

Message #9
Lessons from the Kings of Judah

Kurt Hedlund
11/28/2021

UZZIAH AND THE DANGER OF A PROUD HEART 2 CHRONICLES 26

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

In the early morning hours of November 2 Henry Ruggs (PROJECTOR ON--- HENRY RUGGS) was involved in a fatal car accident. This receiver for the Las Vegas Raiders was in the second year of his pro football career. He was emerging this season as a star of his team, leading the Raiders in receiving yards. But police say that under the influence of alcohol he was driving on South Rainbow Boulevard at a speed of 156 miles per hour when he encountered a car driven by 23 year old Tina Tintor. (RUGGS CRASH SCENE) He smashed into the back of her vehicle. Tina and her dog were engulfed in flames and killed.

Ruggs and his girlfriend were injured and taken to UMC. Later that day he was charged with four felonies and a misdemeanor, for which he could receive up to fifty years in jail. Also that day he was dropped from the Raiders. It was a tragedy for everyone involved. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Henry Ruggs was originally from Alabama. In college he attended the University of Alabama. By all accounts he was a nice guy. He always stayed out of trouble. How did he arrive at such a point in life that he became the cause of a tragedy?

Part of the answer, I believe, lies in the passage before us this morning. Henry Ruggs shared similar blessings and temptations of the primary character in our passage this morning. Perhaps some of us can identify with those blessings and temptations. If so, the story of King Uzziah has lessons to teach us.

We have been looking at lessons from the kings of Judah, as described in the Old Testament Book of 2 Chronicles. The place is the Divided Kingdom of Israel. (PROJECTOR ON--- DIVIDED KINGDOM) After the death of King Solomon Israel was divided into the northern kingdom, which kept the name Israel, and the southern kingdom, which was named Judah, after the dominant tribe in that area.

(DIVIDED KINGDOM TIMELINE) The time in history was about 900 to 630 BC. Today we are looking at King Uzziah who ruled from 792 to 740 BC. His grandpa Joash and father Amaziah both began their reigns well but ended poorly. We shall see how King Uzziah does.

I.

We are going to turn then to 2 Chronicles #26. (p. 377 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs) In the first five verses we will consider THE DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S GRACIOUS, LOVING HEART. (I. THE DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S...) In v. 1 we read, "**And all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and**

made him king instead of his father Amaziah.” In the parallel account of his life in 2 Kings #15 Uzziah is called Azariah. Some of the scholars suggest that Azariah was his birth name and Uzziah was the name given to him when he became king. Some also point out that in the Chronicles account Azariah is the name of the chief priest who becomes part of the story. To avoid confusion the author of Chronicles may have chosen to only use the name Uzziah.

Uzziah was very young to be made king. The Biblical evidence suggests that he ruled with his father for the next 24 years. I pointed out last week that King Amaziah was taken captive by the king of Israel and perhaps kept captive in that northern kingdom. This may have resulted in the situation whereby the people had to get someone to rule in his place in Judah. Uzziah was the natural choice.

According to v. 2, **“He built Elath and restored it to Judah, after the king slept with his fathers.”** After his father King Amaziah died, Uzziah captured and rebuilt Elath. (ELATH MAP) The town was at the top of the Gulf of Aqaba. Modern Eilat is a resort city in Israel. In Uzziah’s day it was a key trading center. It had previously been controlled by the Edomites.

Verses 3 & 4: **“Uzziah was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. 4 And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done.”** King Uzziah had a long reign. Part of it was when his father was officially the king, perhaps when he was in captivity in Israel. In the latter years of Uzziah’s rule, he shared the throne with his son Jotham.

The primary spiritual note here is that Uzziah did some things right in the eyes of the Lord. The comparison with his father Amaziah, however, leaves a cautionary note. For his father did well in the first part of his tenure in office. But toward the end he messed up. Perhaps there is a hint here of trouble brewing for Uzziah. Perhaps he will turn out like his father did.

Then v. 5 says, **“He [King Uzziah] 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.”** Like his grandfather Joash, Uzziah also had a mentor who kept him on track. Perhaps Zechariah was also a priest, as was Joash’s mentor Jehoida. This description of seeking the Lord implies that he was following God’s law.

So Uzziah was blessed with positive things in his background. Growing up in a royal household, he had the best education available. He had material wealth and comforts. He had a spiritual adviser who kept him on the right moral and spiritual track. As a descendant of King David, Uzziah was blessed to be in the line of promise whereby God had promised that this family would always have someone ruling on the throne over God’s people.

Henry Ruggs did not come from quite the same strata of society. But he was blessed with an intact family. He grew up in Montgomery, Alabama, where he had a younger brother and parents who loved and supported him. He had good friends. In high school he was not known to be a partier. He was blessed with great athletic ability. He inherited genes from his mother who had been a high school track star. He had good coaches. Like Uzziah he acquired public attention at an early age. Henry was ranked as the second best high school football player in Alabama. He won a scholarship to the University of Alabama.

Few of us have received the same kind of public attention. But many of us have been blessed with a good family background. Most of us have been blessed to grow up in the USA. Some of us have had a measure of success in school or business or athletics. We can recognize on this Thanksgiving weekend that we have much for which we can be thankful.

II.

Then in vv. 6-15 of our passage we learn about THE UNFOLDING OF A BLESSED HEART. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE UNFOLDING OF A BLESSED HEART) We read in vv. 6 & 7, **“He went out and made war against the Philistines and broke through the wall of Gath and the wall of Jabneh and the wall of Ashdod, and he built cities in the territory of Ashdod and elsewhere among the Philistines. 7 God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabians who lived in Gurbaal and against the Meunites.”** The Philistines were long time enemies of both Israel and Judah. (PHILISTIA MAP)

The Philistines occupied territory to the west of Judah. Whereas Uzziah’s father Amaziah had the humiliating experience of enemies from the north tearing down part of the wall of Jerusalem, Uzziah is tearing down the walls of long time enemies. Gath and Ashdod were leading cities of the Philistines. Jabneh was located a little north of Ashdod. The Judeans proceeded to build settlements in this enemy territory. Who could ever imagine that the Jews would build settlements in the midst of people who were unfriendly to them? History, at times, does repeat itself, doesn’t it?

We don’t know where Gurbaal was located. (EDOM MAP) We do know that the Meunites were an Arab tribe who occupied land in Edom, to the south and east of Judah.

Verse 8: **“The Ammonites paid tribute to Uzziah, and his fame spread even to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong.”** (AMMON MAP) Thus Judah’s influence and control extended also to the east. The king and his people now control territory to the east and south and west. The author attributes this success to the blessing of God and Uzziah’s seeking after Him.

Verse 9 (PROJECTOR OFF): **“Moreover, Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate and at the Valley Gate and at the Angle, and fortified them.”** This

construction project may have involved a rebuilding of the wall that the Israelites from the north had torn down during King Amaziah's administration.

Verse 10: **“And he built towers in the wilderness and cut out many cisterns, for he had large herds, both in the Shephelah and in the plain, and he had farmers and vinedressers in the hills and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil.”** Towers were used for storage of grain and protection for workers. Cisterns were for water storage. The author treats these building projects as evidence of the blessing of God.

Clearly there were agricultural advances during Uzziah's administration. Excavations at Qumran, Gibeah, Beersheba, and other sites have revealed towers and cisterns which date to this time period. (PROJECTOR ON--- UZZIAH SEALS) Archaeologists have discovered two seals belonging to two different administration officials which have Hebrew letters saying “belonging to the servant of Uzziah.” Thus there is historical confirmation of Uzziah's existence and reign.

According to vv. 11-13, **“Moreover, Uzziah had an army of soldiers, fit for war, in divisions according to the numbers in the muster made by Jeiel the secretary and Maaseiah the officer, under the direction of Hananiah, one of the king's commanders. 12 The whole number of the heads of fathers' houses of mighty men of valor was 2,600.”**

There appears to be a greater degree of organization in the Judean army than we have seen before. There appear to be certain full time officials and an officer corps. When the author of Chronicles takes note of a large army, he regards it as a blessing from God. Things appear to be going well for Uzziah.

Verses 14 & 15: **“And Uzziah prepared for all the army shields, spears, helmets, coats of mail, bows, and stones for slinging. 15 In Jerusalem he made machines, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and the corners, to shoot arrows and great stones. And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong.”**

Prior to this point Judean soldiers provided their own weapons. Now the king is providing them. Also his military is developing new weapons. One of these machines sounds like a catapult. Many archaeologists claim that catapults were only developed a few centuries after this. Some of these Biblical archaeologists suggest that what is being described are moveable screens which protected soldiers who were shooting spears and throwing stones on attackers below them.

The basic picture is that we have a young king who is blessed. He has a mentor who is keeping him on the right track. He is seeking to follow God. His country is experiencing military and economic success.

Like Uzziah, Henry Ruggs experienced fame early in his career. He was likewise greatly blessed. I could not determine if he had a church background. He certainly seems to

have a good family background. He had success in high school in track, basketball, and football. He set an Alabama state high school record in the 100 yard dash. At the University of Alabama Henry experienced success in football. He had the third most receptions in school history. He accomplished that in only three years. For after his junior year he entered the NFL draft. He was the first receiver chosen by the pros.

Coach Nick Saban from Alabama described Henry as a first class citizen. He never had to call him into his office to talk about bad behavior. One teammate described Henry as one of the most caring people he knew.

Many of us on this Thanksgiving weekend recognize the significant blessings we have received. Perhaps it was not in athletics. It may have been success in school, in music, in a career, in business, in family life. Those things can truly be celebrated, especially when we recognize God's hand of blessing in them. But there is danger that comes along with these good things.

III.

We come then to v. 16 in our passage and THE TEMPTATION OF A PROUD HEART. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE TEMPTATION OF A PROUD HEART) Verse 16 reads, **“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.”**

Things appear to be going really well for Uzziah. He is at the pinnacle of his career. He is experiencing success on multiple fronts. But then we are told that “he grew proud to his destruction.” Literally the text says that “his heart was lifted up.” That is an accurate description of the nature of pride. It was the original sin of Satan. When pride develops, we begin to think too highly of ourselves. We put ourselves in a place that only God should occupy.

In Proverbs #16 v. 18 (PROVERBS 16:18) the Bible warns, **“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”** Missionary statesman J. Oswald Sanders observed, **“Not every man can carry a full cup. Sudden elevation frequently leads to pride and a fall. The most exacting test of all to survive is prosperity.”** Such was the danger for King Uzziah. Such was the danger for Henry Ruggs. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Pride for King Uzziah led to corrupt actions and unfaithfulness to the Lord. He began to think that he could break God's rules. Here he was convinced that he could break God's rules concerning worship. He sought to offer incense upon the altar of incense. I am sure that he rationalized this as not being a big deal. He was, after all, seeking to worship the Lord. He was the king. What more fitting thing could he do as the leader of the great nation of Judah than to offer incense upon the altar, symbolizing the prayers and worship of God's people.

But this was a violation of God's laws. The Old Testament law was very specific about this. According to Exodus #30 only the priests were to perform this act of worship upon the altar of incense in the temple. This was not the king's prerogative.

Henry Ruggs came into his own this season as the leading receiver for the Raiders. In the last couple of years he has acquired not only fame but also considerable fortune. When he signed with the Raiders, he received a four year contract worth \$16.7 million--- not bad for a 21-year-old.

It seems to me that when we look at his life, we can see signs of the development of a proud heart. Henry began dating his girlfriend Rudy in high school. Along the way they started living together. The Divine Manufacturers Owner's Manual and its instructions about marriage did not apply to them. They then had a baby outside of marriage. Still there was no decision to be married. A year ago girlfriend Rudy posted a video in which she was pleading with Henry to slow down. The speed at which he was driving through the streets of Las Vegas was terrifying her. But he was sure that nothing bad could happen. Apparently Henry also took up drinking.

On that fateful evening earlier this month Henry and Rudy were out enjoying themselves and drinking into the middle of the night. Who was watching their daughter? While cruising through the streets of Las Vegas at 3:30 in the morning at 156 miles per hour, convinced that nothing bad could happen to him, he crashed into a car driven by a young woman. Suddenly his career and his money and his freedom and the life of another came to an end. His young daughter may not have a father around for a number of years,

In less dramatic ways the proud heart problem can happen to us. We can begin to credit ourselves for things which should be credited to God. We can think more highly of ourselves than we ought. We see examples of the temptation of a proud heart in the news. We find stories about it in businessmen and politicians and entertainers and even pastors. We see it in New York governors who think that the rules about proper treatment of women don't apply to them. Such is the temptation of a proud heart.

IV.

In vv. 17-19 we discover THE DANGER OF A RESISTANT HEART. (PROJECTOR ON-- IV. THE DANGER OF A RESISTANT HEART) Look at vv. 17 & 18: **"But Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the Lord who were men of valor, 18 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 sons 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.'"**

It required men of valor to resist the action of the king. King Uzziah's grandfather Joash allowed the importation of Canaanite idol worship. The priest Zechariah confronted him about that. King Joash ordered the priest to be executed right in the temple. Azariah and the priests certainly would have known that history.

Azariah ironically shared the same name as King Uzziah, who is called Azariah in the Book of Kings. The name means “YHWH has helped.” YHWH has indeed helped Uzziah, but Uzziah is here going against God’s law. Will the king turn back to the Lord, as some of his ancestors did?

We read in the first part of v. 19, **“Then Uzziah was angry.”** Confronting proud people about their pride tends to make them angry. It is a sign of a resistant heart.

Henry Ruggs and his girlfriend were both injured in the car accident. At the hospital Henry was belligerent. He refused to agree to a blood test to check for alcohol. A court order was obtained to have that done. It revealed that he had twice the legal limit for alcohol in his blood. Henry told officers to get out. He tried to pull out IVs which had been inserted into his body. He swore at the hospital staff. He later refused to cooperate with police officers who came to investigate the crash. He had a resistant heart. (*The Independent*, 11/4/2021)

V.

In the remaining verses of the chapter we deal with THE CONSEQUENCES OF AN UNREPENTANT HEART. (V. THE CONSEQUENCES OF AN UNREPENTANT HEART) In the second part of v. 19 we are told, **“Now he [the king] 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.”**

When the priests were appointed by God to serve in the tabernacle, they were anointed with oil. According to Leviticus #8 v. 12 (LEVITICUS 8:12), **“And he [Moses] poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him.”** The composition of this oil is detailed in Exodus #30.

In v. 30 of Exodus 30 God tells Moses to use this anointing oil on all of the priests, who are necessarily to be descendants of Aaron. (EXODUS 30:30) The text there says, **“You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests.”** This special oil is applied to the heads of these priests.

So where does the leprosy break out on King Uzziah? Upon his forehead. God’s judgment is quick and sure. (PROJECTOR OFF) The first century Jewish historian Josephus has a fascinating description of this incident. Writing 800 years later he says, **“And when they [the priests] cried out, that he must go out of the temple, and not transgress against God, he was wroth at them, and threatened to kill them, unless they would hold their peace. In the meantime, a great earthquake shook the ground, and a rent was made in the temple, and the bright rays of the sun shone through it, and fell upon the king’s face, insomuch that the leprosy seized upon him immediately...”** (*Antiquities*, 9.10.4)

The writings of Josephus are not on the same level of authority and trustworthiness as the Bible. But it is worth noting that the Bible speaks about a major earthquake that happened during the reign of Uzziah. This earthquake is mentioned in both Hosea and Zechariah. In Zechariah #14 v. 5 (PROJECTOR ON--- ZECHARIAH 14:5) we have this reference: **“And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah.”**

The term “leprosy” is used in the Old Testament to describe several skin diseases. The Old Testament law said that these skin diseases rendered one ceremonially unclean. Such an infected person was required to live apart from other people. He was not allowed into the tabernacle or into the temple precincts. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The story continues in v. 20: **“And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead! And they rushed him out quickly, and he himself hurried to go out, because the Lord had struck him.”** Uzziah himself realizes the significance of what has happened to him.

Verse 21: **“And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death, and being a leper lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the Lord. And Jotham his son was over the king's household, governing the people of the land.”** Because of Uzziah's infection with leprosy he had to live in a separate house. He could no longer perform many of his royal duties. He was cut off from worship in the temple. He could not carry out many of his responsibilities as king. For lepers were commanded by the Old Testament law to stay away from uninfected people. Thus it was necessary to appoint his son Jotham as co-ruler.

The story concludes in vv. 22 & 23: **“Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, from first to last, Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz wrote. 23 And Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the burial field that belonged to the kings, for they said, ‘He is a leper.’ And Jotham his son reigned in his place.”** Isaiah's writings on this period of history have not survived..

The circumstances of Uzziah's burial are a bit unclear. The original text could be translated that he was buried “in a field for burial, for he was a leper”--- implying that he was buried in place separate from the other kings. Or it could be translated that Uzziah was buried “within the field of burial belonging to the kings, although he was a leper.” The key thing to notice here is that King Uzziah was quickly judged for having an unrepentant heart.

The Henry Ruggs incident is certainly a tragedy. A life was lost. People were injured. A career was ended. Money is gone. Freedom may well be lost. A daughter may be raised without a father around.

Yet God is gracious. Henry still has opportunity to change, to repent. For the God who is there is the God of second chances and third chances. Through our church's prison

ministry we have seen many examples of how people's lives can be changed when they turn in faith to Jesus. God is in the business of rescuing seemingly ruined lives.

It is always better for us if we avoid the temptation of a proud heart in the first place. There are practical things which we can do to avoid that. We can keep ourselves accountable to trustworthy friends or relatives. We can maintain a regular time of devotions. Reading and studying God's Word cannot help but remind us of our need for humility. We can keep up a regular conversation with our Creator. We can ask the Lord to keep us dependent upon Him.

The bottom line is having a right relationship with God. C. S. Lewis once observed, **"In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that--- and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison--- you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud, you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you."** (*Christian Behavior*, Lewis)