

Exposition of  
2 Chronicles 26

Sermon Series:  
Spiritual Lessons from OT Kings

Sermon Title:  
Power of Pride  
Lesson from King Uzziah

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## INTRODUCTION

Last week we learned some spiritual lessons from one of Judah's kings – Jehoshaphat. And today's text draws our attention to another of Judah's kings, in fact one of the most powerful kings the land had ever known – Uzziah. He was undoubtedly blessed more than many of the other kings of Judah had ever been, in fact only David and Solomon enjoyed as much military power, political influence, and economic prosperity in comparison to Uzziah, yet still Uzziah would go on to blaspheme the Lord to an extent that few other kings had ever done.

The historical narrative which the Scriptures presents us, I believe is particularly amazing and interesting when we consider the extensive descriptions of his conquests, his army and military defenses. Clearly it can be said that king Uzziah was a military and political genius. As we just read, his army was well-trained and especially organized. The armaments and defenses which he employed represent concepts and technology which we know from experts surpassed much of the world at that time.

Additionally, Uzziah's economic story is just as amazing as his military accomplishment. The text of today's spiritual lesson does not describe a man who merely lavished himself in luxury as a king, but on the contrary, he led the nation in economic recovery and prosperity by responsibly developing agricultural methods for production in barren as well as fertile areas of the land. He diversified crops and animal stock so that the nation became very economically prosperous and no-doubt trading with the outside world through the port at Eloth, just as Solomon had done.

However, as amazing and interesting Uzziah's reign was, he had a tragic fall. This fall was not caused by a political revolution, neither was Judah taken over by a foreign enemy. Uzziah's great fall was not the result of famine, pestilence or some other disaster of nature. **No, friends...Uzziah's fall, like other**

**kings before him was caused by himself. He was the one who was responsible for his downfall.**

As God's people living today, we must read the story of Uzziah carefully. **As we shall see, king Uzziah was a very capable and prosperous leader. However, the sin of pride was allowed to grow in his life until it led him to rebel against the Lord, which reminds us of the word's our Savior spoke as recorded in (Mt.23:12) "...Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."**

## **BODY**

### **BLESSED BY GOD 1-15**

#### **vv. 3-5 Godly Devotion**

- The 52 yr. reign was one of the longest in the history of the nation. By the mentioning of his mother we understand that he had a notable family heritage in Jerusalem.

- **vv.4-5 summarize the background and strengths of Uzziah by emphasizing perhaps the two most important aspects about him.**

**FIRST**, it is noted in v. 4 he "*did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.*" Meaning he followed the Lord's standard, additionally, and rather strangely I might add we are told that the basis for this priority of the Lord's standard in his life was in part his father's (Amaziah) example which really was only a brief light of dedication unto the Lord prior to his apostasy into idolatry. None the less, his father's earlier commitment to the voice of God's prophet to not unite with Ephraim (Israel) and trust in God's support in battle, this early faithfulness must had made an impact on Uzziah.

**SECONDLY**, we observe in v.5 a description of perhaps the strongest influence upon the young Uzziah (spiritually speaking) a

man named Zechariah. Very little is known about this prophet except what read here. To be sure it's not the same Zechariah that many of you are familiar with, that Zechariah would not show up on the stage of history for several hundred years later. But here, this man of God who would have such an influence upon Uzziah was one described as having "*understanding in the visions of God*". This means he possessed perceptions and insights which came only from God regarding visions of divine revelation.

**• v.5 we observe that the text specifically says that Uzziah "SOUGHT" God and then continued to seek the LORD, and it tells us that as long as he did God made him to prosper.** This chapter describes with great detail the power and success of king Uzziah, which is scarcely surpassed by any other in all the OT, **and what is made clear in this verse is that Uzziah's power, ingenuity and riches...all came from God,** "*so long as he sought the LORD*" which he did for a very long time as king, until his later years, when he rejected God's authority.

**APPLICATION:** Here church is a spiritual lesson for us:

**In knowing what we do about king Uzziah's conduct later in life, serves to illustrate for us at this point in the message the principal found in Paul's words to Timothy (2Ti 3:5) "*There are people who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof...*"** or to put it another way...they have an outward religion, so long as it serves their current interests. Uzziah had a form of godly devotion, and sustained it for many years, but as we shall learn it denied the true and inner power of humility and subjection to God's law. This is of course one true test of the person who claims to be a genuine believer...do they humbly bow and subject themselves to the plain truth of God's Word.

## **vv. 6-8 Helped by God**

• Here in v. 6 the description of God's blessings on Uzziah begins with a description of how he was helped by God in making Jerusalem secure from foreign threats. The most frequent threat to the kingdom at this time was the Philistines to the southwest and we note two particular things that were done in the wars against them:

**FIRST:** He destroyed the fortifications in the major Philistine cities- Gath, Jabneh and Ashdod.

**SECONDLY:** He built fortifications at the location of major Philistine cities which teaches us that Uzziah's military power not only won victories over their enemies but also dominated them as well.

• **v.7 "God helped him" here we see God kept his covenant obligations so long as Uzziah sought Him.** We see here that Uzziah continued in success over the kingdom's enemies.

• **v.8 We learn here that because of the help of God, Uzziah's reputation had spread to other kingdoms "for he strengthened himself exceedingly"** and was honored by the Ammonites and was respected as far as Egypt implying that he had become an major international power.

## **vv. 9-15 Demonstration of God's Blessings**

• We have now further demonstrations of God's blessings upon king Uzziah outlined in vv. 9-15, in fact the blessings are very detailed and organized in their presentation.

• **v.9** Describes how he fortified Jerusalem.

• **v.10** Describes an interesting aspect of Uzziah in that he loved farming and agriculture which led him to implement many reforms throughout the land relating to their ability to produce and sustain food, etc.

• **vv.11-13** Detail for us the number and organization of Uzziah's vast army. The experts point out that the way in which he grouped the soldiers indicated an advance military organization which had not ever been known by any other Judean king.

• **v.14** Lists the array of armor and weaponry for his army. 'habergeons' or 'coats of mail'. The slings are referring to the large contraptions operated by ropes under tension which could catapult and project large stone at dangerous speeds, indicating their advance weaponry.

**v.15 'he made in Jerusalem engines invented by cunning men...' this is an interesting insight into their advance state of weaponry, the experts tell us that these sorts of devices would not more commonly come on the scene of history until another 300 yrs or so.**

Again we note God as the origin of all this glory and fame of king Uzziah with the words in v.15 "*for he was marvelously helped, till (until) he was strong.*"

APPLICATION: Here then is another spiritual lesson for us to observe, **that all we are and all we have are a gifts from God. How dare we provoke God to anger by actually thinking we in and of ourselves are anything special thereby robbing Him of the glory that is solely His own! (Job 1:21) Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.**

May we always remember, it is during times of great prosperity that we are to be most aware of our daily dependency upon God's grace, wisdom and discernment, lest our hearts become lifted up which is exactly what happened to Uzziah next where we read how he became overcome with pride.

**OVERCOME BY PRIDE 16-18**

## **v.16 Pride and Transgression**

• Its important for us to note how the end of v.15 sets the context for vv.16-18 when it says “*he was marvelously helped, TILL (UNTIL) he was strong*”. That phrase; as we just finished commenting upon, in one sense summarized the help of God upon Uzziah, however leading into vv.16-18 it also serves to introduce the reason for his downfall – Uzziah became strong in his own eyes, confident in his own abilities, so mighty he concluded in himself that he was above and not subject the rules, authority and laws of God.

**• v.16 “But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction...” This describes for us the deterioration and rebellion of Uzziah’s inner character. Being “lifted up” is a common expression in the Scriptures for pride and arrogance.**

Here it is plain to see that Uzziah had become proud of what he perceived as his own strength, although in reality everything his empire was built upon came from the favor of God, however Uzziah obviously in contrast to v.5 had stopped ‘seeking’ the Lord and became ‘lifted up’ in his own sight.

Rather than seeking the Lord continually as he had done in the past, he began to evaluate his own abilities and importance. He began to elevate himself and his importance within his own heart until one day a critical event took place in the Temple, where God calls him to reckon with his sin!

• **v.16** “*and went in the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar...*” Here, Uzziah’s pride and self-centered confidence lead him to think himself worthy and in fact, deserving to light the incense upon the altar which was only to be done by the priests as God had prescribed it.

• The significance of the burning of incense in this action of Uzziah sheds considerable light upon his state of mind and the

disposition of his heart toward God. The incense offering was instituted by God for the Jews in connection with their perpetual sacrifices and prayers for forgiveness and blessings under the Old Covenant. According to the book of Numbers it was to be only priests appointed from the tribe of Levi who were to burn the incense and furthermore only a particular type was to be used. It was to be done twice a day (morning and evening) and was always in connection with an animal sacrifice, for the hot coals of burnt animal sacrifice were used to then burn the incense...all this insight is relevant because it paints a picture for us that Uzziah who was consumed with self-will and pride, so lifted up in his own worth and status that he thought he didn't need to go through the priests, he thought to himself that all these rules and standards are unnecessary, inconvenient and beneath him, perhaps in his self-centeredness he was a little put off by the fact there was a set of standards which wasn't under his authority, a Law that was above himself. Or...perhaps, in this grand gesture of pride we have before us Uzziah wanted to expand the jurisdiction of royalty apart and independent from the Law of God!

**• How deceived and blinded pride had made him in thinking somehow his actions were acceptable to God or presuming that his modifications of the Temple requirements were justified because of his important status.** Oh yes, he thought to himself “I am in the temple”, and yes he was wishing to make an offering of incense to the LORD upon the altar - but the problem is he wasn't in charge of who it was that was allowed to give the offering – God was. And Uzziah made a fatal presumption in thinking that he could ignore the pattern of sacrifice and order established by God and simply do as he pleased.

**APPLICATION:** Here we have another spiritual lesson to observe: A person may be in a Christian worship setting, they be doing all the right things outwardly, however if one is filled with

pride and self-centeredness, even though he may be in a worshipful setting...their worship and service actually becomes a transgression and a stench in the nostrils of God.

Jesus said: (Mat 15:8) *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with [their] lips; but their heart is far from me.*

## **vv. 17-18 Pride Confronted**

**v.17 Immediately what ought to grab our attention in this confrontation with the high priest Azariah is the fact that the text records he was accompanied by “fourscore priests of the LORD, that were valiant men”. Eighty men?** From this arises

two questions: **FIRST**, why or how did Azariah have immediate access to such a group of ‘valiant men’ **SECONDLY**, why did the priest feel the need to take such an entourage with him?

- To the first question, it very well could be that the reason the high priest had ready such a group of men was that this wasn’t the first time Uzziah had done this. It implies that as his pride had been allow to grow and he began to do things that otherwise he would have never done, such as breaking the ceremonial laws of God. And on this day, the high priest, in obedience to his appointed responsibilities and God’s law decided to risk his life and confront the king!

- Secondly, this would then give us insight into why he felt the need to have such a large number of other priests with him, ones who are described as ‘valiant men’ meaning they were in some way also military men and could fight. I am inclined to think that Uzziah no doubt had with him several armed body guards, some within the Temple and some standing guard outside the Temple. To prevent any violent reaction perhaps Azariah thought the wisest way to approach the king would be to go unarmed but mighty in

number in order to balance and diffuse the tension that was sure to result.

**v.18** *“It appertaineth not unto thee...”* The courage of God’s servants is further amplified here with a bold confrontation against one of the mightiest kings Judah had ever known, however these brave men derived their strength and faithfulness from the Spirit of God, surely they had read the Proverb which Solomon had handed down to them from several generations prior that reminded them *“The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”* (Pro.18:10)

**APPLICATION:** This offers us yet another spiritual lesson: **there will be times when our convictions and faithfulness will be tested and we need to face and speak out against error. Although it may cost us much, although it may seem as though the odds are against us- we, like Azariah must stand for God’s truth without compromise no matter the strength of the opposition.**

**v.18** *“...go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed...”* Here Uzziah is verbally confronted with the law of God. In essence he is called here to repentance, he is called out for usurping the authority structure that had been instituted by God his maker.

• Will Uzziah repent? Will Uzziah acknowledge the truth of God’s law and his own wrong doing? Will he be humble and apologize to God’s appointed servants OR will he be stiff necked and hold onto a “Stubborn Pride”.

## **PUNISHED FOR SELF-WILL**

### **v.19-23 Stubborn Pride & Consequences**

**v.19** *“Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense...”* in this scene, it is obvious to all what Uzziah’s intent was, standing there with the censer ready to light the incense upon

the altar which was sitting just outside the holy of holies which contained the ark of the covenant. He is guilty. He has no justification, caught in the very act of this terrible and blasphemous violation!

- Although our attention here is drawn to his ‘actions’ the Spirit of God wants to be certain we not miss the real problem here and so it is recorded **“Uzziah was wrath” This comes from a Hebrew word which indicates a degree of intensity and fury that is not implied with the usual word – anger.** Therefore, with this understood it appears that his response was not that of a believer, it was not humble confession to his obvious wrong doing – rather it was a response of an inner rage against God’s authority. Oh, how we ought to heed and be cautious to the Power of Pride.

**v.19-20** “leprosy even rose up in his forehead...” “they thrust him out from thence...” “the LORD had smitten him”.

- Uzziah would not repent and while he was caught up in his anger and self-will, the judgement of the Lord fell upon him, he was immediately struck with leprosy. So shocked by the severity of this and perhaps fearful for his very life he flees the Temple and is forced to abandon his throne! Here we have one of the most valiant and successful kings of all Judah’s history taken down in a matter of moments. Uzziah’s glorious reign had lasted for decades, but here in the Temple it came to a sudden and catastrophic end within a few brief moments, whereas before this Uzziah was ‘exceedingly strong’ in his own self-confidence, but now the hand of the LORD has caused him to know that God and Him ALONE is sovereign and supreme.

**APPLICATION:** Here is another spiritual lesson about the Power of Pride: Just as Uzziah’s self-will and pride had slowly developed over a number of years, continuing unchecked, ultimately leading him to be hardened against God’s authority. **We too must be on the watch over our souls regarding the**

**power of pride, for if we do not seek God in prayer to aid us in combating it with sincere godliness and humility - the Lord's judgement may come upon us suddenly and unexpected.**

*(Proverbs 18:12) Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honor is humility.*

## **CLOSING**

In our closing of today's message we must ask the ultimate question of the purpose for such a record in Scripture, was Uzziah truly converted? As we saw, he followed the rules and sought God (v.5). But was he a someone who because of external influences and family had an early good start in the ways of the LROD and the religion of the nation and then grew out of it as evidenced by his pride against God?

Or perhaps he was converted and tragically made the sinful mistake of walking in rebellion and pride and suffered the chastisement of the LORD as a believe and therefore we are to walk away as believers with a warning about not withstanding pride in our own lives?

It is difficult to know for certain, however I am strongly inclined to believe that he was not a converted man because when confronted with the God's truth he showed no repentance and then the record does not indicate that he ever repented prior to his death.

But either way, there have been several good and insightful lessons for us in message about the Power of Pride.

Allow me close with a quote from a eighteenth century preacher – Johnathan Edwards related to pride and humility.

“A truly humble man is sensible of his natural distance from God; of his dependence on Him; of the insufficiency of his own power and wisdom; and that it is by God's power that he is upheld and provided for, and that he needs God's wisdom to lead and guide him, and His might to enable him to do what he ought to do for Him.”