

# King Uzziah

In this lesson we're going to continue our study of obscure Bible stories. This time we're going to look at one of the least famous kings of Judah: the righteous King Uzziah.

After the reign of King Solomon the Lord divided the nation of Israel into two parts. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin were given to the line of David and his descendants reigned over them. Since Benjamin was very small, this kingdom eventually became known as simply Judah. The rest of the tribes were given to other people to reign and became known as Israel. Sadly, Israel never had any righteous kings. Every one of their rulers was wicked. But Judah was different. Some of Judah's kings were wicked and some were righteous. You never really knew what you were going to get from one generation to the next.

Uzziah's father Amaziah is a great example. 2 Chronicles 25 tells us that Amaziah started out as a righteous, God-fearing king. However, one day God gave him victory over the Edomites. After this divine miracle from God, Amaziah took the idols of the Edomites back to Judah and began worshipping them:

**2 Chronicles 25:14:** “Now it came to pass, after that Amaziah was come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense unto them.”

Keep in mind that Amaziah had been a servant of the Lord. Yet as soon as he saw these idols he departed from God and became an idolater! He did this in spite of the fact that *God just gave him victory over the Edomites*. That alone should have taught him that God was stronger than the false idols of the Edomites, and yet he didn't learn that lesson. Amaziah decided to

abandon the God who had given him an incredible victory, and instead worship idols that were unable to save the people of Edom.

God was angry about this. The Lord turned him over to his enemies:

**2 Chronicles 25:20:** “But Amaziah would not hear; for it came of God, that he might deliver them into the hand of their enemies, because they sought after the gods of Edom.”

Amaziah (who was the king of Judah) then launched a disastrous attack against Israel. He didn't win. In fact, he lost *really* badly:

**2 Chronicles 25:22-24:** “And Judah was put to the worse before Israel, and they fled every man to his tent. And Joash the king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, at Bethshemesh, and brought him to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim to the corner gate, four hundred cubits. And he took all the gold and the silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of God with Obededom, and the treasures of the king's house, the hostages also, and returned to Samaria.”

This was a terrible defeat! A large portion of the wall that protected Jerusalem was broken down. In those days that meant the city was now vulnerable to attack and an easier target for enemy nations. On top of that, the treasures of the temple were stolen, the king's wealth was taken away, and even hostages were carried off. Amaziah suffered a *tremendous* defeat. The worthless idols that he had taken from the Edomites weren't able to save him from defeat at the hand of the king of Israel.

This loss didn't go over well among the people of Judah. A conspiracy arose against the king and he was assassinated:

**2 Chronicles 25:27:** “Now after the time that Amaziah did turn away from following the Lord they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem; and he fled to Lachish: but they sent to Lachish after him, and slew him there.”

Amaziah's decision to turn away from the Lord and worship idols didn't turn out very well for him! This was the legacy that Uzziah was given: his father was an idolater who brought ruin upon the nation. Uzziah inherited a city that was vulnerable and a treasury that had been looted. On top of that, Uzziah became king when he was just 16 years old:

**2 Chronicles 26:1:** “Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the room of his father Amaziah.”

Imagine a sixteen-year-old kid reigning over an entire nation. That's the situation Judah was in.

So what kind of king did Uzziah become? Well, Uzziah made some good decisions and some bad ones. He reigned over Judah for an astonishing 52 years:

**2 Chronicles 26:3:** “Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Jecoliah of Jerusalem.”

Unlike his father, Uzziah wasn't an idolater. He served the Lord:

**2 Chronicles 26:4:** “And he did that which was

right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah did.”

Uzziah didn't serve the worthless idols of the Edomites. His reign started well – but sadly it ended poorly. He served the Lord during the ministry of the prophet Zechariah:

**2 Chronicles 26:5:** “And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper.”

This isn't the same person who wrote the book Zechariah. That book was written during the reign of King Darius (Zechariah 1:1), who reigned over Babylon while the Jews were in exile. Uzziah was king long before the time of the exile! Although this Zechariah had an understanding of visions, he's a different Zechariah.

This verse tells us that while Zechariah was alive and carrying out his ministry, Uzziah served the Lord. It seems that Uzziah needed someone to lead him. He would only be good if someone was standing over him. Once Zechariah was gone the king got into trouble.

Uzziah isn't the only king who had this problem. After the time of Uzziah, a man named Jehoash reigned over Judah. He also did what was right – but only during the lifetime of Jehoiada the priest:

**2 Kings 12:2:** “And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him.”

Jehoiada the priest had a very long life, but eventually he died:

**2 Chronicles 24:15:** “But Jehoiada waxed old,

and was full of days when he died; an hundred and thirty years old was he when he died.”

A hundred and thirty years old is an exceptionally long life – especially for the ancient world! Jehoash had plenty of time to learn how to be a good and righteous king, but as soon as Jehoiada died Jehoash went bad. He abandoned the worship of God and began serving idols:

**2 Chronicles 24:17-18:** “Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them. And they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass.”

The Lord used yet another Zechariah, the son of righteous Jehoiada, to tell the king that his idolatry was wrong. In response the king had him *killed*:

**2 Chronicles 24:21:** “And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the Lord.”

Not only did the king put to death the son of his lifelong friend and mentor, but Zechariah was murdered *in the temple*. It seems that Jehoash was only willing to serve the Lord as long as his mentor was standing over his shoulder. As soon as that mentor was gone, Jehoash began worshiping idols and killing innocent people. The king was only good as long as there was someone around making him behave. Once that person was gone, his true nature emerged.

Some people are like that. They'll be good as long as someone makes them be good, and they'll do the right thing as

long as the right person is watching. But if they're left to their own devices they'll do what they really wanted to do all along. Their religion isn't real! It's just an act they put on for the benefit of others.

Uzziah served the Lord during the days of Zechariah. As long as Uzziah served the Lord, God blessed him. When Uzziah began his reign the city of Jerusalem was in tatters, but when he served God he was blessed. Not only was Uzziah able to defeat the Philistines, but he actually built cities in their territory:

**2 Chronicles 26:6:** “And he went forth and warred against the Philistines, and brake down the wall of Gath, and the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod, and built cities about Ashdod, and among the Philistines.”

The protective walls that surrounded key Philistine cities were destroyed. The Philistines were so humbled that Uzziah was able to build Jewish cities in their midst. God gave him victory over the Philistines, and over other nations as well:

**2 Chronicles 26:7-8:** “And God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gurbaal, and the Mehunims. And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah: and his name spread abroad even to the entering in of Egypt; for he strengthened himself exceedingly.”

God watched over Uzziah as long as he served Him. The Lord gave him one victory after another. God strengthened his nation and protected him in battle. The Lord even gave him a great name – verse 8 tells us that Uzziah became famous. As long as he honored the Lord, the Lord honored him.

Uzziah repaired the breaches in the wall around Jerusalem. He then went further and strengthened Jerusalem's defenses even more than they had been originally:

**2 Chronicles 26:9:** “Moreover Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, and at the valley gate, and at the turning of the wall, and fortified them.”

Not only was Uzziah a strong king, but he was a rich king as well. As long as he served the Lord, God blessed him with great wealth:

**2 Chronicles 26:10:** “Also he built towers in the desert, and digged many wells: for he had much cattle, both in the low country, and in the plains: husbandmen also, and vine dressers in the mountains, and in Carmel: for he loved husbandry.”

God blessed Uzziah *tremendously*. God blessed his military might, God blessed his wealth, and God blessed his reputation. As long as Uzziah sought the Lord and did what was right, God blessed him on every side.

Now, I'm *not* saying that if you serve the Lord then God will bless you with wealth! That's not my point. The apostles were righteous men and yet they led lives of poverty, and nearly all of them were martyred for their faith. My point is that God blessed Uzziah in amazing ways.

The king had an enormous military:

**2 Chronicles 26:13:** “And under their hand was an army, three hundred thousand and seven thousand and five hundred, that made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy.

He was so strong that he was able to field an army of 300,000 men! Uzziah was so wealthy that he was able to equip

this army with weapons and armor:

**2 Chronicles 26:14:** “And Uzziah prepared for them throughout all the host shields, and spears, and helmets, and habergeons, and bows, and slings to cast stones.”

The king was so clever that he was able to invent innovative defenses for his city:

**2 Chronicles 26:15:** “And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal. And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong.”

Why was Uzziah successful? Because God blessed him on every side. God blessed his military might, his wealth, and his reputation. Uzziah had it all. As long as he sought the Lord, God was with him.

But one day Zechariah died and Uzziah was left to his own devices. Now, the king knew the difference between right from wrong. He knew what it meant to serve the Lord. God had blessed him on every side and given him power, wealth, and prestige. Yet it was here, at the height of his glory, that Uzziah made the decision that destroyed him.

We saw this same thing happen with Jehoash. As soon as Jehoiada died, the king turned to idolatry and murder. Once his godly influence was no longer around, the king became evil. Uzziah did something similar. Once Zechariah was no longer around to set him straight, Uzziah became proud. He believed that all of his success was his own doing. He wasn't humbled by it, nor did he see it as a rare blessing from God. Uzziah became so convinced of his own greatness that he did something terrible:



**2 Chronicles 26:16:** “But 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.”

At the height of Uzziah's power and glory he decided to go into the temple and assume the role of a priest. The problem is that Uzziah was from the tribe of Judah. In order to be a priest you had to be from the tribe of Levi! Uzziah was *not* allowed to go into the temple and offer incense. God's commands about this were very strict! If you weren't a Levite then you couldn't even enter the holy place of the temple, much less burn incense there! God had restricted that job to the priests of the tribe of Levi, and no one else was allowed to do it. This was a well-known commandment that had been in place since the time of Moses.

This wasn't a minor transgression. God actually *struck people dead* for doing this sort of thing! For example, right after the tabernacle was built two of Aaron's sons decided to commit a sin which was almost identical to Uzziah's. They offered something to God that He hadn't commanded. God's response was immediate:

**Leviticus 10:1-2:** “And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.”

When these two priests did something in the tabernacle that they weren't supposed to do, God responded by sending fire from Heaven that killed both of them where they stood. God *killed* them on the spot! What Uzziah did was worse: not only was he offering strange fire before the Lord, but he was doing it *in*

*spite of the fact that he wasn't a priest.*

Uzziah knew that he wasn't supposed to be doing this but he did it anyway. He was so convinced of his greatness that he thought he could get away with anything. He coveted the role of the priest and decided to take it for himself.

There are some Christians who commit this same sin. When God blesses them and they become great, they start thinking they're better than everyone else. They start believing they can get away with things. After all, look at all the good they've done! Look at all the ways they've served the Lord. God would never judge because they're pillars of the church. The Lord *needs* them. Besides, God loves them and will forgive them for what they've done.

But *God will not be mocked*. The Lord is completely impartial. He doesn't show favoritism – in fact, He does quite the opposite. His judgments start at the church. He disciplines those He loves precisely *because* He loves them. When a Christian decides he's so great and mighty that he has a right to do whatever he pleases, that Christian is about to have a rude awakening. Pride goes before a fall.

God was merciful to Uzziah and gave the king a chance to rethink what he was doing. The brave priests of the temple resisted the king and told him that what he was doing was wrong:

**2 Chronicles 26:17-18:** “And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men: And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God.”

The priests caught Uzziah in the holy place of the temple –

a place he had no right to be. They immediately told him to put down the incense and leave because he was sinning by just being inside the temple at all. They told him he had no right to offer incense because only the consecrated sons of Aaron were allowed to do that.

These were very brave priests. It takes a lot of courage to stand up against the king himself – a man who could have them put to death if he wished. These priests stood up to the king and rebuked him. Sadly, the king didn't listen to the priests. Instead he became angry with them – and that's when God punished Uzziah:

**2 Chronicles 26:19:** “Then Uzziah was wrath, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wrath with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar.”

God didn't kill Uzziah. Instead He humiliated him. The Lord struck him with leprosy right where he stood. This changed the king's life dramatically – and not in a good way.

You see, under the Mosaic Law lepers were considered to be unclean. That means they couldn't touch anything which was holy. Lepers weren't allowed near the temple. In fact, they weren't even allowed to live with other people! They had to live alone (or with other lepers), because anyone they came into contact with was made unclean. Lepers were shunned and avoided by the people. They were the outcasts of society.

The consequences of leprosy fell upon Uzziah immediately. As soon as he became a leper he was thrust out of the temple because his very presence was defiling it:

**2 Chronicles 26:20:** “And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted

also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him.”

Uzziah was so proud that he thought he could get away with anything. He thought he could do whatever he wanted and God would let him get away with it. He thought he was above the law – but he wasn't. He thought the commandments of God didn't apply to him – but they did. He thought God would show him special consideration because he was such a great guy – but God didn't.

Uzziah remained a leper for the rest of his life. He lost everything. He lost his home, he lost his access to the temple, and he even lost his kingship:

**2 Chronicles 26:21:** “And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord: and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land.”

Uzziah had it all and he lost it all. His reputation was gone in an instant. His glory, his strength, and his reign were all gone. God humbled him mightily. In one moment Uzziah went from being one of the most respected men of his time to being an outcast who was avoided by everyone. His pride and disobedience ruined him.

His leprosy even cost him burial in the tomb of the kings:

**2 Chronicles 26:23:** “So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the burial which belonged to the kings; for they said, He is a leper: and Jotham his son reigned in his stead.”

The kings of Jerusalem were usually buried in a special

tomb reserved for kings – but not Uzziah. Since he was a disgraced leper he was buried in a field instead. He wasn't even given a royal burial!

Why did this happen? Because he was convinced that he could get away with it. He was convinced that he was so great the rules didn't apply to him. He thought God's commandments were for other people. He decided that he could get away with it – but he couldn't.

As Moses once told the children of Israel, be sure your sin will find you out (Numbers 32:23). God is no a respecter of persons. He's not going to give you a free pass to sin as you please. Your service to the Lord doesn't give you the right to be immoral. Uzziah isn't the only person who found out, too late, that God is serious and doesn't tolerate sin from anyone.

The point is simple: do not follow Uzziah down the road to destruction. Things didn't turn out well for him – and if we follow his example they won't turn out well for us either.