

Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah: Axis of Evil

Scripture Readings: 2 Chronicles 21-23 (excerpts); 2 Samuel 7:16; Jeremiah 23:5; Matthew 1:1, 6-8

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Dear Congregation of Christ: In 1936, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini declared in a speech in Milan that “this Berlin-Rome protocol is not a barrier, it is rather an axis...” He was referring to the alliance between Germany and Italy—and later, Japan—which became known as the Axis Powers from his speech. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush branded Iran, Iraq and North Korea as the “Axis of Evil.” Today, some writers refer to Russia, China and North Korea as the new “Axis of Evil.”

In the Old Testament chronicles of the kings of the Israelites, there is a similar “Axis of Evil,” which I also call the “Triad of Evil.” This axis is not a group of nations, but a queen and two kings of the southern kingdom of Judah. These are Jehoram (also known as Joram), Ahaziah and Athaliah. King Ahab of the northern kingdom called Israel is also involved in this Axis of Evil. To better understand how this came to be, we must look at the two dynasties that came out of the twelve tribes of Israel.

We have learned before that David was the first king of his dynasty. His son Solomon inherited his throne, but he committed heinous violations of God’s covenant laws against adultery and idolatry. God’s judgment against him was when his son Rehoboam became king, an official in the palace named Jeroboam led a successful rebellion against Rehoboam. Out of this rebellion, a new kingdom called Israel was formed from the ten tribes who joined Jeroboam. What was left of the twelve tribes was the southern kingdom called Judah.

So the united monarchy of the Israelites ended with Solomon. Two dynasties were established. In the north, there was a series of kings, all evil, Ahab being the seventh king. In the south, Jehoshaphat (whom we studied last Sunday), was the fourth king. Then we learned from 2 Chronicles 18:1 that Jehoshaphat and Ahab made a marriage alliance. Ahab gave his daughter Athaliah through the evil Jezebel to be the wife of Jehoshaphat’s son Jehoram. This alliance gave birth to King Ahaziah. These three, Jehoram and Ahaziah and Athaliah are who we will refer to as the Axis of Evil of the ancient Israelites.

All three committed heinous sins of idolatry, murder and corruption against God’s covenant laws he gave to Moses at Mount Sinai. This morning, we will study, **“Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah: Axis of Evil”** under three headings.

“You Have Enticed Judah into Whoredom”

Jehoram ascended the throne after his father Jehoshaphat died. Last Sunday, we learned that Jehoshaphat was a righteous and godly king, even when he made a few mistakes and sinned against God. One of these sins is that he made a marriage alliance with the evil Ahab, king of Israel the northern kingdom. Ahab gave his daughter Athaliah to Jehoshaphat’s son Jehoram. Athaliah was Ahab’s daughter through Jezebel his evil queen.

Jehoram did not follow the godly footsteps of his father. Instead, 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”* (21:6). The daughter of Ahab, who was his wife, is Athaliah, and Athaliah’s mother is Jezebel. Most of you probably have an idea what kind of woman Jezebel was. For most people, the name or word Jezebel connotes “an impudent, shameless, or morally unrestrained woman” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). Why is this? In the history of Israel, Jezebel was the wicked pagan wife of King Ahab. She was the daughter of the king of Phoenicia north of Israel. Jezebel, like his father, was a fanatic worshiper of the idol-god Baal and his female consort named Astarte or Ashtoreth. Baal is the god of storm and Astarte is the goddess of fertility. Pagan worshipers made poles representing their goddess, and their worship consisted of sacrifices, sometimes human, orgies with temple prostitutes, and cutting themselves as penance for their sins.

This is the heinous paganism practiced by Jezebel. So she sought to sweep any worship of the LORD God of Abraham from Israel by exterminating all true priests and prophets of the LORD. Only 100 survived, and only Elijah spoke out on pain of certain death. Jezebel vowed to kill Elijah, but she failed because Elijah was victorious over 850 of her pagan priests and prophets at Mount Carmel. Elijah had these pagan worshipers killed. But Ahab and Jezebel continued their blasphemous idolatry.

This then was the hideous inheritance that Jezebel gifted her daughter Athaliah, who was given as a wife to Jehoram in a marriage alliance with King Jehoshaphat. So, like mother, like daughter. Athaliah was also a fanatical worshiper of Baal, so she seduced Jehoram into her pagan idolatry, away from his father Jehoshaphat’s godly life. In turn, Jehoram enticed the people of Judah into the same wicked idolatry. Therefore, the prophet Elijah pronounced God’s judgment against him, saying, *“the LORD will bring a great plague on your people, your children, your wives, and all your possessions, 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”* (2 Chr 21:13-15). God’s judgment was fulfilled when, during the last two years of his eight-year reign, he contracted the same terrible disease and died of it, perhaps a painful cancer of his bowels (2 Chr. 21:19).

What can we learn from Jehoram’s reign in Israel? Two things. First, there is a solemn warning to all of us Christians about marriage. We know that God forbids us to marry unbelievers, *“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers”* (2 Cor 6:14). For a Christian to be unequally yoked with an unbeliever is like two different animals yoked together in the field. Paul says marrying an unbeliever is a partnership between the righteous and the wicked, or fellowship between light and darkness, or agreement between our Lord and the devil. The result is not only undesirable, but disastrous. How many of us parents favored a man of means for our daughter’s financial security, even if that man is an unbeliever? We probably thought that the man will come around in due time, but this seldom happens. And then the marriage turns into a broken family, a judgment that often happens because of disobedience to God’s commandments.

Second, there is also solemn warning to us about who we choose to be the leaders of our nation. It was not only Ahab and Jehoram who led their peoples into pagan idolatry that incurred

God's wrath. Almost all the kings of Israel and Judah were wicked idolaters, murderers and corrupt leaders. Although God was patient with them for about 900 years, God's patience finally ran out. He sent wave after wave of wicked Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans to destroy, exterminate, exile and enslave them.

Through almost 250 years, God has blessed our nation with prosperity and peace and the Christian faith most of the time. But these last several decades, we have become drunk with prosperity and power and forgotten our Christian roots. Not that America is a Christian nation, but its foundation is rooted in the Christian faith. Why have we forgotten our roots? Because our choice of leaders—from the President and his Cabinet, Congress, Supreme Court, governors, mayors and district attorneys—are way, way short of the moral values God has given all human beings. So now, we are near the abyss of demonic policies of abortion on demand, sexual immorality, transgenderism, socialism, open borders, violent crimes, socialism, racism, abuse of power, and corruption in the highest places. All of these godless leaders have led us into a frightening runaway descent into a bottomless abyss. When will God say, "I have regretted that I have made America, so I will blot them out of the face of the earth." Judgment Day cannot come soon enough.

"Ahaziah's Mother was His Counselor"

After Jehoram's eight-year reign, his son Ahaziah ascended on the throne. What was he like? Alas! Like father, like son! Like grandfather, like grandson! *"He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counselor in doing wickedly. 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"* (2 Chr 22:3-4). His mother was Athaliah, the wicked Jezebel's daughter.

Jezebel also dominated her husband Ahab. He made Ahab build a luxurious palace for her in addition to the king's palace. Ahab then saw a beautiful vineyard near his palace in Jezreel, so he offered to buy it from the owner named Naboth. Naboth politely refused, and Ahab reacted like a little boy sulking in his palace. Jezebel then humiliated Ahab, "Do you now govern Israel?" She was saying to him, "What kind of king are you? Can't you get whatever you want?" So, with deceitful lies, Jezebel had Naboth stoned to death on the trumped up charge of cursing God. Ahab then grabbed Naboth's vineyard. The LORD's judgment therefore came upon Ahab when he was killed in battle against the Syrians. Jezebel, as Elijah prophesied, was executed and her corpse eaten by dogs.

This is also a lesson for us Christian parents, especially mothers. Many households are headed by single mothers. Because of absentee fathers, on their laps fall the responsibility of raising and teaching their children the nurture and discipline of the Lord. In Proverbs 31, we learn of a mother and wife who *"opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue... Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her"* (26-28). Paul praises the Timothy's godly mother and grandmother for raising Timothy in sincere and strong faith (2 Tim 1:5), so Timothy became a pastor under the apostle. He also exhorts older women in the church, including mothers and grandmothers and widows to *"teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands*

and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled” (Tit 2:3-5). Women in the church have a great responsibility in teaching and training young women and men in godly living, so that when unbelievers see the children’s behavior, they will see holiness and godliness and therefore, would not mock God. And this is one of the reasons why our culture today mocks God: absentee fathers and idolatrous mothers.

Mothers and grandmothers who fear the LORD are the most precious of the family, church and nation, raising their children also in the fear of the LORD.

“Athaliah Destroyed All the Royal Family of the House of Judah”

We learned earlier that Jehoram murdered all his brothers to consolidate his despotic rule (2 Chr 21:4). But this was probably not solely his decision. It was probably also plotted by his wicked mother Athaliah, for in 2 Chronicles 22:10, we read, *“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.”* When her grandson Ahaziah died of bowel disease, she set herself up as Queen of Judah. And to consolidate her tyrannic rule, she made sure that all of the royal house of David are killed. Perhaps she wanted to install wanted to start her own dynasty. Or perhaps she wanted to install the current king of Israel, Jehoram, as king of a unified kingdom with Israel dominating Judah.

But Ahaziah’s sister named Jehoshabeath saved the day for the Davidic dynasty. She took Joash, the one surviving infant son of Ahaziah, and hid him in a bedroom in the temple complex. She was able to do this because she also was the wife of the high priest Jehoiada (2 Chr 22:11-12). After six years, Jehoiada proclaimed the young boy Joash as king in the temple court, and executed Queen Athaliah in the king’s palace (2 Chr 23:10-15). That ended the reign of terror of Judah’s Bloody Mary. She was executed in a manner similar to her mother Jezebel, Israel’s Bloody Mary.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Behind God’s frowning providence in the sufferings of his beloved people Judah because of the idolatry, murder and corruption of its kings and a queen is his eternal decree: he would save a people for himself through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. From the serpent in the Garden of Eden; to Pharaoh’s attempt to destroy all Hebrew babies; to Haman plotting the extermination of the Jews in Persia when Esther was the queen; and to Herod’s plot to kill all the babies in Bethlehem; God was working behind the scenes to preserve the line of David.

When the infant heir to the throne of Judah escaped the murderous Queen Athaliah, it was God’s providence at work. We read in 2 Samuel 7:16 that a Son of David would be installed as the eternal king. In Jeremiah 23:5, God would “raise up for David a righteous Branch,” a wise, just and righteous king. And then in Matthew 1:1, 6-8, this king is the Son of David, who is also the Son of Jehoshaphat and Joram. This Son of David is our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal King, in whom is all wisdom, justice and righteousness. Come to him, for he is the only Savior from God’s righteous judgment against all sins.