

Women of Tanach 4: Ataliah: Villain or Victim?

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner – torczyner@torontotorah.com

The players - Generation 1:

Ahab	Husband of Jezebel; King of Israel
Jezebel	Wife of Ahab; born to King Et-baal of Tzidon

The players - Generation 2:

Ataliah	Daughter of Ahab; sister of Yoram; wife of Yehoram; mother of Achaziah
Yoram	Son of Ahab; brother of Ataliah; King of Israel
Yehoram	Son of Yehoshaphat; King of Judea; husband of Ataliah
Yehu	Massacred the household of Ahab and Jezebel; became King of Israel

The players - Generation 3:

Achaziah	Son of Yehoram and Ataliah; King of Judea
Yehosheva	Daughter of Yehoram (and Ataliah?); saved Achaziah's son Yoash

The Rise and Fall of Ataliah

1. Kings II 8:16-18

And in the fifth year of the reign of Yoram son of Ahab, king of Israel, and Yehoshaphat, king of Judea, Yehoram son of Yehoshaphat, king of Judea, took the throne. He was 32 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for eight years in Jerusalem. He walked in the paths of the kings of Israel, emulating the house of Ahab, for he had married the daughter of Ahab, and he committed evil in Gd's eyes.

2. Kings II 8:24-27

And Yoram [really Yehoram] slept with his ancestors and he was buried with them in the City of David, and his son Achaziah reigned in his place. In the twelfth year of Yoram son of Ahab, king of Israel, Achaziah son of Yehoram began to reign in Judea. Achaziah was 22 when he began to reign, and he reigned for one year in Jerusalem; his mother's name was Ataliah, daughter of Omri the king of Israel. And he followed the path of the house of Ahab, performing evil in Gd's eyes like the house of Ahab, for he had married into Ahab's household.

3. Kings II 9 Yehu anointed king of Israel, kills King Yoram of Israel, Jezebel, and King Achaziah of Judea

4. Kings II 10 Ahab's household is destroyed; Achaziah's brothers are killed; Yehu takes the throne of Israel

5. Kings II 11:1-4

And Ataliah, mother of Achaziah, saw that her son had died, and she arose and destroyed the seed of the monarchy. Yehoshava, daughter of King Yoram and sister of Achaziah, took Yoash son of Achaziah and stole him away from among the murdered princes. She hid him and his nurse in the room of the beds; they hid him from Ataliah, and he was not killed. And he hid in the house of Gd for six years while Ataliah reigned over the land. And in the seventh year Yehoyada gathered the officers of hundreds of warriors and runners, and he brought them to the house of Gd and made a covenant with them, and he made them swear in the house of Gd, and he showed them the prince...

6. Kings II 11:12-16

And he produced the prince and placed the crown upon him, along with the Torah scroll, and they coronated him and anointed him, and they struck their hands together and declared, "May the king live!" And Ataliah heard the sounds of the running nation, and she came to the nation, to the house of Gd, and she saw the king standing upon the stage according to protocol and the officers and trumpets before the king, and the entire nation rejoicing and blowing the trumpets, and Ataliah tore her garments and declared, "It's a plot! It's a plot!" Yehoyada the kohen instructed the officers of hundreds, the military officers, "Remove her from the house to the assembly area, and execute anyone who

comes to her aid," for the kohen said she should not be killed in the house of Gd. And they made space for her, and she followed the bridle path to the palace, and she was killed there.

A technical question: Queen?!

7. Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, Pp. 368-369

<http://books.google.ca/books?id=VzyOurF2KIAC&pg=PA368>

Of many queen mothers we know virtually nothing. A small number of them are famous because they rose to a position of power. Mesopotamian queen mother Sammuamat ruled as regent for her son. Also in Egypt several queen mothers ruled as regents for their minor sons. Four out of two to three hundred pharaohs were females: Nitokret, Sobeknefru, Hatshepsut and Tausret. Only if a queen ruled in her own right did she not depend on her husband's power base, which was very exceptional. It is significant that the reigns of these few female kings mostly ended in tragedy. Queens or queen mothers could occupy the throne in a period when the dynasty was in danger of vanishing because there was no male heir...

8. Talmud, Horiyyot 11b

We do not anoint a king who is the son of a king. Why did they anoint Solomon? Because of Adoniyahu's dispute. Why did they anoint Yoash? Because of Ataliah...

9. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Shegagot 15:6

Who is the 'nasi' mentioned in the Torah? This is a king who has no Jewish human authority above him, and none above him in his reign other than HaShem his Gd, whether he is from the house of David or another tribe of Israel.

10. Nachmanides to Talmud, Shevuot 30a

"She judged Israel" means that she led by her word, and they acted based on her advice, like a queen.

Victim or Villain?

11. Kings I 21:21-29

"Behold, I will bring evil upon you, I will consume everything you leave, and I will destroy every child of Ahab and all who are sealed away and left in Israel. I will make your house like that of Yeravam son of Nevat and Basha son of Achiah because of the [Divine] anger you incited, causing Israel to sin." And regarding Jezebel Gd said, "The dogs will eat Jezebel in the moat of Yizre'el."... And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth upon his flesh and he fasted and lay in sackcloth, and he walked humbly. And Gd said to Eliyahu the Tishbi, "Do you see how Ahab humbles himself before Me? Because he humbles himself before Me, I will not bring this evil in his days. I will bring this evil upon his house during his son's days."

12. Kings I 22:34

And a man drew his bow opposite him [Ahab], and he struck the king of Israel between the lower armour and the breastplate. Ahab said to his charioteer, "Turn your hand and carry me out of the camp, for I am wounded."

13. Talmud, Sanhedrin 27b

Why do we need Deuteronomy 24:16, 'Parents will not be put to death for their children?' If it is to teach that parents won't die for their children's sins and children will not die for their parents' sins, it is already written [in the same verse], 'Each man will die for his own sins!'... But how could you really say children will not die for their parents' sins? Exodus 34:7 says, 'He remembers the sins of the parents on their children!' That is where they hold on to their parents' sins.