

Who was Azariah in the Bible?

Azariah was a common man's name in Bible times. The name Azariah means "Yahweh has helped." Names were often given for spiritual reasons. For example, an "ah" added to a name was significant because it was part of Yahweh's name. When God changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah, He was giving them His name as part of His covenant with them (Genesis 17: 4-5, 15-16). While there are a few more mentions of men named Azariah in the Bible, we will look at the most significant ones.

Two men named Azariah were among King Solomon's chief officials. First Kings 4:2-6 mentions "Azariah son of Zadok" and "Azariah son of Nathan." The first Azariah was actually the grandson, not the son, of Zadok (1 Chronicles 6:8). Early Middle Eastern genealogies often skipped generations, calling grandsons and great-grandsons "sons" which meant "descended from." This Azariah may have held the highest office in Solomon's court since he is listed first. The title of "priest" in First Kings 4:2 means "prince" or "high priest," so this Azariah may have been second in command to the king.

The second Azariah mentioned in First Kings 4 is described as "son of Nathan." This Nathan is most likely not the prophet who ministered to Solomon's father, David (2 Samuel 12:1), but rather Solomon's brother (1 Chronicles 3:5). That makes this Azariah Solomon's nephew, who also served as one of his chief officers.

The most famous Azariah was one of Daniel's three friends we know by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. After being taken to Babylon as slaves, their Hebrew names were changed. Abednego's name was originally Azariah. When the young men refused to bow to the king's statue, they were thrown into the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). The meaning of Azariah's Hebrew name was particularly true for Abednego that day.

Another Azariah, also called Uzziah, was a king of Judah (2 Chronicles 26). Historians speculate that he reigned from 783-742 B. C., much of that time as co-regent along with his father, Amaziah. He was 16 years old when he began to reign. He was a good king and helped return the people to the worship of Yahweh alone. For that reason, God allowed him to reign as king for 52 years, significantly longer than most kings ruled. Second Chronicles 26:5 says, "And as long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success." However, in verses 14-16, things changed: "But when Uzziah grew powerful, his arrogance led to his own destruction. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense." Despite his name and despite his earlier adherence to the laws of God, his heart grew proud. He couldn't handle the success God gave him and began to believe that he was responsible for the good things in his life.

We can learn from Azariah's name that simply beginning well does not ensure a lifetime of obedience to God. Even having the name of the Lord as part of our heritage does not free us from the responsibility to live up to that name. We may be born into a Christian home, learn about Jesus from nursery school, and walk faithfully for a time, but God places a high value on faithfulness. Enduring to the end is important (Matthew 24:13; James 5:11; 2 Timothy 2:12). When the Lord is part of our identity, we must live out our days in a way that continues to honor His name.