

Sermon 49, One Big Evil Family, 2 Kings 8:16-29

Proposition: God's providential work in judgment and salvation is at work in the destinies of nations and in the places of your everyday life.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, God has a sense of place. He is omnipresent; we gladly and joyfully confess that the divine nature cannot be limited to a particular place. But nonetheless, God created particular places and He knows how important place is to us humans.

Tonight's section of text is the introduction to the next chapter's bloodbath. Things are building quietly, and though we do have two different battles in our text this evening, this is really the calm before the storm (to use a hackneyed cliché). What I hope to show you this evening about your Heavenly Father is that His providence is always at work for both judgment and salvation, in the affairs of nations and in the most ordinary places of your daily life. Don't think that God is absent from the kitchen at Panera, or from the mudroom of your home, or from the Campbell County courthouse, or anywhere else that your daily path takes you. He knows you, he knows where your family's from, and He is at work in those places. Let's see how the narrator communicates that truth in the lives of these Judean monarchs.

I. Jehoram ben Jehoshaphat, Ahab's son-in-law, vv. 16-24

We see first the son of Jehoshaphat. Now, Jehoshaphat's reign was reported way back in 1 Kings 22. We looked at that text on July 2 of this year. For the last several months, we have focused exclusively on events in Northern Israel under the reigns of Ahaziah and Jehoram, kings of Israel and sons of Ahab. Now we switch briefly back to Judah and see two kings named . . . Jehoram and Ahaziah! What do you think the narrator is trying to tell us? That Judah and Israel are starting to look so much like each other that even the names of their kings are difficult to tell apart.

Think about the current geopolitical map. No one is going to confuse the names Trump, Xi, and Putin with each other. But imagine a scenario in which one of Donald Trump's daughters marries the new president of China, who also happens to be named Donald. That would be weird, I know — but the whole point of the kings of Israel and Judah sharing names at the same time in history is to hammer home the truth that the sins of both kingdoms were damnably similar.

A. His Basic Information, vv. 16-17, 23-24

Well, Jehoram of Judah was the son of good king Hezekiah, but that didn't influence him much. He had been co-regent with his father for a time, but ruled on his own for 8 years in the 840s B.C.

B. The Evil of his Reign, vv. 18-22

And his reign was evil.

1. Its Source: Ahab's Household

The source of that evil was Ahab's line. He did things as they were done in Israel, as Ahab did them, because the daughter of Ahab was his wife. Brothers and sisters, I cannot warn you strongly enough against being unequally yoked. Do not, under any circumstances, date or think about dating an unbeliever. Interracial marriage is a beautiful thing; interfaith marriage is a deadly thing. This ill-fated union with Athaliah very nearly wiped out the line of promise, as we will see in chapter 11.

If you want your children to be idolaters and your grandchildren to be murdered by their own parents (i.e., aborted and/or mistreated to the point of death), then go ahead and marry or sleep with an unbeliever. Otherwise, don't you dare even think about such a thing.

2. Its Penalty Postponed: God's Promise to David

Yet God did not just wipe out Judah then and there. He relented, because He had promised dominion (according to some Hebrew scholars) or a lamp (according to other scholars) to David. That's right: God was merciful to the entire kingdom of Judah because of His plan to save the world through Christ. It wasn't because Judah's sins were less heinous; it was because God was committed to His promise. Why are you spared despite your sins, Christian? Because of God's promise to save the world through the Son of David. That's why. God was at work for salvation in this time of wickedness, state-sponsored idolatry, and economic depression.

Can you believe that God is always at work for salvation? That His promise will never be forfeited and His word will always come to pass?

The word of God trumps human sin. The promise of God outweighs anything we can do to try to stop it or make it of no effect. You and I know that we live in an evil time — yet we must not falter or be discouraged. God’s plan of salvation is at work right here, right now.

3. Its Consequences

But though God was planning salvation, He did not remove the consequences of Jehoram’s sin. The narrator highlights two of these for us.

a) Edom’s Revolt

The first was Edom’s revolt. Edom had apparently been a vassal of Judah since the days of King David almost two centuries before. Yet Jehoram was surrounded by night and barely managed to break through with his life. In the confusion, the text seems to indicate that Jehoram even managed to attack and kill some of his own chariot forces. What a metaphor for the hapless policies of his reign as a whole! One is reminded of Matthew Arnold’s words:

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night. (“Dover Beach”)

Jehoram’s leadership cost Judah its most important vassal ally, and thus access not only to the Red Sea at Ezion Geber but also trade routes to Arabia. Ouch. God is at work for judgment in the lives of those who deliberately and passionately pursue wickedness.

b) Libnah’s Revolt

The Judean Levitical city of Libnah revolted too at this time. What does that tell us? Well, do people leave a thriving, prosperous nation? No. People secede because they think they will be better off without being part of the particular nation they’ve been in to that point. Libnah decided that it had no future in Judah. That would be tantamount to Los Angeles or Dallas or even New York declaring its independence and saying that it has no desire to remain part of the United States. No matter the reason is, such a move doesn’t bode well for the future of a nation.

II. Ahaziah ben Jehoram, Ahab’s grandson, vv. 25-29

Well, Jehoram’s son Ahaziah reigned in his place.

A. His Basic Information, vv. 25-27

We see two troubling things right off the bat. First, he only reigns one year, and second, he reigns during the twelfth year of Jehoram of Israel, who only reigned twelve years (which we know from 3:1). As far as I can remember, Israel and Judah have never both lost a king in the same year before. This is not a good sign. Yet we won’t know exactly what’s going to happen until the next chapter.

Ahaziah was devoted to the ways of Ahab. See how v. 27 manages to mention Ahab three times? I think it’s clear that Ahab and his ways were a major influence in this king’s life. Indeed, with him it was all Ahab all the time. He was a son of Jezebel’s daughter, and he acted like it.

It just goes to show that infidelity is contagious.⁴ If you bring an unbeliever into your family, into your arms, into your bed — look out. Your family's ungodliness will mount by the day.

B. The Setup of his Downfall, vv. 28-29

The last two verses continue to show us our God, who is always at work for judgment and salvation. Ahaziah of Judah and Joram of Israel go together to fight the Syrians at Ramoth Gilead. Sound familiar?

1. Ramoth Gilead, the place of Ahab's wounding

It should, because this is exactly what happened to Joram's father Ahab and Ahaziah's grandfather Jehoshaphat. They got together to fight Syria in this exact spot. God has a sense of place, and His providence is at work in the places that your family frequents! And in that previous fight, the Israelite monarch was wounded mortally while the Judean monarch escaped. Once again, we see something similar.

2. Ramoth Gilead, the place of Joram's wounding

Joram is wounded here. He returns to the first major Israelite town, which also happened to be the location of the Omride family's vacation home — viz., Jezreel.

3. Jezreel, the place of Naboth's Vineyard

And of course Jezreel is the city where Naboth's vineyard was located and the city where the doom on Ahab's line was pronounced by Elijah. And as we'll see next week, it is also the place where both Ahaziah and Joram meet a grisly end at the hand of Jehu. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

III. Application

A. Trust God's Providential Work in Salvation

So where do we go from here? What should our lives look like based on this text? First of all, we should trust that God is work in the places where we go, the places where our families have lived for only a few weeks or for generation upon generation. His promise of salvation in Christ still stands. If He spared Judah for the sake of that promise, He will spare you too if you are united to Christ by faith.

B. Fear His Providential Work in Judgment

But beware that for those who do not trust Christ, God is at work for judgment. He can and will make life very difficult for those who refuse to submit to Him. Church revolts and splits are one potential sign of His disfavor. So don't fight Him. Don't resist Him. Fear Him, and trust His promise to David's Son. Amen.

⁴ For this phrase, as for the title of this sermon, I am again indebted to D.R. Davis, *in loc.*