

On June 27, 1976, Air France flight 139 took off from Athens and headed towards Paris. But that initial course was soon to be altered drastically. Soon after takeoff, 4 terrorists affiliated with the PLO hijacked the plane diverting it to the Entebbe Airport in Uganda, Africa. 238 passengers and 12 crew members had their life schedules dramatically changed in a moment that afternoon.

Once they touched down at Entebbe, the 4 terrorists were joined by 4 others who were waiting for them. They quickly separated the 105 Jewish hostages out and held them in the transit hall, releasing the others. The freed passengers were put on a waiting plane for Paris. The coordinated planning showed that this was not an impromptu missions but it had been carefully programmed for months. The PLO terrorists then issued their demands – 40 convicted Palestinians held in Israeli jails and 13 others held in Kenya were to be released immediately or all the Jewish hostages would be killed.

Now Israeli policy is to not negotiate with terrorists. The belief is terrorist negotiation and compromise simply encourages more terrorism. But this situation was a real test to that policy for over 100 innocent lives were hanging in the balance.

What happened in the next few days has become legendary. Books have been written and movies made about the daring rescue of these hostages. 4 Israeli military planes flew to Africa under the cover of darkness at night, landing without the aid of any ground control. The 100 or so personnel included mostly military commandos but also some medical support as well. The commandos quickly entered the transit hall and yelled out loudly in Hebrew, “Get down on the ground. Crawl.” They knew, of course, that the Jewish hostages would understand the Hebrew but that their Palestinian captors would not. They then began spraying the entire hall with bullets from their machine guns. The 8 terrorists left standing were quickly cut down and the hostages were free at last.

Interestingly, only 3 out of the 105 Jewish hostages were killed in the raid. The reason for their deaths? 2 of the hostages hesitated to fall down to the ground when the command was given and were cut down with the terrorists. They were not immediately obedient. And 1 other young Jewish man amazingly even though he initially fell to the ground, became curious when the gunfire and commotion ensued and raised his head back up to see what was going on. He was initially obedient to the command given. But his partial obedience ended up costing him his life.

There are times in life when obedience is literally a matter of life and death. And there are other times when partial obedience just doesn't cut it. Sometimes partial obedience is no better than disobedience. During our

Summer Sundays we have been looking at the 8 good kings of Judah after the kingdom divided. After Solomon died and the nation divided into the northern 10 tribes and the southern 2 tribes, there were 40 kings who ruled over the Jewish people. 20 ruled the northern tribes that were called Israel during the 209 years before Samaria fell to the Assyrian army. None of those 20 kings of Israel were commended as being good by the Lord. 20 kings ruled the southern tribes that were called Judah during the 345 years before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian army. Only 40% were commended as being good at all by the Lord. And of the 8 who were commended as good, some of them were barely good. Amaziah was one of those kings who we would consider to be on the border line of being good. Yes, he was obedient to the Lord at times, but he was only partially obedient. And the longer he ruled, the less he listened to the Lord's prophets and less obedient to the Lord he became.

Amaziah is introduced to us in 2 Chronicles 25:1, 2. And even in this introduction, his qualified righteousness is referred to.

Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Jehoaddin; she was from Jerusalem. He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, but not wholeheartedly.

The 25th chapter of 2 Chronicles gives the account of the reign of Amaziah (796-767 B.C.). Except for an introduction on Amaziah's succession (vv. 1-4) and a conclusion on his death (vv. 25-28), the account concentrates on two wars that he undertook and on the lessons to be learned from them: (1) his reconquest of Edom, through obedience to the Lord (vv. 5-16); and (2) his ensuing defeat by Israel, in punishment for engaging in a form of idolatry to which he succumbed after his earlier victory (vv. 17-24). His demise repeats a familiar theme: Rejecting God's prophetic word results in divine judgment, military defeat, downfall, and ultimately death. Partial obedience just doesn't cut it in the eyes of God. Let's look together at these 2 halves of Amaziah's reign that are reflected in the 2 military battles that he fought.

Amaziah **first** had to secure the throne for himself. Assassins had killed his father, Joash. Amaziah realized that his position would never be secure with this unruly element on the loose. So the newly coronated king rounded up the traitorous officials who had assassinated his father and had them put to death.

Having secured the throne, Amaziah now turned to the military threat to the east – Edom. He first did what any good leader would do – he assessed the strength of his army. He found that he had 300,000 good fighting men. But as Amaziah looked at his opponent, he didn't think that his army was sufficient to defeat Edom's forces, so the king hired another 100,000 men from the northern kingdom of Israel to increase his army by 33%. He hired mercenaries to bolster his army. But this was not pleasing to the Lord. God wanted Amaziah to trust in Him. Even though his army was smaller, with God's help Amaziah would have been able to

lead Judah to victory over the Edomites. The alliance that Amaziah was making with Israel in this maneuver along with his apparent lack of faith in God's ability to bring victory to his army caused God's prophet to deliver a message to him. Notice this message with me. READ 2 Chron. 25:5-11:

Amaziah called the people of Judah together and assigned them according to their families to commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds for all Judah and Benjamin. He then mustered those twenty years old or more and found that there were three hundred thousand men ready for military service, able to handle the spear and shield.⁶ He also hired a hundred thousand fighting men from Israel for a hundred talents of silver.

2CH 25:7 But a man of God came to him and said, "O king, these troops from Israel must not march with you, for the LORD is not with Israel--not with any of the people of Ephraim.⁸ Even if you go and fight courageously in battle, God will overthrow you before the enemy, for God has the power to help or to overthrow."

2CH 25:9 Amaziah asked the man of God, "But what about the hundred talents I paid for these Israelite troops?"

The man of God replied, "The LORD can give you much more than that."

2CH 25:10 So Amaziah dismissed the troops who had come to him from Ephraim and sent them home. They were furious with Judah and left for home in a great rage.

2CH 25:11 Amaziah then marshaled his strength and led his army to the Valley of Salt, where he killed ten thousand men of Seir.

Now Amaziah's hiring of these northern mercenaries cost him dearly. It cost him silver – a talent of silver for 1,000 mercenaries. A talent was about 75 pounds, so the cost for each soldier would have been a little bit more than an ounce of silver apiece – quite an expense for Amaziah. At today's prices, it would have cost Amaziah about 150 thousand dollars – not an insignificant amount. And when it is considered that Amaziah lost all of that money without even having the soldiers' use, this was a very expensive lesson that Amaziah learned indeed. But the prophet of God warned Amaziah that he would not succeed with his humanly devised plans. But if he trusted in the Lord for victory with a smaller army, he would succeed. To Amaziah's credit, he if reluctantly listened to the Lord and obeyed Him.

But Amaziah also lost in the public relations war with Israel. When he dismissed the 100,000 Jewish mercenaries, they were furious with him. Now we might wonder why they were so upset? They got their money and didn't have to earn it by going to war? But their anger against Amaziah and Judah would have been really 2 fold. On the one hand, their male egos had been attacked. In essence, King Amaziah had hired them, looked at them and then said *we don't need you to win this battle*. They would have taken this as an

affront to their military capabilities. And then there was the matter of the booty. A major part of a soldier's pay was in the plunder of battle that was acquired. After the enemy was defeated, the soldiers were usually free to take anything that they wanted. The mercenaries from the north would have been deprived of this perk – and they were upset about it. So Amaziah had 100,000 soldiers from Israel who were very upset with him. This is important to remember when we come to the second part of our story. In fact, these mercenaries were so upset that they raided some Judean towns while Amaziah was off fighting the Edomites with his army. I guess they figured if Amaziah deprived them of their share of the booty, they would just go and get some for themselves from some of Amaziah's towns.

But because he was obedient to the word of the Lord, God delivered the Edomites into his hand. And the plunder that Amaziah would have gained would have more than outweighed the fee that he would have paid for the mercenaries in the first place.

It is at this point that Amaziah does something that is very irrational. Verses 14, 15 give an account of this bizarre action on Amaziah's part. READ 2 Chron. 25:14, 15:

When Amaziah returned from slaughtering the Edomites, he brought back the gods of the people of Seir. He set them up as his own gods, bowed down to them and burned sacrifices to them. ¹⁵ The anger of the LORD burned against Amaziah, and he sent a prophet to him, who said, "Why do you consult this people's gods, which could not save their own people from your hand?"

Now it would have been a natural thing for Amaziah to bring back some of the Edomite deities. After all, these pagan gods were often made out of silver and gold. They would have been very valuable. And certainly God wouldn't have minded if Amaziah would have melted down these Edomite idols and used the valuable metals for some profitable usages. But Amaziah doesn't take this logical step. He rather takes the irrational turn of setting these idols up as gods and he begins to worship them by burning sacrifices to them. God sends a prophet to point out the irrationality of this bizarre behavior. The prophet's logic is irrefutable. If these gods were so powerful, why couldn't they save the Edomites who worshiped them? Why would you worship gods who were impotent to save their own people? But this time, instead of listening to the prophet of God, Amaziah for some strange reason turns a deaf ear to the prophet's logic and message. Listen to how Amaziah responds. READ 2 Chron. 25:16:

While he was still speaking, the king said to him, "Have we appointed you an adviser to the king? Stop! Why 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."*

It is obvious that pride has now conquered the heart of Amaziah. Puffed up by his dramatic victory over the Edomites, the king wants some of the religious plunder around in visible places so that people would continually be reminded of his military prowess. Amaziah's actions remind us a bit of King Saul who spared the king of the Amalekites and the best of the flocks and herds so that he could have his triumphant procession upon returning back home. And just as Saul's partial obedience cost him his dynasty, so Amaziah's partial disobedience was viewed by God as disobedience and would bring disastrous results as well.

But the most significant part of this scene is how Amaziah responded to the prophet's admonition against him. Before Amaziah had listened to the prophet and obeyed the word of the Lord even though it cost him dearly in silver to do so. But now Amaziah's heart has become hardened to the word of the Lord. So instead of listening to the prophet of God, Amaziah begins to threaten the very life of the prophet. When Amaziah stops listening to the word of the Lord and begins to persecute God's prophets, the Lord removes His hand of blessing from the king.

You will recall that the 100,000 mercenaries from the northern nation of Israel who were upset with Amaziah sending them home raided some of the border cities that separated the southern and northern kingdoms. They were undoubtedly venting some of their frustration having been rejected by Amaziah. When Amaziah got back home from his victory over the Edomites, he immediately heard about these raids. Now Amaziah was in a state of exhilaration after his victory over the Edomites. He had considered the Edomites a much greater threat than Israel. In fact, he had tried to hire mercenaries from Israel to help him against the Edomites, showing that he hadn't considered the nation of Israel to be a threat against him. You don't hire your enemies to guard your back in battle. So Amaziah undoubtedly reasoned that having defeated the greater enemy, Edom, it would be no problem to defeat the less powerful nation of Israel. The raid of the mercenary soldiers on these Judean border towns gave Amaziah just the excuse that he needed to declare war on Israel. What Amaziah didn't count on was the fact that God had helped him gain victory over the Edomites. And now the blessing of the Lord had departed from his reign because of his crass and open idolatry in setting up the idols of Edom to be worshiped in the temple of the Lord.

Jehoash, the king of Israel, saw right through Amaziah's motivation. When he received the challenge to battle from him, he responded:

19 You say to yourself that you have defeated Edom, and now you are arrogant and proud. But stay at home! Why ask for trouble and cause your own downfall and that of Judah also?"

Arrogance and pride were Amaziah's problem at this time. He hadn't acknowledged the hand of the Lord in giving him victory over the Edomites. And now he had disobeyed God openly by setting up foreign

idols. Jehoash obviously was somewhat concerned as king of Israel. He knew that the Judean army had defeated Edom without the help of his soldiers. But Jehoash also knew that his soldiers had a grievance against Amaziah. They had been humiliated. So he was counting on their desire for revenge as motivation.

Amaziah didn't listen to reason. He decided to attack Israel anyway. But the Lord was not with him. And those soldiers from the north finally got their opportunity for the plunder of war. But instead of Edom's plunder, they were able to gain much booty from the land of Judah.

He (Jehoash) and Amaziah king of Judah faced each other at Beth Shemesh in Judah. ²² Judah was routed by Israel, and every man fled to his home. ²³ Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash, the son of Ahaziah, at Beth Shemesh. Then Jehoash brought him to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate--a section about six hundred feet long. ²⁴ He took all the gold and silver and all the articles found in the temple of God that had been in the care of Obed-Edom, together with the palace treasures and the hostages, and returned to Samaria.

The final couple of decades of Amaziah's life were very difficult for him. Like happened with his father, disgruntled officials began to plot against his life. In fact, the Bible says that they began their plotting when Amaziah chose to turn away from following the Lord. So Amaziah had to live the final years of his life in a paranoid state, constantly looking over his shoulder. And eventually he was assassinated.

One day policeman who was sitting at a speed trap saw an elementary-aged boy furiously riding his bike around the block. The boy was red-faced and huffing and puffing as he rode his bike around and around. Finally, after the boy had passed his car for the 4th or 5th time, the policeman became curious and got out of his car to intercept the boy. *What are you doing son riding that bike so fast?* the policeman asked. *I'm running away from home,* the youngster replied in an angry voice. *Well, if you're running away from home,* the policeman continued in an amused fashion, *why do you just keep riding around the block?* The youngster quickly answered back, *Because my mother won't let me cross the street.*

We can get upset and angry at times – this is only natural. It is a natural response to become irritated when life doesn't go the way that we would like. But obedience keeps us from getting too far from home. If we are obedient to the Lord, we won't stray too far from fellowship with Him.

Amaziah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord – but not wholeheartedly. Amaziah was obedient to the commands of the Lord but not completely. When Amaziah crossed the street and began to disobey the Lord, his life and reign began to fall apart. As long as Amaziah was obedient, God's blessed his life and reign.

But when Amaziah's commitment to God waivered and he began to disobey God, his life and reign began to spiral downward.

As someone has said, *When God puts a period at the end of a sentence, don't change it to a question mark.* God knows what is best for our lives. We are wise if we follow His will for us.