

# Uzziah, King of Judah, or the Danger of Success

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## 2 Chronicles 26



The danger of success is very real in the case of fallen creatures, even though they be children of God, and devoted in their measure. The Lord's word to Baruch, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not," (Jer. 45:5) may well be pressed upon every one of our hearts. We cannot be trusted. It is humiliating, but it is true; and because true, it becomes intensely important that Christ and His glory be alone before our souls in any service done or attempted for God.

King Uzziah, as he is called in 2 Chronicles 26, or Azariah, as his name is given in 2 Kings 14:21 and 15:1-7, is a striking case in point. He began well but ended badly. Succeeding his father, Amaziah, at the tender age of sixteen years, he from the beginning sought the Lord, "and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper" (2 Chron. 26:5).

It was a most remarkable thing for a lad of this age to come out so boldly for God and His truth. There can be no question but that there had been a real work of grace in Uzziah's soul, doubtless as a result of the faithful instruction received from his father, who in spite of considerable lack of wisdom was nevertheless a man whose ways in general had the divine approval. The mention of the mother's name, Jecoliah of Jerusalem, would also suggest that she was probably the guide of her son in his early years, directing his footsteps in the way of righteousness. It is a wonderful thing for a child to have godly parentage. How strikingly this comes out in the Word of God, as also in the experience of hundreds of outstanding Christian leaders in our own dispensation.

But beside parental help, we learn that there was a man of God who had a commanding influence over Uzziah for good, namely Zechariah, "who had understanding in the visions of God" (2 Chron. 26:5). We do not know much about this man of prophetic insight, as he does not seem to be mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. We are told that in his days all went well with Uzziah. Evidently he was the kind of a man who needed a check and a helper or counsellor, and he found both in Zechariah. The danger came when he had to be cast, as people say, upon his own resources; though no child of God should ever be cast on aught but the power of God.

For a time Uzziah's life was one long record of success such as few kings have known. He went out to war and was everywhere a victor. Through his prowess Judah assumed something of her Davidic and Solomonic glory. He built towers in the desert for defense, thus enlarging his borders; and digged many wells for refreshment and blessing. In the gentle art of husbandry he was likewise active; a man who delighted to till the ground and cause it to bring forth what would be for cheer and nourishment. His was not the field of the slothful, bringing forth thorns and briars, but the tillage of the diligent receiving blessing from God.

All this is most suggestive and may well speak to us, we who are called to contend

for the faith in the present difficult days. Like Uzziah, we need to be concerned about the defense of the gospel. We are called upon to stand unflinchingly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. We need to be nourished and builded up with words of sound doctrine. This is no time for carelessness or indifference in regard to the truth of God, that great deposit which has been committed to us. Enemies there are on every hand who would seek to rob us of our rightful heritage, but as we go forth in humble dependence on the Lord, feeding upon His Word and devoted to His interests, we can be sure of triumph and victory over every foe.

Uzziah recognized the importance of the principle later enunciated, "In time of peace prepare for war." Therefore he fortified Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah. And he made provision for the storing up of food in case of siege. He had, too, a great army of 307,500 men led by valorous and efficient officers numbering 2,600; an army we read "that made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy" (ver. 13). Nor was this army an unorganized mob, but it was well-drilled, properly accoutred. An army without ammunition would be a failure indeed in the face of an enemy, and it is to be feared that many in the army of the Lord today are poorly provided with weapons wherewith to meet their spiritual foes. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood," we are told in Ephesians 6:12, "but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." And in order to stand against them, we need the whole armor of God. All this seems to be suggested by the preparations that Uzziah made in order properly to equip his great army, as a result of which he went from victory to victory in happy dependence on God.

For how many years he went on in this godly, orderly manner we know not; but in verse 15 we find a sudden break in the happy record: "He was marvelously helped till he was strong." While he was little in his own eyes, God could trust him with success; but when he was strong he forgot, in some sense, that the victories were not of his own prowess and that he had nothing that he had not received. "When he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense" (ver. 16).

It is very evident that something had been working in the heart of Uzziah which had not hitherto come to the surface. Even his very success had fostered to a certain degree a feeling of self-satisfaction with a desire for self-exaltation. What a warning is this for every one of us. Who can trust his own heart? We are so corrupt by nature that even the very blessing of God upon our service may but minister to the pride of our natural hearts if we do not go through everything in fellowship with Him who has called us to minister in holy things. How easy for us to forget that we have no might, no power, no sufficiency in ourselves! "But our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament" (2 Cor. 3:5-6). Therefore we have no reason to boast in anything we accomplish, for has not our blessed Lord said, "Without Me ye can do nothing"?

But Uzziah forgot this. So used had he become to success that he seemed to have reached the place where he felt that whatever he attempted to do must be right, and would be owned of God. He must have known that it was the prerogative of the priests alone to burn incense in the Holy Place. But he sought to usurp this priestly service though he had no title to do so. That God should have called

others to do something in which he had no part was apparently gall and bitterness to the haughty king. Instead of being content to use his own gifts in subjection to the Lord and fill the place allotted to him, his restless nature made him yearn to do what God had forbidden.

Azariah the priest sought in vain to show him his error. He would not be humbled or hindered. God had declared that none but an anointed priest should approach to offer incense. Uzziah was king but not priest; therefore to persist in going in was rebellion against the Lord. Faithfully, Azariah warned and entreated, rebuking him too in Jehovah's name. But all was in vain. Puffed up with pride, he would not be persuaded so he angrily caught up a censer and proceeded to carry out his intention.

Then God intervened. As the king in his haughty self-will pressed forward to mingle with the priestly company the leprosy rose up in his forehead! He was smitten of the Lord, as Miriam and Gehazi had been before him. It was hardly necessary now for the priest to "thrust him out;" for "himself hasted also to go out," realizing in that awful moment whose hand it was that was laid upon him.

The law as to leprosy in Leviticus 13 distinguishes between leprosy of the body and leprosy of the head. Both speak of sin: the former in its grossness as the lusts of the flesh; the latter in its more subtle, though less obnoxious form in the eyes of man, but even more hateful to God — the lusts of the mind. This was Uzziah's case. His mind was exalted through prosperity. Therefore he was smitten in the head.

To the day of his death he dwelt apart from the congregation of the Lord; cut off from Jehovah's house. He remained to the end a sad testimony to the fact that God is not mocked. He will be sanctified in them that come nigh Him.

We are told that Jotham, his son, was over the king's house, judging the people of the land. This means, of course, that while Uzziah was still living and unable to fulfil the kingly office because of the result of his rashness and folly, his son was made regent and administered the government in the place of the father. If we dare allow our imaginations play, we may think of Uzziah diseased and crushed, sitting in front of the separated house in which he dwelt, as an unclean leper, looking out toward the city of Jerusalem, saying to himself, "I should be there; I ought to be ruling this people; I was anointed as king over Israel. But here I am a castaway, and all because of my own self-will and foolishness." Or one might even think of a day when the armies of Israel went marching by on their way to battle, led by Jotham, the Prince Regent, while Uzziah gazed from afar, his heart breaking with grief to think how terribly he himself had failed, as he exclaimed in anguish, "I should have led the hosts today; I should be going out against the enemies of the Lord; but here I must remain as one disapproved of God, utterly set to one side, because I forgot that those who walk in pride He is able to abase." Think of the disappointment and of the loss to all Israel occasioned by the self-confidence of this mighty king. And as we think of it, let us tremble lest we too should have to prove some day the truth of the words, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall"(Prov. 16:18).

It was in the year of Uzziah's death — still under the governmental hand of God — that Isaiah saw the Lord as related in Isaiah 6:1. How different the attitude of the

two men. The one, a prophet, taking the leper's place, covering his mouth and crying, "Unclean!" The other, taking the place of a holy priest, rushing unadvisedly into the presence of God and made a leper thereby! He was buried in the field of the tombs, but not, I judge, in the tombs of the kings themselves, "for they said, He is a leper" (ver. 23).

His early life of dependence on God, his terrible failure, his judgment and his death may all alike speak loudly to our souls. Oh, for grace to imitate his virtues, and avoid his error, that thus we may be kept in the hand of our God for blessing, and not have to fall under His government because of pride and disobedience!