

Athaliah

The Woman Who Was a Notorious Murderess

Scripture References - 2 Kings 8:26; 11; 2 Chronicles 22; 23:13-21; 24:7

Name Meaning - Taken away of the Lord, or Jehovah has afflicted.

Athaliah is also the name of two males (1 Chronicles 8:26, 27; Ezra 8:7).

Family Connections - She was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and so was half Israelite and half Phoenician, and she personified all the evil of her ill-famed parents and transferred the poison of idolatry into Jerusalem's veins.

She was the granddaughter of Omri, 6th king of Israel, "who waded through slaughter to a throne he never inherited." Athaliah married Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat. After many years of strife between the kingdoms of Judah and Israel political relations were more friendly, and as a mother of political expediency on the part of Jehoshaphat - which remains a blot upon his otherwise good memory - he gave his eldest son, Jehoram, in marriage to Athaliah whose brothers, loyal to the worship of Jehovah were murdered by Jehoram. Of this union Ahaziah was born who, with such a revolting figure as a mother, licentious and the personification of despicable arrogance, never had a chance to develop finer qualities of character. With such a mother as his wicked counselor what else could he do but walk in the ways of godless Ahab (2 Chronicles 22:3). After reigning for eight years Jehoram died, unmourned, of a predicted incurable disease. While he reigned, he was dominated by Athaliah who had the stronger character of the two, and who, having inherited from her evil mother strength of will and fanatical devotion to the worship of Baal, made Judah idolatrous. Ahaziah only reigned for a year. Wounded in battle by Jehu, he fled to Megiddo, where he died, and his wicked mother (2 Chronicles 24:7) became envious of the throne. But the sons of Ahaziah stood in her way, and with fanatical ambition she seized the opportunity and massacred all the legal heirs - so she thought. This wholesale, merciless, cruel-hearted murderess sought to exterminate the last vestiges of the House of David through which the promised Messiah was to come. Behind her dastardly crime to destroy "The Seed Royal" we can detect the evil machinations of the devil - a murderer from the beginning - to annihilate the promised seed of the woman predestined to bruise the satanic head. A bad woman bent on destruction is doubly dangerous. After putting to death her young grandsons, Athaliah reigned for six years, and was the only woman to reign as queen of Judah. The daughter of a king, wife of a king, mother of a king, she is now queen. While her husband reigned she was the power *behind the throne - now she is the power on the throne, and* proof of her energy, forcefulness and ability are seen in the length of her reign. A despotic ruler, her every gesture had to be obeyed.

During her reign part of the Temple of Jehovah was pulled down and the material used in the building of a temple of Baal. But the God who over-rules in the destinies of men and nations, intervened to redeem His promise of a Saviour from the tribe of Judah. Unknown to Athaliah as she set out to massacre all her grandsons, the youngest was hid from the orgy of destruction. The sister of Ahaziah, Jehosheba, wife of Jehoiada the high priest hid Joash until he was seven years old (2 Kings 11:2; 2 Chronicles 22:11). Jehoiada had plotted to put Joash (Jehoash) on the throne and waited for the opportune moment to declare the remaining son of Ahaziah the lawful king of Judah. Athaliah came into the Temple as the coronation of Joash took place, and rending her robe, cried: "Treason!" To save the Temple from being defiled with her evil blood she was slain just outside the door where the avenging guards waited to end her infamous life. Thus, as Edith Deen expresses it, The horses trampled over her body where she lay dead at the gates. In her miserable end Athaliah bore a singular resemblance to her mother Jezebel, who was abandoned to the dogs. Athaliah was left in a horse-path, to be trampled upon. Like her mother she died a queen, but without a hand to help her or an eye to pity her. Among the lessons one can gather from the record of the murderess is that we reap what we sow. To Athaliah life was cheap, and thus those who thwarted her purpose must be destroyed. But taking the sword, she perished by it. She breathed out murder, and was in turn murdered. A further lesson we learn from her stained history is that no one can thwart God's purposes of grace. Having promised a sinful world a Saviour, none could make such a promise null and void. Persecution and martyrdom have never been able to destroy the loyal worship of the true God. Idolatry and infidelity cannot possibly annihilate the imperishable Word of God. As we leave the shameful story of Athaliah we find ourselves in full agreement with the summary of her bloody career as given by Dr. Robert G. Lee - Her very name is an execration. She put the whole nation under the shadow of a great horror. She trampled on all faith. She violated all obligation. She lived with the shrieks of those she butchered in her ears. She lived with her hands red with the blood of princes and princesses. She died, frantic with rage, with the accusation of Treason on her lips. She died in the barnyard under the battleaxes of an aroused people.