

One of the themes that we see repeatedly in this part of the book of Chronicles is the theme of counseling.

Every time you speak you are counseling others!

Now, you may be counseling them to root for your favorite sports team.

You may be exhorting them to vote for your favorite politician.

You may be explaining to them the benefits of your dietary wisdom.

But every time you speak, you are interpreting and applying somebody’s wisdom (or folly!)

And every time you listen to someone else,
you are listening to their counsel.

So, whose counsel do you listen to?

Whose word matters most to you?

Each of the kings that we are looking at tonight does well –

so long as they are listening to the right voices;

but disaster strikes when they listen to the wrong voices.

It’s important to keep in mind the historical background to our story.

The book of Kings provides a helpful framework for thinking about Israel’s history.

There are three stories in the book of Kings:

The basic story of Israel in the time of the Kings is oriented around the house of David.

Solomon built the temple for the LORD around 970 BC,

the kingdom is divided in the days of his son, Rehoboam (ca. 930 BC);

the sons of David rule only in the southern kingdom of Judah & Benjamin.

The second story is the story of Jeroboam and the northern kingdom of Israel.

Jeroboam rules the northern 10 tribes –

but the “sin of Jeroboam” is that he builds golden calves

in Bethel and Dan.

The third (and central) story is the story of the Omrides – the family of Ahab.

Omri seized the throne of Israel ca. 880 BC, and his dynasty ruled for 40 years.

Ahab builds a temple to Baal in his father’s city, Samaria,

and the foul seed of Ahab and Jezebel spread throughout Israel and Judah.

The whole ministry of Elijah and Elisha is oriented around the Omrides.

Indeed, the ascension of Elijah is right at the middle of the story.

And Elijah and Elisha are both involved in prophesying the end of the house of Ahab –

Elisha even sends one of the sons of the prophets to anoint Jehu (ca. 840 BC),

the general who destroys the house of Ahab,

and turns the temple of Baal in Samaria into a latrine –
thus ending the third story of Ahab and the house of Baal.

But Jehu turns out to be no better than Jeroboam –
because while he abolishes Baal-worship in Israel,
he follows the sin of Jeroboam in worshipping at the golden calf at Bethel.
And so the northern kingdom of Israel continues in rebellion against the LORD
until it is destroyed 100 years later in 722 –
thus ending the second story of Jeroboam and the golden calves
(the shrine at Bethel is destroyed by Josiah).

The house of David survives for another 136 years,
but in 586 BC, the temple of Solomon is destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar,
and the house of David is taken into exile –
thus ending the first story of the book of Kings.

The Chronicler assumes that you know all this.

And quite frankly, I would encourage you to get that outline of the book of Kings
stuck in your head.

You don't need to know all the names and dates,
but you should know the names of *three* of the northern kings of Israel:
you should know about Jeroboam and the shrines of the golden calf;
you should know about Ahab and the temple of Baal in Samaria,
and you should know about Jehu, the closest thing to a good king in Israel,
who destroyed the house of Ahab and the temple of Baal.

And you should know one date:

722 – Assyria takes the northern kingdom of Israel into exile.

If you know all this, then you can see some of what the Chronicler is doing.

Our story today takes from around 800 BC to 740 BC.

This is a time period in international history
when the neo-Assyrian empire was beset by internal divisions,
and the Egyptians were also torn apart by civil war.

The result was that this was the heyday of the kingdom of Israel in the north.
The line of Jehu was powerful and strong.

Jehu had been forced to submit to the Assyrians (ca. 830s),
but as Assyria weakened in the early 8th century,
Jehu's descendents became more powerful.
Joash (the grandson of Jehu) and Jeroboam II (Joash's son)
reigned for 50 years.

From the archeological records,
it would appear that Jeroboam II
was the most powerful king in Israel's history.

The prophets Hosea, Joel, Jonah and Amos were all active during this period – and their prophecies regularly decry the pride and opulence of the rich, and their oppression of the poor.

But it may help explain why Joash of Israel referred to himself as a cedar in Lebanon, compared to Amaziah, the “thistle” of Judah.

1. Half-Hearted Obedience: Amaziah (25:1-28)

a. The Faithful Half Follows the Word of the LORD... (v1-4)

25 Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. ² And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, yet not with a whole heart. ³ And as soon as the royal power was firmly his, he killed his servants who had struck down the king his father. ⁴ But he did not put their children to death, according to what is written in the Law, in the Book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, “Fathers shall not die because of their children, nor children die because of their fathers, but each one shall die for his own sin.”

Amaziah is the son of Joash of Judah,
not to be confused with Joash of Israel!

His father was the Joash who had been protected from the wicked Athaliah–
the Joash who had restored and repaired the temple.

It is interesting to compare how Kings and Chronicles describe Amaziah.

Kings says that Amaziah “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD,
yet not like David his father.” (2 Kings 14:3)
and then goes on to say that the high places were not removed.
Chronicles says that Amaziah “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD,
yet not with a whole heart.”

The meaning is the same: “not with a whole heart” is equivalent to “not like David his father.”

Given how Amaziah’s reign will end – with his worshiping the gods of Edom –
the Chronicler wants to emphasize the half-hearted nature of Amaziah’s reign.

Amaziah began his reign well–
he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD
And he began his reign by doing justice to those who had killed his father.
But verses 3-4 point out that Amaziah heeded the law of Moses
and did not kill the children for the sins of their fathers.

In other words, Amaziah brought *justice* –
condemning the guilty, but acquitting the innocent.

I don’t know that we sufficiently appreciate how hard this is.
As king, it would be really easy to go overboard and kill the children too

(after all, if you kill the fathers, you are likely going to alienate the children,
and so the next generation will hate you!).
But you who are parents have some idea of how hard this is.

As I was working on this section of the sermon,
I condemned an innocent child along with the guilty!

I sat back down, looked at the page, and saw the words,
“condemning the guilty, but acquitting the innocent!”

I had to go back and ask that child’s forgiveness!

b. ...and Triumphs through Heeding the Words of the Man of God (v5-13)

⁵ Then Amaziah assembled the men of Judah and set them by fathers' houses under commanders of thousands and of hundreds for all Judah and Benjamin. He mustered those twenty years old and upward, and found that they were 300,000 choice men, fit for war, able to handle spear and shield. ⁶ He hired also 100,000 mighty men of valor from Israel for 100 talents^[a] of silver.

In verses 5-6, we hear about the muster of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

Amaziah’s army is considerably smaller than his fathers.

Abijah had 400,000

Asa had 580,000

Jehoshaphat had 1.1 million

Amaziah and his son, Uzziah, have an army of 300,000.

So Amaziah does what countless kings have done (before and since).

He hires mercenaries.

He may have thought that it was acceptable

because these mercenaries were brethren from the northern kingdom of Israel.

[v7-8]

⁷ But a man of God came to him and said, “O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the LORD is not with Israel, with all these Ephraimites. ⁸ But go, act, be strong for the battle. Why should you suppose that God will cast you down before the enemy? For God has power to help or to cast down.”

The son of David must learn to trust in the LORD with all his heart,
and lean not on his own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will direct your paths.

The LORD is your strength.

If he is with you (as we saw this morning), then no earthly power can withstand you.

If he is against you, then no earthly power can deliver you!

God has power to help or to cast down.

And Amaziah wants to trust the LORD,
but he wonders about the money that he just spent.
I just gave 100 talents to the army of Israel!

The man of God replies, “the LORD is able to give you much more than this,”
so he dismisses the Israelite army (infuriating them –
since they were counting not only on their wages,
but also on the plunder and spoil from the battle!).

⁹ And Amaziah said to the man of God, “But what shall we do about the hundred talents that I have given to the army of Israel?” The man of God answered, “The LORD is able to give you much more than this.” ¹⁰ Then Amaziah discharged the army that had come to him from Ephraim to go home again. And they became very angry with Judah and returned home in fierce anger.

So *did* God give Amaziah “much more than this”?
Look at verses 11-12.

¹¹ But Amaziah took courage and led out his people and went to the Valley of Salt and struck down 10,000 men of Seir. ¹² The men of Judah captured another 10,000 alive and took them to the top of a rock and threw them down from the top of the rock, and they were all dashed to pieces.

There’s no indication that Amaziah obtained more than 100 talents of silver.
Indeed, the only reference to “spoil” is found in verse 13,
where the Israelite army raids and plunders the cities of *Judah!*

¹³ But the men of the army whom Amaziah sent back, not letting them go with him to battle, raided the cities of Judah, from Samaria to Beth-horon, and struck down 3,000 people in them and took much spoil.

I want you to think about this.
The outcome of this is quite mixed (just like Amaziah’s heart!).
Amaziah wins the battle – but it appears that he does *not* come out ahead financially.
Not only does he not get a whole lot of plunder,
but while he is away in Edom, the Israelite mercenaries plunder Judah!

Then again, the man of God never promised anything.
He said Amaziah should trust God – and leave the outcome to God.

Now the outcome has gone against Amaziah.
If he was wholehearted in his service to the LORD,
then he would say with Job, “the LORD gives, the LORD takes away,
blessed be the name of the LORD.”
But Amaziah is *halfhearted*.

He seems to be miffed that Yahweh did not do enough for him!

You know what this is like!

Because you have told yourself – “if I just do this, and do that,
then God will give me what I want!”

I know people who have said, “If I just read my bible, and pray every day,
and give my 10%, then God will bless me!”

Amaziah *did* everything he was supposed to do.

And the result was that *he* got plundered by Israelite mercenaries!

So Amaziah did what everyone does when their gods fail them!

He looks for new gods!

Trusting God didn't give me what I want, so I'll pursue what I want from others.

**c. Amaziah Worships the Gods of Seir and Rejects a Prophet of the LORD
(v14-16)**

¹⁴ *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 worshiped them, making offerings to them.*

Why would he worship the gods of Seir?

After all (as the prophet says), the gods of Seir obviously couldn't protect Seir!

So why worship them?

In the ancient world, many believed that if you conquered another nation,
it meant that your god was more powerful than the other god.

But, they recognized that this was not a static situation.

After all, if one god is simply *more powerful* than other gods,
then that god should *always* defeat the other gods,
and so *whoever* worships that god should always win!

History demonstrates that this is not the case.

Just because your god is more powerful does not mean you win every battle!

So, when you've defeated the neighboring country,
how can you make sure that you *stay* on top?

Well, if you bring their gods into your temple,
and keep them happy by making sacrifices to them as well,
then maybe they won't try to get revenge against you next time!

It makes sense.

The only problem is that God had said,

'you shall worship the LORD and him only' –

so if you worship other gods, then you anger the LORD.

And quite frankly, that's just a really bad idea!

So:

¹⁵ *Therefore the LORD was angry with Amaziah and sent to him a prophet, who said to him, "Why have you sought the gods of a people who did not deliver their own people from your hand?"*

¹⁶ *But as he was speaking, the king said to him, "Have we made you a royal counselor? Stop! Why should you 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."*

You can hear in Amaziah's words his dismissive attitude toward the voice of the LORD.

He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD –
but only half-heartedly,
only when it suited his agenda.

Now, I also want you to notice something about the prophet.

Normally we think of prophets as these bold figures
who ignore peril to proclaim the word of the LORD.
If a king says, "Stop," no prophet would ever stop, right?

But this prophet stops!

After all, his message only takes two sentences to communicate.
He seems to have had a longer message from the LORD –
but he never delivers it.

Why not?

Because the LORD generally only sends a prophet to call people to repentance.
(Sometimes a prophet may be sent to say, "Time's up – too late now!"
but even then, those who hear the message "too late" should still repent!)

When Amaziah says, "Stop,"

this prophet recognizes that there will be no repentance,
and so the rest of his message is useless.

And so he jumps straight to the conclusion:

"I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel."

I urge you, brothers and sisters,

pay careful attention to *where* you get your counsel –
to whom are you listening?

Are you listening to the prophetic word of the LORD?

Or are you taking counsel from unknown sources?

Notice v17:

d. “The Thistle and the Cedar”: Amaziah Ignores Wise Counsel (v17-24)

¹⁷ *Then Amaziah king of Judah took counsel and sent to Joash the son of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, “Come, let us look one another in the face.”*

Where is Amaziah getting this counsel?

Who knows?

Who cares?

It's *not* from the LORD, so it's source is irrelevant!

But following this counsel, Amaziah sends messengers to Joash saying,

Come, let us look one another in the face.

This could be a challenge to battle–

or it could be an invitation to a treaty–

but either way, it is a claim to equality.

Amaziah is claiming to be Joash's equal (or possibly even his superior).

In the ancient world, to stand face to face is a sign of equality.

That is why the king's throne was generally elevated,

so that his face was higher than everyone else's.

The king looks down on the people.

(Incidentally, that is why the church has usually had elevated pulpits.

It is not that the pastor is better than anyone else–

after all, the only time I come up here is to preach the Word of God!

The Word of God is elevated!

It is also why I come down from the pulpit to give the declaration of pardon:

because the eternal Word of God–

the one who was in the form of God from all eternity–

has come in the flesh and met us face to face.)

But here Amaziah claims that he is Joash's equal.

And Joash responds with a wisdom parable:

¹⁸ *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. ¹⁹ You say, ‘See, I^[b] 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?”*

It may be that Amaziah had suggested a marriage treaty.

Joash claims that Amaziah is like a thistle–

a worthless plant compared to the exalted cedars of Lebanon.

As I mentioned earlier,
Joash has good reason for saying this.
These years are the glory-years of the northern kingdom.

Israel is at the pinnacle of its power under the sons of Jehu.
So while Joash of Israel may not be a godly king,
he does speak truly to Amaziah!

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 had sought the gods of Edom. ²¹ So Joash king of Israel went up, and he and Amaziah king of Judah faced one another in battle at Beth-shemesh, which belongs to Judah. ²² And Judah was defeated by Israel, and every man fled to his home. ²³ And Joash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash, son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh, and brought him to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem for 400 cubits,^[c] from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate. ²⁴ And he seized all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of God, in the care of Obed-edom. He seized also the treasuries of the king's house, also hostages, and he returned to Samaria.

But Amaziah would not listen – because God had determined to destroy Amaziah.
And so they did face each other in battle,
but Joash captured Amaziah and brought him back to Jerusalem,
where he broke down the wall of Jerusalem,
plundered the temple and the king's house,
and took hostages back to Samaria.

I want you to think about what this means.
Joash of Israel holds hostages.
This means that Amaziah must do whatever Joash wants –
otherwise, the hostages are dead.

Amaziah had wanted to use his idolatry to demonstrate his power.
Instead, his idolatry demonstrates how he has been enslaved.
Amaziah is no more than the puppet of Joash.

e. The Death of Amaziah by Conspiracy (v25-28)

²⁵ Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, lived fifteen years after the death of Joash the son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel. ²⁶ Now the rest of the deeds of Amaziah, from first to last, are they not written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel? ²⁷ 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 and put him to death there. ²⁸ And they brought him upon horses, and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David.^[d]

Notice how verse 25 puts it.
Amaziah lived 15 years after the death of Joash of Israel.
Why mention the death of Joash?
Because Joash of Israel was the “real” ruler of Judah.

But Amaziah was no better than his father (Joash of Judah) –
he refused to heed wise and godly counsel,
and instead listened to foolish counsel,
and so he meets the same end as his father:
assassinated by his servants.

2. Like Father, Like Son: Uzziah, a Third Generation of Half-Hearted Kings (26:1-23)

a. As Long as He Sought the LORD, God Made Him Prosper (v1-5)

26 And all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. ² He built Eloth and restored it to Judah, after the king slept with his fathers. ³ Uzziah was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. ⁴ And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. ⁵ He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God, and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper.

And if it wasn't enough for Joash and Amaziah to be half-hearted –
Uzziah becomes a third generation of half-hearted kings.
We are told that Uzziah “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD” –
which sounds good, until we are told,
“according to all that his father Amaziah had done.”

Hmm.

His father worshiped the gods of Seir and told a prophet to “shut up.”

But the Chronicler wants us to see that Uzziah was not *all* bad.
He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah.

This is obviously a different Zechariah than the one that his grandfather had killed
(After all, Uzziah hadn't even been born at the time of that Zechariah's death).

But it reminds us that as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper.
As long as he listened to those who instructed him in the fear of God, he prospered.

Indeed, for the first part of his reign, it would appear that Uzziah was *wholehearted*
in his devotion to the LORD!

Kings only gives us 7 verses on Uzziah (or Azariah as he is named there).
Chronicles gives us a whole lot more!

b. “God Helped Him”: The Triumphs of Uzziah (v6-15)

⁶ He went out and made war against the Philistines and broke through the wall of Gath and the wall of Jabneh and the wall of Ashdod, and he built cities in the territory of Ashdod and elsewhere among the Philistines. ⁷ God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabians who lived in Gurbaal and against the Meunites. ⁸ The Ammonites paid tribute to Uzziah, and his fame spread even to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong. ⁹ Moreover,

Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate and at the Valley Gate and at the Angle, and fortified them.¹⁰ And he built towers in the wilderness and cut out many cisterns, for he had large herds, both in the Shephelah and in the plain, and he had farmers and vinedressers in the hills and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil.¹¹ Moreover, Uzziah had an army of soldiers, fit for war, in divisions according to the numbers in the muster made by Jeiel the secretary and Maaseiah the officer, under the direction of Hananiah, one of the king's commanders.¹² The whole number of the heads of fathers' houses of mighty men of valor was 2,600.¹³ Under their command was an army of 307,500, who could make war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy.¹⁴ And Uzziah prepared for all the army shields, spears, helmets, coats of mail, bows, and stones for slinging.¹⁵ In Jerusalem he made machines, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and the corners, to shoot arrows and great stones. And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong.

Verse 10 highlights Uzziah's agricultural improvements:

“he had farmers and vinedressers in the hills and in the fertile lands,
for he loved the soil.”

Uzziah is a well-rounded king – not just a warrior or a builder –
he even echoes Solomon's wisdom!

Verses 6-15 tell us about his triumphs against the Philistines and Arabians,
and his fame reaching even to the “border of Egypt.”

In other words, to the south and to the west,

Uzziah's name meant something.

It's a very small circle of influence!

If you pay attention to the details,

there is no hint that Uzziah's name impressed Israel or Syria to the north!

He has a circle of influence greater than his father or his grandfather –

which is to say, “he *has* a circle of influence!”

Somebody actually paid tribute to him!

When you are as tiny and feeble as Judah,
that's impressive!

But like his father – and his grandfather:

c. “He Was Unfaithful”: Uzziah's Leprosy (v16-21)

¹⁶ *But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction.*

Why do we do this?

Moses warned us!

When you come into the land and God gives you all sorts of good gifts,
do not say in your heart, “my strength” and the power of my right hand
has gotten me this wealth! (Dt 6-10)

I look at what God has done at Michiana Covenant over the last 11 years,

and I can be tempted to say, “look at what I have done!”
But that is nothing more than the sin of Uzziah:

For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. ¹⁷ But Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the LORD who were men of valor, ¹⁸ and they withstood King Uzziah and said to him, “It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the LORD God.” ¹⁹ Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to burn incense, and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy^[e] broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the LORD, by the altar of incense. ²⁰ And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead! And they rushed him out quickly, and he himself hurried to go out, because the LORD had struck him. ²¹ And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death, and being a leper lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son was over the king's household, governing the people of the land.

Uzziah is trying to be something that God has not called him to be.

God called him to be king.

Was that not enough?

God called him as the Son of David to be the Meshiach – his anointed one!

But that wasn't enough for Uzziah.

He also wanted to be a priest.

He wanted to offer incense before the LORD in the Holy Place.

We don't know why.

Maybe he had heard Psalm 110 with its royal priest
according to the order of Melchizedek.

And maybe he thought that he was the Son of David who would take that place.

We have been united to the Christ.

We have been given his Holy Spirit!

Through God's promises (according to 2 Peter 1:4)
we become partakers of the divine nature.

But you are *not* the Holy Spirit!

You are not Jesus.

Uzziah had been very useful to God, so long as he remembered who God had called him to be.

But when Uzziah forgot –

when Uzziah tried to be something else,

he became useless – and indeed, worse than useless!

He became positively *dangerous*.

I knew a man once who was a gifted counselor.

He helped a lot of people.

But he became convinced that he could help anyone –
indeed, that if you would just listen to him and do what he said,
your problems would be solved!

And so God struck him with leprosy (figuratively speaking).

Like Uzziah, he was rendered useless to the church,
and he lived out his days isolated from others.

d. The Death of Uzziah (v22-23)

²² *Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, from first to last, Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz wrote.*

²³ *And Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the burial field that belonged to the kings, for they said, “He is a leper.” And Jotham his son reigned in his place.*

In verse 22, the Chronicler reminds us of the prophet Isaiah.

Uzziah had been proud and sought to exalt himself in the temple of Yahweh,
and he was struck with leprosy.

But “in the year that King Uzziah died [Isaiah says], I saw the LORD.”
And Isaiah humbles himself in the temple – before the LORD,
and the angel of the LORD struck Isaiah as well!

When it says that the angel “touched” Isaiah’s mouth with the coal from the altar (6:7),
the word there is the same word as here in 2 Chronicles 26:20.

The LORD had struck Uzziah with leprosy in order to render Uzziah *unfit* for the kingship.

The LORD *struck* Isaiah on the mouth with a burning coal from the altar
in order to cleanse and purify Isaiah for his prophetic task.