

**March 15, 2023, Lenten Midweek 4**

**Cleaning House: Joash**

2 Chronicles 24:1–4, 17–25

Psalms 122; Hebrews 10:19–25; John 2:13–22

Hymns: *LSB* 530, 451

Last week, we considered the reign of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah who made a marriage alliance with King Ahab of Israel. Upon Jehoshaphat's death, King Jehoram, the son-in-law of Ahab and Jezebel, ascended to the throne of his father and reigned in Judah. This was when the alliance of Judah and Israel bore disastrous fruit, for Jehoram *“walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife”* (2 Chronicles 21:6).

Jehoram's first act was to kill all six of his brothers to ensure no rivals. Jehoram reigned eight years, during which neighboring nations revolted and he led Judah into worshipping other gods. He died in agony, *“and he departed with no one's regret”* (21:20).

After Jehoram, Ahaziah, his youngest son, reigned for a year, following the counsel of his mother, Jehoram's widow Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab. Then Athaliah "***arose and destroyed all the royal family of the house of Judah***" (22:10). This woman was as wicked as her mother Jezebel, and, if that could be possible, more ambitious and bloodthirsty. Throughout this time, the house of God had been plundered by the royal family, desecrated, and ignored.

Throughout 2 Chronicles, we see that the state of the temple is representative of the spiritual state of Judah. When the king is far from God, the people are far from God, and therefore the temple is abused and abandoned. It doesn't take long for the temple to fall into disrepair.

Of Ahaziah's sons, only the infant Joash was rescued, hidden away by his aunt and uncle and spared. Queen Athaliah's reign of evil lasted six years while Joash was stashed in the temple. After all, Athaliah paid no attention to the temple after the silver and gold had been taken out.

Joash was declared king at seven years of age, when Athaliah was executed and Joash was brought out by his uncle Jehoiada, the priest, who had raised him. And it is written, ***“Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest”*** (24:2). That’s an odd phrase, and it hints at difficulty to come. But Jehoiada lived to 130, and while being counseled by Jehoiada, Joash did what was righteous.

During that time, Joash commenced a major renovation and cleaning of the temple. He restored the temple to its purpose and offered burnt offerings to the Lord again. It took a long time, but Joash was zealous for the project and made sure that it was completed. And all the days of Jehoiada the priest, worship was restored in Solomon’s temple.

But then Jehoiada died, and other counselors paid homage to Joash, flattering him. They led him to abandon the house of the Lord and serve the Asherim and the idols. The building he had spent so much time renovating, cleaning, and restoring was forsaken for the worship of dead idols. Joash was a weak king who was led by princes rather than principles. So, the wrath of God fell on Judah.

God sent prophets, but Joash paid no attention. The Word of God was of no interest. The prophets were rejected; God's appeal to turn Judah back was rejected. Finally, Jehoiada's son, the priest Zechariah, came to appeal to the king. Zechariah was a cousin to Joash—and like a brother, because he was the son of Joash's adoptive father. Surely, if anyone could get through to Joash, it would be Zechariah.

We read that *“the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah”* and he prophesied to the people, asking, *“Why do you break the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper?”* (24:20).

But for Zechariah's troubles, Joash conspired with the princes against him. As God's prophet and priest stood in the court of the very temple Joash had restored, they stoned him. As he was dying, Zechariah cried out, *“May the Lord see and avenge!”* (24:22), which recalls the blood of Abel crying out to the Lord when his brother killed him.

The temple had been restored so sacrifices could be made. Blood was supposed to be shed in its courts, but not by murder. The recently cleaned temple was defiled by wonton contempt of God's Word and the violent slaying of Zechariah.

Whatever pride Joash had in the temple was in vain when he rejected the Word of God and the Spirit, who dwelt in it.

Solomon's temple, which Joash spent so much money and time restoring, would be destroyed. Many years after Joash died, Nebuchadnezzar would overrun Jerusalem and raze the temple. It was later rebuilt in the time of Ezra and expanded by King Herod. That temple was destroyed by the Romans.

Kings indeed built impressive temples, and kings destroyed them. But even the kings who built and cleansed temples could be led astray. They often turned away from the God whose presence dwelt in the temple. They often turned away from the Word of the Lord. They often turned away from the purpose of the building itself. If their focus was on the building, then their eyes were not fixed on the God whose grace made the temple a meeting place with his glory.

We need a better king than Joash. We need a King who will restore the temple and never let it fall into disrepair. We need a Messiah who will save his people from their sins. We need Jesus Christ, the Son of Joash.

Jesus was also found in the temple as an infant. His life was threatened by the same King Herod who expanded the temple, and he was taken to safety by Joseph. As a young man, Jesus was always about his Father's business and at home in his Father's house. In fact, zeal for his Father's house consumed him, and the Son of Joash would cleanse the temple by overturning money-changers' tables and setting animals free. He restored the temple to its proper use. It was a house of prayer; it was a place to meet God in his gracious presence and receive the forgiveness of sins.

The prophets were sent to prepare Judah for the coming Messiah. But just as the Judeans rejected the prophets in the days of the monarchy, the Pharisees and lawyers of Jesus' day rejected the prophet John and the very Son of God.

All the innocent blood from Abel to Zechariah cried out in vengeance as God declared in his covenant with Noah, ***“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image”*** (Genesis 9:6).

Jesus also told a parable about this in which God sent one servant after another to his vineyard. The tenants mistreated and rejected them. Finally, God sent his Son, but he, too, was killed in cold jealousy. Whereas King Joash conspired to kill the priest Zechariah, it was the chief priests who conspired to send the Son of Joash to death.

Jesus did not cry out from the cross for vengeance, but, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”* (Luke 23:34). The blood of Jesus speaks forgiveness and peace to the many who have transgressed. His blood washes the stain of sin away and is true drink to life eternal.

We need a King who can provide a temple which will survive, which is not subject to the vagaries of politics. We need a temple which is beyond the reach of princes and a sinful people. We need a temple which cannot be destroyed so we can come into God’s presence. And The Son of Joash has restored the temple for eternity.

Our King, the Lord Jesus Christ, bore the temple in his body.

Although his body was destroyed, he did not see corruption but was rebuilt in three days. This temple will never be destroyed or desecrated but is eternally clean. He will continue to be a place of refuge for sinners. He will continue to offer his body and blood as the pledge of the new covenant.

We have an eternal temple for which we yearn and to which we are headed. In him, we worship in spirit and truth, and in him, we have life eternal.

Amen