

## Who was Athaliah in the Bible?

Athaliah was queen of Judah from 841-835 BC and the only female monarch to sit on David's throne in biblical history. Athaliah was the daughter of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel of Israel, and she married Jehoram, the eldest son of Judah's King Jehoshophat. Her time as queen is nestled amid centuries of evil monarchs who reigned over Judah and Israel. An avid Baal zealot, Athaliah rivaled the wickedness of the kings who came before and after her. Her story can be found in 2 Kings 11 and 2 Chronicles 22-23.

Athaliah's husband, Jehoram, was king of Judah until his death in 841 BC. Unlike his father, Jehoram was a wicked king. Athaliah's son, Ahaziah, at the age of 22, ascended to the throne, and proved himself just as evil as his father (2 Kings 8:18, 25-27). Athaliah counseled her son in his devilish schemes (2 Chronicles 22:3). Ahaziah served as king of Judah for less than one year, for he was assassinated along with Israel's ailing King, Joram. Their assassin was Jehu, who had originally been a commander in King Ahab's army (2 Kings 9:5, 25). The prophet Elisha had anointed Jehu as the new king of Israel and commissioned him as an instrument of the Lord to carry out God's judgment on King Ahab and his entire idolatrous family (1 Kings 19:1-17; 2 Kings 9:1-13). Jehu's mission of ending Ahab's dynasty included putting Jezebel and her sons to death. Ahaziah happened to be visiting Joram when Jehu arrived to assassinate Joram, and Ahaziah was killed, too.

When Athaliah received word that her son was dead, she seized the opportunity to usurp the throne by murdering Ahaziah's sons—her own grandsons—thus eradicating the entire royal family so she could take the throne. Unbeknownst to Athaliah, a single grandchild escaped the massacre. Jehosheba, the baby's aunt and the wife of the high priest Jehoiada, took the infant Joash and hid him and his nurse in a bedroom. Joash was later

smuggled out of the castle and taken to the temple, where he remained hidden for six years while Queen Athaliah reigned over the land (2 Kings 11:1-3).

As queen, Athaliah used her influence to further establish Baal worship in Judah, installing priests and building altars for her idol in the very temple of the Lord (2 Kings 11:18; 2 Chronicles 24:7). In this way Athaliah followed the footsteps of her mother, Jezebel. Interestingly, the name Athaliah means either “God is exalted” or “dealt violently with by God.” Queen Athaliah did not exalt God with her life; instead, God dealt violently with her.

After Athaliah had reigned six years, the high priest Jehoiada set guards around the temple and publicly crowned the young Joash as the rightful king. As the new king was anointed, “the people clapped their hands and shouted, ‘Long live the king!’” (2 Kings 11:12). Athaliah heard the commotion, realized what was happening, and ran out of the palace shouting, “Treason! Treason!” (verse 13). Jehoiada commanded the troops to capture Athaliah and execute her, and so they killed the queen “where the horses enter the palace grounds” (verse 16). Seven-year-old King Joash, under the direction of the faithful high priest, tore down the temple of Baal, smashed the altars and images of Baal, and killed the priest of Baal. And “all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was calm, because Athaliah had been slain” (verse 20).