

JEZEBEL'S SON-IN-LAW

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Second Chronicles chapter 21 paints a portrait of moral tragedy. In the days of the divided kingdom, at age thirty-two, Jehoram inherited the throne of his father, Jehoshaphat, and began an eight year reign over Judah from Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat had been a righteous king. His son was anything but. Consider five points on the life and death of Jehoram.

First, Jehoram murdered cruelly. When he ascended the throne, did he give great gifts to his six brothers? No. Did he offer his brothers positions of prominence in the kingdom? No. Instead, he had them put to the sword (v. 4). So callous was Jehoram that he could murder his own flesh and blood without batting an eye. Intolerant of potential competition and lusting for power, Jehoram levied a death sentence on his own family.

Second, Jehoram married foolishly. He took as his wife the daughter of Ahab, king of Israel (v. 6). This means that Jehoram's mother-in-law was Jezebel herself. Now Jezebel had a seldom equaled gift for barbarity, and it is no wonder that her daughter, Athaliah, grew into a woman as ethically bankrupt as her mother. To bring political alliance between the kingdoms of Ahab and Jehoshaphat, Jehoram was married to Athaliah (2 Chron. 18:1). If ever a man had just cause to complain about his in-laws, it was Jehoram. Yet, instead of rejecting their wicked influence and following in the steps of his father, Jehoram turned his back on Jehoshaphat's legacy and walked in the ways of Ahab.

Third, Jehoram multiplied idolatry. He built high places for the exercise of pagan worship, thereby causing Jerusalem to commit harlotry (v. 11). Of all people, the king should have been privy to the fact that his inexcusable acts constituted an abomination to the God of heaven. No doubt his bloodthirsty wife (2 Chron. 22:10), along with the looming shadow of his in-laws, helped keep his moral bearings firmly anchored in the dark.

Fourth, Jehoram merited special condemnation. For his shameless evil, he received one day a most unusual and unwelcome letter, written by Elijah himself. Mincing no words, God's prophet explained to King Jehoram his sins and their consequences. Jehoram had refused to follow the righteous kings of Judah and, instead, had embraced the wickedness of Israel's kings. Jehoram had caused Judah to play the harlot with false gods. Jehoram had murdered his own brothers, who, Elijah claimed, were better men than Jehoram ever was. For such high crimes, God would strike Jehoram's wives, children and possessions. Further, God would afflict Jehoram personally. In a prophecy quite graphic (if not gruesome), Elijah detailed that Jehoram would suffer a disease which would cause his intestines to come out. As God foretold in Elijah's letter, so it came to pass. The Philistines and Arabians came and stole Jehoram's belongings, his wives, and all but his youngest son. Following that, God struck Jehoram with a miserable disease that kept him lingering in agony for two excruciating years, after which the king died in severe pain (v. 19).

Fifth, Jehoram was missed by no one. Though not surprising that a worthless ruler should receive no great mourning, it is still saddening to read the stark declaration in verse 20 that Jehoram "reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he departed with no one's regret" (ESV). He would search in vain who tried to find tears rolling down the cheeks of Jerusalem's inhabitants at the news of their king's death. They didn't care. They were not enriched by his life, so why should they feel loss at his death? The shoes of small men are easily filled. So Jerusalem did not grieve when Jehoram, in unspeakable misery, slipped into eternity, only to discover what real misery is all about. It was a pathetic end to a pitiful life.

Thus, Jehoram murdered cruelly. He married foolishly. He multiplied idolatry. He merited special condemnation. And he was missed by no one. Every step of the way, he left a classic example of how not to live. Then again, perhaps that is not such a shocker. After all, he was Jezebel's son-in-law.