

GOD HELPS THOSE WHO *CANNOT* HELP THEMSELVES

2 Chronicles 26:15-21

Isaiah 6:1 reads: "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple." This passing reference is almost like the people know about King Uzziah Judah. But this is not all scripture has to say about him. The story of Uzziah is told in 2 Kings 14:21-22 and 15:1-7, where he is called his personal name, Azariah. It is also told in 2 Chronicles 26, where he is called by his royal name, Uzziah. The story of Uzziah is a cautionary tale about the necessity of divine help, the power of living contingently, and the danger of human pride. The life, reign, accomplishments, sin, and punishment of Uzziah emphatically declares that God helps those who help themselves.

For the record, the axiom, "The Lord helps those who help themselves," is not in scripture. This familiar saying comes from BENJAMIN FRANKLYN'S Poor Richard's Almanac, not the Bible. FRANKLYN may have remembered it from a similar proverb in Aesop's fable of Hercules and the Wagoner that read, "The gods help them that help themselves." Either way, this emphasis on self-reliance reflects Ben Franklyn's deistic worldview, not biblical truth. The word of God does not promote self-confidence. The Bible teaches confidence in God, not self. Self-sufficiency disqualifies you from divine help. Isaiah 40:29 says: "He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength."

God helps those who cannot help themselves. That is the message of the story of Uzziah. In typical fashion, the chronicler tells the story in two scenes. Verses 1-15 record Uzziah's great success. Verses 16-23 record his tragic downfall. The story of Uzziah reminds us that it is not how you start that counts with God. Anyone can start fast, but can you finish strong? To hear the Lord say "Well done!" at the end of this adventure of faith, remember that God helps those who cannot help themselves. 2 Chronicles 26 makes this point by profiling two seasons in Uzziah's life.

I. GOD HELPED UZZIAH

JIM BAKKER, the founder of the PTL Ministries and a early champion of prosperity theology, wrote an autobiography after being released from prison for mail fraud and conspiracy, appropriately entitled, "I Was Wrong." So is any one who teaches that godliness life guarantees health, wealth, and success. Yet in avoiding the false teaching of Prosperity Theology, we must not avoid the biblical truth that God blesses the righteous. Psalm 1:3 describes the one who delights in God's word: "He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." God delights in blessing godly people. God delights in rewarding righteous people. God delights in promoting faithful people. That is the testimony of Uzziah. Verse 5 states: God made him prosper. Consider the scope and source of Uzziah's success.

A. THE SCOPE OF HIS SUCCESS

Verse 1 says: “And all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah.” Amaziah was a foolish king who went to war unadvisedly. He was defeated in battle and taken captive to Samaria. Amaziah was dethroned by conspiracy, rebellion, and assassination. But the people of Judah did not hold Uzziah responsible for his father’s mistakes. They made Uzziah king when he was sixteen years old. Verse 2 records his territorial expansion. Verses 3 records his long tenure. Uzziah reigned for fifty-two years, longer than any other king of Judah. Verses 3-5 record his godly life. Verses 6-8 record his military victories. Verses 9-11 record his strategic planning. Verses 11-13 record his strong army. Verses 14-15 record his massive arsenal. Verse 15 reports: “his fame spread far.” A king is famous in his own land. But Uzziah was internationally recognized as a Jewish king whose greatness, success, and accomplishments could only be rivaled by David and Solomon.

B. THE SOURCE OF HIS SUCCESS

2 Chronicles 26 reports the accomplishments of Uzziah. Moreover, it tells us the source of his great accomplishments. Verses 4-5 reads: “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.” Verse 17 tells us the source of Uzziah’s military success: “God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabians who lived in Gurbaal and against the Meunites.” Verse 15b states reason behind the international prestige King Uzziah enjoyed: “And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong.” Uzziah was the beneficiary of divine help, grace, favor, wisdom, and blessings. God marvelously helped him.

The fact that the Lord helped Uzziah does not discount Uzziah’s legitimate accomplishments. Uzziah was a godly man, visionary leader, and military hero. It would not be right to ignore his personal accomplishments. When a person denies his or her accomplishments to appear humble, it is usually a veil that covers pride under a veneer of modesty. To say that you didn’t do it when you actually did it is not humility. It is dishonesty. It is humility when you admit that you did it and acknowledge that you did not do it by yourself. What you are, God made you. What you have, God gave you. What you know, God taught you. Where you are, God brought you. Humility is when you acknowledge that your success is rooted in the help of God. That was the testimony of Uzziah. It can also be yours!

- **If you seek the Lord, he will help you.**
- **If you call on the Lord, he will help you.**
- **If you trust in the Lord, he will help you.**
- **If you obey the Lord, he will help you.**
- **If you submit to the Lord, he will help you.**

**YIELD NOT TO TEMPTATION, FOR YIELDING IS SIN;
EACH VICTORY WILL HELP YOU SOME OTHER TO WIN;
FIGHT MANFULLY ONWARD, DARK PASSIONS SUBDUE;
LOOK EVER TO JESUS, HE'LL CARRY YOU THROUGH.**

**ASK THE SAVIOR TO HELP YOU, COMFORT STRENGTH AND KEEP YOU;
HE IS WILLING TO AIDE YOU, HE WILL CARRY YOU THROUGH.**

II. GOD HUMBLED UZZIAH

The story of Uzziah is told in nine verses in 2 Kings 14-15. These verses focus on Uzziah's military success and territorial expansion of Judah. But the story ends with an out-of-place statement in 2 Kings 15:5 "And the Lord touched the king, so that he was a leper." Why would the Lord send judgment on a godly king he had highly favored? 2 Kings leaves this question unanswered. But 2 Chronicles 26 fills in the blanks. The God who initially helped Uzziah ultimately humbled Uzziah. More specifically, God humiliated Uzziah. Uzziah went from a free-fall from divine favor to divine judgment because of sinful pride. It is said that D. MARTIN LLOYD-JONES prayed the same prayer every day: "Lord, keep me from pride." This should be our daily prayer so that sinful pride does not bring us down as it did Uzziah.

A. THE CRISIS OF PRIDE

Verse 16 reads: "But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction." This dramatic turning point teaches us two important lessons about spiritual pride.

PRIDE IS ROOTED IN SELF-SUFFICIENCY. Uzziah was always a strong king. A lesser man would not have accomplished the things he did. But there was a time when Uzziah looked at his kingdom, possessions, and accomplishments and declared, "What a mighty God we serve." But at some point, Uzziah looked at the same things and declared, "What a wonderful king I am!" One of the disturbing details of Uzziah's story is that there is no place where Uzziah acknowledged, credited, or thanked God for his success. Uzziah forgot the source of his success. He began to credit himself for all that he had accomplished.

When I was a boy preacher, I read a series of articles by MANUEL SCOTT, JR. entitled "Preacher Wait Your Turn." In one of the articles, Scott warns preachers not to be guilty of "plagiarizing the Holy Spirit." It is when you take credit for things that only the Spirit of the Lord can do. Preachers are not the only ones who are guilty of plagiarizing the Holy Spirit. Every one of us must be careful not to take credit for what the Lord has done. Jeremiah 9:23-24 says, "Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.'"

PRIDE RESULTS IN SELF-DESTRUCTION. Verse 16 says, “But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction.” In the first half of this chapter, we meet a prosperous king with strategic brilliance, a well-prepared army, and state-of-the-art weapons. These factors alone would have made Uzziah a formidable opponent. There was also a hidden sovereign factor behind his great success. The Lord marvelously helped Uzziah. Psalm 118:6 says, “The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” With God on his side, Uzziah was undefeatable. But this invincible king became vulnerable. When Uzziah became strong, he was lifted up in pride to his destruction. No one destroyed Uzziah. He destroyed himself! There is no sin the Lord judges more quickly or severely than pride.

- **It was the sin for which Satan was cast down.**
- **It was the sin for which Adam and Eve was expelled from the Garden of Eden.**
- **It was the sin for which Samson lost his hair, strength, sight, freedom and life.**
- **It was the sin for which Herod was eaten by worms on his throne.**
- **It was the sin for which the Uzziah self-destructed.**

Pride can destroy what devotion to God has built up. Self-sufficiency inevitably leads to self-destruction. Proverbs 16:18 says, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

B. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PRIDE

Verse 16 says: “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.” To be unfaithful is to violate covenant loyalty to God. God was faithful to Uzziah. But Uzziah was unfaithful to God. “It was through pride that the devil became the devil,” wrote C.S. LEWIS. “Pride leads to every other vice; it is the complete anti-God state of mind.” What are the characteristics of sinful pride that causes one to be unfaithful to the Lord?

REBELLION AGAINST GOD’S AUTHORITY. Verse 16 says: “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.” This was a gross act of spiritual rebellion. In the Old Testament, there were three anointed offices: prophets, priests, and kings. There was a strict separation of powers between these offices. For instance, a king was not authorized to function in the role of a priest. Exodus 30:1-10 and Numbers 18:1-7 make it clear that only the priests were authorized to sacrifice on the altar of incense. The king was anointed to rule the land. But he was not consecrated to minister at the altar.

The separation of powers between prophets, priests, and kings affirms the total sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. Only Christ holds all three offices simultaneously. Jesus the Prophet reveals the will of God. Jesus the Priest provides access to God. Jesus the King exercises the rule of God. We need no other prophet to reveal God’s mind. We need no other priest to secure access. We need no other king to advance heaven’s agenda. Jesus is our all-sufficient Prophet, Priest, and King. In

John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Uzziah was a sinful but godly king who needed a priest to offer sacrifices on his behalf. Uzziah knew his God-given restrictions. He also knew the grave consequences of disobedience. But pride had so filled his heart with rebellion that he did not care. He ruled Judah. Now he was also determined to rule the house of God. It was not enough to be king. Uzziah wanted to be priest as well.

REBELLION AGAINST GODLY AUTHORITY. Verses 17-18 says, "But Azariah the priest when 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 son 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.'" This chapter is the only biblical reference to Azariah the priest. Verse 20 calls him "the chief priest." He seemingly appears out of nowhere to confront Uzziah. But he was not alone. Azariah showed up with eighty other priests of the Lord. These priests were no royal puppets on the king's payroll. Verse 17 calls them "men of valor." Accompanied by eighty honorable men, Azariah withstood Uzziah. They boldly told the king it was not his place to burn incense on the altar. "You are wrong," they said. "And it will bring you no honor from the Lord."

Azariah's confrontation with Uzziah reminds us how important it is to have godly people in our lives that will tell us the truth. There was a day when Uzziah submitted to godly influence. Verse 5 says: "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." Now no one could tell Uzziah anything. This was a key factor to his great downfall. We all need godly people in our lives that will tell us the truth. Proverbs 27:6 says: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy." This confrontation with Azariah also reminds us that God always sends warning before judgment. Psalm 95:7-8 warns: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." If the Lord is speaking to your heart, do not be stubborn.

C. THE CONSEQUENCES OF PRIDE

Verses 19-20 report the downfall of King Uzziah: "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. Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he had leprosy on his forehead! And they rushed him out quickly, and he himself hurried to go out, because the Lord had struck him." Notice the graphic terminology the Chronicler uses to describe Uzziah's downfall: "the Lord had struck him." Here is the great warning of Uzziah's downfall: The Lord knows how to put you in your place. In Luke 18:14b, Jesus says: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." 1 Peter

5:6 says, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you." If we do not humble ourselves, the mighty hand of God will not do it for us. You do not want God to have to put you in your place.

There's two ways to view to view the downfall of Uzziah. On one hand, the striking of Uzziah with leprosy was an expression of God's holy wrath. On the other hand, the striking of Uzziah with leprosy was also an expression of God's sparing mercy. Uzziah's leprosy was divine mercy because the Lord could have issued a punishment much worse than leprosy. In Numbers 18:7, the Lord said to Aaron, "And you and your sons with you shall guard your priesthood for all that concerns the altar and that is within the veil; and you shall serve. I give your priesthood as a gift, and any outsider who comes near shall be put to death." The mercy and grace of God on your life is evidence in the fact that you are still alive! Since the Lord has been merciful, you should break up with yourself and seek the Lord's help! During an interview, the late evangelical scholar, CARL F. HENRY – who at the time was in his seventies – was asked how he had managed to remain so humble for so many decades. DR. HENRY replied, "How can anyone be arrogant when he stands beside the cross?" May this be your prayer:

**JESUS, KEEP ME NEAR THE CROSS.
THERE A PRECIOUS FOUNTAIN –
FREE TO ALL, A HEALING STREAM –
FLOWS FROM CALVARY'S MOUNTAIN**

**NEAR THE CROSS, A TREMBLING SOUL,
LOVE AND MERCY FOUND ME;
THERE THE BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR
SHEDS IT BEAMS AROUND ME.**

**NEAR THE CROSS! O LAMB OF GOD,
BRING ITS SCENES BEFORE ME;
HELP ME WALK FROM DAY TO DAY,
WITH ITS SHADOWS OVER ME**

**NEAR THE CROSS I'LL WATCH AND WAIT
HOPING, TRUSTING EVER,
TILL I REACH THE GOLDEN STRAND,
JUST BEYOND THE RIVER**

**IN THE CROSS, IN THE CROSS,
BE MY GLORY EVER
TILL MY RAPTURED SOUL SHALL FIND
REST BEYOND THE RIVER**