

OUR BIG FIGHT IS AGAINST IDOLS

II Kings 13: 10-13 and II Chronicles 25: 17-28 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Our greatest battle in life, just like the Israelite kings and the kings of Judah, is their same battle; it is the battle against idolatry. We aren't tempted to worship the idols of the Edomites who couldn't help the sons of Esau, the Edomites, to defeat King Amaziah. But all of us are tempted every day of our lives to think there is something more out there, we're tempted to think there is something better than God and His holy Word. The serpent's original temptation to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3: 4-5, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of the fruit of the tree in the-midst of the garden, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God." The enemy wants us to doubt God's Word, contradict His Word, and deny the consequences of disobeying His Word. Tim Keller recently said, "The real danger is not atheism, but that we ask God to coexist comfortably with the idols of our heart. If anything becomes more fundamental than God to our happiness, meaning in life, and identity, then it is an idol."

Jeremiah spent little time expediting the history of Joash or Jehoash in II Kings 13: 10-13, it took him only 4 verses. We read these verses and it appears this is the end of the story of Israel's king, Joash. "In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash/Joash the son of Jehoahaz began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and he reigned sixteen years. He also did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin, but he walked in them. (Then Jeremiah says in essence—I'll let Ezra tell the rest of the story in II Chronicles.) Jeremiah states it, "Now the rest of the acts of Joash and all that he did, and the might with which he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? So Joash slept with his fathers, and Jeroboam sat on his throne. And Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel." Jeremiah gives us a clue that Israel's king Joash won a remarkable victory against Judah's king Amaziah. This story of Amaziah's loss in II Chronicles 25: 17-18 takes up where we left off, after message # 42 in our series, "Lean Not on Your Understanding."

Let me summarize what happened to Amaziah in II Chronicles 25: 1-16. Our focus today will go back to the Southern kingdom, and be more on Judah than Israel, but it will involve both kingdoms. You may remember that Amaziah was the son of the little boy king who reigned 40 years, Joash, who was mentored by the high priest Jehoiada. Remember Joash of Judah was assassinated by two men in Judah, by Zabad, the son of Shimeath, the Ammonite, and Jehozabad, the son of Shimrith, the Moabite. When Amaziah became king at age 25, he struck down those two men who killed his father on his death bed. Then Amaziah foolishly numbered his soldiers and he had 300,000 men he wanted to use to fight the Edomites who lived

in the rocks of Petra, these people from Esau. These Edomites were defeated by Judah and were paying tribute to Judah until 892 BC when they revolted and got their freedom back to be a free nation. Amaziah missed that money and all the sheep and goats Edom paid, so he wanted to get Edom back under his kingdom. This year was 53 years later, in 839 BC, the year that Elisha would die. Amaziah the king of Judah, without asking the Lord, thought his 300,000 troops were not enough, so he hired 100,000 Israeli mercenaries who were from nearby Ephraim. God didn't like this, so he sent a prophet to tell Amaziah to send these mercenaries home, though he had already paid them 4 tons of silver. These Ephraimites didn't take kindly to this turn of events, even though they were paid. They counted on receiving much more in spoils from the battle with the Edomites. As these 100,000 mercenaries returned home, they planned the unthinkable. They planned to get back on Judah. So, they raided the cities of Judah from the capital city of Samaria to Beth-horon, near Bethel, and they struck down 3,000 people and took much spoil. Down in Edom, with his 300,000 Judah troops, Amaziah obeyed the prophet and God gave him the victory over the Edomites. He killed 10,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt and he captured 10,000 more Edomites and took them to the top of a huge rock—probably near the cliffs of Petra, their home, and pushed them over the cliff to their death. What a terrible thing! Then Amaziah did the most unthinkable, after defeating Edom. II Chronicles 25: 14 tells us, “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 worshipped them, making offerings, doubtless sacrifices of animals and incense to these idols. This angered the Lord who sent another prophet to Amaziah to tell him God would destroy him. What was Amaziah thinking?

Were Amaziah's men pushing back after his dastardly deed of pushing those 10,000 Edomite soldiers off the cliff? Did they warn him of what the Edomite gods would do? Worshipping Edomite gods, Amaziah made his most futile, foolish, and final idolatrous act or worship. The prophet told Amaziah God was determined to destroy him. What Amaziah should have done was to thank God for defeating the Edomites, and to release the 10,000 captives, and throw the Edomite gods over the cliff. Yet, Amaziah kept worshipping the Edomite gods. Inside his proud, evil heart, though Amaziah caused the death of 3,000 of his people, by hiring the 100,000 Israeli soldiers, he blamed the northern kingdom. Therefore, he decided he must meet the king of Israel, King Joash, on the battlefield. That's where our story of the demise of Amaziah starts today. His demise was all about idolatry and what happens when we disobey God's first of ten commandments in Exodus 20: 2-3, which declares, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me.” Today let's discover how idolatry is our greatest battle and what happens when we worship idols, which are anything, including our own selfishness that we put before God Almighty. Look with me at four sad results of worshipping idols:

WORSHIPPING IDOLS GIVES US A FALSE BRAVADO, THINKING WE CAN DO AS WE PLEASE WITHOUT SEEKING GODLY COUNSEL.(I.)

Notice II Chronicles 25: 17. “Then Amaziah, king of Judah, took counsel and sent to Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, saying, “Come let us look one another in the face.” What Amaziah was doing was poking king Joash and baiting him, calling him to war. Instead of seeking the advice of Elisha, or one of the sons of the prophets, Amaziah took counsel of his own public officials and courtiers. These words, “Come let us look one another in the face,” was calling Israel to war. A measure of peace without war had existed between the southern kingdom and the 10 Northern Tribes for 100 years. Even the good king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, had sanctioned a marriage alliance between his son Jehoram, and the daughter of Jezebel, Athaliah. That linked the north with the south in an evil marriage. It was desirable for the 12 tribes not to fight each other but to be united as closely as possible. But now, this false peace with both nations who accepted the worship of Baal, now they saw the peace end. The bond was broken by overwhelming pride and vanity in Amaziah ben-Joash of Judah. His victory over the Edomites and his conquest of Petra had doubtless puffed him up with the mistaken notion that he was a great man and an invincible warrior. He was totally infatuated with a passion to kindle an unprovoked war against the ten northern tribes. Amaziah was about to learn the difference in fighting a war God sanctioned—fighting the Edomites, and fighting a war sanctioned only by his pride, and sanctioned without God’s direction. It is dangerous to overlook and to overstep the God of battles—the Lord God of Hosts.

Amaziah sought counsel, II Chronicles 25: 17, but from the wrong place. He knew he was justifying his prideful actions by avoiding hearing from God. The greatest idol at this time, even trumping the Edomite idols Amaziah was worshipping, was the idol inside the king, named Amaziah. He was worshipping himself, insisting on his own way. Doubtless Amaziah was pointing out to his public officials and courtiers the conduct of the 100,000 angry Ephraimites in killing 3,000 people of their own people in Judah. Amaziah called for retaliation. Let me warn us all, when we try to justify our wrong behavior by pointing out the wrong conduct of others. When we do this, we are aiming low and missing the mark with God. This is especially true if we are giving God only our partial obedience. To fight Edom without taking along the Israeli mercenaries was obedient, by sending them home. Yet to worship the Edomite gods was repugnant to God and disobedient. It makes me think of a college student who learned this lesson when he was reprimanded by the College President for misbehavior. When asked why he did the deed, the college student said, “Sir, you’d find it difficult to locate 10 men in this college who wouldn’t have done exactly as I did, had they been in my circumstances. The president replied, “Has it ever occurred to you that you could have been one of

those 10?" I warn us all, if we start speaking with proud bravado, it is most often because we are idol worshippers, bowing down to our own selfish egos. Secondly,

WORSHIPPING IDOLS MAKES US UNWILLING TO LISTEN TO WARNINGS GOD BRINGS THROUGH THE MOST UNLIKELY PEOPLE.

Notice (II.) what happened (II Chronicles 25: 18-20a) when Amaziah's letter reached the king of Israel, king Joash. Listening to a warning from this evil king must have been a laugh for Amaziah. Who was this weak king of Israel, to warn this king of Judah, who had just shellacked the king of Edom and killed 20,000 Edomite soldiers? The last thing Amaziah heard was that Joash' father, king Jehoadaz was reduced to a shoestring army of 50 horsemen, 10 chariots, and 10,000 foot-soldiers, weakened by Syria's king Hazael. What could have happened to make king Joash strong? Amaziah should have backed up and realized some things had changed or he would never have been able to employ and then send home 100,000 Israeli soldiers just from one of the ten tribes, the tribe of Ephraim.

Joash, king of Israel, didn't bat an eye when he got Amaziah's letter. He sent to Amaziah words of diplomacy, wisdom, and warning. His answer was a story counseling Amaziah to bask in his glory over Edom, but then to stay home. The story was quite clear in II Chronicles 25: 18-20a. "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. 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?" Amaziah would not listen." Anyone could see what king Joash was saying to Amaziah. The thistle, imagining himself to be equal with the cedar, was presumptuously suggesting a marriage alliance between them. The difference between the thistle and the cedar was obvious, when a wild beast passed through the wilderness and crushed the thistle underfoot with one misstep. Such a small thistle was powerless to injure the cedar. Joash was saying, in essence, "Why should you meddle with trouble so that you fall, you and your nation of Judah? When we worship the idol called, "I want my own way and I won't listen," we provoke a fight we should always avoid. Worshipping idols blinds us to listening to consider the poor chances we have of success and to consider the effects our defeat will have on others.

Trying to listen to our spouse while checking our text messages won't work. Listening requires a choice of where we place our attention. To tune into others, we must first choose to put down our cell phones, and all that will divide our attention. That might mean laying down the newspaper, moving away from dishes in the sink, or putting down the book we're reading. Chuck Swindoll shares in his book, "Stress Fractures," about something that happened after supper one evening.

Colleen, his younger daughter wanted to tell him something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, 'Daddy, I know you are very stressed and busy, but I wanna' tell you somethin' and I'll tell you really fast.' "Suddenly realizing her frustration, Chuck answered, 'Honey, you can tell me -- and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.'" Colleen's answer was unforgettable. 'Then listen slowly, Daddy.'" Even our schedules we keep can become idolatrous. A tip off is when we stop listening. Thirdly,

WORSHIPPING IDOLS PERSISTENTLY, RISKS GOD NO LONGER STRIVING WITH US, AND TURNING US OVER TO OUR ENEMIES.

Notice (III.) II Chronicles 25: 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 (Judah under king Amaziah) had sought the gods of Edom." God told Noah, before building the ark and the world-wide flood, God said, in Genesis 6: 3, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." Here in our text is an illustration of God's saying, to Amaziah, in essence, "Your time is up, Amaziah. I've sent two men of God, prophets to you. You mocked the last one, and I warned you from the mouth of the king of Israel. You are now at the mercy of your helpless idols. They cannot help you. When Judah went into captivity, Isaiah spoke of the helplessness of their idols. Judah was lugging her idols to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem. The beasts of burden were loaded down with Judah's idols. Isaiah in 46: 1-4, said, "Bel bows down; Nebo stoops; their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts. They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity. "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by Me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am He, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made (you), and I will bear (you); I will carry (you) and I will save (you).

There comes a time when God finally may say, "Enough! You are hell-bent on your own way." So, what happened to Judah's king, Amaziah when he saw Israel's king Joash? Let's reflect on what the second prophet of God said when Amaziah mocked him and said, in II Chronicles 25: 16, "Have we made you a royal counselor? Stop!" 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." So, the grand army of Judah—300,000 soldiers went up against a smaller Israeli army, v. 21 and the two kings faced one another in battle at Bethshemesh, which was Judah's territory? Think of it—Verse 21 makes it clear that Joash, king of Israel didn't wait for one more moment. He mustered his Israeli army and went up to fight this awful battle 15 miles northwest of Jerusalem. There are three places in Palestine with the name Beth-shemesh, but II Kings 14: 11, makes it clear this was the town that was in Judah. King Joash thus marched 44 miles straight south

of Samaria to prove he was a cedar and not a thistle. His weaker army defeated Amaziah and the army of Judah fled each to his home. But Amaziah got to see king Joash of Israel closer than he desired, v. 23 for Joash captured him. Then like a wild beast tromps on a thistle, Joash and his army broke down the wall of Jerusalem for 400 cubits/600 feet, from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate, on the northern wall, the side where Jerusalem was the weakest. Josephus adds that Joash drove his chariot through the breach in the wall into Jerusalem, a practice not unusual for a conquering army. Joash stripped and seized all the gold and silver and all the vessels found in the house of God, which was in the care of Obed-edom. Joash seized also the treasuries of king Amaziah's house, he took captives and hostages and he returned home to Samaria. What an inglorious end to Amaziah's bragging rights, as he became one of the hostages himself going into captivity. This is the only time in Old Testament history that we run across Israel taking hostages. The Hebrew word is **taharobaw**. It means Joash was making his point secure—"You are beaten, and I am taking to Samaria plenty of your own men to witness me putting you in prison along with them. I told you that you would fall, and that I would take Judah down with you."

WORSHIPPING IDOLS PAYS MISERABLE WAGES OF SIN WHICH ARE ALWAYS DEATH, WHEN WE TURN AWAY FROM THE LORD.

(IV.) Notice that Amaziah outlived king Joash, and apparently after Joash died, and after what appears to be 10 years of captivity in prison in Samaria, Amaziah was released to go home where his son Azariah/also more commonly known as Uzziah was reigning. Now there was a co-regency, but nobody wanted Amaziah back co-reigning with his son Uzziah as history records. What happened to Amaziah? Romans 6: 23 came to pass. "The wages of sin is death." Proverbs 16: 18 came to pass, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." II Chronicles 25: 27-28 states, "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, 35 miles southwest of Jerusalem and put him to death there. And they brought him upon horses, and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David." What an awful end after turning away from the Lord! But it will always be true. Exodus 20: 3 states, "You shall have no other gods **before me**. The Hebrew word for "before me is **pawneem**. It means before My face. God wants no other gods or idols on the table of worship before Him. It doesn't mean God doesn't care how many idols we have as long as He is first. No. The Hebrew is clear—He wants no gods or idols before His holy face. When we place anything or anyone before God's face in worship, recreation, football, fishing, hunting, money, clothes, food, Netflix, Amazon Prime, social media, video games, Pokemon Go, our own selfish way, our desire to control—it leads to hard hearts, no repentance, and final judgment, sooner or later. When we trust in the Lord Jesus alone for our salvation offered in the Gospel, turning from sin and back to God, blessings await.