

The Priority of God's House

FOCUS THOUGHT

We must make the house of God a priority in our lives.

FOCUS VERSES

II Chronicles 24:10–11

And all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end. Now it came to pass, that at what time the chest was brought unto the king's office by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that there was much money, the king's scribe and the high priest's officer came and emptied the chest, and took it, and carried it to his place again. Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance.

LESSON TEXT

II Chronicles 24:1–11

1 Joash was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Zibiah of Beer-sheba.

2 And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest.

3 And Jehoiada took for him two wives; and he begat sons and daughters.

4 And it came to pass after this, that Joash was minded to repair the house of the LORD.

5 And he gathered together the priests and the Levites, and said to them, Go out unto the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that ye hasten the matter. Howbeit the Levites hastened it not.

6 And the king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the collection, according to the commandment of Moses the servant of the LORD, and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witness?

7 For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD did they bestow upon Baalim.

8 And at the king's commandment they made a chest, and set it without at the gate of the house of the LORD.

9 And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in to the LORD the collection that Moses the servant of God laid upon Israel in the wilderness.

10 And all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end.

11 Now it came to pass, that at what time the chest was brought unto the king's office by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that there was much money, the king's scribe and the high priest's officer came and emptied the chest, and took it, and carried it to his place again. Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance.

▶▶▶ CULTURE CONNECTION

TO GOD BE THE GLORY

On his twentieth birthday, Tom Marshall was drafted into the U. S. army. He trained for eight weeks and was sent to England to train for eight more months. He saw his first combat during the invasion of Northern France, better known as D-Day. He and his battalion landed on the beaches and worked their way through France. Later, following General Patton, they crossed through Belgium, Holland, and Germany. At the end of World War II, Tom watched as displaced families struggled to find food and shelter. He recalled Paul's words describing the Macedonian call: "Come over . . . and help us." From that moment on, Tom was never the same.

Tom returned home, met and married Leila, who had lost her first husband in the war. They started a family, and after a few years the weight of God's call was heavy upon him. He and Leila, in response to a call for help, left a good job and sold all they had to go pastor.

After his experiences in the war, Tom understood the importance of having a place to gather and worship—a place of safety and unity. People needed a church. Tom and Leila pastored "over forty years in five states: Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina. He built five churches, two parsonages, one large educational building and completed one church building that another minister started" (*To God Be the Glory*, Tom and Leila Marshall, 2002). They discovered people were willing to work and sacrifice alongside them to have a place that was dedicated to God and ministry.

▶▶▶ OUTLINE

I. JOASH BECAME KING AT SEVEN YEARS OF AGE

- A. He Did What Was Right in God's Eyes
- B. We Must Choose to Do What Is Right No Matter Our Heritage

II. JOASH SOUGHT TO RESTORE THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD

- A. Tasked the Priests and Levites to Collect Money
- B. The Levites Slacked in Their Work

III. THE HOUSE OF GOD AND SEXUAL PURITY

- A. Jehoram and the Moral Decay of Judah
- B. Our Worship Shows Our Priorities
- C. The Ransom Collected by Moses and Joash
- D. Our Ransom Has Been Paid by Christ

▶▶▶ CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Near the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, Emperor Zhu Di of China was revered as a living god. Though he only lived from AD 1360 to 1424, he was responsible for consolidating rule over China, pushing out Mongol invaders, extending the Great Wall, and commissioning the largest naval armada in world history until World War II. However, his greatest achievement was arguably the building of the Forbidden City in Beijing.

When the Forbidden City was commissioned in A.D. 1407, it took over one million convicted criminals and conscripted slave laborers ten years to gather the proper materials for the project. It took another one hundred thousand skilled craftsmen to finish the fine details of the city. No expense was spared for the residence of the palace and the Forbidden City, and the rule of the Emperor was absolute.

Unlike the Forbidden City and its palace, the restoration of the Temple of God in Jerusalem was not a project built by forced labor or authoritarian rule. The Temple was restored by the free and

cheerful giving of the faithful. The collection taken to restore the Temple was a “ransom” that had been originally required by Moses. Anyone who chose to not partake in the “ransom” of Judah would not be counted among them in the census; therefore, it was a choice to serve the Lord and contribute to the restoration of His house.

A life of faithfulness cannot be achieved without a lifestyle of sacrifice. During the reign of Joash, the kingdom of Judah would have been aware of growing foreign threats; yet they decided to put their faith in the Lord and His ability to save. Though under the direction of the king, the Temple was restored because of the collective desire of the people to honor the Lord.

The people of Judah were not giving to a fruitless cause, but they were paying a ransom required by the Law of Moses. They were giving for the restoration of the Temple of God. The Temple had been left in disorder and decay by the three rulers prior to Joash. However, Joash’s mentor was Jehoiada the priest, a man of God. It was the people’s willingness to be obedient to the tax of Moses and the righteousness pursued by Joash and Jehoiada that led to the restoration of the Temple, the house of God.

Since the New Testament was established, the house of God is no longer a building of brick and stone, but we as believers are His temple. When Paul admonished the church in Corinth that their bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit, it was not just a simple metaphor. Paul’s warning came in the context of sexual purity. To be sexually pure is to honor the house of God. This principle was true even during the time of Joash.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. JOASH BECAME KING AT SEVEN YEARS OF AGE

Joash was the youngest king of Judah to ascend to the throne. In many ways, having a child on the throne was the reset the monarchy of Judah needed. Before the reign of Joash, the succession of kings from the line of Judah had been David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Ahaziah, then Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah. Among these, Rehoboam, Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah had been unrighteous rulers because of their idol worship and self-reliance. Rulers such as Abijah (meaning “my father is Yahweh”), Asa, and Jehoshaphat were righteous.

Though Jehoshaphat was counted to be righteous, his decisions to ally with Ahab—who was wicked—set up a series of tragic circumstances that ultimately led to a seven-year-old king (I Chronicles 17:3). Jehoshaphat allied himself to the house of Ahab through marriage (I Kings 22:43–44; II Chronicles 18:1). Though Jehoshaphat trusted in God as his father and grandfather had done, his son Jehoram was raised under influences of the house of Ahab and the kingdom of Israel. Little information is given to us in Scripture about Jehoram’s mother, but his wife, Athaliah, was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel.

A. He Did What Was Right in God’s Eyes

Joash did what was right in God’s eyes. When Joash was made king over Israel, he knew nothing of governance; he was only a child. However, his mentor was

Jehoiada the priest. Joash was adopted by Jehoiada and Jehoshabeath. Jehoiada was instrumental to restoring the monarchy of Judah to a path of righteousness. He taught Joash to prioritize the Law of Moses. Joash's mother was also not from the house of Ahab of Israel; she was from Beersheba of Judah.

When Joash was a child, he was surrounded by godly influences who directed him to seek after and prioritize the Lord. Joash was brought up in an environment of righteousness. While Jehoiada was alive, Joash was a righteous king. It is important to surround ourselves with mentors who will encourage us to pursue righteousness. We can follow their example. No matter our age or background, we are always able to draw near to God in repentance to pursue righteousness.

» *How does repentance help us draw near to God?*

B. We Must Choose to Do What Is Right No Matter Our Heritage

Athaliah went on to raise her son, Ahaziah, to value the unrighteousness of the northern kingdom of Israel over the righteous principles of his great-grandfather (five-times), David. When Ahaziah was killed by Jehu the son of Nimshi, Athaliah ruled over Israel as Judah's first and only matriarch queen. During her reign she killed all the royal heirs of Judah (II Chronicles 22:10), with the exception of Joash. The royal coup that had begun with the marriage ended in murder and sin. Joash, a baby, was saved by Jehoshabeath, daughter of King Jehoram and wife of Jehoiada the priest. She hid Joash and his nurse in a bedchamber. He was hidden in the Temple until he reached seven years of age.

Jehoiada was a strong influence on Joash, but he was not controlling the monarchy as a priest. In II Chronicles 24:4–6, after Joash ordered the Levites to go about repairing the house of God, the Levites did not listen. Jehoiada was the chief priest and Joash held him responsible for the inaction of the Levites. In II Chronicles 24:7, Joash referenced how Athaliah had repurposed the Temple for the idols associated with the pantheon of Baal. It is difficult to imagine the chief priest being content with the Temple in a state of disarray when he had the ability to make a change with the support of the monarchy. Joash made sure the Temple was repaired by reinstating the collection Moses required of Israel for the building of the original tabernacle during the time of the Exodus.

» *How could the drama and tragedy have been avoided in the royal household of Judah?*

II. JOASH SOUGHT TO RESTORE THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD

II Chronicles 24:4 says Joash was “minded” to repair the house of the Lord. The NKJV reads, “Joash set his heart on repairing the house of the LORD.” The focus of this verse shows that prioritizing God is an issue of the heart. It would have been easy for Joash to maintain the status quo the previous three rulers before him had set. However, Joash did not let his heart go away from serving God while Jehoiada was alive.

A. Tasked the Priests and Levites to Collect Money

II Chronicles 24:5 says, “And he gathered together the priests and the Levites, and said to them, Go out unto the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that ye hasten the matter. Howbeit the Levites hastened it not.” When the house of God was in disrepair, Joash made its repair a priority.

B. The Levites Slacked in Their Work

When the priests and Levites did not follow the command of Joash, it could have been an excuse to give up. If the priests—the ones responsible for ministering in the house of God—are not even willing to take up a collection for its repair, is there any use in repairing it at all? To Joash, the answer was yes. He had set his heart to make the house of God a priority. Joash held Jehoiada responsible for not taking up the collection (II Chronicles 24:6). Joash cited Moses’ collection from Israel to create the tabernacle as a precedent for the priests to follow.

III. THE HOUSE OF GOD AND SEXUAL PURITY

To understand that the house of God is a priority is to understand the need for sexual purity. The Temple was in a state of decay long before Joash began to rule on the throne. If it had not been for the poor decisions of Jehoshaphat when he allied with the house of Ahab in marriage, the priority of the house of God would have likely remained high. However, when the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel married into the line of the kings of Judah, the gods of Israel replaced the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in priority.

A. Jehoram and the Moral Decay of Judah

The theme of unrighteous and moral decay is pervasive throughout Scripture. The righteous men who were descendants of Seth were corrupted by women who were descendants of Cain (Genesis 4:26; 6:2). Samson—whose name means “day”—was deceived by Delilah—whose name means “night”—and his last moments were spent humiliated with his eyes gouged out. Solomon, who built the Temple and was given wisdom above any other man, also fell into the trap of marrying unrighteous women (I Kings 11:1–8).

Paul made a direct reference to the pervasive theme of unequally yoked marriages in his second letter to the Corinthians:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? (II Corinthians 6:14)

Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, the monarchs of Israel. Through this marriage Judah’s once righteous royal family was corrupted and destroyed. When Judah began to follow after idol worship that was closely tied to adultery, the house of God went into

disrepair. These events are absolutely tied together. If the kings of Judah had made God their priority, then the Temple never would have needed to be restored. Instead, because of the influences from the house of Ahab, the rulers of Judah (Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah) turned after idols and the people followed after sexual sin.

» *How is being equally yoked connected to prioritizing the house of the Lord?*

B. Our Worship Shows Our Priorities

Prostitution and adultery were a part of worship in the idolatry of ancient Israel and pagan temple cults. The narrative of II Chronicles 13–23 describes a dark descent in the monarchy of Judah from a kingdom of righteousness to a kingdom of prostitution and idol worship. The gods of the Canaanites were “worshiped” through adultery. When the prostitution of idolatry began to rise in priority in Judah, the priority of the house of God decreased. Joash was the righteous king Judah needed to both restore true worship within the kingdom and to restore the house of God.

In the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:16–17, Moses addressed the root of idolatry by identifying the power behind it. He wrote, “They provoked Him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they Him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.”

In ancient times, idols and false gods always carried sexual overtones. Sometimes we can be very harsh when we speak of ancient people because it is foolish to bow down to a block of chiseled stone or a statue of precious metal. On the surface, idol worship does not seem very tempting, so it is easy to criticize. However, idol worship gave ancient people an excuse to justify sinful sexual acts. Sinful sexual temptations are still present in today’s world, but they manifest themselves differently. Instead of using an image or precious metal to justify sin, people choose to boldly deny God without shame. Just as devils were behind the worship of idols, there are spiritual forces behind our culture’s obsession with sexual sin.

» *How is adultery and sexual sin connected to idol worship?*

C. The Ransom Collected by Moses and Joash

The reference Joash made in II Chronicles 24:6, 9 to the collection Moses placed on the people for the building of the Tabernacle is found in Exodus 30:11–16. In Exodus, the money that was used for the Tabernacle was not simply a “collection” or a “tax,” but it was called a “ransom.” Moses began by taking a census of the people. Then all the males twenty years of age and older, despite economic status, were commanded to “ransom” themselves to God for the price of a half shekel. By calling this collection of funds a “ransom,” Moses was telling Israel that without fulfilling the contribution

of half a shekel, they would not be represented as being among the people of Israel. The ransom Moses instituted was to be given every time a census was taken in Israel.

D. Our Ransom Has Been Paid by Christ

Paul mirrored the theme of “Ransom” when he spoke against fornication and idols in I Corinthians 6. Verse 20 clearly connects the idea of being “ransomed” to Christ’s work on the cross. By taking the punishment for our sins, Jesus Christ has paid the ransom of death that sin held against us. Paul’s answer to sexual immorality associated with idol worship is rooted in the concept of ransom. Jesus said, “For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). If Jesus Christ has paid the ransom for the sins of every believer and the temple is no longer a building of stone, or a tent, but the human body, then all worship from the body belongs to God. If we identify with Christ, then we are more than His people; we are also His temple. Paul’s teaching is not directed to the individual, but to the corporate church. Sexual impurity by one member of the body has far-reaching impact throughout the corporate worship of the entire church.

» *How do we apply to our lives the ransom paid by Christ?*

»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Just as sexual temptation was a part of the culture surrounding Judah, it surrounds our culture today. Joash made an intentional and conscious decision to repair the house of the Lord. Likewise, we need to be intentional about living in purity. To live in purity is to show God His sacrifice is a priority to us and that we will not allow His house to fall into disrepair.

Purity in relationships includes setting boundaries before marriage and staying committed to only your spouse in marriage. If you are unmarried and looking to become married, then you should also be sure to find someone with whom you can be equally yoked. Because we are the temple of the Lord, we should abstain from sexual sin because it disgraces Jesus Christ’s sacrifice.

It is also important to remember that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (I Corinthians 6:11). Our past is in the past when we repent of our sins, are baptized in the name of Jesus, and receive His Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ paid our ransom on the Cross and that good news is still true. Our past mistakes do not define the relationship Jesus wants to have with us now; He has made us free to be sanctified temples and living sacrifices.