

Two Unknown Heroes: Jehosheba

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[0 : 00] Well, I'd like us to turn together back to 2 Kings chapter 11 and we're going to dig our way into this passage and hopefully learn some wonderful things from it.

Everybody knows that history is full of heroes, men and women who have said and done and accomplished amazing things and which subsequent generations look back on with admiration. There's loads of examples you could pick. You think of the campaigning of William Wilberfords for the abolition of slavery. You think of the research of Marie Curie and all the progress that all the discoveries she made to help with the treatment of cancer.

You think of the leadership of a man like Winston Churchill. You think of the compassion of someone like Mother Teresa. These people are all heroes that we look back on in history with admiration.

The Bible is the same. It's full of heroes. People like Abraham, Moses and David, women like Ruth, Elizabeth and Mary and later on leaders like Peter, Paul and Timothy.

[1 : 13] All those people had their flaws. They had their weaknesses and the Bible never hides them but they were still heroic and these are the people that we hear and that we remember.

But famous heroes all have one thing in common. Famous well-known heroes all have one thing in common. They are the minority because for every one hero, for every one famous hero you have, there are hundreds and thousands of people who do not get remembered.

That's what I want us to think about in our two services today because both this morning and this evening we're going to look at two unknown heroes.

This morning we're in Second Kings and we're looking at a woman that you may never have heard of and if you were reading this passage thinking, I have never heard of any of this, please don't worry because it's not a well-known passage at all.

We're looking at a woman that you probably never heard of yet she's a woman upon whom the whole plan of salvation that God sets out in the Bible, it all depends on something crucial that she did.

[2 : 29] Her name was Jehoshiba and we read about it in Second Kings 11. When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal family but Jehoshiba, the daughter of King Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash, the son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the king's sons who were being put to death and she put him and his nurse in a bedroom thus they hid him from Athaliah so that he was not put to death.

In both our services today we're going to ask three simple questions. What is going on? Why is this important and what do we learn from it?

So our first question, what is going on? As I said when we were reading, we are sitting in around the year 841 BC and that was a messy time in the history of God's people.

As we said, the kingdom had been divided when David's grandson Rehoboam became king, the nation of Israel split in two and you had ten tribes in the north called Israel, two tribes in the south called Judah and for a large part of that history there was tension between that divided kingdom. Previous to this incident in the years running up to 841 there was two dominant figures in the history of Israel, a king and his notorious wife and their names were Ahab and Jezebel.

[4 : 10] Now Ahab is a famous king, he was the king at the time of Elijah and Elisha and he was notorious for his wickedness but at the same time it was a period of relative prosperity for the northern kingdom of Israel.

So Ahab especially in the early part of his reign he was a little bit like the person in school, I don't know if you can remember being in school where you would have someone in your class who did everything that they weren't supposed to do so they would smoke and they would misbehave in

class and they would say and do things that they shouldn't do and yet everything seemed to go well for them.

I remember that in school somebody who was smoking and doing all sorts of stuff that they shouldn't be doing, very unhealthy and then comes sports day he thrashed us all and I thought oh what and it's the same you'd have people like half the girls would always have a crush on the boys who were doing all sorts of stuff that they shouldn't be doing that was the way it felt but eventually it would always catch up on these people and that was true of Ahab, his behaviour and especially his rejection of God caught up with him and after he died there's a very complex web of family relations between the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah and I want to just try and explain that together for a wee moment so that we can get our bearings.

As we said the nation split in two, you've got Israel in the north and you've got Judah in the south. We start with the kings, in Israel you had Ahab who married Jezebel around the same time you had Jehoshaphat who was king of Judah.

Jehoshaphat on the whole was a good king, Ahab was a terrible one but that's the way they were. Ahab had a daughter and a son, daughter called Athaliah and a son called Joram.

[6 : 10] Now Athaliah might not have been Jezebel's daughter, it's important to remember that in those days not Ahab would have had many many wives so we don't know for certain if Athaliah was the daughter of Jezebel but we know that she was definitely the daughter of Ahab.

She was Ahab's daughter, her brother Joram became king after Ahab had died. The key point though is that Athaliah marries Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram.

So you need to see what's happening here, you've got a terrible king here and you've got a good king here and their children marry each other. Athaliah marries Jehoram and the result is that you have a daughter of the king of Israel married into the family line of the king of Judah and so everything is being joined up together.

Now it gets a little bit confusing because these two guys here have got the same name and there's variant spellings. You need to imagine it's a bit like having two kings called John and sometimes one's called Ian and it gets mixed up and so sometimes you'll read the spelling as Jehoram, sometimes as Jehoram.

It does get confusing but please just bear with me and remember that it happens in our own context as well. Two separate guys, one is the son of Ahab, one's the son of Jehoshaphat but now they are brothers in law through her, Athaliah.

[7 : 39] So everyone's sticking with me okay? We'll add a little bit more detail. So Athaliah marries Jehoram, she comes into this side of the divide and so you have a marriage alliance between Israel and Judah.

They are now connected through marriage but that marriage alliance comes through probably the worst family in the history of Old Testament Israel so it's not a good alliance to have taken place. So Athaliah's brother, Jehoram, becomes king in the north here. Her husband Jehoram is king in the south. Jehoram gets killed and you see that, I'll skip that bush.

Jehoram eventually dies and their son Ahaziah becomes king and so that was where we had reached at the end of 2nd Kings chapter 8. Jehoram is king in the north, Ahaziah is king in the south, that's nephew and uncle all connected through her.

And at that time because, I'm sure in many ways because of the connection between the two nations, a kind of cooperation begins to build and you see it read about here.

[8 : 58] In the 5th year of Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel, when Jehoshaphat was king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah begins to reign and he walks in the ways of the kings of Israel as the house of Ahab had done because the daughter of Ahab was his wife.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. So you can see there that everything is starting to be influenced in this direction. The good king Jehoshaphat is gradually being forgotten and the influence of evil king Ahab and his wife Jezebel is getting stronger and stronger and stronger through both the nations.

Okay, sticking with me? Very good. Okay. Ahaziah and Jehoram unite together to fight but it all goes wrong and it all falls apart.

Jehoram here is overthrown by a man called Jehu and that's what happens in the two chapters that we didn't read. Jehu eventually becomes king. Jehu kills Jehoram and Jehu kills Ahaziah and not only does he do that, Jehu because he is now taken over as king, he kills all the descendants of Ahab and that's what you did in those days.

If you conquered a nation, if you conquered a king and became ruler in their place, what you did to cement your position was you wiped out all of your predecessors' descendants.

[10:27] So Jehu very deliberately kills all the descendants of Ahab that he can find and that's so that this is wiped out and so that everything can now follow from Jehu and he's protected.

So it's getting complicated but stick with me. Basically if you're kind of thinking what's going on, basic summary is everyone's getting killed. That's what's happening.

Everybody's getting killed. Okay, right? So Ahab's gone. Jezebel's gone. Jehoram's gone. Ahaziah's gone.

She is left on her own. Athaliah is left on her own. And so what is she going to do? Her husband, he's also gone. He's gone too, as I said. Everybody's dead.

And Athaliah is left on her own. She's queen in Judah. And her family in Israel has just been wiped out by Jehu.

[11:22] And what she does in response to the situation, to her family being killed in Israel, her response is to do exactly the same thing in Judah.

We read that in 1 Kings 1. When Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal family.

Okay, so I'll go back to her picture. Jehu has become king. He wipes out everybody here. Athaliah is left as queen here. Her plan is to wipe out everyone there.

Why would she do that? Well, it was to secure her position. And in many ways, if the line of Ahab is going to continue, it's no longer going to continue in Israel because Jehu's killed them all.

And so for any chance of Ahab and Jezebel's line to continue, the only place it can continue is through her. And her idea is to wipe out the descendants of her husband and she then can reign.

[12:28] And no doubt, she thought that she could then have a line descending from her, continuing the line of Ahab. She wants to protect her own position.

And in order to do that, she's going to kill everybody, including her grandson, baby Joash. He's also under massive threat because Athaliah wanted to wipe out that whole line.

Okay, so that's where we're at. Lots of people getting killed, lots of conspiracy, and you've got this woman right in the middle who is doing her very best to preserve her position and she will kill all of her in-laws and all of her husband's descendants in order to keep her place safe.

Now, just as a wee aside there, there's a very important lesson that I just want to highlight before we move on. When we think about Athaliah and all that she was trying to do, I think her main motivation for wanting to wipe out this family line was her loyalty to her parents, to her father, to Jezebel.

She was clearly very, very loyal to them and she was loyal to their ways. And she wanted to bring Judah into line with everything that Ahab had done with all the wickedness and idolatry that they had stood for.

[13:54] And what that means is that when you look at Athaliah, what you have got in her is somebody who is using a good path to get to a terrible destination.

And that's a very important lesson. She is taking a good path to get to a terrible destination because she takes something that's normally good.

She is loyal to her father. She's incredibly loyal to her father and yet the problem is her father was a wicked man. And so her loyalty, which is a good thing, was taking her to a terrible destination.

And we might live in a very different world from one of kings and queens and conspiracies and intermarriages and all sorts of stuff like that, but yet that's something that people do all the time.

They take a good path to a terrible destination.

And there's lots of ways you see it. You get people who will use love as the pathway to cheat on their wife or their husband because they say, oh, but I love this person.

[15:01] People will use security as the pathway to neglect their families and just spend all their time at work and providing for my family. I've got to work, work, work, work, work. I can't take any time off.

I can't spend time with my children because I'm providing for them. And they're using a good thing, their desire for security to do a not good thing to neglect their children.

Today we'll see people use language like the language of respect to basically say to people, look, you can do and believe anything you like and behave in any way that you want.

And like Athaliah, people can use loyalty as a pathway to actually doing something that God doesn't want them to do.

And there's nobody in here who's extreme as Athaliah who goes on a killing frenzy out of our loyalty. I'm not in any way suggesting that people are at that kind of level.

[15 : 56] But the danger is the same even if the behavior is nowhere near as extreme. It's very easy to use loyalty to something, to take us down a path that leads us to somewhere that God doesn't want us to go.

And that can happen in lots of different ways. But it is easy to think. I mean, I can think of examples. I mean, a great example would just be somebody to say, well, you know, my grandfather didn't go to church, so I'm not going to go.

And that's an idea of a good thing. You want to be loyal to your grandfather, that's nice, but it's actually taking you to a bad destination where you don't go to church. And I'm sure you can all think of many other examples of how that kind of thing can happen.

You can take a good path to a bad destination, and that is exactly what Atalaya did. And her plan would have worked if it wasn't for one woman.

Everything was going to work if it wasn't for the actions of Jehoshiba. Jehoshiba was Ahaziah's sister.

[17 : 11] There she is there, brother and sister. So she knew what was going on. She was connected to the royal family. She could see that her one-year-old nephew was in danger. She knew that Atalaya was going to kill him.

And she saw what was going to happen. So she grabbed him, she took him, and she hid him. And in doing so, she saves his life.

And you'll notice at the end of the chapter it said that when Jehosh became king, he was seven years old. He had been hiding for six years. Jehoshiba saved him when he was one.

And it was her actions that made all the difference. He was saved. And the line of Jehoshaphat, Jeoram, Ahaziah was saved all because of the split-second actions of one woman, of one unknown heroine, Jehoshaphat.

Now, why is all this important? Well, at one level, her actions were crucial because she saved Judah from falling under the long-term rule of Atalaya, who had no loyalty to God.

[18 : 23] And she was a very, very bad leader. And so Jehoshaphat delivered Judah from a bad leader. And that alone makes her a hero because bad leadership can destroy a nation.

But the importance of what Jehoshaphat did goes beyond just the need to get rid of Atalaya as a bad queen. The truth is, and what I want us to see is that Jehoshaphat's actions were crucial for the whole plan of salvation that God reveals in the Bible.

And so we need to take a step back and look for a moment at the bigger picture of what God is doing. Throughout the Bible, God is revealing his plan of salvation.

We call that plan redemptive history, a plan to save people, and that plan has been worked out across history, redemptive history.

And that redemptive history is being worked out across the ages of the Old Testament. And so as humanity falls and sins against God right at the beginning of the Bible, God then initiates a plan of salvation that's been worked out bit by bit across the ages of history, all culminating in the Persian and work of Jesus Christ.

[19 : 42] But the key point is that there's something that unites that plan together, going from the beginning in Genesis all the way through to the coming of Jesus. There's a key thread that unites it all together, and that thread is the connection of a family line.

And you see it right from the beginning. When humanity fell, God responds by saying, I'll put enmity between you and the woman this is him talking to Satan and the serpent, between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head, you shall bruise his heel. That language of offspring is the language of family. It comes again in Genesis 12. God appears to Abraham, and he says, go from your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I'll bless those who bless you and him who dishonours you. I will curse in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Making Abraham into a great nation is the language of family. It's talking about his descendants. That family line continues through Abraham, through Isaac, through Jacob.

[20 : 53] Jacob's family grows into a nation. That nation eventually gets a king, King David. God comes to David and gives him another crucial promise, saying to him, when your days are full filled and you lie down with your father, I will raise up, look at that word again, offspring after you, who shall come from your body and will establish your throne.

He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. That again is family line. And so God's purposes in the Old Testament are being worked out through this family line that's connecting from generation to generation to generation to generation.

It gets narrower and narrower and narrower as it goes from Abraham through Jacob and it eventually comes down to David through his royal family and that's the pathway through which God's purposes are going to be fulfilled.

And it's all quite straightforward. You've got this family line and it culminates in Jesus. And that's why the very first thing that you read in the Old Testament is what? A family tree. That's what Matthew chapter one contains.

So it's all quite straightforward. Family line, the connection is crucial. The key point is that in 841 BC, in the depths of 2 Kings chapter 11, that family line is hanging by a thread.

[22 : 14] It's hanging by one thread. Because Athaliah is killing all of them.

She's killing all the descendants of Jehoshaphat of Joram of Ahaziah. She is wiping them all out and her aim is that this family line stops there.

And instead it will continue through her. If that happens, if that happens, everything that God has promised falls to the ground.

And that's where you see how significant her actions were. In terms of redemptive history, what Jehoshaphat does to stop Athaliah, what she does is as important as Moses crossing the Red Sea. It's as important as Joshua winning the battle of Jericho. It's as important as David defeating Goliath. Jehoshaphat is a heroine of the highest order because she grabbed that baby, she hid him and in doing so she stopped the thread of redemptive history from snapping.

[23 : 38] And this is one of several examples you see in scripture where God uses a key individual in a key moment to preserve his plans and his promises.

And of course we actually knew this already because we read it at the very start of our readings. In the fifth year of Jeoram the son of Ahab king of Israel, when Jehoshaphat was king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign.

He was 32 years old when he became a king. He reigned in Jerusalem for eight years. He walked in the ways of Ahab kings of Israel, it is the house of Ahab at Dunn. The daughter of Ahab was his wife at Athaliah and he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord yet the Lord was not willing to destroy Judah for the sake of his servant David since he promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever.

God from the start of this narrative is saying I am not going to let the disaster happen and he did it through a woman, through Jehoshaphat. Her actions saved the great thread of redemptive history running right through the Old Testament.

It is telling us and reminding us that her actions were absolutely crucial. We have probably never heard of her without her. We would not be standing here today.

[24 : 55] So why is all this important? Don't worry, please don't worry if you are not taking all of that in. Don't worry if you don't remember all these names to be honest. I am barely holding it together in my own mind myself.

We do need to ask though, what do we learn from it all? I am going to just give you three lessons very briefly as we close. What do we learn from it?

Three things. Number one, she was a woman. She was a woman. I think that is so important for us to recognise that when redemptive history was hanging by a thread in 841 BC, it was a woman that God used to save the day.

I also love the fact that the key man in this story at the moment was completely useless because he was lying in nappies. It was the woman who saved him.

It was Joach's smart, brave, quick thinking aunt who saved the nation. It is fascinating that at the point in redemptive history where you have the worst of women, Athalaya, you also have the greatest of women in Jehoshuba as God works out his purposes.

[26 : 13] I think that is just an important thing to remember. Sometimes people can jump to the conclusion with Christianity to say that it kind of restricts women, it represses women, that women are seen as second class. There are no doubt times in the history of the church where people have done that.

But it is not true of how God works. People who think that women are second class in God's plans know very little about redemptive history because the truth is the Gospel stands on the shoulders of some amazing women.

That happens again and again in the Bible whether it is Deborah, Ruth, Elizabeth, Mary, Lydia or Jehoshuba. It has happened again and again throughout the history of the church where God has taken women and used them in amazing ways for the work of his kingdom.

The Gospel is a story full of heroic women. What I want to say today and what I want you to recognize today is that this room right here is full of heroic Gospel women as well.

There are many of you here. Many of you who have done heroic things for the Gospel, many of you who are going to do heroic things for the Gospel.

[27 : 25] Jehoshuba is an amazing reminder of what God does through the women that he is calling into his church. So, that is the first lesson.

Second lesson has three parts to it. I want us to notice that Jehoshuba showed awareness, she showed courage and she showed patience. So, she showed awareness in the sense that she could see what was going on.

She saw the danger and she made sure that she acted when the need arose. But in order to do that, she needed courage.

She had to act fast. She had to do it secretly. If she got caught, she was dead and yet she did it, risking her life so that God's plans wouldn't fail.

When I was reading a commentary on this passage, one of the commentaries said, praise God from whom gutsy women come. I thought that was a great quote summing up the courage that Jehoshuba showed.

[28 : 24] She showed awareness, she showed courage and she showed patience. You think about what happened to Jehoshuba. She saw that Athaliah was going on this killing frenzy. She knew that her one-year-old nephew was in danger.

She grabbed him, she hid him. Then what did she have to do? She had to act completely normal for six years. She had to make sure that she did not give away at all the fact that she had done this.

She had to patiently wait for the right time for God's plan to be fulfilled. She showed awareness, she showed courage, she showed patience. We need all three of these things.

She's a brilliant example for us all. We need awareness. As we look at the needs in our community around us, as we think about the needs of the people that we work with, of the people in our family, we need to be aware of what people need.

We need to be aware of what God actually wants. What does God want for our community? What does God want for the people who don't yet come to church?

[29 : 37] What does God want for us as a congregation? We need to think about that. We need to be aware of that because we cannot serve Him and we cannot honour Him if we're not aware of the needs around us.

We need courage. A question I want to ask you is, what does courage look like for you this week in terms of the Gospel?

What does courage look like? Does it involve putting yourself forward to serve in the church? Does it mean inviting somebody to your home for a meal or inviting them to church?

Does it mean coming along on Thursday evening to your Bible study? Does it mean asking the questions that you would love to ask but that you're scared to ask?

Does it mean actually saying the words, I want to be a Christian? Or I think I might be a Christian?

[30 : 38] Is that what courage looks like to say these things? Well, go for it. Go for it. And we need patience in the Christian life.

Results, rewards, answers don't come immediately. Jehoshaphat did not know for six years whether what she had done was actually going to work. She definitely needed patience. And so do we as we seek to invite people, as we seek to reach out to the Gospel, as we seek to grow in our lives as disciples.

So lesson number one, she was a woman, never ever underestimate what God can do through women. Number two, she showed awareness, courage and patience. We need all of these things ourselves.

Thirdly, and I think most importantly, Jehoshaphat saw the importance of a moment.

She saw a moment when she needed to do something, one moment, one decision, one action.

[31 : 42] And it was decisive. And we've got to remember that as Christians, we will face moments like that every week of our lives, maybe not as massive and as dramatic as Jehoshaphat, but still, we will all face moments that are so crucial for the work of God's kingdom.

And it can happen in so many different ways. You think of the moment when you react as a Christian to something that's been done to you. So whether you're at work or at home or in the community and something is done to you, something happens that you don't like, something frustrates you.

It is a moment where your reaction has the potential to be an amazing witness or it has the potential to leave people saying, well, look at these Christians, they say one thing and they do another.

You think of the moment when we decide how we're going to treat other people. We think of the moments when we make decisions about how we're going to use our time and our resources and all the different things to do. And what I want us to see from Jehoshaphat is that we must never, ever, ever underestimate what God can do through you in a moment.

Never underestimate what God can do through you in a moment. That might be the moment when you just smile at someone and ask them how they're doing.

[33 : 12] It might be that moment when you decide not to pass on the piece of gossip that you've just heard. It might be that moment when you reach out with a text message or an invitation to somebody who feels incredibly lonely.

You might be at work or in the community this week and you are beside somebody and their emotional well-being, their self-confidence, their whole understanding of life, their sense of hope is hanging by a thread.

And believe me, the UK and the Isle of Lewis and Carlyle are full of people who feel like that. They are hanging by a thread and we have got everything that they need.

We have got the true message of hope in the Gospel that can transform someone's life. And I never want you to underestimate what your encouragement, your kindness, your interest in people, your prayers for them, never underestimate the power of that moment of what God can do through you. So as Christians, we need to recognise the importance of a moment. And for anybody who is not yet a Christian, you need to do the same.

[34 : 33] You need to recognise the importance of a moment. And that moment is right now.

That moment is right now. You can look at all these complicated drawings that I have made, all these kings and descendants and nations and everything. You could make that diagram a million times bigger, stretching out the history and the Old Testament, all the things sticking together, everything leading towards the coming of Christ, all of those things across redemptive history, bound together in a massively beautiful tapestry of the outworking of God's plan.

And it's all culminating in a moment when right now God says to you, I want you.

I want you in my family. I want to save you. I want to take the rotten banana of your sin and I want to replace it with the perfect righteousness of my son.

And in that moment, all we have to do is respond and say to God, yes, yes, I will follow you.

[35 : 58] Jehoshua best shows us the importance of a moment.