

Judah During the Divided Kingdom (2 Chronicles 10:1 – 28:7)

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<p>The Reign of Amaziah, part 1: Opening of Amaziah's Reign; Amaziah's Half-hearted Fidelity (2 Chronicles 25:1-12)</p>
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Deterioration Through Half-Hearted Obedience (25:1-28:27)

The final phase of the Divided Kingdom reports on the reigns of Amaziah (25:1-28), Uzziah (26:1-23), Jotham (27:1-9), and Ahaz (28:1-27). As with the first and second phases of this material, the Chronicler's text is complex and presents a number of motifs. Nevertheless, this material falls together principally by explicit comparisons among the various kings. This major motif comes to the foreground in the description of Amaziah as one who **did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not wholeheartedly** (25:2). Half-hearted obedience is a central theme in each reign that follows. Uzziah **did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done** (26:4). His half-hearted commitment is evident in the second half of his reign (26:16-23). Jotham also **did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Uzziah had done** (27:2). Although the Chronicler made it clear that Jotham himself avoided the inconsistencies of his father (27:2b), he also noted that **the people, however, continued their corrupt practices** (27:2b). At the end of this series of comparisons between fathers and their sons, the Chronicler closed this section by drawing a connection between Amaziah and Ahaz. Both of these kings were defeated by northern Israelite armies because Judah had become so corrupt (25:14-24; 28:6-15). As we will see in the comments below, at the end of this phase of the divided period, Judah had become as corrupt as her northern neighbor. This leveling of North and South set the stage for Hezekiah's Reunited Kingdom.

The Reign of Amaziah (25:1-28)

The reign of Amaziah (796-767 B.C.) presents another example of divine blessing and cursing based on the fidelity and infidelity. In this case, Amaziah was initially spared severe consequences for his inconsistency, but God's patience led him to further infidelity and curses. As such, his reign encouraged the post-exilic readers of Chronicles not to allow divine mercy to lead to further infidelities.

Comparison of 2 Chr 25:1-28 with 2 Kgs 14:1-20

The Chronicler's account of Amaziah depends heavily on the record of Kings (// 2 Kgs 14:1-20), but the former is eight verses longer than the latter (see figure 43).

2 Chr		2 Kgs
-----	Events in the North (omitted)	13:1-14:1
25:1-2	Opening of Amaziah's Reign (slightly abbreviated)	14:2-4
25:3-13	Amaziah's Infidelity and Trouble (greatly expanded)	14:5-7
25:14-24	Amaziah's Infidelity and Trouble (greatly expanded)	14:8-24
25:25-28	Closure of Amaziah's Reign (abbreviated)	14:15-28

Comparison of 2 Chr 25:1-28 with 2 Kgs 13:1-14:28 (figure 43)

A number of variations should be noted. First, the Chronicler omitted several passages focusing on events in the North. 1) He did not include 2 Kgs 13:1-25. His interest in the divided period is exclusively in the southern kingdom unless events in the North have a bearing on events in the South (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*). 2) True to his ordinary practice, the Chronicler also omitted the opening synchronization with the northern kingdom (see 2 Kgs 14:1). 3) The notice of Jehoash's death (2 Kgs 14:15-16) is also omitted for the same reason.

Second, the Chronicler replaced the comparison between Amaziah and David (2 Kgs 14:3b) with the notice that Amaziah obeyed God **but not wholeheartedly** (25:2). The Chronicler's characteristic concern with heart devotion and inward sincerity is evident.

Third, Chronicles omits the mention of Amaziah's failure to remove high places (2 Kgs 14:4). This omission shapes the record of Amaziah into a presentation of years of relative fidelity followed by infidelity.

Fourth, the note of victory over Edom (2 Kgs 14:7) has been expanded into a full scale narrative (25:5-13). This additional material contains a number of typical themes in Chronicles.

It touches on the dangers of alliances with northern Israelites, prophetic warnings, and the benefit of submission to the prophetic word.

Fifth, a second encounter between Amaziah and a prophet appears (25:14-16). This meeting is introduced by the king's syncretism, and depicts the king as rejecting the prophetic warning. This expansion gives shape to the second half of the record as one of a period of Amaziah's infidelity.

Sixth, Chronicles adds an explanation of why Amaziah did not heed the warnings of Jehoash of northern Israel. It notes that Amaziah foolishly spurned his enemies' offer of peace **for God so worked that he might hand them over to Jehoash because they sought the gods of Edom** (25:20b // 2 Kgs 14:11). The Chronicler explained that the terrible defeat of Judah was the result of divine retribution .

Seventh, the Chronicler explicitly noted his division of Amaziah's reign into years of fidelity and infidelity in a small comment he added in 25:27 (// 2 Kgs 14:19). He noted that the conspiracy against the king began **from the time that Amaziah turned away from following the Lord**.

Opening of Amaziah's Reign (25:1-2)

Amaziah's Half-hearted Fidelity (25:3-12)

Execution of Assassins (25:3-4)

Report of Executions (25:3)

Qualification and Evaluation (25:4)

Half-hearted Fidelity in Battle (25:5-12)

Amaziah Enrolls the People for War (25:5a)

Amaziah Conscripts and Hires Soldiers (25:5b-6)

Amaziah Encounters Prophetic Rebuke (25:7-9)

Amaziah Releases Hired Soldiers (25:10)

Amaziah Gains Victory (25:11-12)

Amaziah's Trouble from Israel (25:13)

Amaziah's Infidelity (25:14-24)

Amaziah Worships Edomite Gods (25:14)

Amaziah Encounters Prophetic Rebuke (25:15-16)

Amaziah Receives Punishment for Infidelity (25:17-24)

Amaziah Challenges Jehoash to Battle (25:17-19)

Amaziah Refuses Jehoash's Warnings (25:20)

Amaziah Loses Battle to Jehoash (25:21-24)

Closure of Amaziah's Reign (25:25-28)

Outline of 2 Chr 25:1-28 (figure 44)

Structure of 25:1-28

The additions and omissions appearing in this passage form a fivefold symmetrical account (see figure 44).

This chapter begins with the rise of Amaziah (25:1-2) and ends with the closure of his reign (25:25-26). The king's reign divides into acts of half-hearted fidelity (25:3-12) and a balancing account of infidelity (25:14-24). In the center of this structure is a brief note which serves as a report of the negative results of Amaziah's half-hearted fidelity and initiates his acts of infidelity (25:13).

Opening of Amaziah's Reign (25:1-2)

The reign of Amaziah notes a few historical details of his rise to power. The name of the king's mother appears. For the significance of royal mothers see comments on 13:2. As we have seen in the comparison above, synchronization with the Northern kingdom is omitted (see 2 Kgs 14:1) and the text remarks that the king was **twenty-five years old** when he ascended to the throne (25:1). A number of chronological notes in Kings (e.g. 2 Kgs 14:2,23; 15:1) suggest that as many as twenty-four years of Amaziah's twenty-nine year reign was a co-regency with Uzziah. Amaziah's capture by Jehoash of Israel also suggests this historical reconstruction (see 25:23).

The Chronicler evaluated Amaziah's reign as a mixture of good and evil. **He did what was right ... but not wholeheartedly** (25:2). In this regard, the Chronicler varied from 2 Kgs 14:3 which compares Amaziah with David and Joash. Instead, he focused on the condition of Amaziah's heart. Heart motivation is a chief concern in Chronicles. The history often focused on the need for obedience to rise out of a sincere heart (see *Introduction: 16) Motivations*). Amaziah, however, was only mediocre in his devotion to God.

By describing Amaziah in this manner, the Chronicler provided his post-exilic readers with a framework for evaluating the materials that followed. He warned them not to expect striking contrasts between blessing and cursing in the king's life. Instead, they would find here the results that come to those who obey, but with half-hearted devotion.

Amaziah's Half-hearted Fidelity (25:3-12)

The Chronicler followed the book of Kings (// 2 Kgs 14:3-7) and focused first on the relatively positive side of Amaziah's reign.

Structure of 25:3-12

This portion of his record divides into two main parts (see figure 44). The Chronicler's account consists of an evaluative report (25:3-4) and a full narrative (25:5-13). The opening report is entirely positive, but the full narrative illustrates a mixture of obedience and disobedience.

Executions of Assassins (25:3-4)

Following the account of Kings very closely, Chronicles reports that Amaziah's first action after consolidating his power was to execute **the officials who had murdered his father** (25:3). A list of these officials appears in the preceding chapter (see 24:26). Although the dishonorable death of Amaziah's father resulted from the judgment of God against him, those who performed the deed were still held responsible for their actions. The text does not spell out Amaziah's motivations for these executions. The fact that some of these men were sons of Ammonite and Moabite women made their loyalty to Amaziah questionable (see 24:26). He may have executed them for this reason.

Whatever the case, the records of Kings and Chronicles honor Amaziah for his restraint. He did not **put their sons to death ... in accordance with what is written in the Law ... of Moses** (25:4). The fear of reprisals from the sons of those executed did not dissuade Amaziah from following the Law of Moses. Remarkably, the text actually quotes the particular Law in question (see Deut 24:16). The principle of the Law was that **each is to die for his own sins** (25:4). This principle fit well with the Chronicler's emphasis on divine blessing and cursing in the post-exilic period. Chronicles focuses on how each generation of Judah suffered for its own sins and benefited from its own obedience (see *Introduction: 10-27 Divine Blessing and Judgment*). Amaziah's restraint illustrated this principle at work.

The Chronicler's concern with individual responsibility before the Law is similar to several portions of Scripture stemming from the exilic period. Jeremiah (see Jer 31:29-31) and Ezekiel (see Ezk 18:1,19-24) stressed the idea that the exiles were not simply suffering because of the sins of their forebears. The recipients of their prophecies were themselves continuing in the practices of their ancestors and therefore suffered the consequences of their sins. On occasion in Scripture children were punished along with their fathers (see Josh 7:24; 2 Kgs 9:26; 1 Chr 10:14). Although these passages do not explicitly comment on the guilt of the children, we may assume from the Mosaic legislation that these children were sufficiently involved in the sins of their fathers or in sins of their own that they deserved to die as well. The Mosaic Law included the threat of curses on future generations (see Ex 20:5-6; Deut 5:9), but the wrath belonging to forebears is not transferred to later generations. The later generations themselves also prove disloyal and deserving of punishment. In all events, the Chronicler honored Amaziah for observing this principle of Mosaic Law (see *Introduction: 14 Standards*).

Half-hearted Fidelity in Battle (25:5-12)

At this point the Chronicler expanded the notice of one verse in Kings (2 Kgs 14:7) into a full narrative of nine verses (25:5-13).

Structure of 25:5-12

This material elaborates on the events that led to Amaziah's victory over the Edomites in five symmetrical steps (see figure 44).

Amaziah Enrolls the People for War (25:5a)

Amaziah gathered **the people of Judah** and **assigned them to commanders** (25:5a). Amaziah was preparing for war. We learn later that this war was against the Edomites (see 25:11). David had conquered the Edomites (see 1 Chr 18:11-13) and Solomon used their territories to establish maritime trade to the east (see 8:17-18). As an expression of divine judgment, however, the Edomites rebelled against Jehoram (see 21:8-10). Amaziah was attempting to exert Judahite control over these Southern regions again. In the end, his son Uzziah was able to rebuild the Edomite port city of Elath (see 26:2).

Amaziah took a count of his military men much like David (see 1 Chr 21; 27:23-24), Solomon (see 2:17), Asa (see 14:8), and Jehoshaphat (see 17:14-19). This army included men from **all Judah and Benjamin** (25:25a). It was not a professional standing army, but an army raised for a particular occasion much as Moses had ordered (see Ex 30:14; 38:26; Lev 27:3-5; Num 1; 1 Chr 27:23; 23:24; 2 Chr 31:17).

The dramatic effect of this scene must not be overlooked. The Chronicler had just exalted Amaziah for his obedience to the Mosaic Law (25:4). At this point he portrayed the king as preparing for battle with the same Law in mind. The expectation raised for the original readers is that this will be a grand battle of victory. But the Chronicler had also noted that Amaziah was not devoted to the Lord wholeheartedly (see 25:2). The next step in this story reveals why he made this evaluation.

Amaziah Conscripts and Hires Soldiers (25:5b-6)

Amaziah continued to follow the standards of the Mosaic Law in the first portion of this step (25:5b). He **mustered those twenty years old or more** from Judah and Benjamin just as Moses had commanded (25:5b; see Ex 30:14). When these conscripts came together, Amaziah had **three hundred thousand men ready for military service** (25:5b). Mentioning large and skilled armies is one way in which the Chronicler often exalted faithful kings (see 1 Chr 12:24-40; 21:15; 27:1-15; 2 Chr 13:13; 17:12-19; 26:13). As with many references to the

numbers of fighting men, this large number may be understood in several ways. (For the Chronicler's use of large numbers of soldiers see comments on 12:24-37.) The number of Amaziah's soldiers does not represent the greatest army of Judah, but it is still very large and may be a hyperbole. (For the Chronicler's use of hyperbole see comments on 12:14.) Moreover, these soldiers were **able to handle the spear and shield** (25:5b). Although they were not professional soldiers, these men were extraordinarily well prepared for fighting. Once again, the Chronicler raised the expectations of victory.

The first hint of something going wrong appears in 25:6. The Chronicler added the note that Amaziah **also hired a hundred thousand fighting men from Israel** (25:6). No words of condemnation appear immediately, but the history of Chronicles has already provided ample information to cause hesitation at Amaziah's move. He already strongly condemned involvement with northern military power. With this brief note, he began to show how Amaziah was half-hearted in his loyalty to God (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*).

Amaziah Encounters Prophetic Rebuke (25:7-9)

The turning point in this narrative consists of a dialogue between an unnamed prophet and Amaziah. This scene depicts the prophet speaking to the king (25:7-8), the king's question (25:9a), and the prophet's response (25:9b). In these verses, the Chronicler made his evaluation of Amaziah's actions explicit.

The **man of God** (i.e. the prophet) warned Amaziah that **these troops from Israel must not march with** [Amaziah] (25:7). Once again the Chronicler demonstrated his keen interest in prophets (see *Introduction: 15) Prophets*). In no uncertain terms, the prophet insisted that **the Lord is not with Israel** (25:7). This entire speech is reminiscent of Abijah's speech to the northern tribes (see 13:4-12). In the Chronicler's terminology, when God was "with" an army it meant that he would lead and fight for the army (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). The prophet warned the king that he would be defeated by his enemies "**even if you go and fight courageously in battle**" (25:8). Although Amaziah had a strong army (see 25:5-6), he was sure to lose if he opposed the command of God **for God has the power to help or to overthrow** (25:8).

In these words the Chronicler revealed his own caution regarding northern Israel. Although he held out hope for reunification with the faithful of the North, this event and a number of similar occurrences demonstrate that military alliances with evil people in the northern kingdom were forbidden (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*).

Amaziah responded to the prophetic warning with a trifling objection which revealed the priorities of his heart. He wondered what to do about **the hundred talents** he paid for the soldiers from Israel (25:9a). His concern over his monetary investment revealed that Amaziah was more worried about his money than the word of his God.

In response to the king's objection, the prophet said what should have been obvious. God could give much more to Amaziah than the money he might lose if he were obedient to God (25:9b). Time and again the Chronicler had already illustrated how fidelity to God resulted in riches and prosperity for Judah (see *Introduction: 26) Prosperity and Poverty*). In this way, the Chronicler portrayed Amaziah as lacking a wholehearted devotion to God.

Amaziah Releases Hired Soldiers (25:10)

In balance with the hiring of northern mercenaries (25:5b-6), Amaziah **dismissed the troops ... from Ephraim and sent them home** (25:10). The king acted in accordance with the prophetic word, but the Chronicler did not present the king's compliance as a complete turn toward divine blessings. Instead he foreshadowed future trouble for Amaziah by noting that the northern soldiers **were furious with Judah and left for home in a great rage** (25:10). This fact will appear again (see 25:13) and contribute to the troubles Amaziah experiences then (see 25:17-24). As in Rehoboam's reign (see 12:7,8), the Chronicler's message here was plain enough. Infidelity often had enduring consequences despite repentance (see *Introduction: 10-27) Divine Blessing and Judgment*).

Amaziah Gains Victory (25:11-12)

In spite of the foreshadowing of trouble to come, the Chronicler recorded that Amaziah had a great victory. He **killed ten thousand men of Seir** in battle (25:11). The army also **captured ten thousand men alive** and executed them by throwing them over a cliff (25:12). Although this form of mass execution seems inhumane by modern standards, it stands as only one example of the horrors of ancient warfare (see Josh 11:7-11; 1 Sam 4:10). Once again, these large numbers may be understood in a number of ways. (For the Chronicler's use of large numbers of soldiers see comments on 12:24-37.) In all events, Amaziah gained the victory because he removed the northern Israelite soldiers from his ranks. This victory in battle ranked among other similar victories as a demonstration of divine favor (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*).