

## Uzziah: “But When He was Strong, He Grew Proud”

Scripture Readings: 2 Chronicles 26:1-10, 16-21; Isaiah 1:1-7; 6:1, 8-13; James 4:6b-10

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**D**ear Congregation of Christ: We have been studying the kings and the people of the Israelites, beginning with Kings Saul, David and Solomon. After Solomon died, the united monarchy of the Israelites divided into two: the northern kingdom called Israel, consisting of the ten tribes; and the southern kingdom called Judah, consisting of the tribe of Judah. Judah had 20 kings before the Babylonians destroyed the kingdom and exiled the Jews to Babylon. Of these 20 kings, how many do you think were good? There were four: Asa and his son Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, whom we will study the next two Sundays, and Josiah. And there were four kings who were good at first, then became evil later. The remaining 12 were outright evil kings, including the “Axis of Evil” we studied last Sunday: Jehoram, Ahaziah and the wicked Queen Athaliah. These were all evil idolaters and murderers.

How did the Israelites fare under these kings and a queen? We have seen that the evil kings and queen led the people into doing evil, while the good kings led the people into doing good. They did what was right or wrong in the sight of the LORD. We also noted that most of them followed their fathers’ footsteps. Good kings generally followed their good fathers’ footsteps and vice versa. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself said that a good tree bears good fruits while a bad tree produces bad fruits.

After Queen Athaliah was executed by the faithful priest Jehoiada, her young seven-year-old son Joash became king for 40 years. After Joash died, his son Amaziah ruled for 29 years, 15 years of which was in exile in Lachish in southwestern Palestine. And after Amaziah died, his son Uzziah, also called Azariah, reigned for 52 years. Uzziah is our subject this morning.

Uzziah, like four of his ancestors, started well and good in the sight of God. Therefore, God blessed him with victories over his kingdom’s enemies. He strengthened his army and the nation’s fortresses and borders. Judah’s fields, vineyards and cattle flourished. But in his later years, he committed a heinous sin: that of usurping the duty of a priest by burning incense on the altar of incense. This had a disastrous result for him and his reign.

So this morning, our theme is, **Uzziah: But When He was Strong, He Grew Proud**” under three headings.

### “As Long as He Sought the LORD, God Made Him Prosper”

God’s rule for his people never changes: blessings for obedience, curses for disobedience. Our text opens with this assessment of King Uzziah in verses 4-5, *“And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. 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.”*

We must note four things in these two verses. First, Uzziah followed his father Amaziah’s footsteps when Amaziah did what was right in the eyes of the LORD. As I mentioned last Sunday,

most of the time, we can see "like father, like son." A son learns from his father's words and deeds. This is what King Solomon teaches in Proverbs 4:1–2, *"Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight, for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching."* Little children grow up hearing the teachings of their parents and children. If the parents and children abandon this duty, then children usually *"enter the path of the wicked"* (Prov 4:14).

Second, Uzziah sought the LORD. What does seeking the Lord mean? Who seeks whom? During Christmastime, some churches display the slogan, "Wise Men Still Seek Him," referring to the wise men who visited the infant Jesus. However, the Scriptures say that sinners hide from God, just as Adam and Eve did, and Jonah did. Paul says in Romans 3:10–11, *"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God."* But there are many texts in Scriptures that exhort us to seek God. Isaiah 55:6–7 exhorts us, *"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."* Also Psalm 105:4, *"Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his presence continually!"* Who does God exhort to seek him? It is his covenant people who have made vows to seek and obey God, because no unrepentant sinner has the moral will and ability to seek God.

Third, Uzziah was instructed in the fear of God by the priest Zechariah. This is similar to the injunction to fathers to teach their children the discipline and nurture of the Lord. But this duty is also placed upon priests. In the New Testament, we have pastors and elders who teach God's people wisdom and understanding in the fear of the Lord. And fourth, God prospered Uzziah. This was God's promise to his old covenant people, the Israelites. And this promise still stands today. But why do we see many Christians persecuted and murdered in Nigeria, Middle East and China? God's promise of health, wealth and prosperity will be completely fulfilled—not in the present age—but in the age to come, in the new heaven and new earth. Yes, some Christians prosper in this life, but the perfection of life is still coming in the life to come. The old covenant Israelites received peace and prosperity as God's people when they obeyed God's commandments. When they did not, famine, drought, pestilence, natural disasters, defeat, destruction and exile followed.

Uzziah did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and God prospered him.

### **"It is not for You, Uzziah, to Burn Incense to the LORD"**

When he took over his father as king of Judah, the kingdom was in ruins. His father was in exile for fifteen years, and in those years, Judah was invaded and looted by Israel, their brother kingdom in the north. They looted the temple, the palace, and the houses of their gold and silver and other treasures.

Therefore, when Uzziah became king, Uzziah strengthened his army and defeated the Philistines and Arabians who had seized some of Judah's cities. He had a huge army of over 300,000 men with all kinds of weaponry and war machines invented by skillful men. He built fortresses along his borders and rebuilt the ruined ones. Because of his power, the Ammonites paid tribute to him, and his fame spread all the way to Egypt (26:6–9a). But his strength was in the LORD (26:7).

He also built cisterns and wells in the wilderness and in the plain for Judah's cattle and the flock. He had farmers and vinedressers in the fertile lands for bread and wine. Such was the power and prosperity God gave to Judah when Uzziah became king.

But in his later years, disaster struck. How did this happen? Verse 16 is ominous, *"But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction."* One day, at the height of his power and prosperity, the devil instigated in his mind that more than a king, he should also be a priest. So he entered the temple intending to burn incense at the altar. He was unfaithful to God's strict commandment that only a priest can offer incense and sacrifices in the temple (Exo 30:1-10). When he entered the temple, which in itself alone is a violation of God's commandment, Azariah the high priest and 80 other priests blocked his way to the altar, saying, *"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"* (26:18). When Uzziah became angry with the priests, God struck him with a severe judgment: he was leprous from that day on until he died. He was isolated in a house away from the temple, and Jotham his son then governed in his place.

We might think that God is so severe in his judgment against Uzziah. He was a good king, presiding over the peace, prosperity and power of his kingdom. He did not worship idols as most of the other kings did. He sought God during those years. His desire to be priest might only be a spur of the moment, so why punish him so severely for life? In Scriptures, there are other instances where you might accuse God of the same "overreaction." When Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered "unauthorized" fire in the tabernacle, God sent down fire from heaven to consume them (Lev 10:1-2). When the ark of the covenant was being transported by David's men, the cart tipped from a pothole and the ark was about to fall. Uzzah, one of David's men, held the ark to keep it from falling to the ground, and God struck him dead on the spot. In the New Testament, when Ananias and Sapphira lied about money, God struck them dead, also on the spot.

These events have implications for our worship. They instruct us about worship acceptable and pleasing to God. We are to worship only according to God's word; whatever the Scriptures tell us to do in worship, "just do it!" The reverse is true: whatever God does not command in worship, "don't do it!" So, all the innovations and inventions of contemporary worship are prohibited by God. We are to read, pray, sing and meditate on God's word alone. We must not read and teach anything that is contrary to Scriptures. We must pray from Scriptures. We must not sing hymns that are contrary to Scriptures; singing Psalms assure us that nothing that comes from our lips in singing are unbiblical. And we must preach God's word alone in the true gospel alone, with sound interpretation and teaching.

God told Uzziah, *"It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD."* And he is still telling us today, "It is not you, O Christians, to worship according to the innovations of your sinful hearts." When Uzziah usurped the office of a priest, God judged him with leprosy. And the LORD judged not only him, but also his people.

### **"In the Year That King Uzziah Died..."**

After 52 years as king, Uzziah died, punished by God as a leper. In 2 Chronicles 27, we read that his son Jotham followed him to the throne. Jotham was a righteous king following after his

father's works, except he did not enter the temple. In this short chapter, we read that Jotham's reign was also of peace and prosperity after he was victorious over the Ammonites.

But in verse 2, we read another ominous statement, *"But the people still followed corrupt practices."* This refers to the people's idolatry, worshiping idol-gods. Therefore, we might conclude that even when Judah had a good king, the people were still idolatrous and corrupt. Enter the prophet Isaiah. He warned the Israelites during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He saw the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. because of the same idolatry and corruption. But he also saw the same evil among the southern kingdom of Judah.

Isaiah therefore was commissioned by God to warn Judah of impending judgment. In Isaiah 1:4, he laments Judah's evil, *"Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged."* Then in Isaiah 6:1, he wrote, *"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up..."* The LORD then commanded him to warn and condemn the people. They will see and hear God's warning, but their eyes and hearts are dull and without understanding. This does not mean they are dumb. Rather, it means that the people were stubborn in their unfaithfulness and rebellion against God. They knew his laws, but their hearts are full of pride, just as Uzziah did. So the preaching of Isaiah, instead of turning their hard hearts into obedient hearts, hardened their hearts.

So it was that in due time, in 586 B.C., God sent the Babylonians to conquer and destroy Judah, its capital Jerusalem, and its temple. Most of the wealthy and educated Jews were then exiled to serve their conquerors in Babylon. This is also a warning to us as a nation. God has prospered our nation since its founding almost 250 years ago. But our eyes and hearts, like the Jews, have been unfaithful and rebellious against God. God calls us to repent of our sins, just as he called the Jews, *"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken"* (Isa 1:18-20). Blessings for obedience, curses for disobedience.

**D**ear brothers and sisters in Christ: Through Isaiah, God promised Uzziah's grandson King Ahaz that a child would be born to him as a sign of God's faithfulness. If Ahaz was faithful to him, then Judah will not be trampled by Assyria. This sign was the sign of a son named Immanuel who will be born of a virgin woman (Isa 7:14). The LORD gave Ahaz a son, but there is double fulfillment of this prophecy. The ultimate fulfillment is the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose name is also Immanuel, "God with us." And he was born to save all his people from all their sins (Matt 1:21-23). And he was born to be hold both offices of King and Priest, and also Prophet.

God still continues to call us to come to him in faith and repentance. Our Lord Jesus Christ calls us, *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matt 11:28).