



Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah: A Legacy of Evil

Lesson 12

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. (3 John 4)

Everyone will leave a legacy, good or bad. The choices we make will impact those who come after us. This should encourage us, because it means our righteousness can continue to bless those who follow us. But it should also frighten us, because wickedness will not stay confined to a single generation.

As we study the lives of the kings, we are kept from two opposing extremes. We are kept, on the one hand, from a rigid behavioralism that says wicked examples will necessarily result in a wicked life. But we are also kept from the naive perspective that my behavior will only affect me. The wrongs I do might just be passed on to my children and grandchildren. This multigenerational effect of sin is perhaps nowhere better seen than in the reigns of Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah.

In this study we will see how a series of sinful compromises almost led to the entire annihilation of the seed of David. Omri compromised and married his son Ahab to the Sidonian princess Jezebel. Jehoshaphat compromised and married his son to the Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel and Ahab. Athaliah became a threat to Judah far greater than any foreign country. Because a good king compromised and partnered with the most wicked king of the north, his dynasty was almost entirely wiped out.

What does spiritual compromise look like today?

How can spiritual compromises today have a lasting impact on the generation that follows?

In our last study we looked at the end of the dynasty of Ahab. In this lesson and the next we will see how the impact of Ahab's reign corrupted Judah in the south as well, and what it took for God's servants to persevere through one of the darkest hours in Judah.

Jehoram of Judah¹

2 Kings 8:16-24; 2 Chronicles 21

Jehoram's father and grandfather had been godly kings (Asa and Jehoshaphat). Sadly, Jehoshaphat's compromise with Israel was continued and even worsened by his son Jehoram. Dr. Whitcomb has observed, "As is often the case with children, young Jehoram copied the weaknesses of his father but not his strengths, and not only entered willingly into a marriage relationship with the northern princess, but accepted wholeheartedly the pagan ways of her parents as well."² Jehoram begins a downward spiral in the country that will take the courageous action of a godly few to stop.

¹ Just a reminder from last lesson: both Israel and Judah have kings named Jehoram and Ahaziah reigning between 853-841. Israel's Ahaziah ruled from 853-852, followed by Joram (Jehoram) from 852-841. This week we will look at Judah's king Jehoram (Joram) reigns from 853-841, followed their Ahaziah who reigns for one year in 841.

² John C. Whitcomb and John J. Davis, *Israel: From Conquest to Exile: A Commentary on Joshua–2 Kings*, Combined paper edition. (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2012), 435.

I. Jehoram's wickedness (2 Chronicles 21:1-7, 11)

A. Jehoram murders his brothers (21:2-4).

The first thing Jehoram did upon coming to the throne is startling, and the story wastes no time in telling you. Jehoram killed all his brothers along with several nobles. Jehoshaphat had given all his sons gifts of wealth and administrative responsibilities over certain fortified cities. Probably done to keep jealous friction down, the plan backfired and instead Jehoram felt threatened by his brothers and had them all killed.

What hint does verse 13 of this chapter give us as to Jehoram's motivations? What other motivations might he have had?

This is the only time in Scripture that we read of a king in Israel or Judah doing such an outrageous thing. In fact, the author of Chronicles breaks up the normal pattern for summarizing a king's rise to power and the evaluation of his reign (21:1, 5-6) by including this story here. What Jehoram did here God took very seriously, and Jehoram will pay dearly for it.

B. Jehoram follows the example of Ahab (21:6).

Scripture states that Jehoram "walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab." Here we see a king of Judah acting like a king of Israel, and the most wicked king of Israel at that.

What characterized Ahab's rule that probably would have characterized the rule of Jehoram as well?

The reason Scripture gives for this is that “he had the daughter of Ahab to wife.” Jezebel had led Ahab in doing evil, now Athaliah leads Jehoram in doing evil. The powerful influence of a wicked person who is allowed access to your heart cannot be overestimated.

Why was Jehoshaphat not more concerned about taking a wife from Jezebel and Ahab? What kinds of justifications might he have used? How might people today use similar justifications in their associations?

C. Jehoram leads the people in idolatry.

Given the fact we are already told that Jehoram did evil because of his wife, it is little surprise to find that during his reign in Judah he built high places. We have normally heard about the kings of Judah taking away or failing to take away the high places. Jehoram goes a step further in that he actually created new high places for the people to worship, the very opposite attitude of his father who had the high places removed (2 Chronicles 17:6)!

Why would Jehoram seek to undo the good his father had done? How did Jehoshaphat lose his son? What warnings can we take from this story?

II. Jehoram’s punishment (2 Chronicles 21:8-20)

God, in His mercy, refrained from destroying Jehoram and his line out of loyalty to the covenant God had made with David (21:7). However, God’s preserving of David’s line did not mean a free pass for sin, and His punishment on Jehoram was still quite severe.

A. He lost control over Edom and Libnah (21:8-10).

God allowed the nation of Edom to break free from Israel, and the city of Libnah to successfully revolt as well. The writer of Chronicles is clear that this happened specifically as punishment on Jehoram for his wrongdoing.

B. He was attacked by Philistines and the Arabians (21:16-17).

This incident is important to the story for two reasons. First, it shows God's punishment on Jehoram for his sinful choices. Beyond that, it also clues us in to a problem that will grow into a crisis: all the royal sons are taken away, except for just one. This means Ahaziah³ and his sons are the last of David's seed left, and when Ahaziah dies early that will create a power vacuum.

Ironically, all the wives of Jehoram were taken, except apparently for Athaliah. Why do you think it is that she was left?

C. He died from a painful disease (21:12-15, 18).

Elijah sent a letter to Jehoram, warning him that God would bring a painful disease upon him as punishment for his sins.⁴ Elijah, who had fought the Baalism of Israel

³ As we have seen elsewhere in these books, Ahaziah appears to have had two names: Ahaziah and Jehoahaz.

⁴ Some debate exists over the background of Elijah's letter. The story of Elijah's being taken up into heaven (2 Kings 2) occurs immediately after he denounces the Israelite king Ahaziah (2 Kings 1), which would have occurred during the reign of Jehoshaphat of Judah. Immediately following this, the

throughout his ministry, makes one last solemn warning against the spiritual son of Ahab and Jezebel.

Indeed, we see that exactly what God had predicted would happen did in fact happen. Not all illness in someone's life is a result of their sin (see the book of Job), but some illness is. God was clear that what happened here was divine retribution for the wrong that Jehoram had done.

How can we as Christians strike this balance between not assuming God's punishment when things go wrong and yet recognizing that God does sometimes punish?

D. He was shown no honor (21:19-20).

The author of Chronicles wants us to see that Jehoram's actions impacted his legacy. His violent actions, the prophetic warning and punishment of God, and the military failures that plagued Jehoram's reign made it

author of Kings relates a narrative where Jehoshaphat and Jehoram of Israel seek out Elisha, not Elijah, when they need a prophet (2 Kings 3). This chronology implies that Elijah is gone before Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram ascends to the throne and kills his brothers, though that is never explicitly stated. How then did Elijah write a letter to Jehoram of Judah calling him out for destroying his brothers? There are 3 possible solutions: 1) Elijah hadn't actually been taken to heaven yet, and the author of Kings simply moved that story up to 2 Kings 2 in order to serve as a bridge between Elijah's ministry and Elisha's ministry 2) Elijah wrote the letter prophetically, predicting in advance that Jehoram would kill his brothers and what God's punishment would be 3) Some even argue that Elijah wrote a letter from heaven that was delivered to Jehoram. In the end, the timing of the letter, while puzzling, can be reasonably explained by any of these three explanations.

obvious to everyone that Jehoram was not an honorable man, and so at his death he received no honor.

Jehoram began his reign by killing off his own brothers and reestablishing the pagan worship his father and grandfather had attempted to root out. He spent the end of his short eight-year reign losing military battles and suffering from a painful disease for two years. Sadly, in all of this we never read of Jehoram repenting or humbling himself. As far as we know, he remained hard-headed and obstinately loyal to his evil wife and her pagan practices, even as it cost him everything.

Why do people remain loyal to causes and people who are spiritual disastrous and who cost them big time?

Ahaziah of Judah

(2 Kings 8:25-9:28; 2 Chronicles 22:1-9)

We get an important reminder at the beginning of Ahaziah's story. Ahaziah was the youngest son, and therefore the least likely to take over, except that all the other sons had been killed in Judah's war with the Arabians. Ahaziah's short reign of one year was another abysmal disaster, and we will look briefly look at some of the highlights.

I. Ahaziah's wickedness (2 Chronicles 22:1-9)

A. The influences of Ahaziah (22:1-4)

What word shows up 3 times in verses 2-4?

(counsel/counsellors)

Why do you think the author of Chronicles emphasizes this point so heavily?

B. The behavior of Ahaziah (22:4-6)

Ahaziah's negative actions are put into two categories: general wickedness and supporting Israel in their war against Syria.

First, the passage only generally mentions that he did evil, walking the way of the house of Ahab. Likely, this included idolatry and who knows what else as the previously righteous nation of Judah began to look more and more like Israel.

But not only was there general evil and partnership with the rebellious northern kingdom, there was another military alliance. Apparently, Judah hadn't learned its lesson. After the disastrous war against Syria that cost Ahab his life and sent Jehoshaphat running for his life (1 Kings 22), Judah once again decided to support Israel in a battle against their northern foe Syria.

Why was it wrong for Ahaziah to partner up with Israel in their wars against Syria?

II. Ahaziah's end

Ahaziah was in the wrong place in the wrong time, and it cost him his life. Following the example of his grandfather Jehoshaphat, Ahaziah was hanging around the king of Israel, in this case Jehoram. When Jehu begins his revolution, he comes across both kings at the same time, and kills them both. 2 Chronicles 22:7 points out that God specifically engineered this to be the way that Ahaziah would die.

Does this mean that Jehu was right to kill Ahaziah? Why or why not?

What warning can we take from the example of Ahaziah?

Athaliah

(2 Kings 11:1-3; 2 Chronicles 22:10-12).

With the death of Ahaziah begins the darkest chapter in the history of Judah. An Israeli princess, daughter of wicked and pagan Jezebel, seizes power and kills her own grandchildren. Athaliah starts off in the story as a minor character. She is married to Jehoram and influences him negatively. However, over time she comes to play a larger part in the story, until eventually she seizes control of the throne and seeks to wipe out her own descendants who might challenge her power.

For a rising king to kill his brothers in a power grab is sick, even if somewhat understandable. Jealousy has turned brother against brother from the very first family. But what Athaliah does is unimaginable. Killing one's own offspring (including infants) to maintain power is treachery and wickedness of the highest degree.

As we end our lesson this week you probably have a bit of an unsettled feeling. That's good. That's how Israel felt for six years. Six years of wondering what had become of the Davidic dynasty. Six years where the only hope was that God had said and that He would somehow come through in a way no one expected. Six years of mourning, of ruling by one of the most wicked people in the Old Testament. We'll find out what happens next week, unlike Israel who had to wait six years.

What do we learn about God's character and His promises from this story?