

A TALE OF TWO WOMEN II Chronicles 22:10-12

INTRO

I-II Chronicles record the history of Israel's kings. They were written after a remnant returned from exile to the rubble and ruins of their formerly glorious capital, Jerusalem. We must enter into the shoes of the returned exiles in order to properly read our text this morning.

Surely one of the most pressing questions on the mind of all of them as they rebuilt the wall and rebuilt their lives was: "Can I trust God? The God who allowed *this* to happen?¹ What of his promise – his promise that the line of David would continue forever? Where is the Davidic King now, as we pick up the pieces of our shattered temple and shattered lives?"

The Chronicler, inspired by the Holy Spirit, knew that his readers needed to be reminded of God's faithfulness to his promises.

The passage before us focuses on God's promise to David to place a king on his throne forever. It tells of God's promises prevailing against the blackest darkness imaginable. Because God kept his promise then, we can trust that he does so even still.

Hear now God's living and active Word:

[READ II Chronicles 22:10-12]

This is a tale of two women. One used her position to destroy. The other used her position to deliver.

One woman set out to break David's line. The other ensured that it would continue.

Who are these two women and how did their lives intersect in so dark a time?

I. Athaliah: Self-consumed Rebellion

¹ ESV Study Bible, p. 698.

This is the time of the divided Kingdom – After king Solomon, the kingdom split into Israel in the North and Judah in the South. The Northern Kingdom was bad to the bone from the start, and its two worst figures were King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. Guess who was their daughter? (Athaliah)

But if you noticed in our passage, Athaliah is the mother of Ahaziah, King of Judah, the Southern Kingdom. How did she get down South? Ahaziah's grandfather, King Jehoshaphat, made a foolish marriage alliance with the Northern Kingdom, marrying his son Jehoram to Athaliah.

If all that family history was confusing, let me just sum up her life:

- An evil mother – 22:3 says “she was her son Ahaziah’s counselor in doing wickedly”
- An evil grandmother – when it says in v. 11 that she “destroyed all the royal family,” this included her own grandsons
- An evil Queen – actually the only queen of Israel; she took the throne by force after her son’s death, and her reign was marked by bloodshed and spiritual darkness

[She reminds me of the white witch in C.S. Lewis’s Chronicles of Narnia – “‘She is a perfectly terrible person,’ said Lucy. ‘She calls herself the Queen of Narnia though she has no right to be queen at all...And she can turn people into stone and do all kinds of horrible things. And she has made a magic so that it is always winter in Narnia—always winter, but it never gets to Christmas.’”²]

If Athaliah had a hashtag – a life summary – it would be “self-consumed rebellion”

She wiped out David’s line, or so she thought. To do this, she must have had little regard for God and his promises and much regard for herself.

We see at least two lessons from Athaliah for us today:

1) Self-consumed rebellion never gets what it wants

What did Athaliah want? Two things:

- a) *Control*: She wanted the throne. When her son Ahaziah died, there was a power vacuum – 22:9 “And the house of Ahaziah had no one

² C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

able to rule the kingdom” – perhaps no one old enough. This was her big chance. In the words of Matthew Henry, she wanted “to destroy the house of David, that she might set up a throne for herself upon the ruins of it.” But it’s more than just about control for her.

- b) *Revenge*: Why do I say that? In 2 Kings 9-10, we discover that the prophet Elisha appointed Jehu king of Israel to wipe out the house of evil King Ahab. This is Athaliah’s family. By the time she becomes queen, Jehu has killed most of her family, including her son, King Ahaziah.

Because her family was destroyed, she wants to decimate the family of David.

Though self-consumed rebellion goes to unimaginable lengths to get what it wants, it never gets it. Athaliah took the throne by force, yes, but in the verses following our passage, she swiftly loses the throne, along with her life, and the line of David lives on in baby Joash.

2) Evil can at times appear unstoppable – key word: “appear”

Judah languished six years under Queen Athaliah’s cruel hand. Surely few knew of baby Joash stashed in the temple.

To all appearances, the line of David had failed, and with it, the promised Kingly Messiah.

Imagine what life might have been like for the average Israelite living in such dark days. You’ve heard of promises God made to your ancestors, but now they all seem like old wives’ tales, or worse, a cruel joke.

[At times it feels like sin and darkness and evil are on the winning team, and the promises of God begin to fade from memory, like when you forget something important but for the life of you can’t recall what it was.]

Into this darkness, another woman enters the scene.

One put it well: “against the wickedness of one woman, God set the compassion of another.”³

³ Morgan, Blue Letter Bible.

II. Jehoshabeath – Selfless Trust

Who was this woman?

- In v. 11, “the daughter of the king” – King Jehoram, Athaliah’s husband, was her father, but Athaliah was likely not her mother.
- This made her king Ahaziah’s sister and part of the royal family
- Married to a priest – Jehoiada – so she had a foot in both the palace and the temple, which, in God’s providence is the only way she could save baby Joash (her access to the palace allowed her to steal him away from the jaws of death, and her access to the temple allowed her to hide him there)
- Unlike Athaliah, who leverages her position for self, Jehoshabeath uses her position to save the nation, and ultimately, the world
- Jehoshabeath’s hashtag was “selfless, courageous trust” – trust in the promises of God, particularly the promise of a Messianic King coming from David’s line.

Because she believed that God keeps his promises, she had courage to act in the face of danger and darkness.

Her life shows us several truths about God’s promises:

1) God often uses unlikely means to fulfill his promises

- a) *Unlikely People*: This is the only place Jehoshabeath is mentioned in Scripture (along with the corresponding account in Kings). It’s like she comes out of the woodwork to save the day – who was **she** to sabotage the tyrannical reign of Queen Athaliah?

[We could ask a similar question about Mary, the mother of Jesus. She was an unlikely choice and she knew it – in her prayer before Jesus’ birth, she prayed: “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant” (Lk 1:46-47).

- “humble estate” – is a status word – the “condition of being of little or no account,”⁴ particularly of low social status. It’s as if Mary is saying, “Even though I’m a nobody in the world’s eyes, God sees me.”

⁴ Danker, p. 347.

Who would have expected this ordinary girl to bear the Serpent Slayer?]

b) *Unlikely Places*: where did she hide baby Joash?

(v. 11) “she put him and his nurse in a bedroom” – later in verse 11, “hidden in the house of God”

This so called “bedroom” was likely a small closet chamber in the temple where the priests’ bed mats were stored during the day.⁵ It was a place Athaliah would never think to look. Temple worship was not high on her list of priorities.

But it’s not so unlikely when you think about it – the temple was a symbol of God’s presence among his people. In one sense, Joash took refuge in God himself – “hidden in the house of God” – he took his great-great-great-great...grandfather David’s words in Psalm 27 quite literally:

“One thing I ask from the Lord,
 this only do I seek:
 that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
 all the days of my life,
⁵For in the day of trouble
 he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
 he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent”

[What are some of the unlikely ways God has used to fulfill his promises in your life? Unlikely people, unlikely places.]

God fulfills his promises in unlikely ways, but that’s not all we see from her life:

2) God fulfills his promises in the midst of suffering

Do you think it was a comfy, cozy path that Jehoshabeath walked? As I read the text, the words that come to mind are “dangerous” and “costly.”

What was some of the suffering she experienced?

- Life under an evil queen

⁵ Josephus

- Grief and loss – Joash was her nephew; likely many other nephews and other family members were among those Athaliah destroyed
- Six years of secrecy in hiding – going to great lengths to make sure Joash was not found

The thing to note is that this suffering was happening **as** God fulfilled his promises.

[Brother or sister, you may very well be in a place at this very moment where you feel that because of suffering in your life, God must not be there. His promises must not be true. Maybe it's all been a sham.

Let Jehoshabeath's example speak to your heart. Suffering in your life is not evidence that God is not there. It's quite the opposite. The path God most often uses to fulfill his promises is a path laden with suffering.

In the memorable words of an 18th c. man who knew suffering more than most, "[God's] purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower."⁶]

[We have several rose bushes we recently planted, and at first, we thought they would all die. Then I saw a bud. It took what felt like weeks, but recently they all started flowering like crazy.]

3) God's promises take time to unfold (bloom)

For Jehoshabeath, it was six years of shadows and secrecy.

[I imagine that for many believers throughout the ages, God's promises seemed slow in coming.

I picture Noah's family looking out over a dry plain as they constructed a massive boat.

I see Abram and Sarai pining for a son.

I think of Joseph enduring years in an Egyptian dungeon.]

Let me ask you, is there an area of your life where it seems that God has forgotten his promises? Maybe it's been months, years, decades of waiting.

⁶ William Cowper, *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*

In these times of waiting, we need to remember the final lesson from this woman's life:

4) God's promises are unstoppable.

In Athaliah's mind, the line of David was ended. Her line was beginning.

Little did she know that David's line was far from over. The Messianic Promise was balanced on the toddling legs of a one-year-old hiding in a temple closet.

So we see this truth: **God's promises advance through seeming failure. God's promises advance though they seem to have failed.**

As the Israelites read this *tale of two women* after returning from exile, they would have remembered this.

When all seems ended, all is in fact just beginning. God is a God who makes beginnings out of ends.

God did not forget his promise to King David. He saved a royal toddler who would one day overthrow evil Athaliah and bring peace.

Once King, Joash went on to repair and restore the temple he had once called home. But his reign ended in treachery, and his son reigned in his place, and *his* son reigned in *his* place, and the line of David continued until Jerusalem was captured and burned by Babylonians.

Where was the fulfillment of the promise? All the kings, even the good kings, died and left the throne to another.

Until another King. An unlikely King, from Nazareth of all places, a king who, in the words of Isaiah, "had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2b).

Though this King was the means by which God would fulfill all of his promises, his path was laden with suffering. In fact, it was only through his suffering that God's promises were fulfilled.

God's promise of this King took time to bloom – thousands of years of prophecy and foreshadowing and yearning.

And through this King, God's promises advance through seeming failure. The seeming failure of the cross became the ultimate victory. Even as this King was crushed, he crushed the head of the Serpent.

The fiercest of all the Kings of Judah. Lion-hearted. Lamb-like. His Kingdom is unstoppable.

Soon the "root and descendant of David, the bright morning star," will fulfill his last promise recorded in Scripture:

"Surely I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!