



Second Chronicles - Chapter Twenty One

III 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23 - The Kingdom of Judah Down to the Exile (continues)

Summary of Chapter Twenty One

The Chronicler's account of King Jehoram's reign in Judah is considerably expanded over the description given in 2 Kings 8:16-24. The dominant concern here, and in the accounts of his successor Ahaziah in 2 Chronicles 22:1-9, and the usurper Queen Athaliah (2 Chronicles 22:10-23:21), is the disastrous influence of the house of Ahab on the Davidic dynasty and Judah. While the Chronicler's portrayal of Jehoram is unremittingly negative, he highlights God's promise to David as the grounds for hope in the most troubled of days. Again, the Chronicler's own community may take this example from history and apply it to their own circumstances.

III.e 2 Chronicles 21:1-22:9 - Jehoram and Ahaziah

God demonstrates his faithfulness to his promise to preserve David's house, even when the spirit of Ahab is manifested in specific Davidic kings.

III.e.i 2 Chronicles 21:1-7 - Jehoram's Reign

When Jehoshaphat died he was succeeded by his son Jehoram who was married to the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Probably under her influence, he commenced his reign by having his brothers and other officials murdered in order to eliminate an opposition to the apostate ways he intended to establish.

¹ Jehoshaphat slept with his ancestors and was buried with his ancestors in the city of David; his son Jehoram succeeded him.

2 Chronicles 21:1

Jehoshaphat slept with his ancestors. The metaphor of sleep hints at the expectation of awakening sometime in the future, and 'with his ancestors' hints that previous generations also join in this hope, and that Jehoshaphat like David is somehow now with them. Truly, Jehoshaphat passed from this life to eternal rest and reward. The Davidic kings were buried in a complex of tombs in Jerusalem.

His son Jehoram succeeded him. After the long reigns of two good kings, Asa and Jehoshaphat, the fate of Judah was about to go into reverse once again.

Jehoram actually co-reigned with his father from 853-848 BC. Jehoshaphat gave his son Jehoram to Athaliah in marriage, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel; refer to 2 Chronicles 18:1. This was a serious error because the reign of Ahaziah was a spiritual and national disaster for Judah as Jehoram walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, due to the influence of his wife. The ill effects of this were felt even to the next generation, because Ahaziah the son of Jehoram was also a bad king for Judah; refer to 2 Chronicles 22:2-4.

² He had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariah, Michael, and Shephatiah; all these were the sons of King Jehoshaphat of Judah. ³ Their father gave them many gifts, of silver, gold, and valuable possessions, together with fortified cities in Judah; but he gave the kingdom to Jehoram, because he was the firstborn. ⁴ When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father and was established, he put all his brothers to the sword, and also some of the officials of Israel. ⁵ Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned for eight years in Jerusalem. ⁶ 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. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 21:2-6

Their father gave them many gifts, of silver, gold, and valuable possessions, together with fortified cities in Judah. Jehoshaphat followed the same wise policy with his sons that Rehoboam had previously followed in 2 Chronicles 11:18-23 - to scatter them throughout the kingdom and away from the capital so they would not be a concentrated threat to the son who was chosen to succeed him, Jehoram.

Jehoram reigned between 853-841 BC, including a co-regency with his father from 853-848 BC; refer to 2 Kings 1:17 and the comment made on 2 Kings 8:16. His marriage to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, implicated him in the evil ways of that kingdom.

Perhaps some people thought that the marriage between the royal families of the Kingdom of Judah and the Kingdom of Israel would lift up the Kingdom of Israel spiritually. It did not work out that way. Instead, it brought the Kingdom of Judah down spiritually.

He put all his brothers to the sword, and also some of the officials of Israel.

Once in sole possession of the throne, Jehoram demonstrated his true character through the murder of his brothers and other possible rivals, a policy that Athaliah would later repeat for herself: <<*Now when Athaliah, Ahaziah's mother, saw that her son was dead, she set about to destroy all the royal family of the house of Judah*>> (2 Chronicles 22:10). Alliance with the ungodly would bring the dynasty to the brink of destruction.

Despite Jehoshaphat's wise policy of scattering his sons, Jehoram made it a point to murder all his brothers so they would not be any kind of a threat against his reign or voice opposition to his policies that would reverse the reforms of his father and grandfather in bringing the nation back to the Lord. Jehoram's mother Athaliah was herself the daughter of the wicked Queen Jezebel and it seems likely that she was the influence and even the instigator of Jehoram's wicked actions and apostate policies.

He walked in the way of the kings of Israel. This was not a compliment. While the southern Kingdom of Judah had a mixture of godly and wicked kings, the northern Kingdom of Israel had nothing but evil, God-rejecting kings. Refer to the comment made on 2 Kings 8:18.

⁷ Yet the Lord would not destroy the house of David because of the covenant that he had made with David, and since he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his descendants for ever.

2 Chronicles 21:7

Because of the covenant that he had made with David is the Chronicler's comment added to his source; refer to 1 Chronicles 17:14. The implication is that Jehoram's evil was great enough to justify such judgement, but God withheld it out of faithfulness to his ancestor David.

A lamp to him and to his descendants for ever. A metaphor of persistence and permanence in the darkest times, perhaps suggested by the constantly burning temple lamps; refer to 2 Chronicles 13:11. As the subsequent narrative shows, the Davidic line will be brought perilously close to extinction through murder and war, until it hangs by the slenderest thread. Against all odds, the dynasty will be preserved in God's grace, but Jehoram must still bear the punishment of his own wickedness; refer to the comments made on 2 Kings 8:19 and 8:20-22.

III.e.ii 2 Chronicles 21:8-10 - Revolt of Edom

Perhaps emboldened by Moab's rebellion from Israel a few years earlier, Edom revolted against the rule of King Jehoram of Judah, who was also called Joram. Jehoram led his army to Edom to put down the rebellion, but his efforts failed. At the same time, the western priestly town of Libnah revolted against Judah, apparently because of Jehoram's idolatrous practices. Philistines and Arabians also attacked Judah and plundered the royal palace, carrying away all its possessions and many of Jehoram's wives and sons.



Edom and Libnah Revolt 848 BC

⁸ In his days Edom revolted against the rule of Judah and set up a king of their own. ⁹ Then Jehoram crossed over with his commanders and all his chariots. He set out by night and attacked the Edomites, who had surrounded him and his chariot commanders. ¹⁰ So Edom has been in revolt against the rule of Judah to this day. At that time Libnah also revolted against his rule, because he had forsaken the Lord, the God of his ancestors.

2 Chronicles 21:8-10

In his days Edom revolted against the rule of Judah and set up a king of their own. For some time, Edom was essentially a vassal kingdom to Judah and owed them tribute, i.e. taxes. Under the reign of Jehoram, the leaders of Edom sensed weakness in Judah and their opportunity to free themselves. During the times that Judah was faithful to the Lord they had peace but as soon as they turned away from God then it seems that powerful resolution came upon these nations to rise up against Judah and overcome them, or at least take control of their own lands.

He set out by night and attacked the Edomites, who had surrounded him and his chariot commanders. No specific outcome of this battle is recorded; perhaps it was inconclusive. Yet because of the Edom's continued revolt against Judah, it was evident that Judah did not exert itself over Edom again and they remained somewhat independent.

So Edom has been in revolt against the rule of Judah to this day. This is evidence of the weakness of the kingdom under Jehoram. He thought that the marriage alliance with Ahab and the Kingdom of Israel would make Judah stronger, but this act of disobedience only made them weaker: militarily, economically and, most important of all, spiritually.

Libnah was a Judahite city on the border with Philistia. Nothing else is known of this trouble in Libnah, a town of uncertain location on Judah's western border not far from Lachish. This account is taken from 2 Kings 8:20-22, with the additional comment that the revolts happened because Jehoram had forsaken the Lord, the God of his ancestors; refer to 1 Chronicles 28:9. It was a town that was given to the priests (Joshua 21:13) and it is possible that they revolted against Jehoram's moves towards paganism.

III.e.iii 2 Chronicles 21:11-17 - Elijah's Letter

Because of his wickedness, Jehoram received prophetic warning from the Lord through a letter sent to him by the prophet Elijah. It warned him that his people, especially his family, faced destruction because of his actions and that he would die an agonising death. The destruction, particularly on his family, came from the Philistines and Arab nations.

¹¹ Moreover, he made high places in the hill country of Judah, and led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into unfaithfulness, and made Judah go astray. ¹² A letter came to him from the prophet Elijah, saying: ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of your father David: Because you have not walked in the ways of your father Jehoshaphat or in the ways of King Asa of Judah, ¹³ but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem into unfaithfulness, as the house of Ahab led Israel into unfaithfulness, and because you also have killed your brothers, members of your father’s house, who were better than yourself, ¹⁴ see, the Lord will bring a great plague on your people, your children, your wives, and all your possessions, ¹⁵ and you yourself will have a severe sickness with a disease of your bowels, until your bowels come out, day after day, because of the disease.’

2 Chronicles 21:11-15

Moreover, he made high places in the hill country of Judah, and led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into unfaithfulness, and made Judah go astray. This is the Chronicler’s own material. In contrast to his father Jehoshaphat, who sought to suppress the pagan high places: <<*His heart was courageous in the ways of the Lord; and furthermore he removed the high places and the sacred poles from Judah*>> (2 Chronicles 17:6), Jehoram actually promotes their construction, probably as a consequence of his marriage alliance with the northern kingdom. He is the first Judæan king who actually constructed high places, among which is probably to be counted a Baal temple in Jerusalem. This would be destroyed after his wife Athaliah had been deposed as queen and his grandson Joash was made the rightful king: <<*Then all the people went to the house of Baal, and tore it down; his altars and his images they broke in pieces, and they killed Mattan, the priest of Baal, in front of the altars*>> (2 Chronicles 23:17).

And made Judah go astray or commit whoredom was a traditional term among the prophets for apostasy into idolatry: <<*You took some of your garments, and made for yourself colourful shrines, and on them played the whore; nothing like this has ever been or ever shall be*>> (Ezekiel 16:16), and: <<*Ephraim is joined to idols – let him alone. When their drinking is ended, they indulge in sexual orgies; they love lewdness more than their glory*>> (Hosea 4:17-18). Their idolatry was likened to whoredom for two reasons. First, the worship of these pagan sex/fertility gods and goddesses often involved immorality with a pagan priestess or priest. Second, since Israel was obligated to be faithful to God as a wife is obligated to be faithful to her husband, their idolatry was like whoredom in a spiritual sense.

A letter came to him from the prophet Elijah. As always in Chronicles, the errant king is subject to prophetic rebuke; here, it takes the singular form of a letter

from Elijah the prophet. The last years of Elijah's ministry overlapped with the beginning of Jehoram's reign. Just as he had doggedly opposed Ahab in 1 Kings Chapters 17-18, Elijah now condemns Ahab's spiritual successor for leading Judah into idolatry and for murdering his own brothers.

Elijah's main ministry was to the kings of the northern tribes, the Kingdom of Israel. Yet on occasion God also used him to speak to kings of Judah, this time through a letter.

That Jehoram walked in the way of the kings of Israel was God's main complaint against him. He had refused to follow the pattern of his father and grandfather, and instead decided to follow the example of his father-in-law Ahab.

Because you also have killed your brothers, members of your father's house, who were better than yourself. God considered the brothers of Jehoram to be more worthy successors to the throne of Judah than Jehoram himself.

You yourself will have a severe sickness with a disease of your bowels. God promised this painful ailment would come to Jehoram as a punishment for his sins.

Jehoram's death, when it came, has a number of similarities to the divinely ordained death of King Herod Antipas who had ruled during the time of Jesus and had persecuted the fledgling church: <<On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat on the platform, and delivered a public address to them. The people kept shouting, 'The voice of a god, and not of a mortal!' And immediately, because he had not given the glory to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died>> (Acts 12:21-23).

¹⁶ The Lord aroused against Jehoram the anger of the Philistines and of the Arabs who are near the Ethiopians. ¹⁷ They came up against Judah, invaded it, and carried away all the possessions they found that belonged to the king's house, along with his sons and his wives, so that no son was left to him except Jehoahaz, his youngest son.

2 Chronicles 21:16-17

The Lord aroused against Jehoram the anger of the Philistines and of the Arabs who are near the Ethiopians. This was another judgement against Jehoram - to bring enemies against him to trouble his reign. The destruction of Jehoram's own family is decreed, to be fulfilled at the hands of the Philistines and of the Arabians, while Jehoram himself is condemned to a fatal bowel disease (v.15).

Along with his sons and his wives, so that no son was left to him except Jehoahaz, his youngest son. This was a fitting judgement against Jehoram. In trying to protect his own throne he murdered all his brothers, and eventually found that all his sons were taken except one. God spared one in order to fulfil his promise to keep a descendant of David on the throne.

III.e.iv 2 Chronicles 21:18-20 - Disease and Death of Jehoram

Even the loss of his family did not cause Jehoram to repent before the Lord and so the prophecy of his agonising illness and death also came to pass. He suffered for two years before dying. He died without being honoured by his people.

¹⁸ After all this the Lord struck him in his bowels with an incurable disease. ¹⁹ In course of time, at the end of two years, his bowels came out because of the disease, and he died in great agony. His people made no fire in his honour, like the fires made for his ancestors. ²⁰ He was thirty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned for eight years in Jerusalem. He departed with no one's regret. They buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.

2 Chronicles 21:18-20

After all this the Lord struck him in his bowels with an incurable disease. Again, this was a fitting judgement. There was a sense in which Jehoram was rotten spiritually from within; here, God simply caused the physical condition of his body to correspond with the spiritual condition of his soul - so he died in severe pain. The Targum seems to intimate that he had a constipation and inflammation in his bowels; and that at last his bowels gushed out. On disease as divine punishment, refer to 2 Chronicles 16:12 and 26:19-21, and the comment made on John 9:2.

In course of time, at the end of two years. Apparently Jehoram suffered for two years. This was a long time to lie under such an intolerably painful disease; and yet all this was but a typical hell, a foretaste of eternal torments, unless he repented.

His people made no fire in his honour, like the fires made for his ancestors. He was one of the most unloved kings in the history of Judah. Others had fires lit to honour their passing, such as his grandfather Asa: <<*They buried him in the tomb that he had hewn out for himself in the city of David. They laid him on a bier that had been filled with various kinds of spices prepared by the perfumer's art; and they made a very great fire in his honour*>> (2 Chronicles 16:14), but no one it seems mourned this apostate king.

He departed with no one's regret. This compromising and sinful king was not mourned when he died.

They buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings. Jehoram's exclusion from burial in the tombs of the kings is a final indication that he belonged to the ways of Ahab rather than David.