**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**2 KINGS-014. JEHOIADA AND JOASH by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. And when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal. 2. But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons which were slain; and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain. 3. And he was with her hid in the house of the Lord six years. And Athaliah did reign over the land. 4. And the seventh year Jehoiada sent and fetched the rulers over hundreds, with the captains and the guard, and brought them to him into the house of the Lord, and made a covenant with them, and took an oath of them in the house of the Lord, and shewed them the king's son. 5. And he commanded them, saying, This is the thing that ye shall do; A third part of you that enter in on the sabbath shall even be keepers of the watch of the king's house; 6. And a third part shall be at the gate of Sur; and a third part at the gate behind the guard: so shall ye keep the watch of the house, that it be not broken down. 7. And two parts of all you that go forth on the sabbath, even they shall keep the watch of the house of the Lord about the king. 8. And ye shall compass the king round about, every man with his weapons in his hand: and he that cometh within the ranges, let him be slain: and be ye with the king as he goeth out and as he cometh in. 9. And the captains over the hundreds did according to all things that Jehoiada the priest commanded: and they took every man his men that were to come in on the sabbath, with them that should go out on the sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest. 10, And to the captains over hundreds did the priest give king David's spears and shields, that were in the temple of the Lord. 11. And the guard stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, round about the king, from the right corner of the temple to the left corner of the temple, along by the altar and the temple. 12. And he brought forth the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and gave him the testimony; and they made him king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, God save the king. 13. And when Athaliah heard the noise of the guard and of the people, she came to the people into the temple of the Lord. 14. And when she looked, behold, the king stood by a pillar, as the manner was, and the princes and the trumpeters by the king, and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew with trumpets: and Athaliah rent her clothes, and cried, Treason, Treason. 15. But Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the host, and said unto them, Have her forth without the ranges: and him that followeth her kill with the sword. For the priest had said, Let her not be slain in the house of the Lord. 16. And they laid hands on her; and she went by the way by the which the horses came into the king's house: and there was she slain."*

*2 Kings 11:1-16*

The king of Judah has been killed, his alliance with the king of Israel having involved him in the latter's fate. Jehu had also murdered the brethren of Ahaziah, forty-two in number. Next, Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah and a daughter of Ahab, killed all the males of the royal family, and planted herself on the throne. She had Jezebel's force of character, unscrupulousness and disregard of human life. She was a tigress of a woman, and, no doubt, her six year's usurpation was stained with blood and with the nameless abominations of Baal worship. Never had the kingdom of Judah been at a lower ebb. One infant was all that was left of David's descendants. The whole promises of God seemed to depend for fulfilment on one little, feeble life. The tree had been cut down, and there was but this one sucker pushing forth a tiny shoot from the root of Jesse.

We have in the passage, first, the six years of hiding in the temple. It is a pathetic picture, that of the infant rescued by his brave aunt from the blood-bath, and stowed away in the storeroom where the mats and cushions which served for beds were kept when not in use, watched over by two loving and courageous women, and taught infantile lessons by the husband of his aunt, Jehoiada the high priest. Many must have been aware of his existence, and there must have been loyal guarding of the secret, or Athaliah's sword would have been reddened with the baby's blood. Like the child Samuel, he had the Temple for his home, and his first impressions would be of daily sacrifices and white-robed priests. It was a better school for him than if he had been in the palace close by. The opening flower would have been soon besmirched there, but in the holy calm of the Temple courts it unfolded unstained. A Christian home should breathe the same atmosphere as surrounded Joash, and it, too, should be a temple, where holy peace rules, and where the first impressions printed on plastic little minds are of God and His service.

We have next the disclosure and coronation of the boy king. The narrative here has to be supplemented from that in 2 Chron. xxiii., which does not contradict that in this passage, as is often said, but completes it. It informs us that before the final scene in the Temple, Jehoiada had in Jerusalem assembled a large force of Levites and of the heads of the fathers houses from all the kingdom. That statement implies that the revolution was mainly religious in its motive, and was national in its extent. Obviously Jehoiada would have been courting destruction for Joash and himself unless he had made sure of a strong backing before he hoisted the standard of the house of David. There must, therefore, have been long preparation and much stir; and all the while the foreign woman was sitting in the palace, close by the Temple, and not a whisper reached her. Evidently she had no party in Judah, and held her own only by her indomitable will and by the help of foreign troops. Anybody who remembers how the Austrians in Italy were shunned, will understand how Athaliah heard nothing of the plot that was rapidly developing a stone's throw from her isolated throne. Strange delusion, to covet such a seat, yet no stranger than many another mistaking of serpents for fish, into which we fall!

Jehoiada's caution was as great as his daring. He does not appear to have given the Levites and elders any inkling of his purpose till he had them safe in the Temple, and then he opened his mind, swore them to stand by him, and showed them the king's son. What a scene that would be--the seven-year-old child there among all these strange men, the joyful surprise flashing in their eyes, the exultation of the faithful women that had watched him so lovingly, the stern facing of the dangers ahead. Most of the assembly must have thought that none of David's house remained, and that thought would have had much to do with their submitting to Athaliah's usurpation. Now that they saw the true heir, they could not hesitate to risk their lives to set him on his throne. Show a man his true king, and many a tyranny submitted to before becomes at once intolerable. The boy Joash makes Athaliah look very ugly.

Jehoiada's plans are somewhat difficult to understand, owing to our ignorance of the details as to the usual arrangements of the guards of the palace, but the general drift of them is plain enough. The main thing was to secure the person of the king, and, for that purpose, the two companies of priests who were relieved on the Sabbath were for once kept on duty, and their numbers augmented by the company that would, in the ordinary course, have relieved them. This augmented force was so disposed as, first, to secure the Temple from attack; and, second, to compass the king--in his chamber, that is. We learn from 2 Chronicles that it consisted of priests and Levites, and some would see in that statement a tampering with the account in this passage, in the interests of a later conception of the sanctity of the Temple and of the priestly order. Our narrative is said to make the foreign mercenaries of the palace guard the persons referred to; but surely that cannot be maintained in the face of the plain statement of verse 7, that they kept the watch of the Temple, for that was the office of the priests. Besides, how should foreign soldiers have needed to be armed from the Temple armoury? And is it probable on the face of it that the palace guard, who were Athaliah's men, and therefore antagonistic to Joash, and Baal worshippers, should have been gained over to his side, or should have been the guards of the house of Jehovah? If, however, we understand that these guards were Levites, all is plain, and the arming of them with the spears and shields that had been king David's becomes intelligible, and would rouse them to enthusiasm and daring.

Not till all these dispositions for the boy king's safety, and for preventing an assault on the Temple, had been carried out, did the prudent Jehoiada venture to bring Joash out from his place of concealment. Note that in verse 12 he is not called the king, as in the previous verses, but, as in verse 4, the king's son. He was king by right, but not technically, till he had been presented to, and accepted by, the representatives of the people, had had the testimony placed in his hands, and been anointed by the high-priest. So they made him king. The three parts of the ceremony were all significant. The delivering of the testimony (the Book of the Law--Deut. 17:18, 19) taught him that he was no despot to rule by his own pleasure and for his own glory, but the viceroy of the true King of Judah, and himself subject to law. The people's making him king taught him and them that a true royalty rules over willing subjects, and both guarded the rights of the nation and set limits to the power of the ruler. The priest's anointing witnessed to the divine appointment of the monarch and the divine endowment with fitness for his office. Would that these truths were more recognised and felt by all rulers! What a different thing the page of history would be!

The vigilance of the tigress had been eluded, and Athaliah had a rude awakening. But she had her mother's courage, and as soon as she heard in the palace the shouts, she dashed to the Temple, alone as she was, and fronted the crowd. The sight might have made the boldest quail. Who was that child standing in the royal place? Where had he come from? How had he been hidden all these years? What was all this frenzy of rejoicing, this blare of trumpets, these ranks of grim men with weapons in their hands? The stunning truth fell on her; but, though she felt that all was lost, not a whit did she blench, but fronted them all as proudly as ever. One cannot but admire the dauntless woman, magnificent in sin. But her cry of Treason! treason! brought none to her side. As she stood solitary there, she must have felt that her day was over, and that nothing remained but to die like a queen. Proudly as ever, she passed down the ranks and not a face looked pity on her, nor a voice blessed her. She was reaping what she had sown, and she who had killed without compunction the innocents who stood between her and her ambitions, was pitilessly slain, and all the land rejoiced at her death.

So ended the all but bloodless revolution which crushed Baal worship in Judah. It had been begun by Elijah and Elisha, but it was completed by a high priest. It was religious even more than political. It was a national movement, though Jehoiada's courage and wisdom engineered it to its triumph. It teaches us how God watches over His purposes and their instruments when they seem nearest to failure, for one poor infant was all that was left of the seed of David; and how, therefore, we are never to despair, even in the darkest hour, of the fulfilment of His promises. It teaches us how much one brave, good man and woman can do to change the whole face of things, and how often there needs but one man to direct and voice the thoughts and acts of the silent multitude, and to light a fire that consumes evil.