

## 2 Kings 12: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     2 Kings chapter 12 In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibia of Beersheba, and Jehoash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all his days, because Jehoiada the priest instructed him.

Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away. The people continued to sacrifice and make offerings on the high places. Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the holy things that is brought into the house of the Lord, the money for which each man is assessed, the money from the assessment of persons, and the money that a man's heart prompts him to bring into the house of the Lord, let the priests take, each from his donor, and let them repair the house wherever any need of repairs is discovered.

But by the twenty-third year of King Jehoash, the priests had made no repairs on the house. Therefore King Jehoash summoned Jehoiada the priest and the other priests and said to them, Why are you not repairing the house?

Now therefore take no more money from your donors, but hand it over for the repair of the house. So the priests agreed that they should take no more money from the people, and that they should not repair the house.

Then Jehoiada the priest took a chest and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar on the right side as one entered the house of the Lord. And the priests who guarded the threshold put in it all the money that was brought into the house of the Lord.

[ 1 : 2 3 ]     And whenever they saw that there was much money in the chest, the king's secretary and the high priest came up, and they bagged and counted the money that was found in the house of the Lord. Then they would give the money that was weighed out into the hands of the workmen who had the oversight of the house of the Lord, and they paid it out to the carpenters and the builders who worked on the house of the Lord, and to the masons and the stonecutters, as well as to buy timber and quarried stone for making repairs on the house of the Lord, and for any outlay for the repairs of the house.

But there was not made for the house of the Lord basins of silver, snuffers, bowls, trumpets, or any vessels of gold or of silver from the money that was brought into the house of the Lord.

For that was given to the workmen who were repairing the house of the Lord with it, and they did not ask for an accounting from the men into whose hand they delivered the money to pay out to the workmen. For they dealt honestly.

The money from the guilt offerings and the money from the sin offerings was not brought into the house of the Lord. It belonged to the priests. At that time, Haziel king of Syria went up and fought against Gath and took it.

But when Haziel set his face to go against Jerusalem, Jehoash king of Judah took all the sacred gifts that Jehoshaphat and Jehoram and Ahaziah his fathers, the kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own sacred gifts, and all the gold that was found in the treasuries of the house of the Lord and of the king's house, and sent these to Haziel king of Syria.

[ 2 : 48 ] Then Hazeiel went away from Jerusalem. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? His servants arose and made a conspiracy, and struck down Joash in the house of Milo, on the way that goes down to Silla.

It was Jehozakar the son of Shimeath, and Jehozabad the son of Shomer, his servants, who struck him down, so that he died. And they buried him with his fathers in the city of David. And Amaziah his son reigned in his place.

After the imposter Athaliah was deposed, and the young Joash was set up, the reformation of Judah could properly begin. Both Jehu and Joash's anointings began in inner rooms, hidden from public sight, before they both burst out in judgment upon the wicked of their respective kingdoms.

Jehu partly turned back the tide of idolatry in the north, for which the Lord praised him, but he never truly reversed it. In 2 Kings chapter 12, following the coronation of Joash, he will take on a further part of the messianic task of the Anointed One, restoring and reforming the worship of the temple.

Joash, or Jehoash, reigned over Judah for 40 years. This might be regarded as a propitious length of time, the same duration as the reigns of both David and Solomon. Joash is here described as a righteous king, one who serves the Lord, and his life is defined by that.

[ 4 : 10 ] The role played by Jehoiada the priest in his rearing and instruction is identified as a key cause of his long-term faithfulness. The king was supposed to be a son of the Lord, his house connected to the Lord's house, and learning under the guidance of the Lord's appointed stewards, the priests.

We see this in Deuteronomy chapter 17, verses 18 to 20. And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests, and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children in Israel.

Joash had the benefit of spending all of his early childhood in the temple under the instruction of Jehoiada. Jehoiada continued to instruct him when he came to the throne. However, like many before him, Joash failed to deal with the problem of the worship of the high places.

In Deuteronomy chapter 12, the Lord had commanded his people to establish a single central site of worship. One of the primary tasks of the king was to establish the unity and centrality of the nation's worship, ensuring that there weren't many different cultic centres, each with their own attendant customs.

The failure to establish the temple as the single site of worship was an enduring problem from Solomon's days onwards. Joash initially entrusted the priests with the repair of the house of the Lord, over 100 years old by this point.

[ 5 : 48 ] Yet by the 23rd year of his reign, no repairs had been made. We don't know when Joash first instructed the priests in this matter, but it seems likely that it took him a while to recognise its failure.

Perhaps as Joash had been raised in the temple under Jehoiada and the priests, the priests had much greater power and influence in the first half of his reign. The priests' seeming mismanagement of the funds suggest that the temple's disrepair might not merely be a matter of crumbling masonry, but of institutional corruption too.

Joash's failure to address the situation prior to this point suggests a king weakened by his youth and his over-dependence upon the priests perhaps, and perhaps also a king who despite his good intentions and character was lacking in competence for some of the fundamental tasks of effective governance and administration.

The nation was always healthiest when kings, priests and prophets could function in firmly counterbalancing ministries without any one or two of the officers being under the excessive influence of one or both of the others.

Lyssa Rabieli notes that as the northern kingdom of Israel was weakened by Syrian incursions, the temple in the south would have been a symbol of growing importance. It would have consolidated the soft power of Judah with members of the northern kingdom who worshipped the Lord, and it would also serve to validate the Davidic dynasty within the nation.

[ 7 : 08 ] Joash confronts the priests concerning their mismanagement, and he takes the responsibility for the repairs out of their hands. This was an important step towards a better managed administration, but the fact that it took so long was not a promising sign of Joash's competence to achieve it.

While we can see a lot of parallels between Joash and Solomon in their respective anointings, their concern with the temple, the length of their reigns, and other such things, as in the case of Jehoshaphat, the similarities invite contrasts that highlight how far the nation had fallen from its former golden age.

Jehoiada the priest sets up a collection chest for the house, and under the joint direction of the king's secretary and the high priest, the money was counted and weighed out to the overseers of the workers, who in their turn paid the various workmen.

The overseers of the workmen were trustworthy men, demonstrated by the progress of the project, so an accounting was not demanded of them. This money was not used to make implements for the temple's service, however.

The implements were seemingly to come from the king's own money. The money for the guilt and sin offerings was also exempted from the funds, as that money went directly to the priests. Haziel, the king of Syria, who had been anointed by the Lord against his rebellious people of Israel and the idolatrous Omrides, harries the northern kingdom and increasingly becomes a threat to the south.

[ 8 : 28 ] Joash and certain of his predecessors had given costly gifts to the temple as tribute to the Lord, but now Joash takes things that had been given as tribute to the Lord and gives them as tribute to Haziel.

It is a very negative sign. Joash's reign ends in assassination in far more tragic circumstances than 2nd Kings records. In 2nd Chronicles chapter 24, verses 17 to 26, we read of the premature conclusion of Joash's reign.

Now after the death of Jehoiada, the princes of Judah came and paid homage to the king. Then the king listened to them and they abandoned the house of the Lord, the God of their fathers and served the Asherim and the idols.

And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs. Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the Lord. These testified against them, but they would not pay attention. Then the spirit of God clothed Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people and said to them, Thus says God, Why do you break the commandments of the Lord so that you cannot prosper?

Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you. But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord. Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, had shown him, but killed his son.

[ 9 : 45 ] And when he was dying, he said, May the Lord see and avenge. At the end of the year, the army of the Syrians came up against Joash. They came to Judah and Jerusalem and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus.

Though the army of the Syrians had come with few men, the Lord delivered into their hand a very great army, because Judah had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers. Thus they executed judgment on Joash.

When they had departed from him, leaving him severely wounded, his servants conspired against him because of the blood of the son of Jehoiada the priest, and killed him on his bed. So he died, and they buried him in the city of David.

But they did not bury him in the tombs of the kings. Those who conspired against him were Zabod, the son of Shimeath, the Ammonite, and Jehozabad, the son of Shimereth, the Moabite. Like Asa, Joash starts well, but ends badly, striking out against a prophet of the Lord.

A question to consider. Which other Davidic kings took from the treasury of the Lord to give tribute to foreign invaders? Can you think of any ways in which we might face analogous choices regarding the ones to whom we pay our tribute?