

# CHAPTER 26

This chapter gives us an account of the reign of Uzziah (Azariah he was called in the Kings) more fully than we had it before, though it was long, and in some respects illustrious, yet it was very briefly related, ~~1241~~ 2 Kings 14:21; 15:1, etc. Here is,

- I. His good character in general (v. 1-5)
- II. His great prosperity in his wars, his buildings, and all the affairs of his kingdom (v. 6-15).
- III. His presumption in invading the priests' office, for which he was struck with a leprosy, and confined by it (v. 16-21) even to his death (v. 22, 23).

## ~~1401~~ 2 CHRONICLES 26:1-15

### UZZIAH'S PROSPERITY

We have here an account of two things concerning Uzziah: —

I. His piety. In this he was not very eminent or zealous; yet *he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*. He kept up the pure worship of the true God *as his father* did, and was better than his father, inasmuch as we have no reason to think he ever worshipped idols as his father did, no, not in his latter days, when *his heart was lifted up*. It is said (v. 5), *He sought God in the days of Zechariah*, who, some think, was the son of the Zechariah whom his grandfather Joash slew. This Zechariah was one that *had understanding in the visions of God*, either the visions which he himself was favoured with or the visions of the preceding prophets. He was well versed in prophecy, and conversed much with the upper world, was an intelligent, devout, good man; and, it seems, had great influence with Uzziah. Happy are the great men who have such about them and are willing to be advised by them; but unhappy those who seek God only while they have such with them and have not a principle in themselves to bear them out to the end.

II. His prosperity.

**1.** In general, *as long as he sought the Lord*, and minded religion, *God made him to prosper*. Note,

**(1.)** Those only prosper whom *God makes to prosper*; for prosperity is his gift.

**(2.)** Religion and piety are very friendly to outward prosperity. Many have found and owned this, that as long as they sought the Lord and kept close to their duty they prospered; but since they forsook God every thing has gone cross.

**2.** Here are several particular instances of his prosperity: —

**(1.)** His success in his wars: *God helped him* (v. 7), and then he triumphed over the Philistines (those old enemies of God's people), demolished the fortifications of their cities, and put garrisons of his own among them, v. 6. He obliged the Ammonites to pay him tribute, v. 8. He made all quiet about him, and kept them in awe.

**(2.)** The greatness of his fame and reputation. His name was celebrated throughout all the neighbouring countries (v. 8) and it was a good name, a name for good things with God and good people. This is true fame, and makes a man truly honourable.

**(3.)** His buildings. While he acted offensively abroad, he did not neglect the defence of his kingdom at home, but *built towers in Jerusalem* and fortified them, v. 9. Much of the wall of Jerusalem was in his father's time broken down, particularly at *the corner gate*. But his best fortification of Jerusalem was his close adherence to the worship of God: if his father had not forsaken this the wall of Jerusalem would not have been broken down. While he fortified the city, he did not forget the country, but *built towers in the desert* too (v. 10), to protect the country people from the inroads of the plunderers, bands of whom sometimes alarmed them and plundered them, as <sup><4216></sup>2 Chronicles 21:16.

**(4.)** His husbandry. He dealt much in cattle and corn, employed many hands, and got much wealth by his dealing; for he took a pleasure in it: he *loved husbandry* (v. 10), and probably did himself inspect his affairs in the country, which was no disparagement to him, but an advantage, as it encouraged industry among his subjects. It is an honour to the husbandman's calling that one of the most illustrious princes of the house of David followed it and loved it. He was not one of those that delight in

war, nor did he addict himself to sport and pleasure, but delighted in the innocent and quiet employments of the husbandman.

(5.) His standing armies. He had, as it should seem, two military establishments.

[1.] A *host of fighting men* that were to make excursions abroad. These *went out to war by bands*, v. 11. They fetched in spoil from the neighbouring countries by way of reprisal for the depredations they had so often made upon Judah,

[2.] Another army for *guards and garrisons*, that were ready to defend the country in case it should be invaded, v. 12, 13. So great were their number and valour that they *made war with mighty power*; no enemy durst face them, or, at least, could stand before them. Men unarmed can do little in war. Uzziah therefore furnished himself with a great armoury, whence his soldiers were supplied with arms offensive and defensive (v. 14), spears, bows, and slings, shields, helmets, and habergeons: swords are not mentioned, because it is probable that every man had a sword of his own, which he wore constantly. Engines were invented, in his time, for annoying besiegers with darts and stones shot from the towers and bulwarks, v. 15. What a pity it is that the wars and fightings which come from men's lusts have made it necessary for cunning men to employ their skill in inventing instruments of death.

## ~~406~~ 2 CHRONICLES 26:16-23

### UZZIAH'S SIN AND PROSPERITY

Here is the only blot we find on the name of king Uzziah, and it is such a one as lies not on any other of the kings. Whoredom, murder, oppression, persecution, and especially idolatry, gave characters to the bad kings and some of them blemishes to the good ones, David himself not excepted, witness the matter of Uriah. But we find not Uzziah charged with any of these; and yet he *transgressed against the Lord his God*, and fell under the marks of his displeasure in consequence, not, as other kings, in vexatious wars or rebellions, but an incurable disease.

**I.** His sin was invading the priest's office. The good way is one; by-paths are many. The transgression of his predecessors was forsaking the temple of the Lord, flying off from it (<sup><14018></sup>2 Chronicles 24:18), and burning incense upon idolatrous altars, <sup><142514></sup>2 Chronicles 25:14. *His* was intruding *into the temple of the Lord* further than was allowed him, and attempting him to *burn incense upon the altar* of God, for which, it is likely, he pretended an extraordinary zeal and affection. See how hard it is to avoid one extreme and not run into another.

**1.** That which was at the bottom of his sin was pride of heart, a lust that ruins more than any other whatsoever (v. 16): *When he was strong* (and he was marvellously helped by the good providence of God *till he was so*, v. 15), when he had grown very great and considerable in wealth, interest, and power, instead of lifting up the name of God in gratitude to him who had done so much for him, his *heart was lifted up to his destruction*. Thus the prosperity of fools, by puffing them up with pride, destroys them. Now that he had done so much business, and won so much honour, he began to think no business, no honour, too great or too good for him, no, not that of the priesthood Men's pretending to forbidden knowledge, and exercising themselves in things too high for them, are owing to the pride of their heart, and the fleshly mind they are *vainly puffed up with*.

**2.** His sin was *going into the temple of the Lord to burn incense*, probably on some solemn feast day, or when he himself had some special occasion for supplicating the divine favour. What could move him to this piece of presumption, or put it into his head, I cannot conjecture. None of all his predecessors, not the best, not the worst, attempted it. The law, he knew, was express against him, and there was no usage or precedent for him. He could not pretend any necessity, as there was for David's eating the show-bread.

**(1.)** Perhaps he fancied the priests did not do their office so dexterously, decently, and devoutly, as they ought, and he could do it better. Or,

**(2.)** He observed that the idolatrous kings did themselves burn incense at the altars of their gods; his father did so, and Jeroboam (<sup><1100></sup>1 Kings 13:1), an ambition of which honour was perhaps one thing that tempted them from the house of God, where it was not permitted them; and he, being resolved to cleave to God's altar, would try to break through this restraint and come as near it as the idolatrous kings did to their altars. But it is

called a *transgression against the Lord his God*. He was not content with the honours God had put upon him, but would usurp those that were forbidden him, like our first parents.

**3.** He was opposed in this attempt by the chief priest and other priests that attended and assisted him, v. 17, 18. They were ready to burn incense for the king, according to the duty of their place; but, when he offered to do it himself, they plainly let him know that he meddled with that which did not belong to him, and that it was at his peril. They did not resist him by laying violent hands on him, though they were valiant men, but by reasoning with him and showing him,

**(1.)** That it was not lawful for him to burn incense: “*It appertaineth not to thee, O Uzziah! but to the priests, whose birthright it is, as sons of Aaron, and who are consecrated to the service.*” Aaron and his sons were appointed by the law to burn incense, <sup><2317></sup>Exodus 30:7. See <sup><6310></sup>Deuteronomy 33:10; <sup><1213></sup>1 Chronicles 23:13. David had blessed the people and Solomon and Jehoshaphat had prayed with them and preached to them. Uzziah might have done this, and it would have been to his praise; but as for burning incense, that service was to be performed by the priests only. The kingly and priestly offices were separated by the law of Moses, not to be united again but in the person of the Messiah. If Uzziah did intend to honour God, and gain acceptance with him, in what he did, he was quite out in his aim; for, being a service purely of divine institution, he could not expect it should be accepted unless it were done in the way and by the hands that God had appointed.

**(2.)** That it was not safe. It shall not be *for thy honour from the Lord God*. More is implied: “It will be thy disgrace, and it is at thy peril.” The law runs expressly against all strangers that came nigh (<sup><0410></sup>Numbers 3:10, 18:7), that is, all that were not priests. Korah and his accomplices, though Levites, paid dearly for offering to burn incense, which was the work of the priests only, <sup><0435></sup>Numbers 16:35. The incense of our prayers must be by faith put into the hands of our Lord Jesus, the great high priest of our profession, else we cannot expect it should be accepted by God, <sup><0813></sup>Revelation 8:3.

**4.** He fell into a passion with the priests that reproved him, and would push forward to do what he intended notwithstanding (v. 19): *Uzziah was wroth*, and would not part with the censer out of his hand. He took it ill to

be checked, and would not bear interference. *Nitimur in vetitum* — *We are prone to do what is forbidden.*

**II.** His punishment was an incurable leprosy, which rose up in his forehead while he was contending with the priests. If he had submitted to the priests' admonition, acknowledged his error, and gone back, all would have been well; but *when he was wroth with the priests*, and fell foul upon them, then God was wroth with him and smote him with a plague of leprosy. Josephus says that he threatened the priests with death if they opposed him, and that then the earth shook, the roof of the temple opened, and through the cleft a beam of the sun darted directly upon the king's face, wherein immediately the leprosy appeared. And some conjecture that that was the earthquake in the days of Uzziah which we read of <sup><300></sup>Amos 1:1 and <sup><314></sup>Zechariah 14:5. Now this sudden stroke,

**1.** Ended the controversy between him and the priests; for, when the leprosy appeared, they were emboldened to thrust him out of the temple; nay, he himself *hasted to go out, because the Lord had smitten him* with a disease which was in a particular manner a token of his displeasure, and which he knew secluded him from common converse with men, much more from the altar of God. He would not be convinced by what the priests said, but God took an effectual course to convince him. If presumptuous men will not be made to see their error by the judgments of God's mouth, they shall be made to see it by the judgments of his hand. It evinced some religious fear of God in the heart of this king, even in the midst of his transgression, that, as soon as he found God was angry with him, he not only let fall his attempt, but retired with the utmost precipitation. Though he strove with the priests, he would not strive with his Maker.

**2.** It remained a lasting punishment of his transgression; for he continued a *leper to the day of his death*, shut up in confinement, and shut out from society, and forced to leave it to his son to manage all his business, v. 21. Thus God gave an instance of his resisting the proud and of his jealousy for the purity and honour of his own institutions; thus he gave fair warning even to great and good men to know and keep their distance, and not to intrude into those things which they have not seen; and thus he gave Uzziah a loud and constant call to repentance, and a long space to repent, which we have reason to hope he improved. He had been a man of much business in the world; but being taken off from that, and confined to a *separate house*, he had leisure to think of another world and prepare for it.

By this judgment upon the king God intended to possess the people with a great veneration for the temple, the priesthood, and other sacred things, which they had been apt to think meanly of. While the king was a leper, he was as good as dead, dead while he lived, and buried alive; and so the law was, in effect, answered, that the stranger who cometh nigh shall be put to death. The disgrace survived him; for, when he was dead, they would not bury him in the *sepulchres of the kings* because he was a leper, which stained all his other glory.

**3.** It was a punishment that answered the sin as face does face in a glass.

**(1.)** Pride was at the bottom of his transgression, and thus God humbled him and put dishonour upon him.

**(2.)** He invaded the office of the priests in contempt of them, and God struck him with a disease which in a particular manner made him subject to the inspection and sentence of the priests; for to them pertained the *judgment of the leprosy*, <sup><0248></sup>Deuteronomy 24:8.

**(3.)** He thrust himself into the temple of God, whither the priests only had admission, and for that was thrust out of the very courts of the temple, into which the meanest of his subjects that was ceremonially clean had free access.

**(4.)** He confronted the priests that faced him and opposed his presumption, and for that the leprosy *rose in his forehead*, which, in Miriam's case, is compared to her father's *spitting in her face*, <sup><0124></sup>Numbers 12:14.

**(5.)** He invaded the dignity of the priesthood, which he had no right to, and for that he was deprived even of his royal dignity, which he had a right to. Those that covet forbidden honours forfeit allowed ones. Adam, by catching at the tree of knowledge of which he might not eat, debarred himself from the tree of life, of which he might have eaten. Let all that read it say, *The Lord is righteous*.