

women IN SCRIPTure

EXPLORING ALL THE WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

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Abi (Abijah): Mother of King Hezekiah

by Stephanie Catmull



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She knows that adherence to the Law and worshipping the God of Abraham would be the key to saving the nations of Judah and Israel.

ABI (ABIJAH)

II Kings 18:2, II Chronicles 29:1

II Kings 18:2: *He [Hezekiah] was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah.*

II Chronicles 29:1: *Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done.*

Abi (Abijah) is a woman mentioned in only two sentences in the entire Old & New Testament because of her relation to the kings of the northern and southern tribes of Israel in approximate 750-700 B.C. Though she is merely listed as the daughter of Zechariah, the wife of Ahaz, and the mother of Hezekiah, her short footnote in history speaks volumes. Scrutinizing her personality through the mirror of her family gives a glimpse as to her powerful influence in ancient Biblical times.

Let's first take a brief glimpse at her father Zechariah, and the time in which he ruled as king in 753 B.C. The lands of Israel and Judah were in a state of civil unrest, with the 12 tribes of Jacob now being divided between the northern and southern kingdoms. King Solomon, responsible for building the first great Temple of Jerusalem, had levied high taxes on his people and exacted heavy manual labor from its slaves and citizens during its construction. Upon King Solomon's death, Rehoboam, his son and successor, continued this oppressive tradition (even though the Temple had already been completed) against the advice of his elders, thus enraging the people and headed the country into a civil war. Jeroboam, Solomon's high counselor and advisor, attempted to negotiate with Rehoboam and lift the laborious demands on behalf of the citizenry, to no avail. Jeroboam, after his failed attempt to keep the kingdom united, successfully led the secession of the 10 Northern Tribes, forming the country of Israel, and thus leaving Rehoboam as king of the two remaining Southern Tribes of the land of Judah (Judah and Benjamin).

The country of Israel, now ruled by Jeroboam, was essentially prevented from worshiping at the Temple of Jerusalem since they were forbidden to enter the land of Judah. Instead, Jeroboam built a temple in Samaria (the capital of Israel), and thus opposes – willfully or unwillfully - the law of Moses on where the Jewish people were ordered to worship (Jerusalem). Jeroboam and the country Israel, now separated from the land of Judah and worshiping outside of Jerusalem, begin to assimilate the pagan traditions of other tribes and further

stray from adhering to their Jewish law and traditions of worship.

Here enters Zechariah (Abijah's father) who succeeds Jeroboam as king of the Northern Tribes of Israel in 753 B.C. and rules for 6 months in Samaria. According to the Bible, he does evil in the eyes of the Lord, as his fathers had done. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. Zechariah was an evil ruler, and decried the laws of Moses. As a ruler who was immersed in and propagated the pagan traditions, he was nonetheless quite aware of Jewish law, having lived under its traditions under Solomon's reign. His daughter, Abi(jah) would have also been raised under some guise of Jewish tradition as well, as their culture and her household would have been a mixture of both lifestyles. She would have seen the purity, blessings and spiritual Godliness of the Jews in Judah against the backdrop of pagan idol worship being celebrated by her family in Israel. Abi(jah) would have discerned how the further away the people, and her father the King, went from God's law, the further the people of Israel slid into a life of depravity and evil.

Zechariah, six months into his reign, is brutally assassinated in front of his people by Shallum son of Jabesh. It is completely plausible to assume that this assassination of her father took place in front of Abi(jah) as well. Having witnessed her father's gruesome murder would not only have left her in a total state of shock and fear, but also caused her take stock in her current situation. It's not hard to wonder that Abi(jah) looked upon her country's decline into paganism as the largest factor leading to her father's death. Faith and adherence to the Jewish law could have saved her father and her country. Time and time again, the Law of Moses tells the Jewish nation how to worship the God of Abraham, and the consequences of the nation if they break this Law.

Abi(jah)'s story doesn't end here, as she is soon married to King Ahaz of the land of Judah. How and why this marriage takes place is a mystery, since she is a daughter of the northern tribes of Israel. Perhaps it was a marriage for treaty between the two kingdoms, as was often the case during ancient times. Women were often used as bargaining chips, for wealth, or as a contractual alliance between warring nations. Since she had no children and no father, she could have been turned over as a slave wife. Quite presumably, this was not a desired marriage on her part, especially since King Ahaz proves to be one of the most evil kings of Judah.

Although her husband is a descendent of King David, he not only defies Jewish law, he becomes one of the most evil kings to reign over Judah. Amongst his many grievances against the Holy Nation, King Ahaz casts idols for worshipping Baal, burns sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, and offered sacrifices to the gods of Damascus. Most horrific, though, is when he sacrificed his sons in the

fire (against Jewish Law Leviticus 18:21). The Bible does not clearly state if these are the sons that he had with Abi(jah), or perhaps with another wife. But for Abi(jah) to watch her children (or stepchildren) murdered by being burned to death must have left an indelible impression on her. Going against God's law – as both her father and husband did – led only to the torturous death of those close to her.

Seeing again how defiance of God's law leads only to death, Abi(jah) would quite literally run into the arms of God and put her faith, trust, love and hope back into the God of Abraham. She vows to serve Him, not outwardly as fear that her husband could put her death, but through her son Hezekiah, teaching him the ways of the ancients, and instructing him on the laws of Moses and King David. She knows that adherence to the Law and worshiping the God of Abraham would be the key to saving the nations of Judah and Israel.

Women during Biblical times did have some influence in their families, as shown through many Biblical narratives. They typically ran their households with much authority, and this authority and efficiency of running a household was an extremely desirable and admirable trait for husbands to have in their wives.

Abi(jah) exerted such influence in her palace, especially since her husband King Ahaz was preoccupied with the affairs of state.

According to Josephus, Abi(jah) also became a citizen of Jerusalem through her marriage to King Ahaz, and thus enjoyed the many rights that this afforded her. She quite possibly had access to many tutors and the finest education for her son, and made sure that his Jewish upbringing was thorough and complete. More importantly, she exerted the strongest spiritual influence on her son so that Hezekiah would worship God without compromise, and restore his country back to the ways of King David and Solomon before him.

According to the Bible when her son Hezekiah reigns approximately 715 – 686 B.C., he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the pagan Asherah poles. He successfully engineered Hezekiah's tunnel, which served to provide water to the nation and keep them alive when Jerusalem was attacked by the Assyrians in 701 B.C. This tunnels survives to this day, and is a testament to Hezekiah and his faithfulness to God and his nation.

Hezekiah, according to the Bible, trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses. And the Lord was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him.



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Abi(jah) can only be described as a heroine of the Jewish faith and the Old Testament as her perseverance and faithfulness to God survived her evil father King Zechariah of Israel, and her evil husband King Ahaz of Judah. Her powerful, spiritual influence on her son Hezekiah, one of the greatest Kings in the Old Testament, can easily be surmised. Even though she is only mentioned in two sentences in the Bible, her personality shines through and as such should be considered as one of the greatest queen-mothers of all time.



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