

## Homily for Friday in the Third Week after Pentecost

June 19, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Year 2, Proper 6: 2 Kings 11:1–4, 9–17a\*; Psalm 132:11–19; Matthew 6:16–23\**

This morning I typed “Athaliah” into the religious academic periodical search engine, that being a seminary graduate gives me, just to see what might come up. I discovered that one significant unresolved question is who was Athaliah’s father. She is identified as the daughter of Omri, king of Israel,<sup>1</sup> the northern kingdom that refused to submit to Solomon’s son Rehoboam when Solomon died.<sup>2</sup> Athaliah is also identified as the daughter of Omri’s son and successor, Ahab<sup>3</sup>—the Ahab, whose wife was Jezebel. I think it’s fair to say that issue is unresolvable.<sup>4</sup>

Athaliah was married to a Jehoram, a son of Jehoshaphat, the fourth king of Judah. If I’ve followed what I’ve read carefully enough, only the Queen of Sheba, the one who visited Solomon is given the female form of the Hebrew word “king” in the Old

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings 8:26.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 12:1–24.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Kings 8:18

<sup>4</sup> Reuven Chaim (Rudolph) Klein, “Queen A: The Daughter of Ahab or Omri?,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 42 n.1 (Jan–Mar 2014), 11–20.

Testament. Hebrew used another word for the wife of a king.<sup>5</sup>

Our first lesson this morning is about Athaliah seizing power upon the death of her son and then ordering the execution of the other members of the family who might claim power.

It's a long lesson and it never occurred to me before this morning that it needed to be longer. Athaliah is dead. But this is the rest of the story:

*Then all the people of the land went to the house of Ba'al, and tore it down; his altars and his images they broke in pieces, and they slew Mattan the priest of Ba'al before the altars. And the priest [Jehoiada] posted watchmen over the house of the LORD. And he took the captains, the Carites, the guards, and all the people of the land; and they brought the king down from the house of the LORD, marching through the gate of the guards to the king's house . . . Jeho'ash was seven years old when he began to reign.<sup>6</sup>*

Where does this all begin? I think credit goes to King David himself. He coveted his neighbor's wife and had

---

<sup>5</sup> Patricia J. Berlyn, "The Great Ladies," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 24 n. 1 (Jan–Mar 1996), 26–35.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Kings 11:18–21.

her husband murdered. Their son Solomon marries many, many foreign women, beginning with a daughter of Pharaoh. Solomon builds altars for the gods of his wives.<sup>7</sup> The kingdom is divided when he dies. Ten tribes become the kingdom of Israel. Only Judah and Benjamin remain for a son of David.<sup>8</sup>

Polytheism and the oppression of the poor lead to the downfall of the northern kingdom, Israel, and then to the downfall of Judah, the destruction of the temple, and the people of Jerusalem being sent into exile. The two kings of Judah who returned the kingdom to the Lord in their days, Hezekiah, and his great-grandson Josiah, were succeeded by idol worshipers. God has not been unfaithful. Peter Ellis writes that the authors, compilers, of the First and Second Books of the Kings were written to encourage faith in God's promises to God's people. God has not withdrawn his promises from those who have been unfaithful to him<sup>9</sup>

So, Athaliah was the daughter of a king, the wife of a king, and a mother of a king. She knew something about ruling. Solomon himself gets credit for ordering

---

<sup>7</sup> 2 Kings 11:1–43.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Kings 12:1–24.

<sup>9</sup> Peter F. Ellis, “1–2 Kings,” *The Jerome Biblical Commentary: Volume I: The Old Testament*, Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), I:179.

the execution of his elder half-brother Adonijah, the heir apparent until their father had Uriah the Hittite executed and Bathsheba had a child.<sup>10</sup>

I believe we are saved by God's grace, by faith, not by works, but I do think right and wrong matter. I do like the wording of the contemporary translation of the Lord's Prayer: "Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil."<sup>11</sup>

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2020 The Society of the Free Church of St. Mary the Virgin, New York, New York.

All rights reserved.

---

<sup>10</sup> 2 Kings 2:13–25.

<sup>11</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 97.