

Judah During the Divided Kingdom (2 Chronicles 10:1 – 28:7)

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The Reign of Uzziah, part 1: Opening of Uzziah's Reign; Uzziah's Fidelity and Blessing (2 Chronicles 26:1-15)

The Reign of Uzziah (26:1-23)

The Chronicler moved next to Uzziah son of Amaziah (792/91 - 740/39 B.C.). Uzziah's reign provided his readers with another example of a Judean king whose life, like Amaziah before him, was divided into years of blessing and judgment because of half-hearted devotion.

Comparison of 26:1-23 with 2 Kgs 14:21-15:7

The Chronicler included most of the reign of Uzziah in Kings within his account (see figure 45). A number of insignificant stylistic differences appear, but the Chronicler also varied his account in major ways to conform to his doctrine of divine blessing and judgment (see *Introduction: 10-27*) (*Divine Blessing and Judgment*).

First, the most obvious difference between Kings and Chronicles on a large scale is the omission of 2 Kgs 14:23-15:1. In his usual fashion, the Chronicler omitted this material because it focused on events in northern Israel. Here as elsewhere he only touched on the northern kingdom as it came into contact with Judah.

Second, a word should be said about the name of this king. The Hebrew text of Kings calls him "Azariah" (see 2 Kgs 15:1,6,7,8,17,23,27). The Chronicler designated him **Uzziah** throughout this chapter. "Uzziah" appears here and in Isa 1:1; Hos 1:1; Am 1:1; Zech 14:5; 2 Kgs 15:13,30,32,34. Nevertheless, the Chronicler himself used the name **Azariah** in 1 Chr 3:12. It is likely that one name was given to the king at birth and the other at the time of his enthronement. Moreover, the Chronicler may have used **Uzziah** consistently in this chapter to distinguish him from the priest **Azariah** who also appears in this chapter (see 26:17,20).

2 Chr		2 Kgs
26:1-2	Opening of Uzziah's Reign (A) (closely parallel)	14:21-22
-----	Events in the North (omitted)	14:23-15:1
26:3-4	Opening of Uzziah's Reign (B) (closely parallel)	15:2-3
26:5-15	Uzziah's Fidelity and Blessings (added)	-----
26:16-21	Uzziah's Infidelity and Curse (greatly expanded)	15:4-5
26:22-23	Closure of Uzziah's Reign (parallel)	15:6-7

Comparison of 2 Chr 26:1-23 with 2 Kgs 14:21-15:7 (figure 45)

Third, the Chronicler added much material to the account of Kings. Kings gives only nine verses to Uzziah's life (2 Kgs 14:21-22; 15:1-7). The Chronicler's record consists of twenty three verses. Two large additions appear. 1) The Chronicler added 26:5-15 to illustrate how Uzziah received divine blessings during his early years. 2) He expanded 2 Kgs 15:5 // 26:21 to reveal the king's failure that led to his severe skin disease (26:16-20). Both of these major additions were necessary to shape Uzziah's reign into years of blessing and judgment.

Fourth, the Chronicler omitted the notice of high places remaining in Uzziah's early years to enhance his division of the king's reign into a period of fidelity and infidelity (2 Kgs 15:4).

Fifth, the Chronicler shifted from royal sources (2 Kgs 15:6) to a prophetic source (26:22). In all likelihood, this was his primarily source for the materials he added to Uzziah's reign.

Structure of 26:1-23

The Chronicler shaped his account so that it divided into four symmetrical sections (see figure 46).

Opening of Uzziah's Reign (26:1-5)

Uzziah's Fidelity and Blessing (26:6-15)

Uzziah's Military Victories (26:6-8)

Uzziah's Domestic Successes (26:9-10)

Uzziah's Military Strength (26:11-15)

Uzziah's Infidelity and Curse (26:16-21)

Powerful Uzziah Enters Temple (26:16)

Priests Follow Uzziah into Temple (26:17)

Confrontation Between Priests and Uzziah (26:18-19)

Priests Escort Uzziah Out of Temple (26:20)

Powerless Uzziah is Barred from Temple (26:21)

Closure of Uzziah's Reign (26:22-23)

Outline of 2 Chr 26:1-23 (figure 46)

Uzziah's reign begins with a summary of how he came to power and some general comments about his reign (26:1-5). This material balances by striking contrast with the closing notices about his last days (26:22-23). The body of the Chronicler's record divides into two contrasting sections as well. Reports of Uzziah's successes due to fidelity (26:6-15) are followed by an event of flagrant infidelity and divine curse (26:16-21).

Opening of Uzziah's Reign (26:1-5)

The Chronicler began his record with introductory notes on the king's rise to power and general information about his kingdom. His opening follows 2 Kgs 14:21-22 and 15:2-3 closely, but omits 2 Kgs 14:23-15:1 which deals with events in the North. This type of omission is normal for the Chronicler (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*), but here it caused the Chronicler to mention twice in close proximity that Uzziah was sixteen years old when he rose to power (26:1,3).

The opening words **all the people of Judah took Uzziah** (26:1) is an unusual way to describe the rise of a king. It may indicate that popular demand brought Uzziah to power while his father was in captivity in Samaria (see 25:23-24). For other situations where similar transitions of power took place see 22:1; 23:20-21; 33:25; 36:1. Whatever the case, Uzziah shared power with Amaziah from 792/1 B.C. to 767 B.C. He then reigned as sole regent until his son Jotham ruled alongside him for the last ten years of his life (750-740/39 B.C.).

The opening notes on Uzziah's reign highlight several positive features. 1) He **rebuilt Elath ... after Amaziah rested** (26:2). Elath was an important port city in Edomite territory which Solomon had taken for his kingdom (see 8:17-18 // 1 Kgs 9:26-28) and Jehoram had lost (see 21:8-10). Amaziah subdued the Edomites (see 25:11-12), but Uzziah rebuilt the port. The opening of this sea

port was a very positive dimension of Uzziah's reign. For a summary of Judah's involvement with Edom see comments on 25:5a. 2) Uzziah enjoyed one of the longest reigns of Judah's kings, **fifty-two years** (26:3; compare Manasseh 33:1). 3) In general terms, Uzziah is noted as one who **did right in the eyes of the Lord** (26:4). This description appears in the introductory notes on a number of kings (see 14:2; 20:32; 24:2; 25:2; 26:4; 27:2; 29:2; 34:2). He also characterized other kings as having done **evil in the eyes of the Lord** (21:6; 22:4; 28:1; 29:6; 33:2,6,22; 36:5; 36:9,12). These depictions must be taken as general, not categorical. In this case, however, the Chronicler also copied from Kings the qualification that Uzziah did right **just as his father Amaziah had done** (26:4 // 2 Kgs 15:3). This qualification is easily understood in the book of Kings for the writer of Kings hardly mentioned the sins of Amaziah and Uzziah. The Chronicler, however, insisted that Amaziah did what was right, **but not wholeheartedly** (25:2). In this light, the comparison of Uzziah with Amaziah in Chronicles implied that the former gave similar half-hearted devotion as well. This evaluation of Uzziah is supported by the verse that follows. (For the significance of the king's royal mother see comments on 13:2.)

The Chronicler began his first addition to Uzziah's reign with an explanation of his comparison with Amaziah. Uzziah **sought God** (26:5). In the Chronicler's theology, this terminology referred to one of the most important demonstrations of faith. "Seeking" the Lord was to devote oneself to finding God's blessing, especially to finding counsel and help in times of trouble (see *Introduction: 19 Seeking*). Nevertheless, the Chronicler was also quick to say that Uzziah sought God only during the life of **Zechariah who instructed him in the fear of God** (26:5). The identity of this **Zechariah** is uncertain. It is possible that he was a witness of the prophet Isaiah (see Isa 8:1), but this identification cannot be firmly established. Whatever the case, the parallel to Jehoiada's influence over Joash must not be missed (see 24:2). Uzziah **sought the Lord** only under Zechariah's tutelage (26:5). This allusion to Joash's reign prepared the Chronicler's readers to expect Uzziah to be much like Joash. His fidelity was followed by severe infidelity.

In these opening verses the Chronicler foreshadowed his purpose in recording the reign of Uzziah. Uzziah was righteous only under the sway of another. Thus the Chronicler drew his readers' attention to the need for enduring fidelity stemming from wholehearted devotion, rather than mere temporary obedience brought about by external influences.

Uzziah's Fidelity and Blessing (26:6-15)

Having introduced his readers to Uzziah, the Chronicler made a substantial addition focusing on the king's fidelity and resulting blessings. Despite his qualification of Uzziah's faithfulness, the Chronicler reported benefits that came to the king during the years of Zechariah's influence.

Structure of 26:6-15

This account divides into three parts (see figure 46). The first and last sections (26:6-8, 11-15) form an inclusion that frames this material. Both portions deal with the subject of military strength and similar terminology appears in both portions. The king's victories came about because **God helped**

him (26:7) and the result was that **his fame spread** (26:8). Similarly, Uzziah's military strength made **his fame spread** because **he was greatly helped** by God (26:15). Beyond this, 26:8 states that the king had **become very powerful** and 26:15 mentions that he **became very powerful**. The middle section (26:9-10) focuses on the domestic improvements Uzziah made during this time.

Uzziah's Military Victories (26:6-8)

The first report of Uzziah's blessings concerns victories over enemies. The Chronicler frequently referred to the defeat of enemies as demonstration of divine favor (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*). Here he described Uzziah's successes in ways that stressed the magnificence of this blessing. He mentioned victory over **Philistines** (26:6,7), **Arabs** (26:7), **Meunites** (26:7), and **Ammonites** (26:7). Each of these groups appear elsewhere in Chronicles as enemies of Judah (see 1 Chr 10:7-9; 2 Chr 26:6-8). Uzziah's military aggression was limited to the west, south, and southeast because Jeroboam II of northern Israel was very strong at this time.

The Chronicler made it clear that Uzziah's accomplishments were not by human power. He was successful because **God helped him** (26:7). This terminology occurs a number of times in Chronicles where an intervention by God is in view. Unusual success and extraordinary accomplishments are often attributed to the **help** of God (see 1 Chr 5:20; 12:18; 15:26; 2 Chr 14:11; 16:12; 18:31; 20:4; 26:7; 32:8; see also *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). God extended such favor to Uzziah that **his fame spread as far as the border of Egypt** (26:8). News of his victories spread great distances (see *Introduction: 3) International Relations*).

Finally, Uzziah's victories were not isolated occurrences. They demonstrated that he **had become very powerful** (26:8). Although the Chronicler had already made it clear that this period of fidelity will be short lived (see 26:5), Uzziah benefited greatly from the blessings of God.

Israel's prophets had announced that those who returned from exile would be given military superiority over their enemies (see Isa 11:11-16; 29:18-33; 49:14-26; 54:1-3; Jer 30:10-11; Ezk 38-39; Amos 9:11-12). Uzziah experienced a foretaste of this supremacy. This promise, however, would never come in its fullness so long as the post-exilic community did not learn the lesson of Uzziah's early years. Fidelity to God alone leads Judah to military victory.

Uzziah's Domestic Successes (26:9-10)

The Chronicler frequently pointed to building projects and economic growth as demonstrations of God's blessing (see *Introduction: 24) Building and Destruction*; see also *Introduction: 26) Prosperity and Poverty*). Here he added a description of Uzziah that focuses on these kinds of domestic successes during his early years of faithfulness. This report mentions three areas of Uzziah's kingdom.

First, Uzziah completed building projects **in Jerusalem** (26:9). The Chronicler specifically mentioned the fortification of the city with **towers** at key places in the city wall.

Second, Uzziah **had much livestock in the foothills and in the plain** (26:10). For this reason he built **towers in the desert** (26:10), outposts that provided for storage, as well as protection for royal workers. He also constructed **cisterns** for water retention (26:10).

Third, in an unusual moment of insight into Uzziah's personality, the Chronicler wrote that Uzziah **loved the soil** (26:10); he had a keen interest in the agricultural development of Judah. As a result, he had **people working** in agricultural efforts throughout the land (26:10).

This list of domestic successes had a direct bearing on the lives of the Chronicler's post-exilic readers. They had hopes of seeing the land of promise developed in the ways Uzziah took the nation in his day. Military fortification, livestock and agricultural development were high priorities for the restored community. The Chronicler's purpose in these reports is evident. Uzziah received these blessings because he was loyal to his God; they too would see these blessings when they devoted themselves to their God.

Uzziah's Military Strength (26:11-15)

The Chronicler closed this portion of Uzziah's reign by returning to the topic of military strength. In the preceding passage on the subject, he focused on the actual victories in Uzziah's day (see 26:6-8). At this point, his attention turned to a more general description of Uzziah's continuing military strength. His report divides into four items.

First, Uzziah's military strength is introduced in general terms. He had **a well-trained army, ready to go out** (26:11). Uzziah had a sophisticated military organization headed by a series of officers. This was no rag-tag militia.

Second, Uzziah's army was very large (26:12-13). The total given here is 310,100. These large numbers may be handled in a number of ways. (For the Chronicler's use of large numbers of soldiers see comments on 12:24-37.) In all events, Uzziah's army was large and **a powerful force** (26:13). Mentioning large and skilled armies is one way in which the Chronicler often exalted faithful kings (see 1 Chr 12:24-40; 21:15; 27:1-15; 2 Chr 13:13; 17:12-19; 25:5-6; 26:13).

Third, Uzziah made significant provisions for his army (26:14). His soldiers were not expected to provide their own arms as often occurred in biblical times (see Jdg 20:8-17; 1 Sam 13:19-22; 1 Chr 12:2,8,24,33). Instead, the king distributed equipment of different sorts **for the entire army** (26:14). Not only did this fact enhance the portrait of Uzziah's military strength; it also pointed to his economic success.

Besides this, Uzziah's military was supplied with **machines designed by skillful men** (26:15a). The precise nature of these **machines** is not clear. Much debate has surrounded the matter. Some interpreters hold that the Chronicler spoke of some kind of catapult. Yet, little archaeological evidence supports the idea that catapults were used at this time in Judah. Other interpreters believe that Uzziah's men designed a defensive (perhaps mobile) structure on the walls and towers of cities that provided

archers and throwers protection as they performed their duties. Whatever the case, the Chronicler's point is clear. Uzziah's army was a well-equipped professional army.

Fourth, the Chronicler concluded by mentioning that Uzziah's **fame spread far and wide** (26:15b). Everyone knew that God had **greatly helped** him (25:15b; see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). Uzziah's celebrity continued until **he became powerful** (25:15b). These last descriptions of Uzziah repeat ideas mentioned in the opening of this section (see 26:7) and form an inclusio around this portion of Uzziah's reign. The Chronicler made his analysis of this period in Uzziah's life evident. He received divine assistance, became famous as one blessed of God, and received much power.

By framing his reports in this manner, the Chronicler extended a word of hope to his post-exilic readers. They too could find the help of God, fame, and power, if they would only serve the Lord faithfully.

Although the themes of divine help, Uzziah's fame, and power are repeated in 26:8 and 26:15, a slight change occurred in the way the Chronicler handled the third of these motifs. In 26:8 the Chronicler merely mentioned that Uzziah had **become very powerful**. In 26:13, however, he said that Uzziah received divine help **until he became powerful**. In other words, divine assistance came to Uzziah up to the time he gained much power. By this turn of the phrase, the Chronicler foreshadowed the events that follow. Uzziah's power brought an end to the period of his blessing from God. In the final analysis, his success was the occasion of his downfall.