

AMAZIAH AND FAILURE TO LEARN FROM HISTORY
2 CHRONICLES 25

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Writer and philosopher George Santayana (PROJECTOR ON--- SANTAYANA QUOTE) is credited with this statement: **“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”** (*The Life of Reason*, 1905) Philip Schaff is regarded by many as the most famous modern church historian. Born in Switzerland and educated in Germany, he spent most of his teaching and writing career in the US. (SCHAFF QUOTATION) He said this about history: **“History is, and must ever continue to be, next to God’s Word, the richest foundation of wisdom, and the surest guide to all successful practical activity.”** (CT, issue 25, “Why Study Church History?”

Why is this the case? Our English word “history” has within it the answer. History is ultimately His story. The Bible teaches us that God is sovereign over this world and over everything that happens within it. He has a plan for mankind, and He is accomplishing His purposes. In the midst of particular circumstances it may be difficult to know what He is seeking to accomplish. But there are basic principles evident in history and backed up by the Bible which have lessons to teach us about how we should navigate this world in which we live. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In 2019 the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation administered the civics test necessary to pass for immigrants who wish to become American citizens to a representative sample of 41,000 Americans. Only 40% passed the test. Only 27% of those under age 45 passed it. One might think that those younger people are closer to the time of formal education and might remember American history and civics lessons better than us older codgers. But such is not the case. A group called the American Conference of Trustees and Alumni found that only 18% of US colleges require a course in US history or government in order to graduate. Other similar surveys find a disturbing lack of knowledge among Americans about world and US history. If history really is His story, then it is important that we Christians maintain an interest in history. Such is the lesson of the passage before us this morning.

We have been doing a study of the kings of Judah as told in the Old Testament book of 2 Chronicles. (PROJECTOR ON--- DIVIDED KINGDOM CHART) We have seen that after David and Solomon left the scene in roughly 1000 BC, the kingdom of Israel was divided into a northern kingdom, which kept the name Israel, and a southern kingdom, which had the name Judah, because of the tribe of that name which dominated in the south. (DIVIDED KINGDOM) All of the kings of Israel are labeled in the Bible as evil. The kings in the south are a mixed lot. We have seen that these descendants of David over time have become less responsive to God and His word.

Last week we looked at Joash, who was saved from the effort of his evil grandmother Athaliah to destroy all the descendants of David. Joash was protected by his uncle Jehoida, who was chief priest of the temple in Jerusalem. After Jehoida died, Joash turned away from his godly upbringing. He ended up killing the son of Jehoida, who brought a message from God that Joash better get his act together. Because of Joash's evil treatment of this prophet and his turning away from God, the country was overrun and Joash was killed.

I.

So we pick up the story today in 2 Chronicles #25 (p. 377 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs) as we consider Amaziah's FAILURE TO LEARN ABOUT WRONG ALLIANCES WITH UNBELIEVERS. (I. FAILURE TO LEARN ABOUT WRONG ALLIANCES..) In the first two verses we read, **"Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. 2 And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet not with a whole heart."**

Amaziah's reign is usually dated from 796 to 767 BC. This young king had to be aware of the circumstances of his father's death. He had to know that his dad had killed the prophet Zechariah, the son of the high priest Jehoida, who had protected his father as a child. He had to know that his country had been overrun by an inferior army of the Syrians after that.

Here we are told that Amaziah generally did right. Yet he did not follow the Lord with "a whole heart." The word for "whole" is *shalem*. It is a form of the Hebrew word *shalom*, with which some of us are familiar. It means "full, complete." The idea is that Amaziah has a limited commitment. He follows God and His word when it is convenient, when it does not conflict with his own agenda.

According to vv. 3 & 4, **"And as soon as the royal power was firmly his, he killed his servants who had struck down the king his father. 4 But he did not put their children to death, according to what is written in the Law, in the Book of Moses, where the Lord commanded, 'Fathers shall not die because of their children, nor children die because of their fathers, but each one shall die for his own sin.'"**

This is cited as an example of the right things that Amaziah did. His father behaved badly toward the end of his life. Yet his killers were also evil. They were Gentiles who had promoted the worship of false gods. What they did with Amaziah's father was murder, though it also accomplished the judgment of God. So the son was right in having the killers executed.

Often what was done in such situations was to kill the whole family of such assassins to avoid any retribution from them. But that was going beyond what was right and just. This was consistent with the law of God received from Moses, In Deuteronomy #24 v. 16 (DEUTERONOMY 24:16) the Old Testament law declared, **"Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because**

of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin.” So King Amaziah did right in showing this restraint.

The story continues in v. 5 of our passage: **“Then Amaziah assembled the men of Judah and set them by fathers' houses under commanders of thousands and of hundreds for all Judah and Benjamin. He mustered those twenty years old and upward, and found that they were 300,000 choice men, fit for war, able to handle spear and shield.”** Benjamin was the tribe located just north of Judah. For much of the divided kingdom period the people of this tribe sided with Judah.

There is some uncertainty among the scholars about the proper understanding of the Hebrew word for “thousand” here. Some think that the word is better translated as “officers,” or “military units.” This is not a standing army. This is like calling up the National Guard. It involves a preparation for a looming conflict.

Verse 6: **“He hired also 100,000 mighty men of valor from Israel for 100 talents of silver.”** The scholars say that this amounts to about 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ tons of silver, which would be equivalent to three months wages for each soldier, if indeed the reference is to 100,000 soldiers, rather than 100 military units or officers.

The problem here is that King Amaziah’s ancestors have gotten into trouble with YHWH, the God of Israel, for making alliances with the northern kingdom of Israel. The kings of that country are all labeled in the Scriptures as being evil. Amaziah’s ancestors have run into trouble for making these kinds of agreements. Amaziah is not learning from his own Judean history.

According to vv. 7 & 8, **“But a man of God came to him and said, ‘O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the Lord is not with Israel, with all these Ephraimites. 8 But go, act, be strong for the battle. Why should you suppose that God will cast you down before the enemy? For God has power to help or to cast down.’”**

Because King Amaziah has ignored his own nation’s recent history, the Lord sends an unnamed prophet to him. His basic message is: If you follow through on this plan of yours with the northern mercenaries, you will have a bad outcome. YHWH is the source of any victory for Judah. History should teach you that it is reliance upon Him which will bring victory in battle.

According to v. 9, **“And Amaziah said to the man of God, ‘But what shall we do about the hundred talents that I have given to the army of Israel?’ The man of God answered, ‘The Lord is able to give you much more than this.’”** What about the money? What about the hole in the budget? How am I going to explain this waste of money? The prophet says, “Trust God. He has much more to provide for you than this.”

Verse 10: **“Then Amaziah discharged the army that had come to him from Ephraim to go home again. And they became very angry with Judah and returned home in**

fierce anger.” Ephraim is another name for Israel. Ephraim is apparently the dominant tribe in the northern kingdom of Israel.

If these mercenaries got paid, which apparently they did, why is there such anger? They got paid without having to risk their lives in battle. Perhaps they felt disrespected. I suspect that they were more likely checking the odds in Las Vegas and were seeing that they were expected to win this fight easily and collect on the spoils of war. Now they were cut out of a share of this. In the end the Edomites did get beaten, and the Judeans collected the spoils of war.

Verses 11 & 12: **“But Amaziah took courage and led out his people and went to the Valley of Salt and struck down 10,000 men of Seir. 12 The men of Judah captured another 10,000 alive and took them to the top of a rock and threw them down from the top of the rock, and they were all dashed to pieces.”** (PROJECTOR ON--- DIVIDED KINGDOM)

Edom was to the southeast of Judah. Often it was a vassal state subject to Judah or Israel or both. Judah is obviously seeking renewed control. It was successful in this battle, which took place in the Valley of Salt, which was probably at the south end of the Dead Sea. The Judean army was pretty brutal to the defeated victims. We might wonder about such harsh treatment, but the author makes no judgment on the morality of it.

(PROJECTOR OFF) Verse 13 in our text adds, **“But the men of the army whom Amaziah sent back, not letting them go with him to battle, raided the cities of Judah, from Samaria to Beth-horon, and struck down 3,000 people in them and took much spoil.”** Perhaps it was while the Judean army was fighting against the Edomites that the Israelite mercenaries raided the cities of Judah. This was a consequence of King Amaziah’s decision to hire the soldiers from Israel. That was a bad choice.

All of this could be traced back to a failure to learn important lessons from Judah’s own history. Amaziah’s great great grandfather Jehoshaphat married off his son to the daughter of King Ahab of Israel. Ahab was a very evil man. Jehoshaphat should never have caved in to the cultural pressure to marry off his son to a pagan royal family. The wife who married into the family was Athaliah, who tried to wipe out the entire line of King David.

This same Jehoshaphat also got talked into going to war with Ahab against the Syrians. The prophets warned him about doing that, but he would not listen. The results were bad. They lost the battle. Ahab lost his life, and Jehoshaphat barely escaped with his life. To reinforce the lesson a prophet showed up at the palace in Jerusalem.

(PROJECTOR ON--- 2 CHRONICLES 19:2) According to #19 of 2 Chronicles in v. 2, **“But Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him and said to King Jehoshaphat, ‘Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the Lord.’”**

All of the kids in the royal household had to have been educated in Judean history. They had to have been taught these stories. But King Amaziah did not learn the lesson. The lesson was: Don't do stuff with Israel, because it is ruled by evil people.

The New Testament has a modern version of this. The principle is found in 2 Corinthians #6 v. 14. (2 CORINTHIANS 6:14) The Apostle Paul writes to Christians, **“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness.”** There would seem to be some obvious applications of this principle. Just as Jehoshaphat was marrying off his son to a pagan family, so also we should not be marrying off our kids to unbelievers. Parents don't have so much control over that as parents did in ancient times. So the application is more direct to Christian young people. Don't marry unbelievers. Be careful about dating them, too, because it can be difficult to pull away from a romantic relationship.

There would seem also to be an application to Christian businessmen who are tempted to get involved with other businessmen who have different values. Perhaps there are applications of this principle on the international stage. Christian citizens should be skeptical about decisions of our government to make agreements with dictatorships or with terrorist groups like the Taliban.

II.

In vv. 14-16 of our passage we encounter Amaziah's FAILURE TO LEARN ABOUT WORSHIP OF FALSE GODS. (II. FAILURE TO LEARN ABOUT WORSHIP...)

According to v. 14 of #25, **“After Amaziah came from striking down the Edomites, he brought the gods of the men of Seir and set them up as his gods and worshiped them, making offerings to them.”** Seir is another name for Edom, the country to the southeast of Judah, which King Amaziah and his forces just defeated.

Amaziah in his college courses Modern Judean History 101 and Fundamentals of Judaism 201 should have learned that Jews should not worship false gods. It always gets them in trouble. In the recent administration of his father this lesson was recorded in #24 v. 18 (2 CHRONICLES 24:18): **“And they abandoned the house of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs.”** This wrath took the form of a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Syrians.

The story continues in v. 15 of our passage (PROJECTOR OFF): **“Therefore the Lord was angry with Amaziah and sent to him a prophet, who said to him, ‘Why have you sought the gods of a people who did not deliver their own people from your hand?’”** This seems like common sense. Would not even primitive and pagan people understand that a defeated nation should not have any respect for its supposed gods?

Yet there was this cultural tradition in the Ancient Near East that said that the gods of defeated nations should be respected because the defeat was a sign that the defeated nation did not live up to the standards of its gods, and/or that the gods worked against their own people for some reason. Thus it was in the Book of Judges that the Jews lost in battle against the Philistines because of their own misdeeds. The Philistines captured the ark of the covenant and took it to one of their own Philistine temples. The Philistines did show a certain respect for how they treated the ark.

Lest King Amaziah fail to understand the history lesson properly the Lord sends a prophet to warn him. A proper understanding of Judean history should also remind the king that he should listen to such prophets. When his father killed the prophet Zechariah, his administration collapsed.

So in v. 16 we learn, **“But as he [the prophet] was speaking, the king said to him, ‘Have we made you a royal counselor? Stop! Why should you be struck down?’ So the prophet stopped, but said, ‘I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel.’”** This prophet did know recent Judean history. He knew what happened when his predecessor Zechariah prophesied to Amaziah’s father Joash. He was killed. So this guy stopped, with a brief, final word of warning. The king should have been listening.

As the people of God we should be especially sensitive to this warning about worship of false gods. In our day there is a danger of putting government and country in the position of God. Government, according to the Scriptures, has a role to fulfill in providing justice and protection for its citizens. It deserves a certain respect and loyalty.

But we look to government to provide us with security from the cradle to the grave. We expect it to meet our health needs and our employment needs and needs that our families were intended to meet. If we have an unexpected pregnancy, we expect the government to take care of that for us. In Great Britain the government of the UK recently appointed a minister for loneliness. The expectation is that government should even meet our need in situations of loneliness.

But idols always disappoint. Our government leaves behind its own citizens in Afghanistan. It spends more than it takes in. Government can’t ultimately meet our greatest psychological needs for security and significance. Only the Lord God of heaven can do that.

III.

In vv. 17-24 of our passage we encounter the lesson about FAILURE TO LEARN ABOUT THE DANGER OF PRIDE. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. FAILURE TO LEARN ABOUT THE...) According to v. 17, **“Then Amaziah king of Judah took counsel and sent to Joash the son of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, ‘Come, let us look one another in the face.’”** Joash was the name of Amaziah’s father. This is a different Joash. King Joash of Israel interprets Amaziah’s action as a challenge to fight.

Verses 18 & 19: **“And Joash the king of Israel sent word to Amaziah king of Judah, ‘A thistle on Lebanon sent to a cedar on Lebanon, saying, “Give your daughter to my son for a wife,” and a wild beast of Lebanon passed by and trampled down the thistle. 19 You say, “See, I have struck down Edom,” and your heart has lifted you up in boastfulness. But now stay at home. Why should you provoke trouble so that you fall, you and Judah with you?””**

The thistle is intended to represent Judah. The cedar is intended to represent Edom. The wild beast is the northern kingdom of Israel. King Joash is warning King Amaziah that he is going to get hurt if he chooses to fight against Israel. King Joash is an evil king, but he speaks wisdom in this situation. Amaziah has a pride problem.

Verse 20: **“But Amaziah would not listen, for it was of God, in order that he might give them into the hand of their enemies, because they had sought the gods of Edom.”** Amaziah has both a pride problem and a false worship problem.

According to vv. 21 & 22, **“So Joash king of Israel went up, and he and Amaziah king of Judah faced one another in battle at Beth-shemesh, which belongs to Judah. 22 And Judah was defeated by Israel, and every man fled to his home.”** (BETH SHEMESH) Beth-shemesh was fifteen miles west and a little south of Jerusalem. Judah loses big in this battle.

Verse 23: **“And Joash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash, son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh, and brought him to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem for 400 cubits, from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate.”** (PROJECTOR OFF) This is the worst defeat for Jerusalem since the capture of the city by David a couple of centuries earlier. About 600 feet of the north wall of the city is torn down.

Verse 24: **“And he [King Joash of Israel] seized all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of God, in the care of Obed-edom. He seized also the treasuries of the king's house, also hostages, and he returned to Samaria.”** Hostages taken in such a situation were typically members of the royal household. They became major leverage in future relations with the defeated country. King Amaziah would have to think twice before he did something that might anger the king of Israel. His own family member's lives might be in danger. Thus the king's pride has been turned to humiliation.

Pride is a danger to any ruler of a country. God sent the rulers of Judah and Israel prophets. He has sent us the Bible. The Bible combined with the events of history serve as a warning about the danger of pride in our world leaders. So many of the proudest rulers of history ended up in humiliation: Hitler, Napoleon, Big Daddy Amin in Uganda, Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

James #4 v. 6 (PROJECTOR ON--- JAMES 4:6) warns all of us, **“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** The Old Testament prophets conveyed the

same message. In Isaiah #2 v. 12 (ISAIAH 2:12) that prophet warned his people, **“For the Lord of hosts will have a day of reckoning/ Against everyone who is proud and lofty/ And against everyone who is lifted up,/ that he may be abased.”**

George Steinbrenner was owner of the New York Yankees for many years. He was a proud man. He once bragged, **“I will never have a heart attack. I give them.”** (syracuse.com, 3/23/2019) In July of 2010 he died of a massive heart attack. History and the Bible warn us about the danger of pride.

IV.

We come finally then to THE RESULTS OF FAILURE TO LEARN FROM HISTORY. (IV. THE RESULTS OF FAILURE TO...) According to v. 25, **“Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, lived fifteen years after the death of Joash the son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel.”**

The son who follows Amaziah as the next king is Uzziah. By putting the Biblical pieces together it appears that he became co-ruler with his father in the fifth year of Ahaziah's reign. That was much earlier in the rule of a king than was usual. Also we have this note about the beginning of Uzziah's reign in #26 v. 1: **“And all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah.”** Normally it was the king who appointed his son as the next king. It is unusual to see the people making a son of the previous ruler to be king.

So it could be that Amaziah himself was taken hostage in the defeat by the nation of Israel. So the people of Judah had to appoint the next king, Amaziah's son Uzziah. Verse 25 in our passage notes that Amaziah lived fifteen years after the death of Joash, the king of Israel. Some of the students of the Bible are suspicious that after Joash died, Amaziah was released from captivity and returned to Judah.

Verses 26 & 27: **“Now the rest of the deeds of Amaziah, from first to last, are they not written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel? 27 From the time when he turned away from the Lord they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish. But they sent after him to Lachish and put him to death there.”** Perhaps there was some particular incident, not otherwise identified, that marked King Amaziah's turn away from the Lord.

(LACHISH JERUSALEM MAP) Lachish was the second largest city in all of Judah and Israel for much of this period of early history. It was to this city which Amaziah fled. But it was there that he met his doom. Verse 28 concludes, **“And they brought him upon horses, and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David.”** (PROJECTOR OFF)

So it is that God's people should always learn from history and the Bible. We should learn from our own personal histories. So often through life we encounter difficult situations where we cry out to God for help, and He provides deliverance in some fashion. But then we encounter another difficult situation, and we can forget about that

past deliverance. We need to remember that past deliverance. Especially in this Thanksgiving week we should remember God's provision of past deliverances.

In one sense we Christians should have more of an interest in history than any other people in the world. For the basis of our eternal salvation lies in an historical event. Our claim is that the Second Person of the Triune Godhead became a human being and died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. We argue that the historical evidence also is that He rose from the dead to prove that He really was God. When we trust in this Jesus, we believe in the promise that He gave, and His first followers passed on, that we can have forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.