

## **Pushing Back the Darkness**

‘A fire started in the grasslands close to a farm. The county fire department rushed to the scene, but the fire was more than they could handle. Someone suggested calling the volunteer fire department. Despite some doubt that they would be of any assistance, they were called. The volunteers arrived in a dilapidated old fire truck. They rumbled straight towards the fire, drove right into the middle of the flames and stopped! The firefighters jumped from the truck and frantically started spraying water in all directions. Soon they had snuffed out the centre of the fire and leaving two parts which were easily put out. As the farmer watched all this, he was impressed and grateful that his house and farm had been spared. He quickly got his chequebook and donated \$1000 to the volunteer fire department. A local news reporter asked the volunteer fire captain how they planned to use the funds. The captain replied, “The first thing we’re gonna do is get the brakes on our fire truck fixed!”

Well, that’s one way to put a fire out! Or, rather, from today’s Bible lessons, we just jump right in the middle of it. Consider Judah’s King Joash. We recall the tragedy that was the illegal reign of Athaliah, Joash’s grandmother; of how she had assassinated all the heirs to the throne, in order to secure her own rule. Her

lust for power was seemingly insatiable. That she was inhabited by the demonic spirit that had lived in Jezebel earlier is plain. Athaliah, however, was outsmarted by God. God is good at that, isn't He? After all, He is God! And though evil people with satanic assistance wreak havoc on the earth, God remains in control, sits in the heavens and laughs at their pathetic attempts to wrest control of the universe away from Creator Father God. As we read last week, Baby Joash is hidden away from Athaliah until, at age seven, he is brought out by loyalists and crowned king in her stead, taking his rightful place on the throne of Judah. So after the uproar, turmoil and tumult of Athaliah's reign of evil, Judah was once again governed by a righteous king and administration. Well, for a while, mostly in the earlier years of Joash' reign.

We read here in II Kings 12, referencing the additional details in the parallel accounts in II Chronicles 24, that Joash began his reign under the righteous guidance of the high priest Jehoiada. Recall that Jehoiada raised the boy Joash in secret in the Temple building itself for those seven years. Now that he was out in the open, Jehoiada continued to guide the young king. And it came to pass that the Temple itself needed repairs.

As for all buildings, maintenance is required. Leaks develop, cracks appear, plaster and finishes give way, paint pigments fade. If things are left as is, eventually the entire structure will collapse. The Temple was no different. God could have maintained it all by Himself, as He did during the 40 years in the wilderness. For

God's very presence persisted in the Holy of Holies despite the people's recurring unfaithfulness and abominable idolatry. But that is not how God operates in this current age, though this state of affairs is not permanent, for when the future New Jerusalem appears, descending from Heaven, there will be no more maintenance required! For even during the Millennial Kingdom when His Majesty Christ Jesus directly rules the earth, rust, deterioration, and decay will begin to reverse themselves as the original perfection of the earth and the universe is reasserted. But for now, in this current phase of existence, God partners with humans to both maintain and build back the Kingdom of God on earth.

Holy Spirit moved King Joash to initiate a renovation of the Temple. Now the Jerusalem Temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world. The total wealth of God's people was concentrated here, and justifiably so. As God showered His blessings on the people, fickle in their faith though they were, the wealth of His blessings accumulated in this place. Never more so than during the reign of King Solomon. The entire interior of the Temple was covered in pure gold. Everything the eye could see was gold. Even the 200 decorative shields that hung on the walls were themselves made of solid hammered gold. To say nothing of the holy vessels, the golden menorah, the brazen altar, the table for the offering bread, and the Ark of the Covenant itself. No comparable concentration of wealth in a single building existed in all the world. It was legendary, and renowned over the entire Middle

East and beyond. But as awesome as all that was, in later eras, the Temple's gold was often looted. As an object of envy to surrounding nations, when Judah was rebelling against the Lord and His commands, God would in response lift His hand of protection allowing the curses of the covenant for their disobedience to manifest. And so we read of the repeated sacking of Jerusalem.

In times of peace, the wealth of the nation would return to the Temple in stages. But never as splendid and bounteous as in Solomon's day. Even so, it was still a place of great wealth. And in times of apostasy, as during Athaliah's rule, it was little more than a museum piece—great to look at, a source of national pride, but not a place of awe-inspiring worship. And it'd fallen into disrepair. It desperately needed attention. So the renovation project under King Joash was initiated. Offerings solicited. Money came in. Funds were appropriated. But even after twenty years, still no construction had begun! Extra-biblical sources indicate that much of the money was being embezzled by some of the very people entrusted to gather it and distribute it for the repair projects. And after King Joash confronted the priests and Levites about the unacceptable state of affairs, and unconscionable "bureaucratic" red-tape delays, a renewed effort was begun. This time, an official offering box with a hole at the top was built. No one could see how much was collected. More importantly, no one with sticky fingers could pilfer money out of it when others weren't looking! This time, the funds were secure. The workmen them-

themselves were scrupulously honest, rightly fearing the honor of the Lord, and used the monies in perfect order, requiring no accounting of it at all! And the Temple was repaired. So some of the darkness that had settled upon the land and people was pushed back. It took two attempts, but it succeeded. For a while.

We're told that Joash reigned 40 years. That's a good, long time. And was plenty of years long enough for people to get off track. In his "mature" years, though the Temple had been renovated and Temple worship restored, Joash neglected to remove the pagan altars scattered throughout the land. The people were still worshipping demonic false gods here and there, and continuing to defile the Holy Land. Obtuse and hardheaded Joash became as his years as pampered king and lord over his domain lengthened. Until God had to allow King Hazael of Damascus to attack Judah in order to get Joash's attention. It wasn't successful. Joash, we're told in II Chronicles 24:22-25, though he'd been raised and guided by the priest Jehoiada, ended up having Jehoiada's two sons killed! And when Hazael attacked, instead of seeking God in prayer and supplication, Joash took matters into his own hands. Never a wise course of action—to take matters into our own hands, that is! King Joash raided the Temple treasury and removed all the gold and silver and the sacred vessels and furnishings and sent them to Hazael to "bribe" Hazael to leave Jerusalem and Judah alone. The payoff worked, and Judah was again at peace. For a while. But at what cost!! Joash, hav-

ing been wounded in battle with King Hazael and the Syrian army, was then himself assassinated by his own servants in retaliation for having killed the high priest Jehoiada's, sons. Amaziah, Joash's son, then took the throne in his place.

With Joash's coronation as the new and rightful king of Judah, a pushback against darkness had began. But it was never completed. It succeeded only part way. The national repentance was not total. By the end of Joash's reign, things had started to revert to wickedness once again. How tragic! But we can appallingly see the same thing happening in America today as well. During President Trump's first term in office, a pushback against the darkness encroaching over our land began. But by the end of his term, using the cover of a pandemic and its accompanying Godless responses and remedies, the most evil, debauched and fraudulent election in our history took place three years ago. The pushback against the darkness fell short. Far, far short. So much so the darkness took more ground in our land than ever before. But the devil has overplayed his hand. More and more people have been "awoken" and are beginning to see the putrid cesspool that's been swelling up under their noses for decades. The push back against darkness is mounting! Don't forget to mention America in your prayers! Daily. Though we decidedly do not deserve His mercy, God is not done with us. So rejoice in Him, and stay faithful to Him and His commands, regardless of the difficulties this life throws at us. It will be worth it. Vastly more than worth it!

