

**JOASH**  
Fickle Faith  
II Chronicles 22-24

I. Thermometer or Thermostat?

A. What's the difference?

In many ways a thermometer and a thermostat are similar:

- They both are designed to give information about the environment (temperature).
- They often register the same numbers (room temperature).
- They sometimes even look alike.

But in one very important respect they are very different: A thermometer **reflects** the temperature while a thermostat **regulates** it.

B. Good King Joash

In many ways Joash looked like a good king: his training, his priorities, his decisions, etc. But he had one very serious moral flaw in his character: he behaved like a thermometer when God had designed him to be a thermostat. His behavior reflected his environment rather than regulating it. Although he was the king, he was a **follower** more than a **leader**.

C. Three objectives are envisioned for our study of the life of Joash this morning:

- 1) Become familiar with the story of Joash's life.
- 2) Analyze Joash's character flaw.
- 3) Apply what we have learned to our own lives.

II. The Life and Times of "Good" King Joash.

We find the story of Joash in II Chronicles 22-24 and II Kings 11-12. In examining these passages we can divide his life into three sections:

- 1) Ascendency: Turning **to** God (II Chronicles 22-23)
- 2) Faithfulness: Living **for** God (II Chronicles 24:1-14)
- 3) Apostasy: Turning **from** God (II Chronicles 24:15-27)

A. Ascendency: Turning to God (II Chronicles 22-23).

In many ways the most interesting part of Joash's story is how he came to the throne. It would be difficult to imagine a more dramatic entrance into the kingship. Understanding his family history and the events that preceded his reign help us to better understand the dynamics that influenced his life.

1) The Family Tree: Dysfunction Junction (II Chronicles 21-22).

Though his great-grandfather (Jehoshaphat) was a godly man, his wicked grandfather and father dramatically diluted the legacy of godliness that Joash received.

- a. Grandfather Jehoram (sometimes called Joram) (II Chronicles 21:1-20).

<sup>4</sup> When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father (Jehoshaphat) and was established, he killed all his brothers with the sword, and also some of the princes of Israel. <sup>5</sup> Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the **house of Ahab** had done, for the daughter of Ahab (Athaliah) was his wife. And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. (II Chron. 21:4-6)

Jehoram's reign was characterized by war and idolatry. The prophet Elijah warned him of the consequences of such a life, but Jehoram refused to listen.

<sup>12</sup> And a letter came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father, 'Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, or in the ways of Asa king of Judah (your grandfather), <sup>13</sup> but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel and have enticed Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem into whoredom, as the house of Ahab led Israel into whoredom, and also you have killed your brothers, of your father's house, who were better than yourself. <sup>14</sup> behold, the LORD will bring a great plague on your **people**, your **children**, your **wives**, and all your **possessions**. <sup>15</sup> and you **yourself** will have a severe sickness with a disease of your bowels, until your bowels come out because of the disease, day by day.'" (II Chron. 21:12-15)

b. Father Ahaziah (sometimes called Jehoahaz) (II Chronicles 22:1-9)

<sup>2</sup> Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri. <sup>3</sup> He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his **mother** was his counselor in doing wickedly. <sup>4</sup> He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as the house of Ahab had done. For after the death of his father they were his counselors, to his undoing. (II Chron. 22:2-4)

The defining characteristic of Joash's father was that he was controlled by his mother. He was momma's boy. It was Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, who was the real power in Judah. And her influence helped to usher in one of the darkest moments in the history of God's people. When Ahaziah was killed after only one year on the throne, Athaliah seized the throne of David for herself.

<sup>10</sup> Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the **royal family** of the house of Judah (She killed her own grandchildren!). <sup>11</sup> But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the king's sons who were about to be put to death, and she put him and his nurse in a bedroom. Thus Jehoshabeath, the daughter of King Jehoram and wife of Jehoiada the priest, because she was a sister of Ahaziah, hid him from Athaliah, so that she did not put him to death. <sup>12</sup> And he remained with them six years, hidden in the house of God, while Athaliah reigned over the land. (II Chron. 22:10-12)

It is interesting to note the role of two women in this drama. One woman (Athaliah) brought sin and destruction, the other woman (Jehoshabeath) brought salvation. Although the Bible seems to reflect a world ruled by men, it doesn't hide the **power of a woman** (Eve... Mary...) to affect human history... for good and for bad.

## 2) Ding, dong, the witch is dead (II Chronicles 23:1-15)

For seven long years Athaliah ruled in Judah. Thinking that all the legitimate descendants of David had been killed in her purge, the people of Judah lost all hope of ever re-establishing the true monarchy in Jerusalem. David's dynasty (and the hope for a Messiah!) was no more. But thanks to the courageous efforts of Jehoshabeath (Joash's aunt) and her husband Jehoida, the chief priest, the infant Joash was saved.

Joash was not the only baby in the Bible that was saved from the murderous rage of an evil ruler (Moses, Jesus...). God had a plan. And nothing Athaliah could do would thwart the **sovereign purposes** of God. In a carefully planned coup d'etat, Jehoida brought out the seven-year old Joash, proclaimed him king, put the crown on his head and began to shout, "Long live the king!"

*<sup>12</sup> When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she went into the house of the LORD to the people. <sup>13</sup> And when she looked, there was the king standing by his pillar at the entrance, and the captains and the trumpeters beside the king, and all the people of the land rejoicing and blowing trumpets, and the singers with their musical instruments leading in the celebration. And Athaliah tore her clothes and cried, "Treason! Treason!" <sup>14</sup> Then Jehoiada the priest brought out the captains who were set over the army, saying to them, "Bring her out between the ranks, and anyone who follows her is to be put to death with the sword." For the priest said, "Do not put her to death in the house of the LORD." <sup>15</sup> So they laid hands on her, and she went into the entrance of the horse gate of the king's house, and they put her to death there.*  
(II Chron. 23:12-15)

Euphoria filled the land as people celebrated the demise of the wicked queen! In our own day we saw something similar in 1989 when Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena, the hated communist rulers of Romania, were arrested, set before a televised kangaroo court on Christmas Day and then executed. There was dancing in the streets that day!

## 3) Jehoida rules as regent (II Chronicles 23:16-21)

While Joash was still a child (in his minority), Jehoida ruled on his behalf. During these years, Jehoida labored to clean up the damage done during Athaliah's reign of terror, preparing the way for Joash to assume full control when he came of age.

- He led the people in a renewal of the covenant. (II Chron. 23:16)
- He led a movement to tear down the temple of Baal and abolish idolatry in the land. (II Chron. 23:17)
- He restored true worship in the Temple at Jerusalem. (II Chron. 23:18-19)
- He chose two wives for Joash. (II Chron. 24:3)

The nation of Judah and the new king owed an immense debt to this godly priest who had **preserved** the dynasty of David and **restored** true worship to the land. The result of his influence is recorded in these simple words: *So all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet after Athaliah had been put to death with the sword. (II Chron. 23:21)*

B. Faithfulness: Living for God (II Chronicles 24:1-14).

When Joash came of age, he assumed the reigns of power for himself. For over two decades, he lived for God. It appeared that Joash was going to be one of the great kings of Judah and leave **a legacy** of godliness and justice.

*<sup>4</sup> After this Joash decided to restore the house of the LORD. <sup>5</sup> And he gathered the priests and the Levites and said to them, "Go out to the cities of Judah and gather from all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that you act quickly." (II Chron. 24:4-5)*

Solomon's Temple was now 125 years old and in need of repair. More significantly, in recent decades true worship of the living God had been perverted into idolatrous **syncretism**, even in the Temple itself (II Chron. 24:7). Overcoming initial reluctance even among the priests themselves, Joash created a nation-wide capital campaign to renovate the Temple.

*<sup>8</sup> So the king commanded, and they made a chest and set it outside the gate of the house of the LORD. <sup>9</sup> And proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to bring in for the LORD the tax that Moses the servant of God laid on Israel in the wilderness. <sup>10</sup> And all the princes and all the people rejoiced and brought their tax and dropped it into the chest until they had finished. (II Chron. 24:8-10)*

The result was that the Temple was restored and the nation was called back to the worship of the one true God.

C. Apostasy: Turning from God (II Chronicles 24:15-27).

1) When Jehoida dies...

Up until this point in the story everything appears to be wonderful. However, the careful reader may have discerned two subtle hints in the text. Once you know how the story ends, these verses take on great significance.

- *Joash was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem... <sup>2</sup> And Joash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD **all the days of Jehoiada the priest.** (II Chron. 24:1-2)*
- *But Jehoiada grew old and full of days, and **died**. He was 130 years old at his death. <sup>16</sup> And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, and toward God and his house. (II Chron. 24:15-16)*

Suddenly we are introduced to a question of vital importance: What will happen to Joash once the influence of godly Jehoida (uncle, high priest, adviser, confidant) disappears? Will he continue to walk in faith and lead wisely? Or will the change of "climate" (thermoter? thermostat?) precipitated by Jehoida's death cause a change in behavior? Jehoida's death will **reveal the truth** about who Joash really is:

- Is he a thermometer or a thermostat?
- Is he a leader or **a follower**?
- Is he a man of principle or a **wimp**?
- Can he walk on his own or does he need a **crutch**?
- Does he truly know God or only know **about** God?
- Does he serve God because it is right or because it is **convenient**?
- Does he reflect his environment or does he **shape it**?

The very next verses give the tragic answer to our questions:

*<sup>17</sup> Now after the death of Jehoiada the princes of Judah came and paid homage to the king. Then the king **listened** to them. <sup>18</sup> And they abandoned the house of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs. <sup>19</sup> Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the LORD. These testified against them, but they would not pay attention. (II Chron. 24:15-19)*

Even though Joash began to follow ungodly counsel, God had not given up on him. He sent prophets to warn them and call them back to godliness and truth. They refused to listen. But God would not give up. Perhaps Joash would reconsider his ways if the son of the man who had done so much for him spoke to him.

*<sup>20</sup> Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, "Thus says God, 'Why do you break the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.'" <sup>21</sup> But they conspired against him, and by **command of the king** they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD. <sup>22</sup> Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. And when he was dying, he said, "May the LORD see and avenge!" (II Chron. 24:20-22)*

This brazen act of cruelty left its mark on many in Israel, notably Jesus. Centuries later he referred to Joash's treachery in a speech to the Pharisees who, like Joash, were guilty of **refusing to listen** to the voice of God.

*<sup>47</sup> Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. <sup>48</sup> So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. <sup>49</sup> Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' <sup>50</sup> so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation. <sup>51</sup> from the*

*blood of Abel to the blood of **Zechariah**, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. <sup>52</sup> Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the **key of knowledge**. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.” (Luke 11:47-52)*

Lest anyone miss the gravity of Joash's sin, God sent judgment upon him in a form that let everyone know God's opinion about "good" King Joash.

*<sup>23</sup> At the end of the year the army of the Syrians came up against Joash. They came to Judah and Jerusalem and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus. <sup>24</sup> Though the army of the Syrians had come with few men, the LORD delivered into their hand a very great army, because Judah had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers. Thus they **executed judgment** on Joash. <sup>25</sup> When they had departed from him, leaving him severely wounded, his servants conspired against him because of the blood of the son of Jehoiada the priest, and killed him on his bed. So he died, and they buried him in the city of David, but they did not bury him in the tombs of the kings. (II Chron. 24:23-25)*

### Table Talk

1. How do you react to Joash? Does his life make you angry? Or do you feel sympathy for him? Do you immediately identify with him or do you find him revolting? Discuss these reactions with the men at your table.
2. From a theological standpoint, was Joash someone who had genuine faith but lost it? Or was he someone who never had it in the first place? In other words: can one lose one's salvation?
3. What makes a man a thermostat/follower? (Like Joash)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

4. What makes a man a thermometer/leader? (Like Jehoida)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

### III. Fickle Faith.

In Joash, we have a classic illustration of what might be called "fickle faith." Whether he had genuine faith at the beginning or not, we see in his tragic story a man who was **unstable**.

**vascillating, mercurial,** fickle. He couldn't make a commitment and then stick with it. In his life we find three characteristics of fickle faith.

A. **Second-hand** faith.

Joash had a faith that seemed to depend on someone else's (Jehoida's). As long as that influence was present, faith seemed to be present too. But when that influence disappeared... second-hand faith was unable to stand on its own legs.

Many in the church today have a faith similar to that of Joash's. As long as they are in association with friends, spouse, parents, leaders, etc. they have a faith that seems authentic. But what happens when that influence is removed? Without my own **personal experience** of Christ, faith and repentance, my faith is on a very shaky foundation.

The Samaritan village mentioned in the fourth chapter of John illustrates what needs to happen in everyone's spiritual journey. The villagers had heard the woman's testimony and then had had a two-day personal encounter with Jesus for themselves.

*They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard **for ourselves**, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." (John 4:42)*

B. Unable to **feed himself**.

The text seems to imply that Joash never learned to feed himself. Jehoida was always there to spoon-feed him: to tell him what he needed to know, to read and interpret the Scriptures for him, to pray for him and with him, to discern the will of God for him, etc.

It is natural (and even cute!) when an infant cannot feed himself and needs to be spoon-fed. But something is seriously wrong when 10, 20 or 40 year-old cannot feed himself but needs someone else to prepare his meals and then feed him!

*<sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be **teachers**, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food. <sup>13</sup> for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish **good from evil**.*

*Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of **repentance** from dead works and of **faith** toward God, <sup>2</sup> and of instruction about **washings (baptisms)**, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup> And this we will do if God permits. <sup>4</sup> For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> if they then **fall away**, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. (Hebrews 5:12-6)*

Indeed, learning to feed ourselves on a diet of solid food is essential!

C. A focus on **pleasing other people**.

First, Joash wanted to please Jehoida. But when Jehoida died, he then wanted to please his new advisers. Those who have fickle faith are men-pleasers. They are consumed with the desire to please those around them. This causes them to adapt to their social context much like a **chameleon** adapts to his. Their identity is fluid... it depends on where they happen to be and who they happen to be with. Paul had strong words for this.

*For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. (Gal. 1:10)*

## IV. The Art of Self-Leadership.

In his book *Courageous Leadership*, Bill Hybels has a wonderful chapter entitled "The Art of Self-Leadership." The point of the chapter is that before we can effectively lead others, we must first learn to lead ourselves! Hybels encourages us to regularly ask ourselves a series of questions to make sure we are managing the most fundamental thing entrusted to us: ourselves.

A. Is my **calling** sure?

Am I devoting my life, my energies, my resources, my time to that which God created me for and Christ redeemed me to do?

B. Is my **vision** clear?

Where am I headed? Are my objectives clear? Are my goals in life pleasing to God and honoring to Christ? Can I stand before my family, my friends, my church and humbly say: "This is the picture of the future I believe God has given us. This is what we are going to do; this is why we're going to do it; and this is how we are going to accomplish the mission."

C. Is my **passion** hot?

Does serving God still ignite fires of passion in the depths of my soul? Does zeal for the Lord's work consume me? Or does Christian discipleship feel more like a duty and a responsibility?

D. Am I developing my **gifts**?

Can I name the spiritual gifts I believe God has given me? What am I doing to use and develop those gifts for the Kingdom of God?

E. Is my **character** submitted to Christ?

Am I a man of integrity? Would my wife and children say that my walk matches my talk?

F. Is my **pride** subdued?

One of the dangers of leadership is pride. Even in the church (maybe we should say, *especially* in the church) the temptations to selfish ambition and egocentrism are great. Would my family, friends and colleagues consider me to be a humble person?

G. Am I overcoming **fear**?

Are there areas in my life where I may be missing the blessing of God because I am controlled by my fears?

- H. Are **interior issues** undermining my leadership?  
Do I have unresolved issues from my past or unconquered sins in my present that are sabotaging my ability to step out and lead like I know God wants me to do?
- I. Is my **pace** sustainable?  
Am I building into the rhythms of my life times for rest, renewal and refreshment? Am I making sure that my body, my emotions, my spirit and my mind stay fresh and alive? Or does my unbroken pace leave me exhausted and fearful if I'll even make it to the finish line?
- J. Is my **love** for God and people increasing?  
What drives me, motivates me? If my most basic motivation to lead is anything other than love for God and love for people, then I have embarked on a journey of very questionable value.

### Table Talk

1. Do you consider yourself a leader or a follower? Discuss whether this means you are a thermostat or a thermometer. Does Christ expect all of his disciples to be "leaders"?
2. Look at the three characteristics of "fickle faith" (Second-hand faith, Spoon fed, Men-pleasers). Which of these traits has been (or perhaps still is) the most difficult for you to overcome? What do you plan to do about it?
3. Look over the ten questions on the art of self-leadership again on pages 8 & 9. Zero in on one question that seems designed for your current situation. Share this with your table partners and suggest possible ways you can better respond to this question in the future.
4. Pray for one another.