

"The heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing of."  
—Blaise Pascal

**30-Jul-10**

## **The High Places (Part Three)**

Previously, we saw that King Jehoash (or Joash) of the southern kingdom of Judah did what was right in God's sight, but only while Jehoiada the priest was alive. Though his reign was not one of terror or debauchery, and though, overall, he surpassed his father's and grandfather's righteousness, he nevertheless failed to remove the pagan high places from Judah. More than this, after Jehoiada died, he foolishly listened to other leaders in Judah who steered him into idolatry. He died an ignominious death, assassinated by his servants, and was buried apart from the other kings.

Jehoash's son, Amaziah, became king at the age of 25 and reigned until he was 54. Like his father, he declined to do anything about the high places in his realm. [God](#) records His assessment of this ruler in [II Kings 14:3-4](#): "And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like his father David; he did everything as his father Joash had done. However the high places were not taken away, and the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places."

In many respects, Amaziah's reign mirrored his father's; it began well and ended poorly. Immediately after his coronation, he showed his commitment to God's law: Although he had the servants who had participated in his father's murder executed, he did not punish their children:

But the children of the murderers he did not execute, according to what is written in the Book of the Law of [Moses](#), in which the LORD commanded, saying, "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; but a person shall be put to death for his own [sin](#)." ([II Kings 14:6](#); see [II Chronicles 25:3-4](#))

Yet, after this noble beginning, Amaziah began to falter. He gathered the men of Judah and soundly defeated the Edomites, but in this victory were planted the seeds of his own defeat:

Now it was so, after Amaziah came from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the people of Seir, set them up to be his gods, and bowed down before them and burned incense to them. Therefore the anger of the LORD was aroused against Amaziah, and He sent him a prophet who said to him, "Why have you sought the gods of the people, which could not rescue their own people from your hand?" So it was, as he talked with him, that the king said to him, "Have we made you the king's counselor? Cease! Why should you be killed?" Then the prophet ceased, and said, "I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not heeded my advice." ([II Chronicles 25:14-16](#))

Like Jehoash, Amaziah was not only lax in destroying the centers of idolatry within his realm, but he also later practiced idolatry himself. He trusted in God enough for the victory over Edom—and by extension, over the gods of the Edomites—but he then put his trust in those neutered gods and turned away from the God who had defeated them! To compound his folly, Amaziah rejected the Word of God through His prophet, culminating in God turning against him.

Unchecked by the prophet's words, Amaziah let the God-given overthrow of [Edom](#) go to his head, and he challenged the king of Israel to battle. The king of Israel—wiser in this instance—tried to warn him off:

"Indeed you say that you have defeated the Edomites, and your heart is lifted up to boast. Stay at home now; why should you meddle with trouble, that you should fall—you and Judah with you?" But Amaziah would not heed, for it came from God, that He might give them into the hand of their enemies, because they sought the gods of Edom. ([II Chronicles 25:19-20](#))

Predictably, Amaziah suffered defeat, and a large portion of Jerusalem's wall was destroyed. Further, the Israelites ransacked both the house of the Lord and the king's house, portraying what Amaziah himself had symbolically done to the Temple and his own house. Finally, like his apostate father, Amaziah died a dishonorable death at the hands of assassins.

[II Chronicles 25:2](#) gives a slightly different assessment of Amaziah: "And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, *but not with a loyal heart.*" The word "loyal" can also be translated as "full," "whole," "perfect," "peaceable," "made ready," or "blameless." It has the connotation of "friendly," as in being friendly to a cause. For example, when Solomon inaugurated the Temple, he commanded Israel to "Let your heart therefore be *loyal* to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and keep His commandments, as at this day" ([I Kings 8:61](#))—a command Solomon himself forsook in his later years ([I Kings 11:4](#)).

In other words, in Amaziah existed an element of resignation or perfunctory compliance, but he was not wholly committed to doing the right thing. He did what was right, but it was under internal duress. Because of the guidance Jehoiada the priest gave to his father, and because of his own familiarity with the [law of God](#), Amaziah could not claim ignorance. He knew the right thing to do, and for a time he did it—but his heart was not in it. As soon as he had a taste of success and a boost of confidence, what was in his heart—pride, idolatry, and insolence before God, among other things—could no longer be contained. As [Jesus Christ](#) taught, the things of the heart eventually come out and cause defilement ([Mark 7:20](#)).

How much are we like Amaziah? We can certainly stumble as he did. He knew of the true God and the right way, but he was also well-aware of the pagan world around him. For a time, he constrained himself to do what was right, but once things began going his way, [the world](#) turned his head, and his heart was lifted up. Because he did not have a loyal heart—because he was not wholeheartedly devoted to God—it was only a matter of time before what was inside revealed itself. While doing what is "right in the sight of the LORD" is always better than doing wrong, perfunctory compliance eventually ends. Amaziah's tolerance of the high places in the kingdom God had entrusted to him exposed what lived in his heart, and eventually his life came to match it, much to his detriment and of those under him.

Where do our loyalties truly lie? Doing what is right in God's sight does not count for much if the heart strains to go another way. Though Solomon failed to follow his own advice, he gives tremendous counsel in [Proverbs 4: 23](#) (NIV): "Above all else, *guard your heart*, for it is the wellspring of life."

- David C. Grabbe

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [The Household of God and Loyalty](#)

by Martin G. Collins

The ultimate shame and disgrace for a covenant people is to be found disloyal. God will be faithful to His design and purpose for humankind and will pursue it to its glorious end. With the loyal God is loyal; with the disloyal God is not loyal, but still faithful. Being counted as loyal is reason to be appointed to leadership roles in civil and religious offices. Faithfulness is a role-relative trait when it applies to the priesthood - as is seen in both Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul, as well as family or friendship roles. Loyalty can be defined as an enduring commitment to a person over a long period of time, persisting even through obstacles that threaten this lasting commitment.

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## From the Archives: Featured Article

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

No act is insignificant because of two "natural" principles: the tendency for increase and what is sown is reaped. John Ritenbaugh shows that in regard to sin and righteousness, these principles play major roles in our lives.

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