

2 Chronicles 26: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] 2 Chronicles chapter 26 And all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. He built Eloth and restored it to Judah after the king slept with his fathers.

Uzziah was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jekeliah of Jerusalem, 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. He went out and made war against the Philistines, and broke through the wall of Gath and the wall of Jabni and the wall of Ashdod.

And he built cities in the territory of Ashdod and elsewhere among the Philistines. God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians who lived in Gerbael, and against the Meunites. The Ammonites paid tribute to Uzziah, and his fame spread even to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong. Moreover Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, and at the valley gate, and at the angle, and fortified them.

[1 : 09] And he built towers in the wilderness, and cut out many cisterns, for he had large herds, both in the Sheffala and in the plain. And he had farmers and vine-dressers in the hills and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil.

Moreover Uzziah had an army of soldiers fit for war, in divisions according to the numbers in the muster made by G.I.L. the secretary, and Measaiah the officer, under the direction of Hananiah, one of the king's commanders.

The whole number of the heads of father's houses of mighty men of valor was 2,600. Under their command was an army of 307,500, who could make war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy.

And Uzziah prepared for all the army shields, spears, helmets, coats of mail, bows, and stones for slinging. In Jerusalem he made machines, invented by skilful men, to be on the towers and the corners, to shoot arrows and great stones.

And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong he grew proud to his destruction, for he was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.

[2 : 17] But Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the Lord who were men of valor. And they withstood King Uzziah and said to him, 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.

Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the Lord God. Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, in the presence of the priests in the house of the Lord, by the altar of incense.

And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him. And behold, he was leprous in his forehead. And they rushed him out quickly. And he himself hurried to go out, because the Lord had struck him.

And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death. And being a leper, lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the Lord. And Jotham his son was over the king's household, governing the people of the land.

Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, from first to last, Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, wrote. And Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the burial field that belonged to the kings.

[3 : 28] For they said, He is a leper. And Jotham his son reigned in his place. While we read of Azariah the son of Amaziah in chapters 14 and 15 of 2 Kings, the treatment of him in those chapters is, considering the length and the relative success of his reign, surprisingly fairly cursory.

We do, however, read a lot more concerning him in 2 Chronicles chapter 26. He is referred to as Uzziah rather than Azariah in the book of 2 Chronicles, although he is also called Uzziah on a few occasions in 2 Kings chapter 15.

Uzziah's father Amaziah had suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of the Israelite king Jehoash, who had broken down the walls of Jerusalem, raided the treasuries of the temple and the king's palace, taken hostages back with him to Samaria, and placed Judah under his sway.

Perhaps even to the extent of temporarily uniting Judah and Israel, the northern and the southern kingdoms, under his rule. Amaziah was killed in a conspiracy. Uzziah became king as a teenager. And we could be forgiven for thinking that Uzziah's rule would have little chance of succeeding. However, under Uzziah the kingdom of Judah flourished. He was the second longest reigning king of Judah, after Manasseh, and he reigned longer than any northern king.

[4 : 42] He won several significant military victories. He fortified the city of Jerusalem. He rebuilt and strengthened the walls that had been broken down under his father. The boundaries of the nation greatly extended.

He restored Judah's access to the highly strategic Gulf of Aqaba, which had been of great importance for Solomon's wealth and power, building Eloth. Having access to this port would have opened up an immensely valuable realm of international trade.

As Sarah Japheth observes, reading the narratives of Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, and Amaziah, we may get a sense of how important gaining control of this port was for the Judean kings. Without this port, the Red Sea trade would be closed to them.

Uzziah was a good king who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. His father and his grandfather, Amaziah and Joash, had been righteous kings most of their days, and Uzziah largely follows in their footsteps in this regard.

We might speculate about the identity of Zechariah. This man instructed Uzziah and seems to have been a cause of his faithfulness. It is most likely that he was a priest, rather like Jehoiada who had taught Joash, Uzziah's grandfather.

[5 : 49] As in the case of Joash, as long as his instructor lives, he is faithful. However, when the instructor dies, the impression is given that he falls from his former faithfulness. In both Joash and Uzziah's situations, they may have failed to grow to the point of being mature enough in their characters to be able to pursue faithfulness when they lacked a close counsellor to encourage, support, and direct them.

While Uzziah sought the Lord, the Lord also made him to prosper. Nevertheless, although he was faithful for much of his reign, like Joash's grandfather, the end of his reign was marked by serious sin.

So few of the faithful kings of Judah were able to end their reigns well. The latter parts of their reigns were so often marred by unfaithfulness and its consequences. Uzziah achieved very significant military victories over the Philistines.

The wall of Jerusalem had been broken down under the reign of Amaziah his father, but now his son is breaking down the walls of other cities, the cities of the Philistines. He also builds cities within the territory of the Philistines.

The Philistines are to the west of Judah, and gaining power over the Philistines would also likely have given Uzziah access to the Mediterranean. He also gains dominance over the Meunites to the south, and the Ammonites to the northeast.

[7 : 03] Uzziah is so extremely successful that his influence and reputation spreads even to the border of Egypt, an influence reminiscent of that which Solomon enjoyed. In speaking of Uzziah's fame, the text might imply that he was beginning to enjoy some stature as a figure on the international stage of the wider region.

Uzziah's rebuilding and fortifying of the walls of Jerusalem suggests that Judah is no longer under the dominance of Israel, and is free to re-establish its defences, the defences that had been broken down under the reign of Amaziah, without interference from the north.

He not only fortifies the walls of Jerusalem, he builds towers to defend the broader territory from invaders and raiders. This securing of the territory of Judah permits agricultural expansion, also

served by Uzziah's attention to the provision of water in the wilderness.

Like David and Solomon, Uzziah is a king who is attentive to the land, which flourishes under his rule. The people were not merely to control the land, they were to put down deep roots into it, and the development of Judah's agriculture under Uzziah was one way in which this was achieved. Besides building defences, Uzziah greatly strengthens Judah's army. They are well-ordered, well-equipped, and his men also invent ingenious new weaponry, enabling his fame to reach its zenith.

[8 : 21] However, at this point, Uzziah commits a sin at the very height of his power. Lifted up by his pride, he presumptuously attempted to burn incense to the Lord, an act that was restricted to the appointed priests.

We might recall the sins of Nadab and Abihu, or of the rebels in Korah's rebellion. Azariah, his namesake, goes in after him with 80 priests, 80 priests who had been charged, presumably, to guard the temple.

They courageously withstand King Uzziah, who insists on going further, angry that they would prevent him. Uzziah might believe that he is serving the Lord, that he is bringing glory to God by offering this incense, but in fact, he is breaking the explicit word of God, and he should know better. His action is driven not by humility towards God, but by pride, his heart is lifted up, and so he believes that he can take this prerogative that belongs to the priests alone, and assume it as his own as the king.

While he's still in the confrontation with the priests, leprosy breaks out on his forehead. The forehead was the place where the high priest bore the mark that he was holy to the Lord, and now God had placed the mark of a curse upon Uzziah.

[9 : 28] Leprosy, on various occasions in scripture, is associated with God's striking of someone. It's a sort of plague. It's referred to in language reminiscent of the plagues of Egypt in chapters 13 and 14 of the book of Leviticus.

Miriam was struck with leprosy in chapter 12 of the book of Numbers when she spoke against Moses with Aaron. Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, was struck with leprosy in 2 Kings chapter 5 after he lied to Naaman and also to his master Elisha.

Much as in the book of Daniel, as a result of his pride, Nebuchadnezzar was brought low and made like a beast and driven out from among men, King Uzziah is driven out as a result of his leprosy. Driven out of the temple, but also driven out of his palace. He has to live as a leper in a separate house. He's excluded from the house of the Lord, which included the palace complex.

While the king usually lived in part of the house of the Lord as the servant and the son of the king, now he no longer has access to even that. Jotham, his son, has to take on the administration of many of the affairs of the realm as a result of this.

[10 : 29] We are told that the rest of his works were recorded by the prophet Isaiah, who as we see here and also in the case of Hezekiah, wrote not only prophecy but history. The reference to Isaiah here is an important reminder that many of the ministries of the prophets, both minor and major, were taking place alongside these kings that we are reading about.

Isaiah, Hosea and Amos all prophesied during the reign of Uzziah. Indeed, the great temple vision of Isaiah in chapter 6 of his prophecy is dated to the year of King Uzziah's death.

The prophecies of Zechariah and Amos also refer to an important event that occurred in the reign of Uzziah, a great earthquake that struck Judah. A question to consider.

In the story of King Uzziah, we see faithful priests setting limits upon the rights and the actions of the king. How can this help us better to understand the relationship between the ministries of priests, kings and prophets and how these different roles place limits upon and exercise certain forms of authority over each other?

How can this help us better?