

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 35

The Divided Monarchy *Hebrew Aleph - Qoph*

How is your Hebrew coming along? I have learned there are several types of people in class in relation to our learning the Hebrew alphabet.

Last Sunday, we had our new members' lunch, which gave me a chance to visit with ten different tables of new members and the host families (notice I carefully avoided calling the hosts "the old members!"). I discussed with many of them what they like about the class and where we can improve.

One table had a married couple where the man said to me, "You know how you say some people like the Hebrew alphabet lessons and others don't?"

"Yes," I replied.

"I'm one of those that don't!" He good-naturedly told me.

Quickly his wife jumped in exclaiming, "And I *love* that part!"

I chuckled at the difference of these two married folks, the way they both seemed to enjoy the difference in each other, and I thought, "This is good!" With 600 plus people sitting in each class, it is impossible for me to deliver a lesson where all parts appeal to all people. (I won't even start on how hard it must be for Pastors David and Stephen to preach to 4,000 at a time!) So a goal is to teach a buffet, rather than one meal for all. We then hope that everyone can leave with some food to satisfy each one's appetite!

Later in the week, I got more insight into our class and the Hebrew lessons. I was visiting with Doug, a friend who has two twelve-year-old daughters in our class. He told me that recently at their dinner table, his wife had made some great mashed potatoes. Doug told me that he asked his wife for a dollop of mashed potatoes when his twelve-year-old Rachel said, "Daddy, you can't have a dollop until you have a gimel!"

That struck me as both funny and informative for two reasons. First, that girl is quick-witted! That is amazing to me that she has paid good enough attention to where this is fresh in her mind! A second reason I laughed was my pronunciation of "daleth" in class must have my Lubbock accent if it sounded to her like "dollop!"

We do spend time working on this Hebrew alphabet because for some folks, it enhances their personal study. For those who get along fine without it, we just let them muse on something, elbowing them to tune back in when we get past the letters!

HEBREW

With that introduction, let us add three more Hebrew letters to our working knowledge. That will leave us with just three final letters for a later lesson. So far, we have:

א *Alef*

ב *Beyt*

ג *Gimel*

ד *Daleth* (or “dollop”)

ה *Hay*

ו *Vav*

ז *Zayin*

ח *Chayt*

ט *Teyt*

י *Yod*

כך *Kaph*

ל *Lamed*

מם *Mem*

נון *Nun*

ס *Samech*

ע *Ayin*

To these letters, we add three more. The next letter is called “*Pay*” (pronounced like “*Pay* for the groceries, please.”) and sounds like an English “P.” The letter looks like the start of a good curly-cue:

פ

Like several other Hebrew letters, this one occasionally has a dot in the middle, which changes the way we pronounce it. It then sounds more like the English “PH” or “F.” When the *pay* is at the end of a word, like several of the other letters, it has an alternate form. It is as if the bottom is straightened out and brought down below the writing line:

ף

Many scholars think that *pay* was derived from the picture of a mouth.¹ While the final form looks nothing like a mouth, one can certainly imagine an open mouth and even a tongue in the basic form of the letter.

The next letter in the Hebrew alphabet is a bit of a tongue twister for some English speakers. It is a fun letter that looks similar to an *ayin* and yet is different. The letter is called a “*tsade*,” or for some it is spelled in English as “*tzade*.” It is pronounced as a “t” “z” or “t” “s,” which is why it sounds so unusual! We have the letter residing in the way we pronounce the “Tzar” or “Tsar” of Russia. As mentioned, the letter is shaped similar to an *ayin* (א) in the top, but the base is different:

צ

The *tzade* draws its name (and early font) from a fishing hook.² I’m not sure the letter in its font as we read and use it would meet great success in hooking a fish!

Our third and final new letter this week is called a “*qoph*.” This is a very important word for any Scrabble player, because it is one of the few legal words

¹ Klein, Ernest, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language*, (Macmillan 1987), at 492.

² *Ibid.*, at 539.

³ ~~Someone~~ ~~Some~~ ~~one~~ ~~is~~ ~~reading~~ ~~this~~ ~~and~~ ~~saying~~, “But you **aren’t** allowed to use foreign words in Scrabble!” That is true! But “*qoph*” is not technically a foreign word! It is the English word for a certain letter in the Hebrew alphabet!

that use a “Q” but no “U.”³ This letter is pronounced like a “Q” and looks like a “P” (almost). The Hebrew letter is:

ק

This letter means “the eye of a needle” and the early script certainly looked like a needle’s eye.⁴ The font we now use still retains a bit of the appearance, although not as strongly!

We will practice and use these three letters this week as we consider three different narratives in 2 Kings.

WHO IS AT YOUR *PETACH*?

We start with the Hebrew word, *petach* which starts with our new letter, the *pay* (פתח). *Petach* is the Hebrew word for doorway or entrance. We all have had the experience of having someone come to our door. At my office, those who work in the building come to my door if they wish to visit about something. For those who come in off the streets, they meet the receptionist who then either directs them to me, or more likely alerts my assistant who then brings the visitor up to my door and into my office.

Our story for the *petach* in 2 Kings is found in chapter 5. It is the story of Na’aman. Na’aman was not an Israelite; he was the famous and astute commander of the Syrian army. The Syrians, we should remember, were regular enemies of the Israelites. Syria was constantly trying to maintain a measure of control of the eastern highway that paralleled the Jordan Valley connecting Egypt and Mesopotamia. It was during a raid of Na’aman’s army into Israel that Na’aman got possession of an Israelite girl subsequently assigned to work for Na’aman’s wife.

Na’aman had a health problem. He had leprosy. The Israelite girl told Na’aman’s wife that there was a prophet in Israel who could cure the general. When Na’aman took that report to the king of Syria, the king of Syria wrote the king of Israel and told him to cure Na’aman of leprosy!

³ Someone somewhere is reading this and saying, “But you *aren’t* allowed to use foreign words in Scrabble!” That is true! But “*qoph*” is not technically a foreign word! It is the English word for a certain letter in the Hebrew alphabet!

⁴ *Ibid.*, at 559.

Now that must have been quite the sight! The enemy king sends his top general into enemy territory with a load of gold, silver, some gifts of cloths, and a letter instructing the Israelite king to perform a medical feat far beyond known human ability. The king of Israel was distraught, making quite a scene and seeing this as the Syrian king provoking a fight.

Elisha, the true prophet of *Yahweh* God, hears about the problem and sends word for the king of Israel to send the general to Elisha's house. Na'aman mounts his chariot, as do the soldiers with him, and they ride to Elisha's house. Na'aman himself goes to Elisha's *petach* (doorway), ready for treatment and healing. Elisha does not answer his door, nor does he have the commander brought in. Elisha does not even bother to see the commander! Elisha simply sends a messenger/servant to the door with a message:

Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean (2 Kings 5:10).

Na'aman was furious. After the trip to the king of Syria, then to the king of Israel, and then to Elisha's house (as opposed to the king of Israel summoning Elisha to court), Elisha gives a simple order to dip in the Jordan River seven times. This is a river that the general would have to cross in his return to his homeland, so Elisha was not asking for much in ordering the dipping seven times. It seems that the simplicity of it all galled the general as much as anything. His reply speaks volumes:

I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD *his* God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper (2 Kings 5:11).

Na'aman added that if all he needed to do was bathe, then he had rivers cleaner than the Jordan in his homeland!

Enter into this picture, the servants of the general. They came to him asking why he refused to do something so simple? Na'aman listened to them and dipped seven times into the Jordan. Of course, he came out clean after the last dip.

At this point, Na'aman returned to Elisha and Elisha himself visited with him. Na'aman recognized and confessed the truth of *Yahweh* as the only true God and urged Elisha to accept a gift as payment for the healing. Elisha declined the gift, no matter how hard Na'aman tried to give it.

Na'aman then asked Elisha for something most unusual. Na'aman wanted two mule loads of dirt so that any future sacrifices would be over Israelite soil! Na'aman also wanted Elisha (and *Yahweh*) aware that when Na'aman was in the

temple of the Syrian god Rimmon, that Na'aman would be worshipping Yahweh in his heart, and not the pagan deity.

Elisha sent Na'aman away with his blessing ("Go in peace"), and went back to his normal life. Elisha's servant, however, let his greed get the best of him. He waited until Elisha was not looking and then went after Na'aman, making up a story to get some of the clothes and silver. Once the servant returned to Elisha, it was clear that Elisha knew what had happened. Elisha pronounced that the servant would not only get the silver and cloths from Na'aman, but would get his leprosy too. The story ends with the servant leaving Elisha "a leper, like snow" (1 Kings 5:27).

This story is preached and taught often, and for good reason. It teaches many important lessons. We learn the simplicity of obedience thinking about how nearly Na'aman let his own view of things trump the simple instructions given by Elisha. We consider the king of Israel and learn the panic of those who need God, but have no relationship of trust and understanding where they can call upon him in need. We see with Elisha's servant that God's eyes are not hidden when people act out of greed and take things that are not right for them. The servant girl could have relished in the misery of her captor rather than alerting Na'aman's wife to the possible cure. Similarly at a time when Israel's leadership had turned its back on Yahweh, this servant girl was spreading the good news of Yahweh's might and concern for man.

We are impressed by the insight of Na'aman to recognize that Yahweh is indeed the only real God. We are also touched at his pious desire to make sure that his heart is known when his job requires him to go to a pagan temple.

But there is another focus that we are setting out in this lesson, one built around the *petach* (doorway) of Elisha. The man at the door was one of the most powerful men among the adversaries of Israel. He had a need and a heart that was right. He brought that need to Israel, to the God of Israel, through God's prophet. Elisha had a servant relay to this foreigner the instructions of God, and God healed the man.

This is a time in Israel when the heart of the Israelites was turning away from God to other gods and their idols, yet foreigners were coming into faith even as Israelites are abandoning faith. This becomes more pronounced in the experience of the prophet Jonah whom we consider in the next lesson. This same contrast is in the servants of Elisha and Na'aman. Elisha's servant lies and takes rewards that do not belong to him. He leaves the story a leper. Na'aman's servant wisely pointed out to him the simplicity of obedience, leading Na'aman to a cure. The foreigner is more tuned into the Lord than the "chosen" one.

POINT FOR HOME

“*Na’aman stood at the door of Elisha’s house*” (2 Kings 5:9).

Where are you (where am I) at the *petach* (doorway) of the man of God? Are we the one coming to God in need? Are we the one with the answers? Are we the messenger carrying the healing words of God? Are we the greedy servant trying to capitalize upon an opportunity, in spite of God’s will? Are we the Israelite king who stays away, oblivious to the whole story?

Truth be told, at different times in life, I probably fill most roles in this story, if not all. My prayer is that I am the one who comes to God in need, hears his word, however he gives it, and walks in obedience with all the joy that results.

WAS JEHU A *TZADIK*?

The Hebrew word *tzadik* appears over 250 times in the Old Testament. The first letter in the word is similar to the word itself. It is our letter *tzade*. The word *tzadik* (צַדִּיק) is both a marvelous word and an aspiration. Moses was a *tzadik*. Melchizedek had “*tzadik*” as part of his name. The word *tzadik* means “righteous.” So in Genesis 6:4 we read that Noah was “a righteous man.” Melchizedek means, “My king (“*melchi*”) is righteous (“*tzadik*”). The word conveys the idea of “righteous” as well as the English idea of “just.”

Not surprisingly, *tzadik* is used over and over as a descriptive word for Yahweh God. Psalm 71:2 calls on God to deliver and rescue in accordance with his righteousness. As one both morally pure and perfect, God’s righteousness causes him to punish evildoers and keep his promises.

With this in mind, we turn to the story of Jehu, the king that brought an end to the reign of Ahab, Jezebel, and the northern dynasty that started with Omri. Jehu, like Na’aman, was a military man. A commander of the Israelite armies, Jehu was surprised one day when a messenger of Elisha came into a room and anointed him king of Israel. The anointing prophet declared that Jehu was God’s instrument to strike down the house of Ahab and Jezebel.

The other military leaders heard about the prophet’s words and immediately proclaimed Jehu king. Jehu then went and assassinated the reigning king (Joram, son of Ahab) as well as Jezebel.⁵ But Jehu did not leave it there. Jehu also

⁵ We do well to note that Jehu was with Ahab when Ahab rode to claim Naboth’s vineyard after Jezebel had Naboth killed (2 Kings 9:26). That was the trip recorded in 1 Kings 21:16-24 where Elijah met Ahab (and Jehu) at the vineyard and pronounced the curse upon Ahab and the males in his house.

assassinated Ahaziah, the visiting king of Judah. He then wrote letters to the rulers of Israel's capital city Samaria. Jehu told the rulers to find the best and fittest of Ahab's 70 sons and set high on the throne so he could fight Jehu for the title of king.

Seeing that Jehu had already killed the reigning kings of Israel and Judah, the rulers were afraid and instead pledged themselves to Jehu. Jehu ordered them to prove their allegiance by executing all 70 of Ahab's sons and delivering their heads to Jehu in Jezreel. The heads were delivered and Jehu had them dumped in two piles at the entry to the city.

Jehu hid his own role in these deaths as he set out the action as one sanctioned from God:

It was I who conspired against my master and killed him, but who struck down all these? Know then that there shall fall to the earth nothing of the word of the LORD, which the LORD spoke concerning the house of Ahab, for the LORD has done what he said by his servant Elijah (2 Kings 10:9-10).

Jehu then killed in cold blood anyone else from the house of Ahab, including his close friends, his military supporters, and his priests. Having finished this killing, Jehu headed to the capital of Samaria, happening upon some relatives of the recently assassinated king of Judah (Ahaziah). He asked them what they were doing in Israel and was told they came to visit the royal family. Hearing this, Jehu killed all 42 of them.

Jehu then found a supporter named Jehonadab and asked him to ride in Jehu's chariot.

Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD (2 Kings 10:16).

Jehonadab went on the chariot ride with Jehu into Samaria. Once in Samaria, Jehu killed anyone left affiliated with Ahab.

After this, Jehu sent the call around to the countryside, seeking all the priests of Baal. Jehu did so deceptively, claiming,

Ahab served Baal a little, but Jehu will serve him much (2 Kings 10:18).

Jehu threatened to kill any Baal priest who failed to show up. This threat was ironic since once they did all show up, Jehu had them all executed, carefully ensuring that no priests or servants of Yahweh God were in their midst.

After killing the priests, Jehu had the worship stone removed from the Baal temple and had it destroyed. He then turned the temple into a latrine! Jehu is credited

with wiping out Baal worship from Israel for the 28 years of his reign. Because Jehu honored God's word in bringing destruction to Ahab's house, God promised that Jehu's sons would sit on the throne for four generations.

Was Jehu a *tzadik*? Was he a righteous man? Scripture does not say so. This title is not given to him, and would be inappropriate for him.⁶ Jehu used deceit and half-truths to accomplish his agenda. He also went far beyond the judgment of God bringing death to many people not even remotely from the house of Ahab. Old Testament scholar R. K. Harrison aptly described Jehu by his deeds, which revealed his,

...thoroughness of purpose, promptness of action, ruthlessness, and lack of principle... His impetuosity was demonstrated in his furious driving (2 Kings 9:20). He was bold, daring, unprincipled, masterful, and astute in his policy. But one seeks in vain in his character for any touch of magnanimity or of the finer qualities of the ruler. His "zeal for Yahweh" was too much a cloak for merely worldly ambition.⁷

Jehu used the authority of God both for the proper judgment he wrought as well as for the unnecessary slaughter. He set himself up as one who stood for God so that opposing Jehu was tantamount to opposing God. Old Testament scholar Paul House believes the murder of the Judahites coming to visit the royal family was the subject of Hosea's later lament,

Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel (Hosea 1:4-5).⁸

Jehu was not a righteous man. He was a man who used the language and even did some of God's works. But he also did many evil things, sometimes even calling them works of God. He did not know God, for he continued to worship the idols of Jeroboam.

During the reign of Jehu, Israel lost considerable land to Hazael,⁹ the usurper king of Syria that we discussed last lesson. By the time Jehu died (around 814 BC), he "had lost the whole of Transjordan south to the Moabite frontier on the Arnon."¹⁰

⁶ Not surprisingly, no king in the book of 1 or 2 Kings is called righteous! (Although Saul does say that David was "more righteous" than Saul in 1 Sam. 24:17). Even the few good kings who worship Yahweh rather than idols, do not carry the term.

⁷ Harrison, R. K., "Jehu," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Eerdmans 1982), Vol.2, at 981-2.

⁸ House, Paul, *The New American Commentary: 1 and 2 Kings*, (Holman 1995).

A *tzadik* is one who:

- “is generous and gives” (Ps. 37:21),
- “utters wisdom” and “speaks justice” (Ps. 37:30)¹¹,
- “cares for the needs of his animals” (Pro. 12:10),
- “hates what is false” (Pro. 13:5),
- “weighs his answers” (Pro. 15:28),
- “leads a blameless life” (Pro. 20:7),
- “gives without sparing” (Pro. 21:26),
- “cares about justice for the poor” (Pro. 29:7),
- “detest the dishonest” (Pro. 29:27),

None of these passages suggest that any human is *fully* righteous or without any sin. Ecclesiastes 7:20 makes this clear:

Surely there is not a righteous [*tzadik*] man on earth who does good and never sins.

In this sense, only God is truly a righteous one [*tzadik*], as the Scriptures repeatedly attest.

⁹ A good case can be made that Hazael attacked Israel because of an alliance between Jehu and Assyria, Hazael’s enemy to the north. As discussed in the last lesson, a discovered statue of Assyrian king Shalmaneser III spoke of Hazael as a usurper to the throne (the Bible explains he assassinated Syrian king Ben-Hadad, while the Assyrians reference Hazael as a usurper calling him the “son of a nobody.” Assyrian inscriptions also record the Assyrian warring against Hazael, while Jehu is shown bowing in submission to Shalmaneser III. This extra-biblical record indicates that Jehu joined sides against Hazael rather than supporting Hazael against the northern power. Once Shalmaneser III died and his warring against Hazael stopped, it is reasonable to assume that Hazael took his vengeance out on Israel. Scripture does not give the reasons for Hazael’s attacks against Israel, but merely notes that he conquered a good bit of Israel.

¹⁰ Bright, John, *A History of Israel*, (Westminster John Knox 2000), at 254

¹¹ Repeatedly, the Proverbs cite the importance of the mouth and words of the righteous. The mouth of the righteous is “a fountain of life” (Pro. 10:11) and brings forth wisdom (Pro. 10:31); the tongue of the righteous is “choice silver” (Pro. 10:20); the lips of the righteous “nourish many” (Pro. 10:21) and “know what is fitting (Pro. 10:32), *etc.*

Still, God blessed the righteous ones (Ps. 5:12), and he watches over their way (Ps. 1:6). The Lord upholds the righteous (Ps. 37:17), and never lets them fall (Ps. 55:22).

POINT FOR HOME

“I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel” (Hos. 1:4).

Scripture gives a lot of blessings that flow to the righteous. Those are not blessings enjoyed by Jehu. As believers, our goal should not be simply to *get* God’s blessings. This is never supposed to be about *us*. Our goal always needs to be walking in God’s ways, acknowledging him in each step. This is because we are his and he is our Lord and God. It is right and fitting to do so.

There is no sidestepping the results, however. God does bless the righteous, protect the righteous, uphold the righteous and give peace to the righteous. Do the righteous struggle? Of course! Do the righteous face persecution? Absolutely! But never in any way that conquers the righteous--only in ways that make the righteous purer and holier before God. This is the promise, and this is the goal. Let us seek to be *tzadeks* before a *tzadek* God!

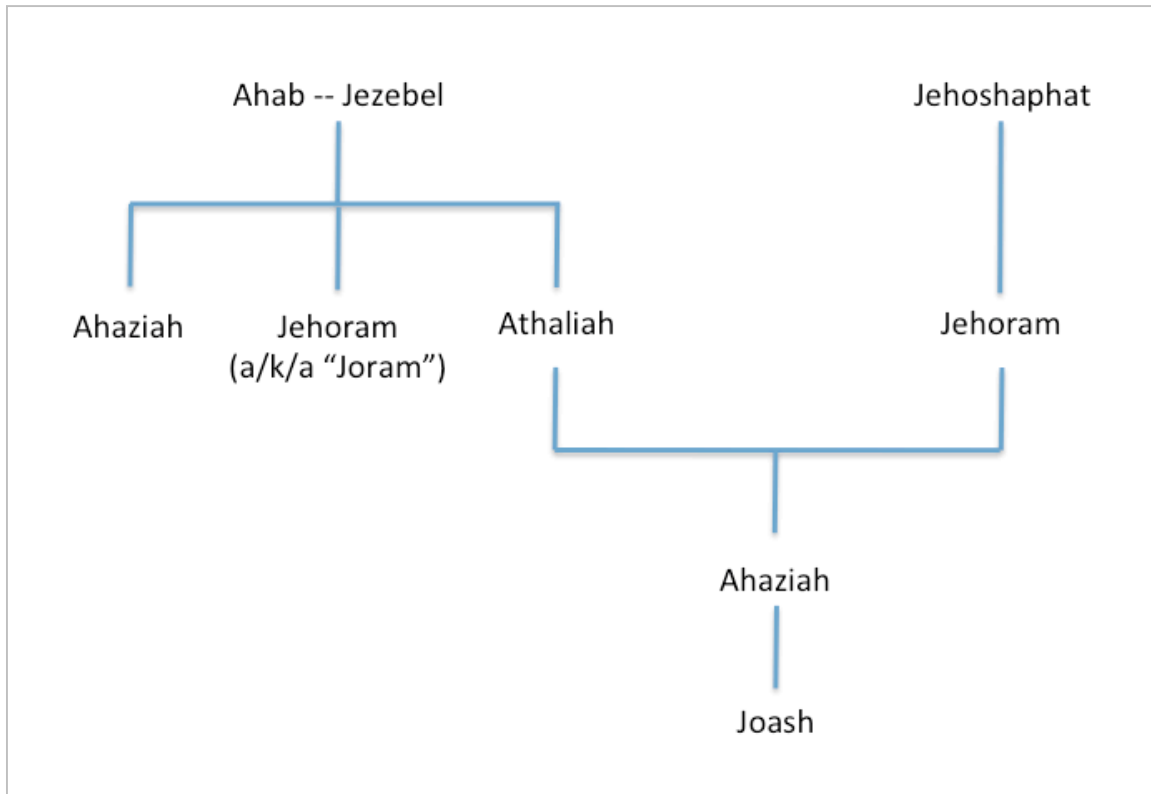
IS THE *QOL* MUSIC OR NOISE?

I will be the first to say that much of the music of my youth was “noise” to my father. He just never got into the groove of Deep Purple’s “Smoke on the Water!” It brings us to the Hebrew word *qol* (קול) which can mean, “noise,” “shouts of joy,” or even occasionally “music.” This is the word we feature in the story of Judah’s kingly succession after Jehu killed its king Ahaziah (2 Kings 9:27).

To understand the story, we need to add a bit of ancestry. Ahab and Jezebel were king and queen of Israel. They had a son named Ahaziah who reigned less than two years before dying. His brother Jehoram succeeded him. Ahab and Jezebel also had a daughter named Athaliah.

Meanwhile, in the southern kingdom of Judah, the king was Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat had a son also named Jehoram (2 Kings 1:17). If these mixed up names were not bad enough, Jehoshaphat married off his son Jehoram to Athaliah, the sister to Israel’s Jehoram and Ahaziah, who was also the daughter to Ahab and Jezebel. Judah’s Jehoram and Ahab/Jezebel’s Athaliah gave birth to a boy named in honor of Athaliah’s brother Ahaziah! So now we have in Judah, a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel as queen mother, when Ahaziah, her son takes the throne. This

is the Ahaziah who was visiting his uncle Jehoram in Israel when Jehu slays both Jehoram and Ahaziah.



The throne in Judah was then open for the next in David’s lineage, but Jezebel’s daughter, the Israelite Athaliah had other plans. She had everyone of the royal family killed, setting herself up as reigning queen! (She was, after all, Jezebel’s daughter... The acorn did not fall far from that tree!) Actually, she *thought* she had them all killed! Yes, she was bent on killing her own grandchildren to keep the throne to herself. An infant son of the now dead king was stolen away and hidden with his nurse in the temple of Yahweh. The boy’s name was Joash.

For six years, Joash remained hidden, and the wicked Israelite queen, with not a drop of David’s blood in her veins, sat on David’s throne. In the seventh year, a priest named Jehoiada brought things out in the open. Jehoiada made known to select guards the identity of the boy Joash. The guard then set up around Joash fully armed with instructions to kill any who approached the boy.

With Joash surrounded by troops, Jehoiada brought out David’s crown and placed it on his head. The troops and crowd started clapping their hands loudly proclaiming, “Long live the king!”

The Scripture then says,

When Athaliah heard the *qol* of the guard and of the people, she went into the house of the LORD to the people (2 Kings 11:13).

Athaliah realizes what has happened and shouts over and over “Treason!” Technically she was right, but it was she who had acted treasonously, not the priests and people! The guards took her outside the temple to kill her, and the seven-year-old began his forty-year reign.

Was the *qol* noise or was it music? I guess it depends on whose ears were hearing it!

POINT FOR HOME

“Athaliah heard the qol of the guard” (2 Kings 11:13).

This is really a question of sides and agendas. As simple as it may seem, we really do face a constant struggle to live God’s agenda, hear his music, or live our own concept of how the world should be, considering God’s sound distracting and distasteful noise. This is the point Scripture comes round to over and over. We need to live trying to focus our lives on God’s purpose, not our own. We pray for his will to be done on earth rather than our own. We want to dance to his music, and not any noise!

WANT MORE?

Get your Hebrew bookmarks out and practice on the letters! We only have three more to go and we will finish the alphabet! Then, we will announce the *contest and awards!* Meanwhile, email us at wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com and let us know how you are doing!