 24:9]

To facilitate collection of the taxes and offerings, the king requested that they make a collection box, so “Jehoiada the priest took a chest and bored a hole in its lid. He placed it beside the altar, on the right side as one enters the temple of the Lord.” As a result of Joash's proclamation, the people began to regularly visit the temple and drop in their offerings. When the box became heavy with coins, the king's scribe and the high priest's officer came and put the coins into bags, brought them up to the palace and counted it.

Finally, enough had been gathered. Carpenters, masons and workers with iron and brass were hired, and the work began. The king and Jehoiada gave the funds needed to purchase and install everything that had broken down in the temple. “The men in charge of the work were diligent, and the repairs progressed under them. They rebuilt the temple of God according to its original design and reinforced it.” [2 Chronicles 24:13] This last phrase insinuates that the wicked members of Athaliah's family had actually taken away some of the stones from the temple as well as the gold, silver and brass articles of service. Therefore, they had to

restore the temple to its original footprint.

Once the building was completely restored, the money still being donated was focused toward those missing and defiled instruments, used in the service for sacrifices and worship. Not only did this focus on repairs encourage King Joash, the priests and Levites, but it also encouraged the people to return to the temple of the Lord for their worship. 2 Chronicles 24:14 recorded that, “As long as Jehoiada lived, burnt offerings were presented continually in the temple of the Lord.” Then Jehoiada died at the marvelously blessed age of 130 years old and was buried in honor. He was buried with the kings in Jerusalem with the epitaph, “because of the good he had done in Israel for God and his temple.”

[2Chronicles 24:16]

King Joash had probably reigned for around 25 of his 40 years when he lost his mentor and adoptive father, Jehoiada. This was the turning point of his life. He seemed to be searching for someone else to give the fantastic counsel and guidance he had lost, but he chose poorly. 2 Chronicles 24:17, 18 recorded, “After the death of Jehoiada, the officials of Judah came and paid homage to the king, and he listened to them. They abandoned the temple of the Lord, the God of their ancestors, and worshiped Asherah poles and idols. Because of their guilt, God's anger came on Judah and Jerusalem.” Now scripture revealed the negative memory left of

Joash's life.

Why did King Joash so easily move from dedication to the temple of the Lord God into idol worship? Most of the commentators seemed to conclude that Jehoiada had been Joash's conscience. As long as he lived, Joash followed his example of devotion to God because he lived Jehoiada's faith. However, Joash had never made the personal choice to make Jehovah his own God. MacLaren challenged us, "To become a Christian is the most personal act one can perform. It is a thing that a man has to do for himself."

I remember going to church every Sunday as a child with my Mom. She told us that she would pack all of her five children, up and take us so we could go to Sunday School and church with her weekly from our infancy on, even though our Dad stayed home. As a teenager, I was active in the youth group and choir of our little independent church as well as started a small Christian club out of my public high school.

However, it was in my freshman year, in a Christian college, that I had my crisis of faith. I was taking a class that compared world religions when I wondered, "Do I believe what I believe just because I was raised by my Christian Mom? If I had been born to a devoutly Hindu family, is that how my faith would have grown? How do I know which faith is true?" I had to honestly study and

compare the beliefs, represented in that class, to what I knew of the Bible. It was perhaps my deepest dive into my faith that I had ever done, up to that time. Finally, I emerged with an understanding of how all other faiths fall short of the true redemption and forgiveness of sins we have in Christianity. I gained a rock-hard faith of my own, and a firm faith in where I am going after this life, because of God's mercy and grace through Jesus Christ my Savior.

Unlike the journey I took in college, Joash turned away from the truth of God's Word he had learned through Jehoiada, and turned to the enticements offered in idol worship. So, he chose the princes, the guidance of his peers among the leading families in Judah, instead. They introduced him to the immorality of Asherah poles and idol worship. But God would not let Joash lead the nation so blithely down this road to destruction.

God began to convict prophets to challenge the king and his people to turn away from idols. In fact, one of God's messengers was Jehoiada's son named Zechariah. 2 Chronicles 24:20 records Zechariah's challenge and prophecy: "This is what God says: 'Why do you disobey the Lord's commands? You will not prosper. Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you.'"

Surely the well meant intervention to stop bad behavior should have made a difference, especially when spoken by a long

time friend, or even a family member. Zechariah was a cousin and had been like a brother to Joash. He along with his father had provided the example of the priesthood, and devotion to the worship of Jehovah. But Joash listened to his new “friends” and put Zechariah to a farce of a trial. They “plotted against him and by order of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the Lord's temple.” [2 Chronicles 24:21] They proved Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 15:33: “Bad company corrupts good character.”

MacLaren condemned Joash's actions in this way: “The murder of Zechariah was beyond the common count of crimes, for it was a foul desecration of the temple, an act of the blackest ingratitude to the man who had saved his infant life, and put him on the throne; an outrage on the claims of family connections, for Joash and Zechariah were probably blood relations,” through Zechariah's mother, who was Joash's aunt.

Scripture narrates this atrocity in verse 22 saying Zechariah prophesied even while he was dying from the stoning: “May the Lord see this and call you to account.” His prophesy quickly was fulfilled. Verse 23 indicated, “At the turn of the year, the army of Aram marched against Joash; it invaded Judah and Jerusalem and killed all the leaders of the people.” [2 Chronicles 24:23] This is how God punished Joash and his counselors for this terrible deed.

From last week's lesson, we learned that God recognized that Jehu, in the Northern kingdom of Israel, also did not love the Lord with all his heart. So, God had used Hazael king of Aram to reduce Israel's territory when he "overpowered the Israelites throughout their territory east of the Jordan in all the land of Gilead ..." [2 Kings 10:32, 33] Now, as punishment for Joash turning away from the Lord, Hazael turned his army against Judah as well. From the King's version of this war, it would seem Aram attacked Judah only as an after-thought as he returned home from his campaign into Gath.

However, putting both the Kings and Chronicles records together, it is evident that Joash pulled together a large army, led by the men of the "leading families," (his counselors) to go out to face the attackers who only came with a smaller force. Joash was probably fighting along with this army from Judah. Hazael led "the Aramean army." The seasoned king of Aram quickly defeated Joash's army, killing all of the prominent leaders of the people, because the Lord delivered Judah's army into his hands. How could this happen? "Because Judah had forsaken the Lord, the God of their ancestors, judgment was executed on Joash. When the Arameans withdrew, they left Joash severely wounded." [2 Chronicles 24:24,25]

In 2 Kings 13:18 it is revealed that in order to stop the

Aramean attack on Jerusalem itself, Joash, “took all the sacred objects dedicated by his predecessors – Jehoshaphat, Jehoram and Ahaziah, the kings of Judah – and the gifts he himself had dedicated and all the gold found in the treasuries of the temple of the Lord and of the royal palace, and he sent them to Hazael king of Aram, who then withdrew from Jerusalem.” All the things Joash had treasured ended up as ransom paid to the nation of Aram because Joash turned his heart away from God.

Joash met his end by men who served him. As he laid in bed, in pain from his wounds, “His officials conspired against him and assassinated him at Beth Millo, on the road down to Silla.” [2 Kings 12:20] 2 Chronicles 24:25 records that these men “conspired against him for murdering the son of Jehoiada the priest, and they killed him on his bed. So he died and was buried in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.”

Although Joash did many good deeds during his early reign by which the worship of the Lord God was greatly advanced in his nation, his wayward heart brought the sum of his reputation to an infamous end. He was not honored with Judah's great kings, but he did preserve the line of David, in that his son, Amaziah succeeded him as king.

But when it came time to step out on his own as king, Joash chose to follow the advice of his peers, rather than the words of the

covenant he had vowed to uphold. What could have made a difference in his reign? Our memory verse holds the key:

“How can a young man {or I would add: a young or mature woman

or man} keep his way pure? By living according to your word.”

[Psalm 119:9] Joash would have held a copy of God's Word in his own hand, and listened to it during countless evenings of lessons with Jehoiada. He knew God's covenant with Israel included him. But he never took it to heart.

We face a new year of choices ourselves. We cannot lean on our parents' faith, our church's creed, or even our discussion group's advice to lead our lives. We must build an inward faith on the Lord Jesus Christ and lean on His Word for our decisions; for our guidance throughout 2019 and on to the end of our lives. Is this the faith of our Fathers or Mothers? Or is this your faith. Because you can never go wrong following God's guidance; and you can never miss His guidance if you immerse yourself in His Word. You're right on track by joining us here, as People of the Word.