

A MAN WHO FORGOT GOD

II Chronicles 26

How wonderfully illuminating are these Old Testament biographies! Uzziah was one of the greatest kings. His brilliant reign proved to be the most magnificent period of Jewish history after the days of Solomon.

I. His Prosperity. II Chronicles 26:1-5.

Uzziah was the son of King Amaziah. His father met his death by violence at the hands of the people (II Kings 14:19). His mother's name was Jecoliah. She was a godly woman and she wielded a wonderful influence over her son. He was evidently a well-trained and an obedient son. With a godly mother and the memory of an honorable father, Uzziah had a good foundation for a useful life and successful reign. As a rule, the future lives of children are shaped by the example of their parents and the training which they receive from them. How fortunate are those sons who have godly parents and are brought up in the ways of the Lord! No greater heritage could possibly be given to children by their parents than a real Christian influence and training. Uzziah followed in the footsteps of his father and imitated his good example.

After the murder of Amaziah, his son was chosen by the people to occupy the vacant throne. He had natural gifts which fitted him for the kingship of God's people. He was clever, enterprising and practical. He possessed remarkable ability as an agriculturist and as an engineer. Having ascended the throne amid a blaze of sunshine at the early age of sixteen, Uzziah began his reign as an ardent reformer. He manifested an unusual interest in the welfare of his subjects and was greatly loved by them.

It is good to know that when Uzziah began his reign he sought to please the Lord. In this respect he followed the example of his father. The young king sought to discover the will of God and then to conform to it. He appreciated and was responsive to every agency that could enrich his spiritual life. He followed the Lord very closely. He had an exceedingly wise counselor in spiritual matters--Zechariah, a prophet who was skilled in the things of God. Zechariah was a great blessing to Uzziah. It is a glorious privilege and a wonderful blessing to be associated with those who know the will of God and live in conformity with it. The value of their influence can never be estimated. Because he honored God he prospered greatly, both in a material and a spiritual way.

If any man wants the blessing of God, he must walk with the Lord. Those who will not walk with Him need not expect to receive His best. The closer that one lives to the Lord the more numerous will be his blessings and the greater will be his influence.

II. His Power. II Chronicles 26:6-15.

This wise and active young ruler was a great soldier and a military genius. He began his reign by a successful expedition against the enemies of his father who had revolted some eighty years earlier. He waged victorious warfare with the Philistines, the Ammonites and the Arabians. He gathered a standing army of more than three hundred thousand, and then brought it to a much higher point of efficiency than it had reached during the best days of his father's reign. He equipped the army with the best weapons known in that day. Because of the large supply of weapons which he provided for his army other nations considered his forces formidable.

Being a civil and a military engineer, for which he gained an enviable reputation, Uzziah erected great towers, built up strong defenses, and made noteworthy achievements. He rebuilt Elath, a port on the Red Sea from which Solomon had previously carried on his lucrative trade with the East, and thus strengthened the commercial interests of his kingdom. Uzziah became one of the most powerful monarchs of his day. His fame spread far and wide because God was with him.

III. His Presumption. II Chronicles 26:16-18.

Enervated by such unusual material prosperity and military success, Uzziah made the terrible mistake of yielding to the temptation to become proud, arrogant and presumptuous. His prosperity and power turned him away from the One who had helped him. Inflated with pride, he turned his back upon God to whom he owed everything.

An ominous note is sounded in the solemn and sad statement, "But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction." His success went to his head. Having become strong, he attributed his success to his own prowess and did not give God the glory. He forgot the words of his great ancestor, King Solomon: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." Proverbs 16:18.

Proud and haughty, Uzziah had the temerity to enter the temple and to transgress the Law by invading the sanctity of the Holy Place and burning incense on the sacred altar. This intrusion of the sacred office of the priesthood was divinely forbidden. Such presumptuous pride is one of the constant dangers in the Christian life.

Obsessed with a sense of his own greatness, Uzziah disregarded the direct command of God that the priests alone should burn incense on His altar. Witnessing the foolhardy course of the presumptuous monarch, Azariah, the high priest, and eighty other priests did the manly and courageous thing by promptly going into the temple and trying to persuade him to cease his evil practice. With holy boldness they protested against what he was doing. It was not an easy thing for them, as subjects, to resist the presumptuous act of their king, but they did so regardless of the cost. When these brave men withstood him, by protesting against what he was doing, they incurred the wrath of the king. He resented very much their wise words of counsel.

IV. His Punishment. II Chronicles 26:19-21.

How often men rise while they are humble, and then because of a heart lifted in pride, they exalt self and fall! The way up is down. When one exalts himself he puts self at the center of his interest, at the top of his goal and in the front of his efforts. He magnifies himself and minimizes others. Ere long he stumbles and falls.

When the proud and presumptuous king was reprimanded for the thing which he had done, he became angry, instead of repenting for his sin. Because of his refusal to heed the warnings of the servants of God and his deliberate persistence in disobeying Him, the king was smitten with leprosy. His dread disease, which was really worse than death, was regarded as the stroke of God's hand. The once great and mighty king, now an humbled, disgraced and segregated leper, found himself in that condition simply because he did that which he had been forbidden to do. Even though he may have thought that God's restrictions did not matter, he had discovered, to his sorrow, that they did. He had learned that it is impossible to disobey God and not suffer the consequences. In fact, it is a dangerous thing for anybody to trifle with the plain commands of God. It is always a serious thing to trifle with God's Word.

Uzziah is a splendid illustration of the fact that all who begin well do not end thus. That terrible disease of leprosy caused him to be driven from the palace to the pest-house. Royal personage though he was, Uzziah was compelled by the stern requirements of Jewish law to live in isolation until his death. While he was in seclusion all governmental affairs were administered in his name by a deputy, his son Jotham. At last, when the end came, Uzziah was not given the usual burial of a king in a royal sepulchre.

God grant that not a one of us who has begun well with God shall ever permit the destructive powers of prosperity, power, pride and presumption to undermine the life or bring ultimate shame and disgrace.