

On one snowy, wintry day in England, Prince Edward of Wales and Albert, Duke of Windsor, while still young boys, were wistfully looking out the window of the Buckingham Palace. How they would love to go out and frolic in the snow like other young boys. But they were not allowed. They certainly had ample toys to play with, but they couldn't just go out and have a snow ball fight with the other children. As they were whispering their inner wishes to each other, the governess who was watching them disappeared for a moment to go to the rest room. Edward and Albert looked at each other wide-eyed. This was too good to be true. They finally had their chance for freedom.

As quickly as they could, the young boys threw on their winter coats and were out the back door. They took off down a few streets and were soon lost in the streets of London. And it wasn't long before they found what they wanted – a group of boys having a good, old-fashioned snowball fight. Prince Edward and Duke Albert joined the fun with great enthusiasm. In fact, they became so boisterous that one of them threw a snowball wildly, cracking a window in a nearby house. In an unfortunate bit of timing, a Bobbie happened to be walking down the street on patrol just when the snowball loudly cracked the glass.

The boys scattered all over the place when the Bobbie rushed over to apprehend them. But lacking the street experience of the other youngsters, Edward and Albert managed to get caught with one other boy – the rest of the gang got away.

What are your names? the English police officer demanded. *I'm Edward, Prince of Wales,* the 1st youngster replied. *I'm Albert, Duke of Windsor,* the 2nd boy answered. With each answer the Bobbie's face was becoming more and more stern as he thought the boys were playing games with him. *And what's your name?* he asked the 3rd boy. The youngster wiped his nose on his sleeve, looked over at the other two with a twinkle in his eye, and answered, *I'm sticking with my buddies here. I'm the bishop of Canterbury.*

Everybody faces peer pressure. Even those of royal bloodlines face peer pressure. Many of the actions that we choose are influenced by pressures from those around us. One of the marks of true spiritual maturity is the ability to choose the right course of action in the midst of pressure to go the other way.

The 3rd good king of Judah is an excellent case study in peer pressure. His name was Joash. He assumed the rule of Judah in almost the most difficult situation imaginable. Yet during the times of greatest difficulty he was a good and righteous king – mainly due to healthy and proper peer pressure. The 2nd half of his reign, however, was marked by some of the most treturous acts possible. And he caved in to wickedness

and unrighteousness because of poor peer pressure. Let's look briefly at the circumstances under which Joash assumed the throne before we study these 2 opposite halves of his reign.

In order to understand the situation that Joash found himself in as a young boy, we have to go all the way back to Omri, King of Israel.

*Omri was the general of Israel's army. He was a man gifted in military intelligence. Following Zimri's assassination of Elah, Omri took the opportunity of the chaotic condition in the land to take over the throne of Israel. With his instinct for military matters, he soon built a stable and powerful empire. But part of doing this brought great destruction to Israel in the long run. For to seal an alliance that Omri made with the Phoenicians, the daughter of the King of the Phoenicians was given to Omri's son in marriage. This would eventually bring Jezebel into the position of queen of Israel and would bring the immoral and destructive Baal worship to God's people.

*You would think that Judah would learn from Israel's mistake. But such was not the case. Judah found it militarily profitable to make an alliance with Israel. To seal that alliance, as was commonly the case, a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel was given to King Jehoram to be his wife. This would bring Jezebel's daughter, Athaliah, into the position of being queen of Judah and would bring the immoral and destructive Baal worship south down into Judah.

*After Jehoram died, his son Ahaziah assumed the throne of Judah. Athaliah, Jezebel's daughter, was the queen mother. She was very aggressive seeking to exercise power and control whenever possible.

*Her opportunity for complete control came when Jehu, the new king of Israel, was commissioned by God's prophet to wipe out all of Ahab and Jezebel's wicked line. Jehu not only killed the sons of Ahab and Jezebel who were in line to rule in Israel, he also took an unexpected opportunity to kill Ahaziah the son of Jehoram and Athaliah who was visiting in Israel as the ruling king of Judah. This left the throne of Judah vacant. Athaliah, the queen mother, jumped at the opportunity to grab the throne, making herself the ruler of Judah. This was the only time in Judah's history when a woman ruled the land as queen. It was also the only time in Judah's history when a direct descendent of King David was not on the throne.

*In order to secure her control as queen, Athaliah systematically killed every one of David's descendants who would have any claim to the throne. Athaliah was successful in her extinction of David's line except for one person. A tiny baby named Joash who was whisked from the palace by his nurse to the temple where he was carefully guarded and raised by the priest, Jehoiada. For 7 years, Athaliah ruled the land of Judah with a wickedness that God's people had never seen before. She instituted Baal worship. Her thirst for blood seemed to know no boundaries. But all the while, without her knowledge, Joash was growing in the

temple. Athaliah had thought that she had extinguished David's seed. But God had preserved a single remnant in fulfillment of his promises to King David.

*When Joash was 7, Jehoiada felt that he could wait no longer. The nation just couldn't stand much more of Athaliah's wicked rule without totally collapsing. So in a very secretive manner, Jehoiada made all of the preparations necessary to have Joash put in his rightful place on the throne. He made sure that the army was with him. Then he executed his coup. Joash was proclaimed to be king in a grand ceremony at the temple. When Athaliah heard of the commotion, she went to the temple to see what was happening. When she learned that Joash had been anointed king of Judah, she had the gall to protest crying out *treason, treason*. But her protests fell on deaf ears. She was immediately arrested and put to death. Joash was placed on the throne as king of Judah. And the entire land rejoiced because a true descendent of David had finally been given his rightful place on the throne.

*So it is not difficult to see the pressure that young Joash had as just a 7 year old boy. Not only was he king of Judah, he was the only descendent of David left. All of the promises of God rested on his young shoulders. With the heaviness of this weight, Joash began his rule.

Joash is commended as a good king by God. But his reign can definitely be divided into 2 sections. Before the death of Jehoiada, when this godly high priest continued to have a fatherly influence on Joash, Joash was a godly king who instituted many beneficent reforms. But after Jehoiada died, Joash began to be influenced by some wicked men who had remained silent during the years when Jehoiada's influence had been so great. During this 2nd half of his reign, Joash did some horrible things, tarnishing his godly heritage as a good king. Let's look at these 2 opposite halves of Joash's reign this morning.

2CH 24:1 Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem forty years. His mother's name was Zibiah; she was from Beersheba. ² Joash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all the years of Jehoiada the priest.

What was the major project that Joash accomplished as King during the lifetime and influence of Jehoiada? It was the renovation of the temple of the Lord. READ 2 Chron. 24:4-14:

2CH 24:4 Some time later Joash decided to restore the temple of the LORD. ⁵ He called together the priests and Levites and said to them, "Go to the towns of Judah and collect the money due annually from all Israel, to repair the temple of your God. Do it now." But the Levites did not act at once.

2CH 24:6 Therefore the king summoned Jehoiada the chief priest and said to him, "Why haven't you required the Levites to bring in from Judah and Jerusalem the tax imposed by Moses the servant of the LORD and by the assembly of Israel for the Tent of the Testimony?"

2CH 24:7 Now the sons of that wicked woman Athaliah had broken into the temple of God and had used even its sacred objects for the Baals.

2CH 24:8 At the king's command, a chest was made and placed outside, at the gate of the temple of the LORD. ⁹ A proclamation was then issued in Judah and Jerusalem that they should bring to the LORD the tax that Moses the servant of God had required of Israel in the desert. ¹⁰ All the officials and all the people brought their contributions gladly, dropping them into the chest until it was full. ¹¹ Whenever the chest was brought in by the Levites to the king's officials and they saw that there was a large amount of money, the royal secretary and the officer of the chief priest would come and empty the chest and carry it back to its place. They did this regularly and collected a great amount of money. ¹² The king and Jehoiada gave it to the men who carried out the work required for the temple of the LORD. They hired masons and carpenters to restore the LORD's temple, and also workers in iron and bronze to repair the temple.

2CH 24:13 The men in charge of the work were diligent, and the repairs progressed under them. They rebuilt the temple of God according to its original design and reinforced it. ¹⁴ When they had finished, they brought the rest of the money to the king and Jehoiada, and with it were made articles for the LORD's temple: articles for the service and for the burnt offerings, and also dishes and other objects of gold and silver. As long as Jehoiada lived, burnt offerings were presented continually in the temple of the LORD.

Now we can understand why Jehoiada was hesitant at first to aggressively attack this much needed temple renovation. There was no question that the temple of God desperately needed refurbishing. After 7 years of neglect by Athaliah, and worse than that, abuse and desecration by her pagan sons, the temple was in pitiful disarray. Baal worship had even been substituted for the worship of the true and living God. So there was no question that the temple needed some tender love and care, some refurbishing to make it spiff and shine again. But Jehoiada could have been hesitant to tackle the needed repairs because of the appearance of self interest. Here he had guarded and raised Joash because it was the right thing to do. He had guarded and raised Joash in order to keep the line of David viable. He had guarded and raised Joash so that righteousness might prevail over wickedness in the land. And he didn't want to hinder the progress made by making it seem that he had done all of this only to get the temple refurbished. He didn't want to make it appear that he had ulterior motives all the time. So Jehoiada was hesitant to jump into the temple renovation at first until Joash insisted that he do so.

And we can also see why Joash made this commitment to temple repair. After all, he owed his very life to Jehoiada. Jehoiada must have been like a father to him, the only father that he had ever known. Joash would have known how much the temple meant to Jehoiada; how much a renovation would mean to him. And Joash had grown up around the temple as a young boy. He would have known the shabby shape that the temple was in. So we can understand why this would have been a number one priority to Joash. So Joash instituted a program of renovation of the temple – and this was very pleasing to God. This, frankly, was what earned Joash a place among the 8 good kings of Judah. For it was this first part of Joash’s reign when Jehoiada was still living, when the King accomplished what was pleasing in the sight of God.

But we would fail to see the complete picture if we stopped with just the first half of Joash’s reign. For Jehoiada eventually died. After this godly priest died, probably about 12 years or so before Joash’s death, the King began to be influenced by some other counselors – evil, wicked men. These men had been silently waiting in the wings, knowing that they couldn’t challenge the power and integrity of Jehoiada while he was living. But after the godly priest died, they saw their chance to spring into action. They influenced Joash to do something unspeakably despicable. Listen to what Joash did as we continue to read from 2 Chron. 24:15-25

2CH 24:15 Now Jehoiada was old and full of years, and he died at the age of a hundred and thirty.¹⁶ He was buried with the kings in the City of David, because of the good he had done in Israel for God and his temple.

2CH 24:17 After the death of Jehoiada, the officials of Judah came and paid homage to the king, and he listened to them.¹⁸ They abandoned the temple of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and worshiped Asherah poles and idols. Because of their guilt, God's anger came upon Judah and Jerusalem.¹⁹ Although the LORD sent prophets to the people to bring them back to him, and though they testified against them, they would not listen.

2CH 24:20 Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood before the people and said, "This is what God says: `Why do you disobey the LORD's commands? You will not prosper. Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.' "

2CH 24:21 But they plotted against him, and by order of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the LORD's temple.²² King Joash did not remember the kindness Zechariah's father Jehoiada had shown him but killed his son, who said as he lay dying, "May the LORD see this and call you to account."

2CH 24:23 At the turn of the year, the army of Aram marched against Joash; it invaded Judah and Jerusalem and killed all the leaders of the people. They sent all the plunder to their king in Damascus.²⁴ Although the

Aramean army had come with only a few men, the LORD delivered into their hands a much larger army. Because Judah had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers, judgment was executed on Joash.²⁵ When the Arameans withdrew, they left Joash severely wounded. His officials conspired against him for murdering the son of Jehoiada the priest, and they killed him in his bed. So he died and was buried in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.

Now isn't this an amazing picture? After Jehoiada, the godly influence on Joash, passes away, the king begins to listen to wicked, pagan counselors. Perhaps he always felt that he was in the shadow of the powerful high priest who had saved the David dynasty. But for whatever the reason, Joash begins to sow some wild oats. He's in his mid-30's by now and he begins to listen to prophets of Baal and Asherah. The fact that these people were still in a position of influence shows the devastating influence that Athaliah and Ahab and Jezebel had on this entire region. When Joash takes this turn for the worst, godly prophets begin to speak out against this new direction in an attempt to rebuke and correct him. God's blessing leaves Judah as the powerful nation of Aram to the north of Israel begins to oppress Joash and his people. But instead of listening to the corrective hand of God and the message that God's true prophets were giving him, Joash turns against them. He even comes to the low-point of martyring Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada. That this was an all-time low is seen in the fact that even some advisors to the king see the wickedness of this action and use this act as an excuse to assassinate Joash, an extreme measure to be sure. So Joash is recorded among the righteous kings for his godly living and renovation of the temple during the first half of his reign, but he ends his rule in a despicable manner, performing one of the most treacherous acts that can be imagined. In both halves of his reign, it is clear that he is influenced by outside forces. During the first half of his reign, he is under the influence of the godly high priest, Jehoiada. During the last part of his reign, he is under the influence of the pagan advisors who turned his heart from the Lord to the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth.

Now as we conclude our study of Joash, we need to be reminded of the powerful influence that peer pressure can exert on our lives. This is one of the reasons why the Bible is so pointed in directing us to encircle ourselves with godly influences and to avoid having wicked people as our inner circle of friends.

PR 22:24 Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man,
do not associate with one easily angered,
PR 22:25 or you may learn his ways
and get yourself ensnared.

PR 1:10 My son, if sinners entice you,
do not give in to them.

PR 2:12 Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men,
from men whose words are perverse,
PR 2:13 who leave the straight paths
to walk in dark ways,
PR 2:14 who delight in doing wrong
and rejoice in the perverseness of evil,
PR 2:15 whose paths are crooked
and who are devious in their ways.

PR 2:20 Thus you will walk in the ways of good men
and keep to the paths of the righteous.
PR 2:21 For the upright will live in the land,
and the blameless will remain in it;
PR 2:22 but the wicked will be cut off from the land,
and the unfaithful will be torn from it.

Each of us is responsible for the direction of our life and will give an accounting to the Lord for how we have used this valuable treasure of life that has been bequeathed to us. If we need to stand alone against the crowd to follow God's righteous paths, then like Daniel or Joseph, this is the course that we must be willing to take. But we must also be wise in surrounding ourselves with godly influences in life so that we might not be continuously tempted to do wrong. This is a great lesson that we can learn from Joash.