



"Life is the sum of your choices."  
—Albert Camus

**13-Aug-10**

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

Before continuing with Judah's next king, Jotham, it is worthwhile to consider another aspect of the previous three kings. As we saw, Jehoash (Joash), Amaziah, and Uzziah (Azariah) all "did what was right in the sight of the LORD" ([II Chronicles 24:2](#); [25:2](#); [26:4](#)), yet during their reigns "the high places were not removed" ([II Kings 12:3](#); [14:4](#); [15:4](#)). All three are also in the lineage of [Jesus Christ](#), but they are conspicuously absent in His genealogy given in Matthew 1. To compound this peculiarity, some of the very worst kings of Judah—such as Ahaz and Manasseh—are included.

One possible reason for this has already been alluded to, and it may relate to the negligence of these three kings to remove the high places from the kingdom entrusted to them by [God](#). That is, they all had strong and righteous beginnings, but over the course of their reigns, they regressed spiritually. Rather than becoming better over time, these three monarchs squandered the position and opportunities given to them. In contrast, Judah's particularly bad rulers had a semblance of [repentance](#) later in their lives.

In his youth, Jehoash had a strong and moral priest to guide him, but once the priest died, it became apparent that Jehoash lacked the character to stand on his own. He gave in to idolatry and died without honor. Amaziah began

his reign with righteous mercy, but upon tasting military victory, he became proud and started worshipping the gods of the people he had conquered. Like his father, he was assassinated. Uzziah also became militarily strong, and in his hubris, he rashly entered the Temple and burned incense to God—something reserved for the sons of Aaron alone. He ended his days in isolation as a leper. The lives of these kings are records of neglect that culminated in their downfalls—to the detriment of those under them and after them.

Jotham was the fourth successive king of Judah who "did what was right in the sight of the LORD," but during whose reign "the high places were not removed." He had the shortest reign of the four—16 years—and died at a mere 41 years of age. Though he, too, failed to remove the high places, unlike his fathers, he remained true to God during his short reign and life.

And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD; he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done. However the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. He built the Upper Gate of the house of the LORD. ([II Kings 15:34-35](#))

[II Chronicles 27:2](#) adds, "And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Uzziah had done (although he did not enter the temple of the LORD). But still the people acted corruptly." The chapter goes on to detail his work in constructing a gate in the Temple courtyard, working on the wall of Ophel, and building cities and fortresses throughout Judah. He was not only industrious, but also victorious in war against the Ammonites.

[II Chronicles 27:6](#) provides another significant description: "So Jotham became mighty, *because he prepared [or established] his ways before the LORD his God*" (emphasis ours; cf. [Proverbs 4:26](#); [16:3](#); [24:3](#)). Jotham was well aware of the presumptuous mistake of his father Uzziah, and it must have weighed on him as he contemplated the direction of his own life. God prospered him because he considered his ways to ensure that they conformed to God's standard. God was no stranger in his thoughts.

Notice also the phrase "the LORD *his* God." The relationship was a personal one; God was not simply a Being about whom Jotham had heard stories. No, he was dedicated to God and remained committed throughout his life. However, like his fathers, though he did not personally worship on the pagan high places, he tolerated them—and that tolerance had some unintended consequences in his progeny.

Jotham's son, Ahaz, was truly a bad king. He

did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David had done. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel. And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree. ([II Kings 16:2-4](#))

Apparently, Jotham's good example was not enough, as Ahaz latched onto what had been left undone and ran with it. The high places had been a feature in Judah for about 150 years when Ahaz assumed the throne, and thus they were a part of his environment, even though his father did not worship at them. But Jotham's tolerance of them was probably a contributing factor to his son's path into idolatry and beyond to the abhorrent practice of child sacrifice.

In looking at the record of Jotham's life, we can see that while he was fastidious in his own relationship with God, he apparently put little effort into improving matters spiritually for the people. While he did not personally regress as his fathers had, he did not get the nation back on track regarding the true worship of God. He held steady in his own life, but did not dirty his hands attempting to clean up the spiritual morass that he had inherited.

The histories of Israel's kings and judges show that successful spiritual revivals typically begin with tearing down the idols *first*, which sets the stage for the people to turn back to God. The same dual action appears throughout Scripture: Getting rid of something bad is combined with replacing it with something good. When we are converted, we have to remove the false in

addition to taking in the truth. Similarly, the instructions for the [Feast of Unleavened Bread](#) combine removing the leavening *and* eating unleavened bread. In addition, one of the prophecies about Jesus Christ says that He would "know to refuse the evil *and* choose the good" ([Isaiah 7:15-16](#)). Because our Creator is a God of purity, the best results always come from paying attention to both aspects—otherwise, the result is a mixture of good and evil, which always falls short of the mark. Even if one holds onto the good, ignoring the evil (as opposed to excising it) allows it to grow and fester like a cancer, ready to break out and cause harm.

Jotham stands as the best of the four kings we have studied, and considering the overall state of the nation, perhaps he did the best that he could. Unlike Hezekiah, he did not lead a spiritual revival, but neither did he personally let down. Nevertheless, the net effect of these four kings' reluctance to rid Judah of the high places was to allow an evil to endure that later resulted in the kingdom's destruction and captivity.

- David C. Grabbe

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Why Three Kings Are Missing From Matthew 1](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Three Old Testament kings are included in the genealogies of Kings and Chronicles, but conspicuously absent in Christ's genealogy Matthew. The common denominator in all three cases (Joash, Amaziah, and Uzziah) was that although they started out ostensibly well, they allowed weak character, pride, inordinate self-esteem, and presumptuousness to turn their hearts away from God (metaphorically transforming from butterflies to worms), refusing to repent, forcing God to blot their names from remembrance. God expects steadfast endurance in His servants (Matthew 10:22). II Chronicles 15:2 reveals the principle that faithfulness and loyalty is a two way street. God's mercy is perfectly balanced by His Justice.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Pillars Stand for Something!](#)**

by John O. Reid

God has called us to be "faithful pillars" in His house. John Reid explains what a pillar is, what we need to be doing to become pillars and the reward of a "faithful pillar."

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