No human being can begin to imagine the numerous things that have happened throughout the history of the world, and the books of the world cannot contain all its stories. Some stories and events are known, however, and some are recorded in the Bible. God selected specific events to be recorded because of their significance. He wanted to leave us with powerful examples for our learning. Paul exhorted, “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4). God has given us such an example in the life of King Uzziah, as recorded in 2 Kings 15:1–5 and 2 Chronicles 26. As we study his life, we discover the wonderful strength of seeking God and the dreadful weakness of pride.

THE STRENGTH OF THE GOOD KING

Uzziah became king of Judah at age sixteen, following the death of his father, Amaziah. The Scriptures highly commend Uzziah as one who “did right in the sight of the LORD” (2 Kings 15:3a; 2 Chronicles 26:4a). We can only conclude that King Uzziah was a man who withstood Satan’s temptations in his life and chose to do right.

God has revealed how Uzziah developed and maintained this commendable attribute of doing right. The writer of 2 Chronicles said of Uzziah, “He continued to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding through the vision of God” (26:5a). Although Uzziah was king and carried the authority rightly bestowed by that position, he humbled himself in the early part of his reign. Uzziah could easily have presumed that God had put him in this high leadership position expecting him to make all the decisions by himself. He could have supposed that, since God was directing him, his understanding was best. On the contrary, we find Uzziah seeking advice.

Uzziah’s source of advice is important. He elected to listen to Zechariah above others. He did not seek Zechariah for political advantage or fame, but because Zechariah was one who had “understanding through the vision of God” (2 Chronicles 26:5). Uzziah wanted to hear God’s wisdom on important matters, instead of the thinking of earthly advisers. Uzziah chose to listen to God’s opinion, as opposed to taking opinion polls from people as leaders often do today. God disclosed Uzziah’s fine example here. Instead of trying to gain political advantage or to be popular, Uzziah commendably chose to do the right thing. Choosing to know God’s instruction on a matter and doing it was Uzziah’s greatest strength. This is the first attribute that God has highlighted for us to study and to follow.

As we read further, we learn that God blessed Uzziah because he chose to know and to do God’s will. “As long as he sought the LORD, God prospered him” (2 Chronicles 26:5b). There is not always a direct correlation between following God step by step and receiving earthly
blessings free from trials and sorrows. We need only to look at the life of Job to learn differently. Job was described by God as “blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil” (Job 1:1b); yet Job suffered unbelievably at the hand of Satan. He suffered beyond what most people can even comprehend. Note, however, that God blessed Job at the end of his days more than He had at the beginning.

As we look at the life of Uzziah, we can read of many blessings that God gave to Uzziah for having sought Him. Uzziah had a vast, organized, well-supplied army to defend Judah and to conquer others. “The total number of the heads of the households, of valiant warriors was 2,600. Under their direction was an elite army of 307,500” (2 Chronicles 26:12, 13a). Uzziah’s army was described as one of mighty power that helped him defeat his enemies.

Because of God’s help, Uzziah was also a great leader for his army. He prepared his army with quality equipment, including spears, armor, and shields. He also extended to them advanced inventions created by skillful men of his day. Because of this, their fame spread to other kingdoms. Uzziah conquered the Philistines and other nations that fought against Judah during his reign. He tore down the fortress walls of many great cities (2 Chronicles 26:6). God helped him to advance because Uzziah obeyed the Lord in what he did. Uzziah built towers in the city of Jerusalem and also in the desert. These towers served as a major defense for his people. From these towers his army was able to defend the people of Judah (2 Chronicles 26:9, 15).

As king, Uzziah was a great leader of the people. He advanced himself and the people of his kingdom. He dug wells for the livestock in the lowlands and in the plains. He also had farmers and vinedressers in the mountains and in the fields. With the help of God, Uzziah was able to produce a very prosperous nation. Everything we see in the early years of Uzziah’s reign points to one conclusion: God blesses those who seek Him.

**THE WEAKNESS OF THE PROUD KING**

As Uzziah grew older, he did not grow wiser. He allowed the strength that God had given him to become his weakness. This demonstrates the deceptive nature of Satan. What was once a great potential for Uzziah led to his downfall. A look through the Bible produces example after example of how Satan can take something good, given by God to benefit man, and turn it into something evil that can destroy man. Adam and Eve were given the wonderful gift of choice, yet they chose to trust Satan rather than God (Genesis 3). King David was given great power to rule his kingdom, but he used that power to commit adultery with Bathsheba and to have her husband killed (2 Samuel 11). Further, God gave mankind intimacy as a blessing for marriage (Hebrews 13:4), but people have turned sex into adultery and homosexuality. Paul cautioned us to beware of the devil’s schemes (Ephesians 6:11).

Strength alone was not Uzziah’s downfall; his pride in his strength caused him to fall. Eventually, he began to trust in himself more than in God. “When he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly” (2 Chronicles 26:16a). Uzziah entered God’s holy temple to burn incense on the altar. God’s law specified that only the priests, the sons of Aaron, were to offer incense. Uzziah should have recalled how King Saul, the first king of Israel, had fallen by offering a sacrifice to God instead of waiting for God’s prophet, Samuel, to come and offer the sacrifice (1 Samuel 13). Uzziah made the same mistake.

God said that Uzziah’s heart was “proud” (2 Chronicles 26:16). In other words, he exalted himself. As Uzziah’s pride set in, it appears that God gave him an opportunity to repent before his eventual downfall. Azariah, a priest of God, followed King Uzziah into the temple along with eighty priests of the Lord. He commanded the king to leave, reminding him that he was not permitted to burn incense to the Lord. This gave Uzziah an opportunity to change his heart, but his pride again took over. Instead of listening to Azariah’s rebuke to leave the temple, Uzziah became furious, determined to offer the sacrifice himself. The humble king who once sought the Lord for direction had changed. God struck Uzziah with leprosy, and he was cast out of the temple. Uzziah remained a leper until he died (2 Chronicles 26:21). What an epitaph!
LESSONS FROM THE PROUD KING

Lesson 1: Pride is a common failing among people. Pride was the downfall of many religious leaders during Jesus’ time. He often rebuked the Pharisees for having hearts that were hard and eyes that were blind (John 9:40, 41; 12:40). They refused to listen to Jesus, in spite of the miracles He performed to prove His authority. He also spoke about God’s people in general in the Parable of the Sower. The seed (the Word of God) could not enter the wayside soil (the heart) because it was too hard (Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23).

Even the apostles, Jesus’ closest followers, wrestled with pride. At times, Jesus had to rebuke them because of their arguing among themselves over who was the greatest (Matthew 18:1; Mark 9:34). As a result of their pride, they at times found it difficult to serve each other (John 13).

Solomon, said, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling” (Proverbs 16:18). God has also given us warning through the pen of Jeremiah: “Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). A person knows how to walk because God gave mankind that ability. However, being capable of walking does not mean that a person is capable of knowing where he ought to walk. When prideful man chooses his own path, it leads him to destruction.

Lesson 2: People become proud for a variety of reasons. We must beware of intellectual pride (1 Corinthians 3:18; 8:1, 2), racial pride (John 4:9), pride of possessions (1 Timothy 6:17), spiritual pride (Matthew 23), and pride of position (Matthew 23:6, 7; Mark 10:35–40).

Lesson 3: When struggling with pride, remember that God provides help.

1. Resist Satan and humble yourself before God, “for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble . . .” (1 Peter 5:5, 6; see Luke 18:14).
2. Do not think of yourself too highly, but have high regard for others (Romans 12:3, 16; Philippians 2:3–8).
3. Remember that true strength and ability shine from God through our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:7–10; 1 Corinthians 3:18–21).
4. Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . . Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:3, 5).

Paul exhorted us to follow his example and not to allow our strengths, coupled with pride, to become our downfall. He said, “I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27). In 1 Corinthians 10:12 he declared, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.” It is easy to see why Solomon listed pride (“haughty eyes”) among the seven deadly sins (Proverbs 6:16–19). Pride has been one of the greatest weapons of Satan’s arsenal in the battle against God’s people.

For much of his life, Uzziah was a good king who sought the Lord. In his later years, however, he let his pride take control and he became “unfaithful to the LORD his God” (2 Chronicles 26:16b). David Schonhoff

JOTHAM: A LESSON IN GOD’S PROVISION
(2 Kings 15:32–38; 2 Chronicles 27)

Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was twenty-five years old when he became king of Judah. He reigned for sixteen years and “did what was right in the sight of the LORD” (2 Kings 15:34), following the example of his father’s early years.

Because Jotham “ordered his ways before the LORD his God” (2 Chronicles 27:6), he became a mighty king. He was responsible for the building of the upper gate on the Lord’s temple (2 Kings 15:35) and for extensive work on the wall of Ophel (2 Chronicles 27:3). He built cities, fortresses, and towers, and collected tribute from the Ammonites. However, he allowed his subjects to continue in their corruption, including idol worship and sacrifices on the high places.

Along with other kings of Judah, Jotham is named in the genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1:9). These kings were part of God’s plan to bring Christ and His salvation into the world. They also serve as object lessons that God blesses those who serve Him faithfully and allows those who do evil to suffer the consequences of their deeds.

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