

Athaliah: Sovereign Queen of Judah

II Kings 8:26

Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem one year; **his mother's name was Athaliah daughter of King Omri of Israel.**

בן-עשרים ושנים שנה אחזיהו במלכו ושנה אחת מלך בירושלם ושם אמו עתליהו בת-עמרי מלך ישראל:

II Kings 11

When Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, learned that her son was dead, she promptly killed off all who were of royal stock.

But Jehosheba, daughter of King Joram and sister of Ahaziah, secretly took Ahaziah's son Joash away from among the princes who were being slain, and [put] him and his nurse in a bedroom. And they kept him hidden from Athaliah so that he was not put to death. He stayed with her for six years, hidden in the House of GOD, while Athaliah reigned over the land.

In the seventh year, Jehoiada sent for the chiefs of the hundreds of the Carites and of the guards, and had them come to him in the House of GOD. He made a pact with them, exacting an oath from them in the House of GOD, and he showed them the king's son.

He instructed them: "This is what you must do: One-third of those who are on duty for the week shall maintain guard over the royal palace; another third shall be [stationed] at the Sur Gate; and the other third shall be at the gate behind the guards; you shall keep guard over the House on every side.

The two divisions of yours who are off duty this week shall keep guard over the House of GOD for the protection of the king.

You shall surround the king on every side, with your arms at the ready; and whoever breaks through the ranks shall be killed. Stay close to the king in his

ועתליה אם אחזיהו (וראתה) [ראתה] כי מת בנה ותקם ותאבד את כל-גרע הממלכה: ותקח יהושבע בת-המלך-יורם אחות אחזיהו את-יואש בן-אחזיהו ותגנב אתו מתוך בני-המלך (הממותתים) [המומתים] אתו ואת-מינקתו בחצר המטות ויסתרו אתו מפני עתליהו ולא הומת:

ויהי אתה בית יהוה מתחבא שש שנים ועתליה למלכת על-הארץ: לפ

ובשנה השביעית שלח יהוידע ויקח את-שרי (המאיות) [המאות] לכרי ולרצים ויבא אתם אליו בית יהוה ויכרת להם ברית וישבע אתם בבית יהוה וירא אתם את-בן-המלך:

ויצנם לאמר זה הדבר אשר תעשון השלשית מכם באי השפּת ושמרי משמרת בית המלך:

והשלשית בשער סור והשלשית בשער אחר הרצים ושמרתם את-משמרת הבית מסח:

ושתי הידות בכם כל יצאי השפּת ושמרו את-משמרת בית-יהוה אל-המלך:

והקפתם על-המלך סביב איש וכליו בידו והבא אל-השדרות יומת והיו את-המלך בצאתו וקבאו:

ויעשו שרי (המאיות) [המאות] ככל אשר-צוה יהוידע הכהן ויקחו איש את-אנשיו באי השפּת עם יצאי השפּת ויבאו אל-יהוידע הכהן:

ויתן הכהן לשרי (המאיות) [המאות]

את-החנית ואת-השלטים אשר למלך דגד אשר בבית יהוה:

ויעמדו הרצים איש וכליו בידו מפתח הבית הימנית עד-פתח הבית השמאלית למזבח ולבית על-המלך סביב:

ויוצא את-בן-המלך ויתן עליו את-הגזר ואת-העדות וימלכו אתו וימשחוהו ויכו-כף

comings and goings.”

The chiefs of hundreds did just as Jehoiada ordered: Each took his men—those who were on duty that week and those who were off duty that week—and they presented themselves to Jehoiada the priest.

The priest gave the chiefs of hundreds King David’s spears and quivers that were kept in the House of GOD.

The guards, with their arms at the ready, stationed themselves—from the south end of the House to the north end of the House, at the altar and the House—to guard the king on every side. [Jehoiada] then brought out the king’s son, and placed upon him the crown and the insignia. They anointed him and proclaimed him king; they clapped their hands and shouted, “Long live the king!”

When Athaliah heard the shouting of the guards [and] the people, she came out to the people in the House of GOD. She looked about and saw the king standing by the pillar, as was the custom, the chiefs with their trumpets beside the king, and all the people of the land rejoicing and blowing trumpets. Athaliah rent her garments and cried out, “Treason, treason!”

Then the priest Jehoiada gave the command to the army officers, the chiefs of hundreds, and said to them, “Take her out between the ranks and, if anyone follows her, put him to the sword.” For the priest thought: “Let her not be put to death in the House of GOD.”

They cleared a passageway for her and she entered the royal palace through the horses’ entrance: there she was put to death.

And Jehoiada solemnized the covenant between GOD, on the one hand, and the king and the people, on the other—as well as between the king and the people—that they should be GOD’s people.

Thereupon all the people of the land

וַיֹּאמְרוּ יְחִי הַמֶּלֶךְ: }ס

וַתִּשְׁמַע עֲתָנִיָּה אֶת־קוֹל הָרָצִין הָעַם וַתֵּבֵא
אֶל־הָעָם בֵּית יְהוָה:

וַתֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה הַמֶּלֶךְ עֹמֵד עַל־הַעֲמֹוד כַּמִּשְׁפָּט
וְהַשָּׂרִים וְהַחֲצָצְרוֹת אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְכָל־עַם הָאָרֶץ
שֹׁמְחִים וְתִקְוָה בַּחֲצָצְרוֹת וַתִּקְרַע עֲתָנִיָּה אֶת־בְּגָדֶיהָ
וַתִּקְרָא קָשָׁר קָשָׁר:

וַיֵּצֵא יְהוֹיָדָע הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־שָׂרֵי (הַמַּאֲיוֹת)

[הַמַּאֲיוֹת ו] פָּקְדֵי הַחֵיל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם הוֹצִיאוּ

אֹתָהּ אֶל־מִבֵּית לַשְּׁזֵרֹת וְהִבָּא אַחֲרֶיהָ הַמֶּת

בַּחֲרֹב כִּי אָמַר הַכֹּהֵן אֶל־תּוֹמַת בֵּית יְהוָה:

וַיֵּשְׁמוּ לָהּ יָדַיִם וַתֵּבֹא דָרוֹךְ־מִבּוֹא הַסּוּסִים בֵּית

הַמֶּלֶךְ וַתּוֹמַת שָׁם: }ס

וַיִּכְרֹת יְהוֹיָדָע אֶת־הַבְּרִית בֵּין יְהוָה וּבֵין הַמֶּלֶךְ

וּבֵין הָעָם לַהֲיוֹת לָעַם לַיהוָה וּבֵין הַמֶּלֶךְ וּבֵין

הָעָם:

וַיָּבֹאוּ כָל־עַם הָאָרֶץ בֵּית־הַבַּעַל וַיִּתְּצוּהוּ

אֶת־מִזְבְּחָתוֹ וְאֶת־צִלְמֵי שִׁבְרֵי הַיֵּטֵב וְאֵת מִתְּנֵן

כֹּהֵן הַבַּעַל הָרָגוּ לִפְנֵי הַמִּזְבְּחוֹת וַיִּשֶׁם הַכֹּהֵן

פָּקְדֹת עַל־בֵּית יְהוָה:

וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שָׂרֵי הַמַּאֲיוֹת וְאֶת־הַכֹּהֲנִי וְאֶת־הָרָצִים

וְאֵת כָּל־עַם הָאָרֶץ וַיִּרְיֵדוּ אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ מִבֵּית

יְהוָה וַיָּבֹאוּ דָרוֹךְ־שֹׁעַר הָרָצִים בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשָּׁב

עַל־כַּפֵּסַת הַמְּלָכִים:

וַיִּשְׁמַח כָּל־עַם־הָאָרֶץ וְהָעִיר שִׂקְטָה

וְאֶת־עֲתָנִיָּה הַמִּיתוּ בַּחֲרֹב בֵּית (מֶלֶךְ) [הַמֶּלֶךְ]:

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went to the temple of Baal. They tore it down and smashed its altars and images to bits, and they slew Mattan, the priest of Baal, in front of the altars. [Jehoiada] the priest then placed guards over the House of GOD.

He took the chiefs of hundreds, the Carites, the guards, and all the people of the land, and they escorted the king from the House of GOD into the royal palace by the gate of the guards. And he ascended the royal throne.

All the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet. As for Athaliah, she had been put to the sword in the royal palace.

Ruth Rabbah 4:5

“Behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem[, and he said to the reapers: May the Lord be with you. They said to him: May the Lord bless you” (Ruth 2:4).

“Behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem”] – Rabbi Tanḥuma said in the name of the Rabbis: There are three matters that the earthly court decreed and the supernal court agreed with them, and these are: To greet another with the name of God, the Scroll of Esther, and tithes. Greeting others, from where is it derived? It is as it is stated: “That think to cause My people to forget My name” (Jeremiah 23:27). When did they think to do so? It was during the days of Atalyahu.

וְהִנֵּה בָּעָזוּ בָּא מִבֵּית לֶחֶם (רוּת ב, ד), רַבִּי תַנְחוּמָא בְּשֵׁם רַבִּנָּן אָמַר, שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים גָּזְרוּ בֵּית דִּין שָׁל מִטָּה וְהִסְכִּימוּ עִמָּהֶם בֵּית דִּין שָׁל מַעֲלָה, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן: לְשָׂאֵל שְׁלוֹם בְּשֵׁם, וּמַגִּילַת אֶסְתֵּר, וּמַעֲשָׂרוֹת. שְׂאִילַת שְׁלוֹם מִנּוּ, שְׁנֵאָמַר (יִרְמְיָה כג, כז): הַחֲשָׁבִים לְהַשְׁכִּיחַ אֶת עַמִּי נְשָׂמִי, אֵימָתִי חָשְׁבוּ בִּימֵי עֲתִלְיָהוּ

Ruth Rabbah 7:15

“The women said to Naomi: Blessed is the Lord, who has not left you without a redeemer today, [and may his name be proclaimed in Israel” (Ruth 4:14).

“The women said to Naomi: Blessed is the Lord, who has not left you without a redeemer today.”] Just as the day rules over the heavens, so, it will be with your descendants; they will dominate and rule over Israel forever. Rabbi Ḥunya said: It was due to the women’s blessing

וּתְאִמְרָנָה הַנָּשִׁים אֶל נְעָמִי בְּרוּךְ ה' אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִשְׁבִּית לָךְ גֹּאֵל הַיּוֹם (רוּת ד, יד), מָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה רוּדָה בְּרַקִיעַ, כֹּךְ יֵהָא בְּזִרְעָה, רוּדָה וְשִׁלִּיט בִּישְׂרָאֵל לְעוֹלָם. אָמַר רַבִּי חוּנְיָא מְבָרְכוּתֵיהֶן שָׁל נָשִׁים לֹא נִתְקַעְקְעָה בִּיצְתוֹ שָׁל דָּוִד בִּימֵי עֲתִלְיָהוּ וְרַבִּי תַנְחוּמָא בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל אָמַר נְשָׂמָה כְּתִיב (בְּרֵאשִׁית יט, לב): וְנִחְיָה מְאֹבְיָנוּ זָרַע, אֵין כְּתִיב כָּאֵן בּוֹ, אֱלָא זָרַע, אוֹתוֹ הַזֶּרַע שֶׁהוּא בָּא מִמָּקוֹם אַחֵר, וְאִיזָה זֶה, זֶה מְלֹךְ הַמַּשְׁחִיחַ.

<p>that the line of David was not cut off during the days of Atalyahu. Rabbi Tanḥuma said, in the name of Rabbi Shmuel: There it is written: “We will give life to offspring from our father” (Genesis 19:32). Son is not written here, but rather, offspring – that offspring that will come from elsewhere, and who is this? It is the messianic king.</p>	
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Flavius Josephus (1st cent. CE), *The Antiquities of the Jews*

When Athaliah unexpectedly heard the tumult and the acclamations, **she was greatly disturbed in her mind**, and suddenly issued out of the royal palace with her own army; and when she was come to the temple, the priests received her; but as for those that stood round about the temple, as they were ordered by the high priest to do, they hindered the army inert that followed her from going in. But when Athaliah saw the child standing upon a pillar, with the royal crown upon his head, she rent her clothes, and cried out vehemently, and commanded [her guards] to kill him that had laid snares for her, and endeavored to deprive her of the government. But Jehoiada called for the captains of hundreds, and commanded them to bring Athaliah to the valley of Cedron, and slay her there, for he would not have the temple defiled with the punishments of this pernicious woman; and he gave order, that if any one came near to help her, he should be slain also; wherefore those that had the charge of her slaughter took hold of her, and led her to the gate of the king's mules, and slew her there.

From Handel's *Athaliah* (18th cent. CE, after Racine's *Athalie*, 17th cent. CE): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kYW2sJVJE4>.

E'en now, as I was sunk in deep repose,
 My mother's awful form before me rose;
 But ah! she chill'd my soul with fear,
 For thus she thunder'd in my ear:
 “O Athalia, tremble at thy fate!
 For Judah's God pursues thee with His hate,
 And will with unrelenting wrath this day
 Set all His terrors round thee in array.”