



Second Chronicles - Chapter Twenty Three

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

III.f 2 Chronicles 22:10-23:7 - Athaliah Seizes the Throne (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Three

The information in this chapter is drawn mainly from 2 Kings 11:4-20, with numerous changes to reflect the Chronicler's particular concerns. After six years of hiding the young son of the late king, the priest Jehoiada brought together the senior people from Judah in the temple. He ordered the priests and Levites to take up strategic positions in the temple complex in order to guard the king designate. Once the guard was in place, Joash was proclaimed as the new king.

When Queen Athaliah heard the commotion she came to the temple and was alarmed to see a new king. She cried out treason but, at this, Jehoiada had her arrested and taken out of the temple complex to be executed. After this, the people went to the temple dedicated to Baal, destroyed it and killed the priest that served there. Jehoiada then instructed the Levitical priests to assume their rightful duties in the temple and King Joash was set upon his throne.

¹ But in the seventh year Jehoiada took courage, and entered into a compact with the commanders of the hundreds, Azariah son of Jeroham, Ishmael son of Jehohanan, Azariah son of Obed, Maaseiah son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat son of Zichri. ² They went about through Judah and gathered the Levites from all the towns of Judah, and the heads of families of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 23:1-2

But in the seventh year Jehoiada took courage, and entered into a compact. This is the Chronicler's addition, mentioning the role of the Levites and the heads of families of Israel, as well as military figures, in the uprising against Athaliah; refer to the comment made on 2 Kings 11:4. Other references to the Levites in their key role of defending the king and the sanctity of the temple have been added in vv.5-8.

Jehoiada was a godly man who was concerned with restoring the throne of David to the line of David, and taking it away from this daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. He was also the husband of Jehoshabeath, the woman who hid the young boy Joash and protected him from the Athaliah's massacre; refer to 2 Chronicles 22:11.

³ Then the whole assembly made a covenant with the king in the house of God. Jehoiada said to them, 'Here is the king's son! Let him reign, as the Lord promised concerning the sons of David.'

2 Chronicles 23:3

Then the whole assembly made a covenant with the king in the house of God. From the place where the oath was made and the context of the oath, it can be seen that the worship of the true God was not dead in Judah. These captains could respond readily to their responsibility before the Lord.

The assembly was the representative body of leaders of the people. Wise kings sought the advice and support of this body in their undertakings; refer to 1 Chronicles 13:2 and 29:1; and 2 Chronicles 30:2. It was only right that they should be summoned to attend on this momentous occasion.

The covenant with the king probably included the arrangements under which Joash would rule, including Jehoiada's supervisory regency until Joash reached adulthood; refer to 2 Chronicles 24:4.

Here is the king's son! This was a dramatic moment. For six years everyone believed there were no more surviving heirs of David's royal line and there was no legitimate ruler to displace the wicked Queen Athaliah. The secret had to be secure, because the king's son would be immediately killed if his existence were revealed. The captains must have been shocked by the sight of this six year old heir to the throne. One reason Athaliah was able to reign for six years was that no one knew of any legitimate alternative. Many people live under the reign of Satan because they do not really know there is a legitimate King ready to take reign in their life.

Let him reign, as the Lord promised concerning the sons of David. The Chronicler's addition affirms that the coup was in keeping with God's promise to preserve David's line; refer to 1 Chronicles 17:14, 2 Chronicles 6:10 and 21:7.

⁴ This is what you are to do: one-third of you, priests and Levites, who come on duty on the sabbath, shall be gatekeepers, ⁵ one-third shall be at the king's house, and one-third at the Gate of the Foundation; and all the people shall be in the courts of the house of the Lord. ⁶ Do not let anyone enter the house of the Lord except the priests and ministering Levites; they may enter, for they are holy, but all the other people shall observe the instructions of the Lord. ⁷ The Levites shall surround the king, each with his weapons in his hand; and whoever enters the house shall be killed. Stay with the king in his comings and goings.'

2 Chronicles 23:4-7

This is what you are to do. Jehoiada had a plan to depose the wicked Queen Athaliah and to replace her with the child king. These leaders needed to follow his plan carefully, and to do it on the Sabbath. Jehoiada chose the Sabbath for the day of the coup, because that was the day when the guards changed their shifts and they could assemble two groups of guards at the temple at the same time without attracting attention. The duties of the guards were typically on a seven day cycle: <<*The gatekeepers were on the four sides, east, west, north, and south; and their kindred who were in their villages were obliged to come in every seven days, in turn, to be with them*>> (1 Chronicles 9:24-25).

The Chronicler adds that all the people participated in the coup, although he is careful to note that they remained in the courts and did not enter the temple. Only the priests and ministering Levites were permitted to enter the Holy Place.

III.g 2 Chronicles 23:8-24:27 - Joash

Joash's rule marks not only the restoration of the throne to the rightful Davidic king but also Judah's return to its covenant commitment to be the Lord's people (v.16). Thanks largely to Jehoiada and his watchful concern for the nation's life, these reforms are successful for a while, but things go awry once the old high priest has died. Joash is the first in a sequence of three kings, to be followed by Amaziah and Uzziah, whose reigns begin on a relatively positive note but end in failure or ignominy because they reject godly counsel.

III.g.i 2 Chronicles 23:8-11 - Joash Crowned King

Once the Levites had made the temple complex secure, the priest Jehoiada crowned Joash as the new king of Judah.

⁸ The Levites and all Judah did according to all that the priest Jehoiada commanded; each brought his men, who were to come on duty on the sabbath, with those who were to go off duty on the sabbath; for the priest Jehoiada did not dismiss the divisions.

2 Chronicles 23:8

The Levites and all Judah did according to all that the priest Jehoiada commanded. This was an important plan that had to be followed carefully. Queen Athaliah was a powerful enemy and many had a vested interest in her corrupt reign.

Each brought his men, who were to come on duty on the sabbath, with those who were to go off duty on the sabbath. The coup was timed for the changing of the temple and palace guards on the Sabbath day, to bring the maximum number of armed men into the temple precincts without arousing suspicion.

⁹ The priest Jehoiada delivered to the captains the spears and the large and small shields that had been King David's, which were in the house of God; ¹⁰ and he set all the people as a guard for the king, everyone with weapon in hand, from the south side of the house to the north side of the house, around the altar and the house.

2 Chronicles 23:9-10

The priest Jehoiada delivered to the captains the spears and the large and small shields that had been King David's. These men were equipped with weapons dating from the days of King David. It was fitting for these soldiers who would set the heir of David's royal line back on the throne of Judah to use these weapons which had belonged to King David.

Since it is not likely that the soldiers needed to be armed by the chief priest, it is probably the symbolism that is important here. The commanders are making it clear that they have allied themselves with David's cause, and at the same time they are receiving articles to be given to the new king as symbols of his royal power. The spear is a prominent royal weapon in the Books of Samuel; e.g. 1 Samuel 18:10-11 and 22:6. It was fitting for these soldiers who would set the heir of David's royal line back on the throne of Judah to use these weapons which had belonged to King David.

¹¹ Then he brought out the king's son, put the crown on him, and gave him the covenant; they proclaimed him king, and Jehoiada and his sons anointed him; and they shouted, 'Long live the king!'

2 Chronicles 23:11

Then he brought out the king's son. First the king's son had to be revealed. No one could support him and he could not take his rightful throne until he was brought out before the people.

Put the crown on him. Next the king's son had to be crowned. This was the public and official recognition of him as king.

Along with his coronation and anointing, Joash is presented with the covenant or testimony, which several interpreters understand to be the terms of his covenant with the assembly (v.3), while others think it is a copy of the laws of God, perhaps the Book of Deuteronomy, as specified in Deuteronomy 17:18, which states that the king should have his own copy of the Scriptures. This is the basis for the British custom of presenting the monarch with a copy of the Bible during the coronation service. It seems likely that Joash is presented with a list of divinely ordained laws, Hebrew 'edut. The king's son had to come with the Word of God. Joash probably appeared before the people holding the scrolls of God's Word. This is similar to the declaration of his later descendant King Josiah, who was an even greater reforming king: <<***The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord, keeping his commandments, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. All the people joined in the covenant***>> (2 Kings 23:3).

They proclaimed him king. The king's son had to be received. He had the royal right to impose his reign, but he instead allowed his rule to be received.

Jehoiada and his sons anointed him. The king's son could never fulfil his office without a divine anointing administered by the Lord's anointed priesthood.

Long live the king! The king's son received praise once he was recognised as their king. He was now accepted as the rightful and legitimate heir to David's throne.

III.g.ii 2 Chronicles 23:12-21 - Athaliah Deposed

The commotion coming from this excited crowd attracted the attention of the queen and she came to the temple to see what was happening. To her horror she discovered that a rightful heir to the throne had survived her earlier purge and that she was now deposed. Her protestations fell on deaf ears and she was taken outside of the temple complex to be executed.

The temple designated to Baal was the next target to be destroyed along with its priest. Jehoiada then set in place the order to the priests and Levites to minister in the temple as was their rightful place of duty to the Lord.

¹² When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she went into the house of the Lord to the people; ¹³ and

when she looked, there was the king standing by his pillar at the entrance, and the captains and the trumpeters beside the king, and all the people of the land rejoicing and blowing trumpets, and the singers with their musical instruments leading in the celebration. Athaliah tore her clothes, and cried, 'Treason! Treason!' ¹⁴ Then the priest Jehoiada brought out the captains who were set over the army, saying to them, 'Bring her out between the ranks; anyone who follows her is to be put to the sword.' For the priest said, 'Do not put her to death in the house of the Lord.' ¹⁵ So they laid hands on her; she went into the entrance of the Horse Gate of the king's house, and there they put her to death.

2 Chronicles 23:12-15

When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she went into the house of the Lord to the people. Attracted by the noise of the gathered crowd, the queen made the short journey from the palace to the temple.

When she looked, there was the king. For the usurper Queen Mother this was a horrifying sight. For six years she had ruled because she believed there were no legitimate claimants to the throne of David. Now she sees that one son of Ahaziah - Joash, her own grandson - escaped her murderous intent.

The pillar is probably either Boaz or Jachin, the pillars at the temple entrance: <<*He set up the pillars in front of the temple, one on the right, the other on the left; the one on the right he called Jachin, and the one on the left, Boaz*>> (2 Chronicles 3:17), refer also to the comment made on 2 Kings 11:14.

All the people of the land rejoicing and blowing trumpets. The people were not only rejoicing in the coronation of their rightful king, they were obviously weary of the wicked reign of Athaliah and were rejoicing in the knowledge that she had now lost her seat of power.

The Chronicler has added the reference to the singers with their musical instruments leading in the celebration, who are evidently Levites; refer to 1 Chronicles 23:5 and 25:6.

Athaliah's cry of Treason! Treason! shows that, as well as being blind to her own position as a violent usurper, she had no inkling that any of the house of David had survived her purges.

The charge of treason by Athaliah was not unfounded. This was treason against her government, but it was a well-founded and godly treason against a tyrannical, wicked ruler.

Bring her out between the ranks; anyone who follows her is to be put to the sword. This was both righteous and prudent. It was a just sentence against this woman who had murdered so many, and prudent precautions were taken so she could not mount a resistance.

Do not put her to death in the house of the Lord. Jehoiada's instruction to remove her from the temple precincts for execution is in order to avoid defiling the sacred site anymore; yet ironically, his own son will not be spared this fate: *<<But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the Lord. King Joash did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. As he was dying, he said, 'May the Lord see and avenge!''>>* (2 Chronicles 24:21-22).

She went into the entrance of the Horse Gate of the king's house, and there they put her to death. This was located outside of the temple complex but very close by as it was an entrance into the king's palace that was adjacent to the temple complex.

The Horse Gate is referred to elsewhere: *<<Above the Horse Gate the priests made repairs, each one opposite his own house>>* (Nehemiah 3:28), and: *<<The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes, and all the fields as far as the Wadi Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate towards the east, shall be sacred to the Lord. It shall never again be uprooted or overthrown>>* (Jeremiah 31:40).

¹⁶ Jehoiada made a covenant between himself and all the people and the king that they should be the Lord's people. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Jehoiada assigned the care of the house of the Lord to the levitical priests whom David had organised to be in charge of the house of the Lord, to offer burnt-offerings to the Lord, as it is written in the law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, according to the order of David. ¹⁹ He stationed the gatekeepers at the gates of the house of the Lord so that no one should enter who was in any way unclean. ²⁰ And he took the captains, the nobles, the governors of the people, and all the people of the land, and they brought the king down from the house of the Lord, marching through the upper gate to the king's house. They set the king on the royal throne. ²¹ So all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet after Athaliah had been killed with the sword.

2 Chronicles 23:16-21

Jehoiada made a covenant between himself and all the people and the king that they should be the Lord's people. The climax of these dramatic events is the ceremony of covenant renewal led by Jehoiada, in which the high priest, king, and people commit themselves afresh to be the Lord's people; refer to the comment made on 2 Kings 11:17. This shows that God intends that both kings and citizens have mutual obligations towards the other. Neither have absolute rights over or against the other. The covenant was between the Lord and the king and the people. They recommitted themselves to honour, obey, and serve God. Effectively, this meant the reaffirmation of the Law of Moses as the rule for the kingdom and the removal of pagan practices and cultic personnel.

The house of Baal in Jerusalem may have been built for Athaliah as part of the marriage alliance with the northern kingdom, much as Solomon had provided shrines for his foreign wives: <<*Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who offered incense and sacrificed to their gods*>> (1 Kings 11:7-8). In 2 Kings Chapter 10 Jehu supervised the destruction of the temple of Baal in Samaria. Here the temple of Baal in Jerusalem was destroyed, and appropriately destroyed by the people themselves.

They did not stop at destroying the building itself; they went on to destroy both the sacred objects dedicated to Baal and to kill Mattan, the priest of Baal, in front of the altars. The execution of Mattan carried out the requirement of God's Word directed against those who should lead others into false religion; refer to Deuteronomy 13:5-10.

Jehoiada assigned the care of the house of the Lord to the levitical priests whom David had organised to be in charge of the house of the Lord. The priest Jehoiada was careful to reinstitute these practices and customs according to Biblical patterns, based on what God had revealed to David and Moses. Verses 18b-19 are the Chronicler's addition, affirming that, as part of the covenant renewal, temple worship was also brought into proper conformity with the stipulations of Moses and David.

They set the king on the royal throne. After more than six dark years, now the rightful king of Judah once again ruled over his grateful people. It is no wonder that all the people of the land rejoiced. The people's rejoicing augmented the joy of temple worship, and sounded a note unheard since the days of Jehoshaphat; refer to 2 Chronicles 20:27. That the city was quiet was a sign of God's blessing, which often followed special acts of faith and obedience, as confirmed by 1 Chronicles 4:40 and 22:9, and 2 Chronicles 13:23, 14:4-5 and 20:30.