



Second Chronicles - Chapter Twenty Six

III 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23 - The Kingdom of Judah Down to the Exile (continues)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Six

The Chronicler reproduces most of this section of 2 Kings 15:1-7, but splices it with a lengthy passage of his own material (vv.5-20a) illustrating God's blessing on Uzziah's reign, which was between 791-740 BC, and recounting the cause of his downfall.

As with his presentation of Joash and Amaziah, the Chronicler has divided Uzziah's reign into two parts: a period of faithfulness and blessing, followed by sin and punishment. The language used, such as 'to seek God,' 'prosper,' 'God helped him,' 'fame,' etc., and the motifs of blessing, i.e. military success, building projects, and armed forces, are all characteristic of the Chronicler's style and thought, and they carry a sober message. The chapter is essentially a sermon on the dangers of pride: Uzziah's God-given success leads him into presumption, seeking an office of spiritual leadership that could never be rightly his, for he attempted to take on the role of a priest in the temple and was struck down with leprosy. He had to go into isolation for the last ten years of his reign, effectively making his son Jotham the king in his place.

III.i 2 Chronicles 26:1-23 - Uzziah

Refer to the chapter summary above.

III.i.i 2 Chronicles 26:1-15 - Reign of Uzziah

King Uzziah, also known as Azariah, came to the throne following the assassination of his father Amaziah and reigned for fifty two years, making him the second longest reigning monarch in the history of both kingdoms. Because he determined to follow the ways of the Lord he had great military success against the

surrounding nations and gained a reputation for being a strong leader. He built up the defences in the nation, also turning his attention to supporting agriculture.

¹ Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king to succeed his father Amaziah.

2 Chronicles 26:1

Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah, and made him king to succeed his father Amaziah. Amaziah was assassinated by undisclosed subjects. However, this reference is to the time when Amaziah was taken captive during his war with King Joash of Israel and Uzziah became the effective king even though his father still lived and would come back to Jerusalem in due course.

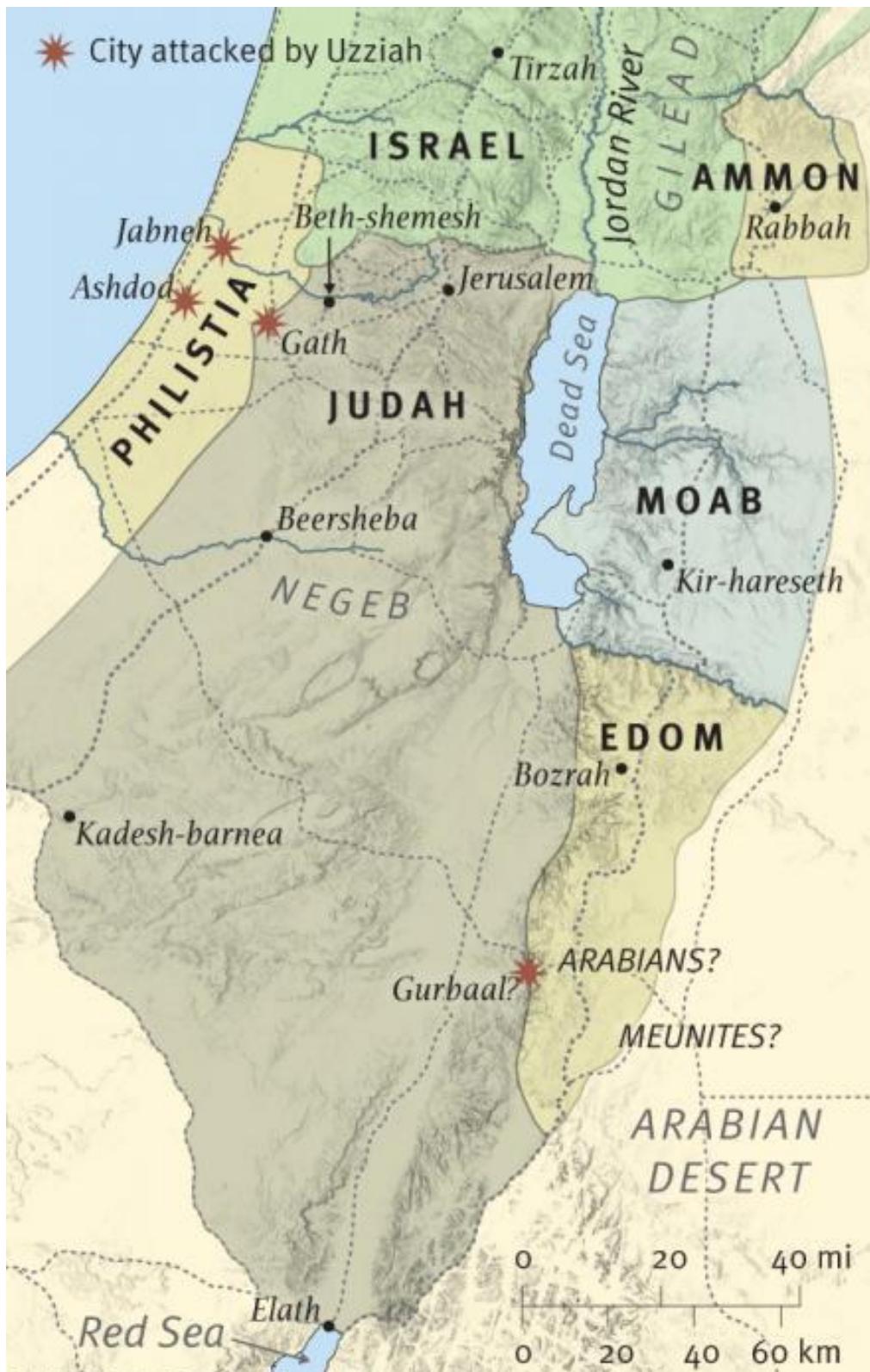
Uzziah is also called by the variant form Azariah in 2 Kings 15:1 and 15:6-7, and 1 Chronicles 3:12, but in 2 Kings 15:13, 15:30, 15:32 and 15:34 he is called Uzziah. The Chronicler's preference for Uzziah may be in order to avoid confusion with the chief priest Azariah in vv.17-20.

Uzziah came to the throne at a difficult time. Following the tragic events that brought King Amaziah's reign to an end, Jerusalem was in disarray, a major section of its protective wall destroyed, its temple and palace emptied of their treasures, and some of its inhabitants taken away to Israel as hostages.

² He rebuilt Eloth and restored it to Judah, after the king slept with his ancestors.

2 Chronicles 26:2

He rebuilt Eloth and restored it to Judah, after the king slept with his ancestors. Although 2 Kings 14:22 specifies it was Amaziah who had died, there are many commentators who believe the reference is intended to refer to King Joash of Israel. If the reference is to Amaziah then this points to the period when Uzziah becomes sole regent. If the reference is indeed to Joash, this is further evidence that he was the one exercising power in Judah after the battle of Beth-shemesh. It was only after the death of Joash and with the decline of Aram that Uzziah was able to consolidate Amaziah's gains in Edom by claiming the port of Eloth at the north end of the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea. This town, closely associated with Ezion-geber and the trade of the Solomonic era with the wider world (1 Kings 9:26), stood at the southern end of the great King's Highway that ran all the way north through Transjordan to Damascus and facilitated trade connections especially with southern Arabia. Presumably it was lost to Judah when Edom revolted during Jehoram's reign; refer to 2 Kings 8:20-22.



Judah's Resurgence during Uzziah's Reign

A power vacuum created by Assyria's attack and withdrawal from Syria allowed King Uzziah of Judah to recover land that had once belonged to Judah. Uzziah recovered Elath on the Red Sea, captured some Philistine towns, and fought against the Arabians at Gurbaal and against the Meunites (vv.6-8).

³ Uzziah was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 26:3

Uzziah was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for fifty-two years in Jerusalem. The reign of Uzziah included co-regencies with his father Amaziah (796-767 BC) and his son Jotham (750-732 BC). Uzziah's reign saw the beginning of Isaiah's prophetic ministry; refer to Isaiah 1:1 and 6:1.

Only King Manasseh of Judah, who ruled between 686-642 BC, had a longer reign than Uzziah, although this account will show that Uzziah was reliant on his son's governance for the last ten years of his life.

⁴ He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done. ⁵ 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.

2 Chronicles 26:4-5

He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done. Uzziah's reign was largely characterised by the good he did in the sight of the Lord. His godliness was rewarded with a long reign of fifty two years although his pride and even arrogance would mean that he spent much of his life in isolation through leprosy. Refer to 2 Kings 14:3-4 for a similar description of Amaziah.

He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah. Some commentators believe this Zechariah acted as a religious adviser to Uzziah, as Jehoiada had done for Joash; refer to 2 Chronicles 24:2. Nothing else is known about this Zechariah. He is not the same as the priest Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 24:20-21 or the prophetic author of the canonical Book of Zechariah, who began his ministry in 520 BC. However, it could be a reference to King Zechariah of Israel who reigned briefly in 753 BC, thus allowing the Chronicler to put a timestamp on this statement, i.e. that Uzziah was a godly king up until 753 BC, three years before his son Jotham took over the helm when Uzziah became leprous because of his sin.

As long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper. This generally mixed review of Uzziah's reign is also indicated by 2 Kings 15:1-4, which reveals that Uzziah, called Azariah in Second Kings, did not remove the high places, traditional places of sacrifice to the Lord and sometimes gateways to idolatry.

⁶ He went out and made war against the Philistines, and broke down the wall of Gath and the wall of Jabneh and the wall of Ashdod; he

built cities in the territory of Ashdod and elsewhere among the Philistines.⁷ God helped him against the Philistines, against the Arabs who lived in Gur-baal, and against the Meunites.⁸ The Ammonites paid tribute to Uzziah, and his fame spread even to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong.

2 Chronicles 26:6-8

He went out and made war against the Philistines. Uzziah was active in opposing the ancient enemies of the Israelites. The Philistines may also have been active against Judah in the not too distant past, perhaps being among those who came with the Arabs and massacred many of the royal family of David; refer to 2 Chronicles 22:1. Uzziah's victories over the Philistines in the west and southwest were reinforced by building settlements in these conquered territories. The Arabs and the Meunites, also recorded in 2 Chronicles 20:1, were nomadic groups from the south.

The Philistines lost two of their major cities, Gath and Ashdod as well as Jabneh. The latter was formerly Jabneel of Judah (Joshua 15:11) and later became Jamnia where the Sanhedrin was re-formed after Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70.

The Ammonites paid tribute to Uzziah. This was another example of the strength of Uzziah's kingdom. He exacted tribute from the Ammonites, which was like a tax that recognised their lower place under Judah.

⁹ Moreover, Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate, at the Valley Gate, and at the Angle, and fortified them.¹⁰ He built towers in the wilderness and hewed out many cisterns, for he had large herds, both in the Shephelah and in the plain, and he had farmers and vine-dressers in the hills and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil.

2 Chronicles 26:9-10

The Corner Gate. Following King Amaziah's ill-fated attack on King Joash of Israel, the city wall in Jerusalem was broken down from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate and this new tower here was probably erected as part of the repair work on the wall, strengthening the city's defences against future attacks.

He built towers in the wilderness and hewed out many cisterns. Uzziah stands out as an enthusiastic promoter of farming throughout the wilderness of Judah and the Negeb, the foothills of the Shephelah west of Jerusalem, and the coastal plain. Uzziah was a remarkable king, who had a broad interest in the improvement of his kingdom. Because of his many achievements, it was fitting that his fame spread among other nations.

The reality of Uzziah's 'towers of the desert' in arid southern Judah has been validated by the discovery of an 8th Century tower at Qumran.

One unique description of Uzziah is that he loved the soil. This shows that he had a mind and a heart for more than technology and fame; he also had an interest in practical matters and things that benefited the majority of his people. Judah depended on its agriculture and the king did all he could to support this industry.

¹¹ Moreover, Uzziah had an army of soldiers, fit for war, in divisions according to the numbers in the muster made by the secretary Jeiel and the officer Maaseiah, under the direction of Hananiah, one of the king's commanders. ¹² The whole number of the heads of ancestral houses of mighty warriors was two thousand six hundred. ¹³ Under their command was an army of three hundred and seven thousand five hundred, who could make war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy. ¹⁴ Uzziah provided for all the army the shields, spears, helmets, coats of mail, bows, and stones for slinging. ¹⁵ In Jerusalem he set up machines, invented by skilled workers, on the towers and the corners for shooting arrows and large stones. And his fame spread far, for he was marvellously helped until he became strong.

2 Chronicles 26:11-15

Uzziah had an army of soldiers, fit for war. On the roles of armies as a mark of blessing on righteous kings refer to 1 Chronicles 12:23-40, and 2 Chronicles 13:3-4, 14:8 and 17:12-19. Verse 13 could be interpreted as '300 units (or commanders) with 7,500 men.' Refer to the comment made on 1 Chronicles 12:23-37 for more information on interpreting such large numbers of troops.

Machines or 'inventions' are implements of war from which men hurled projectiles in defence of the city. Murals from the siege of Lachish dated 701 BC show defenders on the city walls shooting arrows and hurling stones from behind wooden frames on which shields have been hung.

There is some debate and even controversy as to whether these were defensive or offensive inventions. If it does describe the invention of catapults, it is a remarkable thing that Uzziah and his men invented such equipment more than two hundred years before archaeological evidence suggests. The Targum states, 'He made in Jerusalem ingenious instruments, and little hollow towers, to stand upon the towers and upon the bastions, for the shooting of arrows, and projecting of great stones.'

Adam Clarke comments, “This is the very first imitation on record of any warlike engines for the attack or defence of besieged places; and this account is long prior to any thing of the kind among either the Greeks or the Romans. The Jews alone were the inventors of such engines; and the invention took place in the reign of Uzziah, about eight hundred years before the Christian era. It is no wonder that, in the consequence of this, his name spread far abroad, and struck terror into his enemies.”

And his fame spread far, for he was marvellously helped until he became strong. At the end of this extended section praising and promoting the goodness of Uzziah’s reign, the author includes this ominous word. At some point in his success, the king began to turn from God’s help and began to trust in his own strength. The chief reason for Uzziah’s success was God’s help. This is a special word in Chronicles found also in 1 Chronicles 12:19, 2 Chronicles 14:10 and 25:8, whose meaning is equivalent in the NT to the enabling work of the Holy Spirit; refer to Acts 26:22, Romans 8:26, 1 Thessalonians 2:2 and 2 Timothy 1:14.

III.i.ii 2 Chronicles 26:16-23 - Pride and Apostasy

King Uzziah grew proud due to his power and success. One day he went into the temple to make an offering, something forbidden to all except the Aaronic priesthood. The priests challenged him and he grew angry with them. Therefore, the Lord immediately struck him with leprosy and he had to remain isolated for the rest of his life. His son Jotham had to govern in his place.

¹⁶ But when he had become strong he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was false to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to make offering on the altar of incense. ¹⁷ But the priest Azariah went in after him, with eighty priests of the Lord who were men of valour; ¹⁸ they withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, ‘It is not for you, Uzziah, to make offering to the Lord, but for the priests the descendants of Aaron, who are consecrated to make offering. Go out of the sanctuary; for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honour from the Lord God.’ ¹⁹ Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to make offering, and when he became angry with the priests a leprous disease broke out on his forehead, in the presence of the priests in the house of the Lord, by the altar of incense. ²⁰ When the chief priest Azariah, and all the priests, looked at him, he was leprous in his forehead. They hurried him out, and he himself hurried to get out, because the Lord had struck him.

2 Chronicles 26:16-20

But when he had become strong he grew proud, to his destruction. Uzziah is a prominent example of a man who handled adversity better than success.

False or unfaithful translates Hebrew *ma'al*; refer to the comment made on 1 Chronicles 2:3-8. It carries the sense of affronting God's holiness as in a violated oath (Leviticus 6:1-7), or failing to accord him his due in worship.

Uzziah entered the temple of the Lord to make offering on the altar of incense. Uzziah impugned God's holiness by trespassing on the temple, which was for the priests and Levites only, and by seeking to offer incense, a duty reserved for the priests alone; refer to Exodus 30:1-10 and Numbers 16:40. In his pride, he wished to have spiritual as well as political authority over the people. Uzziah's presumptuous act recalls Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16:1-40.

But the priest Azariah went in after him. It took courage to confront a king, an heir of King David, a commander of the armies of Judah. Yet Azariah the priest knew that King Uzziah's crime was so great that it justified this confrontation.

It is not for you, Uzziah, to make offering to the Lord, but for the priests the descendants of Aaron, who are consecrated to make offering. Azariah simply called Uzziah to recognise this long-standing principle. God clearly declared that only the descendants of Aaron could come before him as priests excepting the priesthood according to Melchizedek, which priesthood Jesus belonged to. Azariah's rebuke still offers Uzziah the chance to repent and leave, and it is only in the course of his angry, impenitent outburst against the priests that the king is struck with a skin disease.

They hurried him out, and he himself hurried to get out, because the Lord had struck him. Uzziah would not listen to the Biblical commands and customs that forbade him to enter the temple and offer incense. He would not listen to the rebuke and warning from the priests. Yet he did listen to the judgement of God against him, and he finally hurried to get out.

²¹ King Uzziah was leprous to the day of his death, and being leprous lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the Lord. His son Jotham was in charge of the palace of the king, governing the people of the land. ²² Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, from first to last, the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz wrote. ²³ Uzziah slept with his ancestors; they buried him near his ancestors in the burial field that belonged to the kings, for they said, 'He is leprous.' His son Jotham succeeded him.

2 Chronicles 26:21-23

King Uzziah was leprous to the day of his death, and being leprous lived in a separate house. Uzziah came into the temple as an arrogant king, and he left as a humbled leper and stayed that way for the remainder of his life. He could not even go into the outer courts of the temple which were once open to him as to other worshippers for he was excluded from the house of the Lord altogether because of his leprosy. In overstepping this boundary, he found his freedom more restricted than ever before.

Because he was a leper to the day of his death, King Uzziah was not buried in the normal royal tombs of Jerusalem but in a common burial field near his ancestors. A stone plaque was found in Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, from the Second Temple period that bears the inscription, ‘Here were brought the bones of Uzziah, king of Judah. Do not open!’ It may be that the king’s bones were moved to the Mount of Olives many centuries after his death.

When Uzziah became a leper and was unable to govern, he had to live in a separate house – literally in Hebrew ‘the house of freedom’ (*bet hakhopshit*), which is probably a metaphor for being relieved of responsibility in government more than a description of his living conditions. The king was seriously incapacitated and was regarded as effectively dead - the related Hebrew word *khopshi* in connection with the world of the dead in Job 3:19, where it is translated ‘free,’ and in Psalm 88:5, ‘forsaken’ or ‘set loose’. Because of his leprosy, Uzziah had to withdraw from his royal duties. His son Jotham therefore exercised effective governmental power in Judah.

Uzziah was excluded from the house of the Lord. His son Jotham was in charge of the palace of the king, governing the people of the land. Because of his leprosy, Uzziah had to withdraw from his royal duties in accordance with: <<He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp>> (Leviticus 13:46), and: <<The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Command the Israelites to put out of the camp everyone who is leprous, or has a discharge, and everyone who is unclean through contact with a corpse; you shall put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp; they must not defile their camp, where I dwell among them. The Israelites did so, putting them outside the camp; as the Lord had spoken to Moses, so the Israelites did>> (Numbers 5:1-4); therefore his son Jotham became co-regent. Death was the punishment prescribed by law for the crime Uzziah committed and that is essentially what he suffered - a living death separated from everyone and everything.

Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, from first to last, the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz wrote. This is not a reference to the canonical book bearing his name, but another work by this prophet, who received his call in the year of Uzziah’s death:

<<In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple>> (Isaiah 6:1); refer also to the comment made on 2 Chronicles 32:32-33.

It is important to consider the reign of Uzziah in totality:

- He began his reign at only 16 years of age.
- He reigned for 52 years.
- Overall, he was a good and strong king who led Israel to many military victories and who was an energetic builder and planner.
- Despite all this, Uzziah had a tragic end.

Therefore, when Isaiah wrote that he was called in the year King Uzziah died, he said a lot. It is to say, “In the year a great and wise king died.” But it is also to say, “In the year a great and wise king who had a tragic end died.” Isaiah had great reason to be discouraged and disillusioned at the death of King Uzziah, because a great king had passed away, and because his life ended tragically. Yet despite it all, he saw the enthroned Lord God who was greater than any earthly king.

For they said, ‘He is leprous.’ This is a sad and somewhat unfortunate summation of a mostly great king of Judah; yet it shows the great expense and tragedy of not finishing well, and that late mistakes and scandals can colour a whole lifetime or career. This is the last of three successive reigns which concludes with a period of disobedience and disaster, and it seems that nothing is able to prevent Judah and their kings sliding into sin and judgement. Idolatry, rejection of the prophets, violence, and pride repeat themselves with devastating regularity.

Charles Spurgeon comments, “I have lived long enough to observe that the greatest faults that are ever committed by professedly Christian men are not committed by young people. Most painful is it, to me to remember that the worst cases of backsliding and apostasy that I have ever seen, in this church, have been by old men and middle-aged men, - not by young people; for, somehow or other, the young people, if they are truly taught of God, know their weakness, and so they cry to God for help; but it often happens that more experienced people begin to think that they are not likely to fall into the faults and follies of the young; and I care not how old a man may be - even if seven centuries had passed over his head: - if he began to trust in himself, he would be a fool, and soon he would have a grievous fall.”

Although Uzziah’s pride did not cause the exile, it is an excellent illustration of why the exile eventually came about. From now on, Judah’s end is definitely in sight.