



"Man must cease attributing his problems to his environment, and learn again to exercise his will—his personal responsibility in the realm of faith and morals."

—Albert Schweitzer

23-Jul-10

## The High Places (Part Two)

As we saw in Part One, the high places—and more specifically, the idolatrous worship they came to represent—were a critical issue in the histories of Israel and Judah. Paganism was especially prevalent among the northern [ten tribes](#) after their God-inspired separation from the [house of David](#), but it had its place in the southern Kingdom of Judah as well. In fact, even though the Kingdom of Israel seems to have been more idolatrous, and its kings worse, [God](#) focuses far more on the high places built, destroyed, or left alone by various kings of *Judah*—the royal line to which much had been given and from which much was required.

Once Jeroboam—the first king of the northern tribes—set the stage for idolatrous worship by building high places, creating his own profane priesthood, and moving the Feast of Tabernacles back one month, all of the kings of Israel followed suit. The high places proved to be a permanent feature until Assyria carried Israel into captivity. Judah, however, had more of a love-hate relationship with its high places, and God spends more time detailing the spiritual highs and lows of its leadership.

King Jehoshaphat (or Joash) of Judah, though he overcame much and did many good things, did not quite have the fortitude to rid the kingdom of its high places. To understand him, one must begin with his grandmother, Athaliah, the daughter of King Ahab of Israel and his queen, Jezebel, perhaps the most wicked royal couple ever to rule over God's people. Athaliah was thus actually of the house of Israel, though she married into the house of Judah when she became the wife of Jehoram (or Joram). This union bore evil fruit, for, like his ancestor Solomon, Jehoram could not resist the negative influence of his wife and her family. Jehoram "walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother advised him to do wickedly. Therefore he did evil in the sight of the LORD, like the house of Ahab; for they were his counselors after the death of his father, to his destruction" ([II Chronicles 22:3-4](#)).

After Jehoram's death, his son, Ahaziah, reigned in his place, but only for one year ([II Kings 8:26](#)). His short reign was a continuation of his father's, as "he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the LORD, like the house of Ahab, for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab" ([II Kings 8:27](#)).

After Ahaziah's death, his mother Athaliah had the male heirs killed, and she unlawfully made herself queen. However, before she could kill Ahaziah's son, Jehoash, Ahaziah's sister hid him in the Temple, where he remained for six years while Athaliah ruled over Judah. When Jehoash was seven, though, Jehoiada the priest—his uncle—crowned him as king and had Athaliah put to death ([II Kings 11:4-16](#); [II Chronicles 23:1-15](#)). Also at that time, the people of Judah—likely under Jehoiada's direction—tore down the temple of Baal, broke its altars and images, and killed the priest of Baal ([II Kings 11:17-18](#); [II Chronicles 23:16-17](#)).

After this turbulent start, Jehoash reigned for forty years, which God summarizes in [II Kings 12:2-3](#): "Jehoash did what was right in the sight of the LORD all the days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him. But the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places."

Jehoash did some good things, such as overcoming the bottlenecks that were keeping the Temple from being repaired ([II Kings 12:4-16](#)). Not swayed by the ways of his grandmother or the family of Ahab, he was certainly a more moral king than his father or grandfather. Nevertheless, during their reigns, influenced as they were by the kings of Israel, high places had been constructed—ones that Jehoash failed to destroy. He was apparently not serious enough about the spiritual state of his realm to remove these obvious stumblingblocks.

God's assessment in verse 2 contains a critical detail: Jehoash did the right thing "all the days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him." Jehoash's uncle was the real, uncrowned hero, the moral force that kept the king essentially on track during his reign. He re-instituted the covenant, and as a result the people were reminded of their obligations and motivated to rid the land of Baal-worship ([II Kings 11:17-19](#)). Upon his death, Jehoiada received a royal burial "in the City of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God and His house" ([II Chronicles 24:15-16](#))—a noble interment that Jehoash himself did not receive.

When Jehoiada's counsel ceased, so did Jehoash's uprightness:

Now after the death of Jehoiada the leaders of Judah came and bowed down to the king. And the king listened to them. Therefore they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served wooden images and idols; and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem because of their trespass. ([II Chronicles 24:17-18](#))

In response to this [sin](#), God raised up Jehoiada's son, Zechariah—a cousin whom Jehoash probably grew up with—to reprove Jehoash: "Thus says God: 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He also has forsaken you'" ([II Chronicles 24:20](#)). The king commanded that Zechariah be stoned in the Temple courtyard for his testimony, forgetting not only God but also all the [kindness](#) that Zechariah's father had shown him ([II Chronicles 24:15-22](#); see [Luke 11:51](#)). Fittingly, Jehoash's servants later conspired against him and killed him, and though he was buried in Jerusalem, he was not buried with the other kings ([II Chronicles 24:25](#)).

God had provided young Jehoash with a wise and moral guide, and as long as Jehoiada lived, Jehoash did well. But he never really made his uncle's ways—God's ways—his own; he was spiritually strong only while in the presence of a godly man. Upon Jehoiada's death, Jehoash began

listening to foolish advice and even succumbed to re-instituting idolatry. He became similar to today's politicians, always testing to see which way the wind is blowing so he can align himself with other centers of power.

When Jehoiada lived, Jehoash aligned himself with the priest. When Jehoiada died, Jehoash aligned himself with the other leaders of Judah, although that meant leaving God. Thus, Jehoash did what was right in the sight of God while under the aegis of a moral father figure. Nevertheless, the high places built during his father's and grandfather's reigns were not destroyed because they were not personally abhorrent to him. He was content to have them, perhaps because he did not want to alienate the leaders in Judah—who were biding their time until the old priest died to fashion the kingdom according to their own tastes. Jehoash lacked the character to do what is right regardless of what the herd was doing.

Next time, we will look at Jehoash's son, Amaziah, another king who nominally did what was right in the sight of God.

- David C. Grabbe

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Character Matters](#)**

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh, reflecting on President Clinton's lack of moral character (and the foolish double-mindedness of the people who twice put him in office), reflects that in God's kingdom only those who have God's approval, those who have developed iron-clad character will be qualified to rule. Americans unfortunately have separated legality and competence from morality and character. There is a direct correlation between the character of the leader and the morality of the people (having a deadly ripple effect to the entire population). In selection of leaders, whether king or elder, God has emphasized that character has to be at the core. A leader has to practice what he preaches. We have been called to a process of character building, qualifying to rule in God's Kingdom.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[What Do You Do in the Dark?](#)**

by Mike Ford

Character has been defined as "what you do in the dark." It is what you are when no one else can see you. Mike Ford uses the story of Joseph in Potiphar's house to extract some lessons about character.

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