

A TALE OF TWO JOASH'S

(or, what a lack of determination can do to you)

Tonight, we're going to look at some examples of a lack of determination in Scripture. I'm going to read from the book of Second Kings chapter thirteen. In this chapter there's an interesting description of an overlap of the *King of Judah* and the *King of Israel*. Not only did these two kings have the same name, they're both an example of a lack of determination. But first, let's start with a little historical context.

King Solomon, whom the Lord loved and greatly blessed, did not remain true to Jehovah in his later years. His downfall was due to his lust for beautiful women. He began to marry foreign women, which he had to know was *forbidden* in the Law of Moses, and all of those women demanded to be allowed to worship their foreign gods. Not only did Solomon set up various temples and places of worship for the foreign gods of these women—which once again, he had to have known this was forbidden by the Law—eventually he *himself* started worshipping those foreign gods. The story of how the *wisest man on earth* allowed his heart to be turned away from God is a tragic story indeed. Anyway, God came to Solomon and pronounced judgment on him for his great sin.

One of the judgements was that the nation of Israel would be divided into *two* kingdoms, and that those kingdoms would wage war on one another until they returned from Babylonian exile. That judgment came to pass after Solomon's death. The nation was divided into the Southern Kingdom (which included the tribes of Judah and Benjamin), and the Northern Kingdom (which included the rest of the tribes of Israel). The Southern Kingdom was called "Judah" and the Northern Kingdom was called "Israel" (or "Ephraim" or "Samaria"). From that day until their return from Babylon centuries later, there would always *two* kings of the divided nation. The kings of "Israel" were all bad. None of them were faithful to God—though some of them *did* respect God (to a degree) and seek the help of His prophets. The kings of "Judah" weren't much better, the exceptions being:

Asa (son of Rehoboam)

Jehoshaphat (son of Asa)

Joash (son of Ahaziah)

Amaziah (son of Joash)

Azariah, or Uzziah (son of Amaziah)

Jothan (son of Uzziah)

Hezekiah (son of Ahaz)

Josiah (son of Jedidah)

For a large portion of his life, Joash was one of the good kings of *Judah*. He reigned over Judah for about 41 years. In the thirty-seventh year of his reign, another man, also named Joash became King of *Israel*. This Joash reigned over Israel for 16 years. So, for a space of about four years, both the King of Judah and the King of Israel had the same name. This might help us to understand what is said of Joash in II. Kings thirteen:

*And Jehoahaz [king of Israel] slept with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria; and Joash [Jehoash] his son became king [of Israel] in his place. In the thirty-seventh year of **Joash king of Judah**, Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz, became king over Israel in Samaria, {and reigned} sixteen years.*

*And he did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not turn away from all the sins of **Jeroboam the son of Nebat**, with which he made Israel sin, but he walked in them. Now the rest of the acts of Joash [Jehoash] and all that he did and his might with which he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? So Joash [Jehoash] slept with his fathers, and **Jeroboam** [not the son of Nebat, but Jehash's son] sat on his throne; and Joash [Jehoash] was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.*

The story in this chapter is about Joash, a bad king of Israel. But it takes place during the reign of Joash, the king of Judah. It's also confusing to see that there are two "Jeroboams" mentioned. These are two different men as well. Jeroboam (the son of Nebat) is Jeroboam I, the first king of Israel after the division of the nation. He reigned 22 years. The other Jeroboam is Jeroboam II, the son of Joash. Next, the writer gives us a flashback of something that happened while Joash was still alive.

When Elisha became sick with the illness of which he was to die, Joash [Jehoash] the king of Israel came down to him and wept over him and said, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!"

*And Elisha said to him, "Take a bow and arrows." So he took a bow and arrows. Then he said to the king of Israel, "Put your hand on the bow." And he put his hand {on it,} then Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands and he said, "Open the window toward the east," and he opened {it,} Then Elisha said, "Shoot!" And he shot. And he said, "**The LORD'S arrow of victory, even the arrow of victory over Aram; for you shall defeat the Arameans at Aphek until you have destroyed {them.}**"*

*Then he said, "Take the arrows," and he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, "**Strike the ground,**" and he struck {it} three times and stopped. So the man of God was angry with him and said, "**You should have struck five or six times, then you would have struck Aram until you would have destroyed {it.}** But now you shall **strike Aram {only} three times.**" [the degree of our commitment and determination to co-operate with God so He can fulfill His promise]*

II. Kings 13:9-19

I want to use this event to illustrate what I've been saying for years in this chat room—which is that God's promises, whether natural or spiritual, are *not* unconditional. This story shows that just because it is God's will or desire to give us something, that doesn't mean we will get it. The king of Israel came to Elisha on his death bed and pleaded for help against the armies of Syria, which were taking more and more territory from Israel. Through the prophet, God gave King Joash a promise. Let's look at it again:

*...then Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands and he said, "Open the window toward the east," and he opened {it,} Then Elisha said, "Shoot!" And he shot. And he said, "**The LORD'S arrow of victory, even the arrow of victory over Aram; for you shall defeat the Arameans at Aphek until you have destroyed {them.}**"*

Is there any doubt that victory over the Syrians was *promised* by God?

Is there any doubt that God was predicting a good *natural* destiny for King Joash?

If the story ended *there* it would be a great example for Calvinist's, Hyper-Sovereignty preachers, and other passive religious leaders to use, in order to prove that God is totally responsible to bring His promises to pass in our lives—as long as we keep “believing” He will do so, of course. However, the story *doesn't* end there. The very next event shows us that the things God promises can be, and often are, missed or forfeited.

After shooting the arrow out the window, Elisha instructs the king to take the remainder of arrows in his hand and “strike the ground” with them. Joash didn't know it but this was Elisha's way of discerning *how much determination* the king would exert in obtaining the promise of victory. Unfortunately, the king didn't show much determination (symbolically) when striking the ground because only hit the ground three times. He must have been under the impression that since God had declared victory through His prophet, that victory would be sure *regardless* of the level of determination or co-operation he displayed.

The Bible says Elisha was “*angry with him and said 'you should have struck five or six times, then you would have struck Aram until you would have destroyed it. But now, you shall strike Aram only three times'*”. Isn't that a little unfair? I mean, how was the king to know how many times he was supposed to strike the ground? All Elisha said was to strike the ground; he didn't specify how many times.

But it wasn't the exact amount of times that mattered. What Elisha was looking for was a strong determination to obtain the promise. A strong determination would have caused the king to *keep* hitting the ground again and again. The fact that he only hit the ground three times showed his lack of determination to achieve the promised victory. It revealed a *lazy spirit* in the man. The king probably thought God was (totally) responsible to produce the victory he promised the king!

The same is true of us. God has promised a glorious destiny to those who love Him, to those who will remain faithful to Him, and to those who will follow His Son *wherever* He goes. But that destiny can and will be missed or forfeited if we do not co-operate with Him in a very serious and determined manner. The thing that determines whether or not we will receive the promise God has made to us is NOT simply the fact that God has made the promise. The thing that will determine whether or not we receive the promise is the degree of our commitment and determination to co-operate with God so He can fulfill that promise!

God promised the King of Israel victory over his enemies. But the Lord *could not* fulfill that promise because the king's heart was not fully committed or determined to obtain the victory. This king might have been the first Calvinist because he assumed the promised victory would be “all of God and none of him”! Apparently he thought that as long as he kept “believing” God would fulfill that promise, it would be fulfilled.

Now let's look at the *other* Joash, the King of Judah. This Joash arose as a bright star in a dark period of Judah's history. For fifteen years Judah had been ruled by Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah, a family that was infamous for their brutality. As a baby, Joash was rescued from murder by his aunt Jehosheba, and was raised by her and her husband, Jehoiada the priest. When Joash was seven years old, Jehoiada, in a stunning display of courage and loyalty to the Lord, overthrew the usurper Athaliah and placed Joash (the Lord's choice) on the throne. He showed Joash how to renew the national covenant to follow Jehovah.

Joash's first royal act (under Jehoiada's supervision) was to destroy the nearby temple of Baal. Because he walked under the godly influence of his adopted father, Joash eliminated many (but not all) of the evils that were instituted by previous rulers of Judah. Most notably, he supervised the reconstruction of Solomon's temple, which was deteriorating with age at that point.

God allowed Jehoiada to live to be 130 years old—the oldest age recorded since before the flood—in order to be a godly influence on Joash. He didn't die until Joash was over 30 years old. During all that time Joash followed the Lord. But after Jehoiada died, Joash's *lack* of determination to serve the Lord becomes evident.

*In the seventh year of Jehu Jehoash began to reign; and forty years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba. And **Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him.** But the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places.*

II. Kings 12:1-3

*And when they had finished it, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada, whereof were made vessels for the house of the LORD, even vessels to minister, and to offer withal, and spoons, and vessels of gold and silver. And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the LORD continually **all the days of Jehoiada.***

*But Jehoiada waxed old, and was full of days when he died; an hundred and thirty years old was he when he died. And **they buried him in the city of David among the kings,** because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house.*

*Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. **Then the king hearkened unto them.** And they left [forsoke] the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear.*

*And the Spirit of God came upon **Zechariah the son of Jehoiada** the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD. Thus Joash the king **remembered not the kindness** which Jehoiada his [adopted] father had done to him, but **slew his son.** And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon it, and require it.*

And it came to pass at the end of the year, that the host of Syria came up against him: and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus. For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the

*LORD delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. So they executed judgment against Joash. And when they were departed from him, (for they left him in great diseases,) his own servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and slew him on his bed, and he died: and they buried him in the city of David, **but they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings.***

II. Chronicles 24:11-25

When the godly influence was taken from Joash's life, he began to depart from the Lord because he had no determination of his own to serve the Lord. The determination to serve God came from Jehoiada. After the death of Jehoiada the princes of Judah came to the king and flattered him. Joash returned their adulation by sponsoring their cults, which he had himself had crushed just a few years earlier.

God began to send troubles on the nation in an effort to bring them to repentance. Syria attacked Jerusalem. But rather than call on God for aid, as other successful kings of Judah had done, Joash plundered the valuables from the Temple and offered them as a *bribe* to the king of Syria. The king withdrew for the time being, but he would soon be back. In the mean time, God sent prophets to explain *the connection* between their faithlessness and their problems with Syria but the king and his new cronies refused to hear.

Finally, the Lord sent Jehoiada's son Zechariah to plead with Joash. Because of the debt he owed his adopted father, you'd think Joash would have paid at least a minimum of respect to his son, Zechariah. But he didn't. Instead, he sentenced Zechariah to death by stoning. As he lay dying, Zechariah said, "*May the LORD see this and call you to account.*"

By the way, many scholars believe it was this martyrdom Jesus referred to when he said: "*From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.*" (Lk. 11:51)

In any case, not only did Joash depart from the serving the Lord after Jehoiada died, he became very wicked. After Joash had Zacharias murdered, Syria launched a second attack, this time slaughtering the nobility and plundering their wealth. Since the king of Syria had only sent a small strike force, Joash quickly assembled a full army of Israel and struck in defense of his kingdom but he lacked the Lord's support. The small Syrian army defeated the much larger army of Joash and Joash himself was badly wounded in the battle.

The poor leadership of Joash and his ruthless treatment of Jehoiada's son caused a group of opponents to kill him as he lay recuperating in his bed. Because he became such an evil man, the people refused to bury him with the rest of Judah's kings. He was buried in a commoner's grave while Jehoiada was buried with the kings of Judah. Thus, a very *ignoble* end comes upon a once-godly and spiritually prosperous life—all because of a *lack of determination* to serve God.

You see, the problem with Joash was that he didn't realize he didn't have *his* own commitment to God. He didn't realize he was *feeding* off of Jehoiada's commitment. He never took the time to really *examine himself* and discern just how much of what they were doing *together* was the result of his own commitment to God and how much was the result of Jehoiada's commitment. Therefore, he ended up confusing Jehoiada's determination and commitment with his own.

We need to make sure we're not like Joash.

We need to be sure we're not *feeding vicariously* off the determination and commitment of others.

We need to be sure we're not *feeding vicariously* off the commitment of some minister, or the determination of those around us.

We need to be sure we have our own commitment to God and our own determination to keep serving Him regardless of what happens to us.

If Obama sent his private army to your home tonight and arrested you and deported you to a jail cell in some Third World country, could you stand spiritually all alone?

If God let Satan take your house, your family, and your even your health from you—like He did with Job—would you be able to keep the faith?

If every *external* godly influence was removed from your life tonight, would you still be *determined* to follow Jesus wherever He goes?

Some of us are having to answer these kinds of questions right now because a very precious and godly influence in our lives *may* soon be taken from us. This person is not only a godly influence but an example of *extreme* courage, determination and devotion to God. I'm speaking of my mother, sister Annabelle.

Let me tell you about the kind of determination and courage she has manifested day in and day out for the past 12 years. . .