

2 Chronicles 26: King Uzziah

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[0 : 00] Well, tonight we're going to spend a bit of time looking together at 2 Chronicles chapter 26 and we're going to really cover the whole chapter, but I'll just read verse 1 again.

All the people of Judah took Uzziah who was 16 years old and made him king instead of his father, Amaziah.

And as we study this chapter we are going to be looking at the life and reign of King Uzziah and the lessons that we can learn from him. Often when you go to a chapter right in the depths of the Old Testament it's easy to think, well what relevance does this have for us today?

How can we learn anything from these events from so long ago? Well, I hope that we will see that the issues at stake in this chapter are of immense relevance to us and there's a lot that we can learn from 2 Chronicles 26.

But when we come to a chapter like this it's good to start off by just getting ourselves orientated in terms of the historical context and where all these events fit in to the timeline of the Old Testament. Because when you come to the kings that we have recorded for us it's very easy to get confused and we may well be on fairly unfamiliar territory when we come to look at Uzziah. Don't worry if that's the case, hopefully we'll see where we are quite quickly.

[1 : 37] Whenever it comes to the Old Testament kings the main reference point for us all is David. He was the model king and his reign was the high point in Old Testament history.

Although he wasn't the first king, Saul was king before him. David though in many ways in terms of God's purposes, God's plan he was the starting point of God's monarchy in Israel.

So David is a reference point in terms of being the model king but he's also a very good reference point in terms of dates because the 40 year reign of David straddled the turn of the millennium in 1000 BC. So in other words when you think of David think 1000 BC that was more or less when he lived.

After David came Solomon, after Solomon came Rehoboam and Rehoboam's reign is another key moment because after he became king the nation of Israel split in two and you had the northern kingdom which was made up of 10 tribes and it was called Israel with its capital city in Samaria and then you had the southern kingdom which was Judah and Benjamin the two remaining tribes and it was known as Judah and its capital remained in Jerusalem and that was where the the Davidic line of kings continued and it's always helpful to see these things on a map. Here you have more or less the kingdom of Israel as it would have been under the reign of of David but as we said when David's grandson came to the throne the kingdom split in two so you had Israel in the north and you had Judah in the south and first and second kings record the history of both of these nations and in terms of the northern kingdom it was it was a very bleak history because in the north there the kingdoms every one of them turned away from God they were all bad and just over 200 years after that division Israel was conquered by Assyria. If we look at the next slide we can see that that next to Israel you had Syria next to Syria you had Assyria which was the big superpower of this period in history and the northern kingdom in the year 722 BC was crushed out of existence by the nation by the empire of Assyria.

First and second chronicles is a little different from first and second kings because first and second kings covered both Israel and Judah first and second chronicles focuses much more just on Judah and although Israel had all bad kings Judah had a kind of mixture some kings were good some kings were not so good so here's a list of the kings that we have from David through to Uzziah just to run us through here David 1000 BC then after him you had Solomon and so on now I've put them into different colors blue is good red is bad and orange is good and bad because some of the kings were good in many ways but they also made made terrible mistakes so we had Rehoboam in 931 not a not a great king Abijah after him again not good then things improved

[5 : 20] Esa was was on the whole a good king Jehoshaphat also a very good king although both did make mistakes then again things went bad Jehoram Ahaziah Queen Athaliah was a very very low point in the history then things improved a little with Joash he started well but in later life he fell away exactly the same thing happened with his son Amaziah he it says that he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord yet not with a whole heart and later in life he ended up worshiping idols and he actually actually challenged the northern kingdom to war so if you think about that in David you had a united kingdom but by the time we reach Amaziah these kingdoms are not only split they're at war with each other then we come to Uzair who was king from 792 to 740 and although we do we did read about an mistake a big mistake at the end of Uzair's life we've still made him blue because he was a good king in many many ways in terms of other books of the Bible King Uzair comes at the same time as

Josea same time as Amos and the same time as Isaiah and you I'm sure you remember in Isaiah chapter 6 we read of how he was called by God in the year that King Uzair died. Now the thing I want us to notice here is that if you look at Uzair you can see that he comes at the end of a succession of poor kings and the consequence of that is that he comes to the throne in a period of weakness.

His predecessors had failed and the nation was now in decline and as we look at Isaiah in more detail I want us just to study study it under two simple headings we're going to look at what Uzair did right and we're going to look at what Uzair did wrong. So first of all what did Uzair do right well he did a lot of things right and on the whole he was a very good king. From Jehoran through to Uzair we have about 50 years of weakness and failing on the throne of Judah and when Uzair came to the throne things were at a really low ebb. His father Amos and had suffered a humiliating defeat against the northern kingdom. We can read about that in chapter 25 I'll just summarize it here. Now it gets confusing because around this time you had Joash there was two Joashes one was king of Judah one was king of Israel and they weren't far away from each other in history. So Joash king of Israel that's northern kingdom and Amosiah king of Judah that's Uzair's father faced one another in battle at Beth Shemez and Judah was defeated and Amosiah king of Judah was captured and he ended up being humiliated. Jerusalem was attacked the wall was broken down treasures from the temple were seized and so by the time the 16 year old Uzair came to the throne Judah was a nation that was humiliated and wounded and so what on earth would you do coming to the throne age 16 in that kind of situation what would you do? Well we read that Uzair did the best thing he possibly could. He set himself to seek God in the days of Zachariah who instructed him in the fear of God and as long as he sought the Lord God made him prosper and prosper he certainly did because the result of of Uzair coming to the throne was that the circumstances of Judah quickly began to improve and from verse 6 to verse 15 in this chapter we have this great summary of all that

Uzair achieved and as we read through that we can see the qualities that he had. First of all it's clear that he was courageous we read how he went up to Philistine and he made war against them defeating them and and other opponents the Arabians the Minuites the Ammonites he bravely stood up to them and overcame them. He was responsible we see that from verse 9 he built towers defending the nation providing for the nation he even made sure that that he gave attention to agriculture he loved the soil he had farmers vine dressers he really looked after his kingdom he wasn't building a massive palace for himself at the expense of the nation he was being responsible and and improving the defenses and infrastructure of the nation. Verse 11 onwards tells us that he was well organized you have this wonderful list of soldiers officers secretaries commanders numbered organized ready to help the king if an enemy came and then we read a really interesting thing in verses 14 and 15 it tells us that he prepared for them shield spears shield spears helmets coats of mail bows stones for slinging and then it tells us something really interesting it tells us that he was an innovative king says he made machines invented by skillful men to be on the towers in the corner to shoot arrows and great stones and I don't know maybe it's just because I'm an engineer but I think that's a brilliant verse you think of of how he was innovative developing new things for the good of his nation so he was courageous he was responsible he was organized he was innovative and these are not words that we often associated associate with the christian life but do you know if you think about it they all are important in our lives as christians and as a church as christians we need to be courageous now we are immensely blessed by the fact that here in scotland we don't face the persecution that that many of our brothers and sisters face in other lands

and god forbid that we ever forget how blessed we are and and and the plight that others experience but nevertheless we still have to be brave as christians what we brave this week if you're at work and you're under pressure from the crowd from the people around you to do things that you know are wrong to think too much or to gossip or to mistreat somebody need to be brave need to be brave to stand up to them when we are facing a world that is increasingly opposed to biblical teaching we need to be brave in that context to stand up for what we know is right but it applies in other ways too in our relationships with one another the bible tells us that we are to be close to one another we are to open be open to one another we are to bear one another's burdens we are to share our problems we are even to confess our sins you know it takes courage to do that it takes courage to be open with one another and likewise many aspects of serving god inviting someone to church i don't know about you but i don't find that easy i need to be brave in that context we need courage to witness courage to try new things courage to admit when we are wrong courage to apologize there's a lot of courage involved in being a christian and of course we [13 : 43] must never forget that the christian life is a battle yes we are on god's side but that means that we are enemies of satan and his kingdom and we need to be brave and i just wonder if that's one of the main reasons why jesus so frequently said to his disciples do not be afraid because he knew that courage was a vital part of the christian life so we can learn from usiah in terms of courage we also learned from him in terms of the fact that he was responsible because we have to be responsible too when we think of a king we often think of somebody in great a position of great privilege don't we we think oh wouldn't it be amazing to be a king imagine you'd have all that stuff and that massive house and you'd never have to worry for anything you'd never have need of anything we think of being a king as being in a position of enormous privilege and that of course is true in many ways but the emphasis in the old testament is not so much on the privilege of being king the emphasis is on the responsibility of being king and one of the images that is used for a king in the old testament is a shepherd indeed david the model king was a shepherd and the reason that image is used is because just as a shepherd is to care for his sheep to protect them to lead them to provide for them so too a king is to protect and provide and care for his people that's why usiah such a great example he built these towers he he defended his nation he made sure his people were safe he was a shepherd king and of course as we said in the morning the same word is used to describe elders in the new testament era we as elders are to shepherd the flock to guide to protect to feed and to care for and so responsibility is at the heart of biblical leadership and that question of responsibility applies to all of us in our lives as Christians we all have responsibilities with our family our work our possessions I know that you are all juggling responsibilities all the time and and and I think you do it remarkably well but we must remember that that is part of what God wants us to do to take our responsibilities seriously because privilege and responsibility always go hand in hand in the Christian life and I think this is an area where where our contemporary world has gone wrong because remember the biblical biblical model is privilege and responsibility the two together today we have people everywhere and all too often all they want is the privilege and this is something that you see in the news all the time people demand their privileges but yet don't say very much about their responsibilities but they don't use the word privileges they use a different word they use the word rights it's the same thing people demand their rights but they don't always talk about their responsibilities and of course this is where we see that the biblical worldview makes perfect sense of life

for example what does the Bible say about the NHS well that might seem like a really strange thing to say what does the Bible say about the NHS well the NHS is an amazing privilege but you can't have it without the responsibility of taxation privilege and responsibility go hand in hand it's the biblical pattern being applied same in other areas of life democracy you can't have the privilege of democracy without the responsibility of accepting defeat if the person you vote for is ends up in the minority and the same the privilege of safety we can't have the privilege of safety without this responsibility of enforcing the law this is one of the many many many reasons why it is the biblical worldview alone that makes sense of life and of reality god says that with privilege comes responsibility the two go hand in hand and Uzair is a good example of that he had all the privileges of being king but never did he neglect his responsibilities we must be the same we also learn from Uzair that we need to be organized again that's something that we don't necessarily think about very much in terms of our Christian lives but you look at Uzair he was really well organized and he had his kingdom functioning well everything was in order and this raises a really interesting

question if I ask the question what sort of things are important to god what would you say what what comes into your mind instantly if I say what things are important to god what are the first things that come into your mind well you will probably think of things like righteousness holiness faith obedience worship truth of course these things are all immensely important to god but running right through the whole of scripture from beginning to end we see another quality that is at the heart of what god likes and that is orderliness god likes things to be in order because if you look at creation at the very beginning you see god putting everything in order you look at the nation of israel there was this intricate structure of tribes and households everything organized in a very clear way and you look at the tabernacle and the temple everything is measured and organized to the tiniest detail god likes things to be in order that's why we read in the new testament in titus paul says to titus I left you in caith so that you might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you so having elders having deacons having a congregational structure is all part of the organization that god likes so that means that we as a church we've got to be well organized and that means that that that's something so simple like our rotas are really important creche rota cleaning rota door duty rota t duty rota they might seem these things might seem so insignificant but whenever we're doing something on a rota the vital question is this who are you doing that for who are you doing creche duty for next sunday morning

well there's only one true answer to that you're doing it for god and that makes it immensely important so organization is important we need to be organized as individual christians and that that involves making sure that our priorities are always right and it's good to stop and think about these things because I find myself slipping in so many important areas we slip and stumble in terms of bible reading in terms of our prayer life in terms of our involvement in gospel activities it's very very easy for these things to slip and good god-honoring organization will help us in these ways usiah is telling us that we need to be organized and then we come to the last thing that we saw about usiah which which as an engineer I find most interesting where it says it teaches us that he was innovative and we as christians need to be innovative as well as usiah developed new machines in order to defend his people to protect them so the use of innovation was enabling him to fulfill the role that god had given him and we are to learn from his example because innovation is something that we can use and embrace if it will help us to fulfill the duties and responsibilities that god has given us that's why we willingly consider new things if they will further the gospel in terms of outreach and discipleship innovation is an important thing but two vital things to remember we have to remember first of all that we always need to have a scriptural basis for what we're doing we must never seek innovation just for the sake of it but only if it will enable us to become a more biblical god-honoring church and of course the opposite is true we should never resist change simply for the sake of it we should at all times hold on to what scripture says and to make that our priority so everything that we do in terms of innovation must have a scriptural basis but we also have to remember that many of the things that we do as a church were once an innovation a church building is an innovation because there was none in the New Testament things like lighting, pews, microphones, a screen, they were all innovations once and sitting in pews instead of around a table for communion that was an innovation and recording services all of these have been excellent innovations to suit the needs of the church innovation has been an immense blessing to us over the years and that's something that we want to continue but as I said the vital thing is that we always always always hold on to scripture the authority of the bible must always be at the forefront of everything that we do that we do so Uzair is an example to us in many many interesting ways in terms of courage in terms of organization in terms of innovation in terms of all of these things that are perhaps things we don't often think about but at the heart of Uzair's success lay two vital things he sought the Lord and he had a godly mentor go back to verse five he set himself to seek God in the days of Zachariah who instructed him in the fear of God and as long as he sought the Lord God made him prosper and so he sought the Lord he purposefully and deliberately sought the Lord the word sought there conveys the idea of looking for something with care seeking with care and I think that that is conveying to us the fact that I say that Uzair in everything that he did he didn't just rush on as I am so prone to do but he stopped to make sure that in his decision making his conduct his planning his ambitions he did all of these things with a careful consideration of what God wanted it's so so easy to rush on ahead and to forget about God and part of the reason for that is that there's always so many things to do but Jesus reminds us that we must seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and then all the other things will fall into place the word seeking there is really interesting because if you think about it if you are seeking something imagine you've left your

glasses somewhere you've lost your glasses do you mean I can't see anything I have to put them back on but if you imagine that you've left your glasses somewhere you're looking for something you would say to yourself where have I put that where have I put this where have I put that but do we ever ask the question where have I put God where have I put God in my plans where have I put God in my finances where have I put God in my work in my hobbies in my lifestyle and if we find that we have left God out of any of these areas then like Uzair we need to set ourselves to seek him but Uzair also we see from this verse had a godly mentor this person Zachariah now we know pretty much nothing about Zachariah apart from his name it's not the same Zachariah who we have in the second last book of the Old Testament he lived about 300 years later about that he lived a lot further on so it's not that Zachariah we know very little about him but this man whoever he was he instructed Uzair explained things to him and most importantly he taught him to fear God and that is what lies at the heart of biblical wisdom a humble and reverent devotion to God and this man was a wonderful mentor to Uzair it's a reminder that having a mentor is immensely important if you look at the Bible you'll see that the pattern of of people being mentored is very common you've got Moses mentoring Joshua Elijah mentoring Alicia

Barnabas mentors Paul and then Paul goes on and mentors Timothy and it's reminding us of the fact that biblical Christianity is never ever ever in isolation God has made us to be together to help each other to talk together to pray together to spend time together to encourage each other to bear one another's burdens God has instructed us to do all of these things it's what he wants and we have to ask ourselves a really important question do we mentor each other it's vital to remember that mentoring is not an innovation it's a thoroughly biblical principle of discipleship Uzair had a good mentor so he's fascinating because he he he makes us touch on many areas of the Christian life that that certainly I find I don't think about often enough Uzair was a great king and under his reign the fortunes of Judah were turned around but not everything about him was a success because the second half of verse 15 powerfully says something to us his fame spread far for he was marvelously helped until he was strong and it just makes it just stops us in our tracks when we see that and as we read from this position of success and strength Uzair made a terrible mistake that was to ruin the rest of his life we read from verse 16 how he decided that he wanted to go into the temple he wanted to burn incense on the altar of incense and as he went in there the the priest tried to prevent him as that I the priest and 80 men with him tried to stop him but he refused to listen he was angry and he would not pay attention and the result was leprosy broke out upon him and of course leprosy was a highly contagious skin disease and anyone who suffered from it had to be immediately quarantined and so they rushed Uzair out and for the rest of his days he had to be isolated excluded from the house of the Lord because he was a leper and again there are some really important lessons here I just want to touch on three or four briefly together here we see the danger of success the danger of fame Uzair had a prosperous reign he'd achieved greatness in the eyes of all around him and it's so interesting to think if you imagine you could look at Uzair at the at the height of his reign you would say what what an outstanding leader he is able to handle his officials around about him he's able to handle his people well he is able to handle the nations around him well because even all the way to Egypt they knew about him and they respected him so in terms of everything that was around him Uzair could handle it he was outstanding but his downfall didn't come from without it came from within because when he was strong he grew proud remember he came to the throne in weakness and he sought God and there's a vital lesson because in many ways it's easier to seek God

[33 : 31] when we are weak because our need is obvious now that's something that we still see all the time you see people who are crushed by bereavement they're seeking God then you see people who are terrified of an illness that they're facing they'll seek God then but then when they're strong God gets forgotten when Uzair's weakness had passed he forgot that he was still utterly dependent on God and that's something that we must guard against because every success that you and I have as a Christian or that we have as a church or as a denomination every success that we have is a potential trap because pride can spring up in our hearts and instead of carefully seeking God we forget about him and we must never ever ever forget the words of Jesus when he says

I am the vine you are the branches whoever abides in me and I in him he it is that bears much fruit for apart from me you can do nothing that's what Uzair forgot so we see the danger of success we also see the danger of a desire for what we can't have if you think of Uzair he had pretty much

everything he was the king with all the privileges that that involved and yet this incident towards the end of his life arose from the fact that he wanted to do something that he wasn't allowed to do and that desire the desire to have what you can't have has been at the root of sin since Eve looked at the fruit and saw that it was good for food and that it was a delight for the eyes and ever since then the world has constantly been attracted to anything that is out of reach so so so so many of the issues faced by society can be traced back to this that if you can't have it if I can't have it I want it that happens in so many in so many areas of life and this is a very trivial example but I don't know about you but I find whenever I have to replace my car there's the one that you can't afford that you want you think oh I would love that and you console yourself by thinking well I'll be able to afford it next time I need a car because in four years time or whatever they'll be cheaper and I'll be able to afford it of course four years later I don't want it because it's lost all its appeal now that's a bit of a silly example maybe I'm the only person in the world is like that but maybe you're the same in so many ways the human race wants what it can't have and so this king Uzair who had provided so much for his people was ruined because he wanted for himself something that he wasn't allowed and we must guard against this attitude and it's reminding us of the fact that contentment is a vital element of our health as Christians

Paul writes in his old age godliness with contentment is great gain how you Ziya needed to hear those words for we brought nothing into the world we cannot take anything out of it but if we have food and clothing with these would be content but those who desire to be rich fall into temptation into a snare into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction now Paul hears in the speaking in the context of riches but the principle applies to all things Uzair who had riches beyond anyone else in the nation still wanted what was out of reach and so we must strive for contentment content with what we have content with the responsibilities that we are given if you look at Uzair he tried to do a job that was not for him that's what the priest said is it is not for you and sometimes there are privileges and responsibilities that other people have but which are not for us and that's part of the beauty of a church we don't all do everything we don't all have every gift we all serve together with the gifts that God has given

Uzair is teaching us about the danger of desiring something that we can't have we also see the danger of not listening because if you look at this incident Uzair is warned against his actions by Azariah and 80 other priests imagine the scene imagine um imagine we but this was the temple building imagine that I was standing at the altar of incense about to to to to burn the incense and 80 people 80 ministers or 80 elders came flooding in saying don't do it don't do it there would have been a huge commotion yet Uzair refuses to listen and that is simply the fruit of the pride that has arisen in his heart remember it says that when he grew strong he became proud and this is the fruit of that pride manifesting itself because listening to the priests would have meant humbling himself but of course a proud heart does not like to be humbled and again that's a danger we have to guard against as Christians we should always be ready to listen to a wise word from a brother or a sister in Christ that affects all of that's including me I always need to be ready to be told or to be corrected or to be guided and as Christians we should always be ready to say I'm sorry I was wrong if Uzair had said that he would never have become a leper and then last of all we see the danger of getting angry because if you look at the sequence of events and ask the question what is it that triggers the leprosy if we read through this chapter quickly we could easily say Uzair got leprosy because he went to burn incense on the altar and in a sense that's correct but it's not exactly correct because what is it that triggers the leprosy is it entering the temple no it's not is it picking up the censor no is it not listening no the trigger is his anger as it tells us here when he became angry with the priests leprosy broke out in his forehead if you think about it God was giving Uzair a chance to repent he sent those priests in as a warning to him their rebuke was an act of mercy calling Uzair away from this potential disaster in his life but Uzair not only refused to listen but he became angry and that is what triggered his leprosy and we all need to think about that because I look at myself and I ask what is my instinctive reaction when someone rebukes me or when someone disagrees with me what's my instinctive reaction

I get annoyed and then I realize that I am just like Uzair and it can all be traced back to pride in our hearts where we forget about God and we think that we know best Uzair began his reign by seeking the Lord in humility but by the end of his life he made the terrible mistake of thinking that he knew best the key question is what about us it's a reminder to us that we do not come to God boasting about our achievements we do not come to God on the strength of our own personality we do not come to God in the glory of our successes we come to God saying Lord I need you as Jesus

said everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted
let's pray together

[43 : 34] God our Father we acknowledge that your word has got so much to teach us and here we read of King Uzair and we want to emulate the wisdom and godliness that he showed through much of his life but we want to avoid the pride that ensnared him at the end of his life and we know Lord that that we are just as capable of making the same mistake and we pray that in your mercy you would keep us keep us constantly aware of the fact that we need you and help us even to grasp that we need you more than we will ever really understand and so Lord we come to you in humility praying that you would just hold us and keep us and lead us and guide us because in a world full of sin and with hearts that are so easily tempted all

Lord God we need you and so we look to you in Jesus name amen