

## **The King who perished because of the ‘Elvis Syndrome.’**

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### **2 Chronicles 26:3-21.**

**Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king and reigned for fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother was Jecoliah from Jerusalem. He behaved well in the eyes of GOD, following in the footsteps of his father Amaziah. He was a loyal seeker of God. He was well trained by his pastor and teacher Zechariah to live in reverent obedience before God, and for as long as Zechariah lived, Uzziah lived a godly life. And God prospered him.... God helped him in his wars...Uzziah became famous, his reputation extending all the way to Egypt. He became quite powerful. Uzziah constructed defense towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate, the Valley Gate, and at the corner of the wall. He also built towers and dug cisterns out in the country. He had herds of cattle down in the foothills and out on the plains, had farmers and vinedressers at work in the hills and fields--he loved growing things. On the military side, Uzziah had a well-prepared army ready to fight.... Uzziah had them well-armed with shields, spears, helmets, armor, bows, and slingshots. He also installed the latest in military technology on the towers and corners of Jerusalem for shooting arrows and hurling stones. He became well**

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known for all this--a famous king. Everything seemed to go his way.

But then the strength and success went to his head.

Arrogant and proud, he fell. One day, contemptuous of GOD, he walked into The Temple of GOD like he owned it and took over, burning incense on the Incense Altar.

The priest Azariah, backed up by eighty brave priests of GOD, tried to prevent him. They confronted Uzziah:

"You must not; you cannot do this, Uzziah--only the Aaronite priests, especially consecrated for the work, and are permitted to burn incense. Get out of God's Temple; you are unfaithful and a disgrace!"

But Uzziah, censer in hand, was already in the middle of doing it and angrily rebuffed the priests. He lost his temper; angry words were exchanged--and then, even as they quarreled, a skin disease appeared on his forehead. As soon as they saw it, the chief priest Azariah and the other priests got him out of there as fast as they could. He hurried out--he knew that GOD then and there had given him the disease. Uzziah had his skin disease for the rest of his life and had to live in quarantine; he was not permitted to set foot in The Temple of GOD. His son Jotham, who managed the royal palace, took over the government of the country.

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In many ways Uzziah was a model King.

- He exercised godly authority.
- There was a judicious handling of his role.
- He was sensitive in his care.
- He honoured God for many years.

He was a **righteous achiever** -- Verses 4-5.

He was blessed by God because he honoured God and diligently sought His face.

He was a **victorious warrior** -- Verses 6-8.

He attacked Judah's enemies and God gave him victory.

He was a **benevolent builder** -- Verses 9-10

He built up both the urban and rural life of the nation.

He was an **efficient defender** -- Verses 11-15.

He not only made gains but he was able to secure them and establish them.

The 'hinge point' of this chapter is verse 16.

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**“But when he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense.”**

My question is, “What day was this? What day was it that he got up and changed his style? Was it a Monday? A Thursday? Was it the 1st of the month or perhaps the 13<sup>th</sup>?”

The obvious answer is that it wasn’t a particular day at all. It wasn’t a day, but a gradual process.

It was a gradual process – like the formation of cataracts upon the eyes that gradually began to alter his perspective.

Like the gradual arthritis that stiffens the bones, there comes a process that begins to stiffen this man’s soul so that it wasn’t as soft and pliable as it had been before.

It wasn’t an overnight proposition; it does manifest in one particular instance, but it didn’t all just happen on that particular day.

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Uzziah didn't set out to, or at some point decide to, end this way.

This is a lesson for we who are called to be Kings.

None of us are beyond or above the confusion that stumbled this man.

Things were going well.

We tend to think that the great tests of life come to us in our defeats, in our dark days, in difficult circumstances. The reality is that we are probably the most vulnerable in times of success.

Often it's 'apparent success' that is the greatest test of all.

Death by success.

The concept itself is a paradox.

It happened to Elvis Presley, hence the term, 'The Elvis syndrome.'

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At the height of his success and fame his life unraveled and he died of a drug overdose. He was a victim of his own success and fame.

One of Elvis’s inner circle commented after he died, “Somebody ought to get a hold of people before they get big and let them know what they’re getting into. I wish somebody could have done it with Elvis. He had all these people around him but I swear it’s like he didn’t need bodyguards, he needed life guards.”

The ‘Elvis Syndrome’ is a very common phenomenon. From Marilyn Munroe to Kurt Cobain, from Ernest Hemmingway to Jimi Hendrix, there are scores of people who have perished as a result of their own success.

Adam and Eve were given everything they possibly needed for happiness. Yet they chose the one option that destroyed everything they had.

King David ran into the biggest trouble of his life at the height of his fame.

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**Benjamin Franklin** once commented,

**“Success has ruined many a man. “**

## **Proverbs 27:21 {Message}**

**The purity of silver and gold is tested by putting them in the fire; the purity of human hearts is tested by giving them a little fame.**

Before you check out and think, “Whatever!! I’m hardly likely to experience success at that kind of level!”

You don’t have to succeed in mammoth proportions to experience the ‘Elvis syndrome.’

The symptoms can occur with the smallest level of achievement and appear in various stages.

The Elvis Syndrome is a progressive phenomenon.

We can all probably think of friends who have succeeded, then failed miserably.

You may even see a time when you have sabotaged your own success.

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Uzziah reached the 'pinnacle' and his heart was 'lifted up.'

The Hebrew word translated 'lifted up,' is a word that means 'to soar.'

The basic idea is that of soaring like a bird.

### **Job 39:27**

**“Doth the eagle **mount up** [NIV soar] at thy command, and make her nest on high?”**

We sometimes say of a person, “Oh don't worry about him, he's given to 'flights of fancy' or 'flights of imagination.’”

That's what began to happen to Uzziah.

Over time a process began to work in his soul whereby he started to believe his own 'press reports.'

He began to attribute his success to causes that lay within his own heart, rather than seeing that any success he was enjoying was a result of God's favour on his life.

- “It was my initiative.”

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- It was my vision
- It was my doing.
- It was my skill.

He begins to be 'dizzied' by the heights to which he is lifted.

The same thing that happened to Nebuchadnezzar – "Is this not this great Babylon which I have built?"

Something is beginning to be eroded in the moorings of his own soul.

Allowing this process to take place is to invite disaster.

### **Proverbs 17:19**

**" ..... He that exalts his gate seeks destruction."**

The modern day equivalent of '**lifting your own gate,**' would be '**pushing your own barrow,**' or '**blowing your own trumpet.**'

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There is an inherent danger in times of success or in times when we come to a season of maturity at some point in our lives.

It is so easy, almost without thinking, to assume a posture of independence.

**“We can do this stuff. You don’t need to stand over me.”**

We mistakenly suppose that our maturity allows us the license to do things on our own terms.

We allow our hearts to be lifted up, and away, from a simple childlike dependence on God.

Uzziah went into the temple to burn incense to the Lord. God had ordained Israel’s pattern of worship in that day. Only the priests could go into the Holy Place of the temple to carry out this function.

Uzziah wanted to worship on his own terms.

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“I’m mature enough to decide I how I’ll do this. I don’t need somebody to tell me how to worship.’

He strayed into territory that was outside of his jurisdiction.

There’s no degree of supposed maturity that allows for this to take place.

The Priests withstood Uzziah – a very brave action, for a King in those days wielded unquestioned power.

Even at this late stage, Uzziah could have recognized the wisdom of their challenge and backed off.

He could have come to his senses, turned back and sought forgiveness.

He didn’t.

He became furious with the priests for withstanding him.

When you are caught in this process it’s so hard to turn around.

Even when deep down you know something is wrong. It’s easier to rise to your own defense.

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We justify our behaviour.

“Who do you think you are to tell me what to do?”

In conclusion there are four things we see in Uzziah that are lessons in how not to live like a King.

1. He was forgetful of the grace he had been shown.

This seems to be a repeated refrain in the lives of these Kings who lost something.

It was Shakespeare who said that ingratitude is the basest of all human sins.

The failure to be thankful is at the root of many a long road to destruction.

### **2 Chronicles 32:25**

**“But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem.”**

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Hezekiah actually recognized what was happening and humbled himself – Uzziah did not.

### **2. There was a violation of the place he had been given.**

Pride, in its swollen grasping way, reaches out to take more and in so doing exceeds its reach.

People who are lifted up invariably overstep the mark.

They are built for bigger things than what they are presently living in and being recognized for so they attempt to move up and in so doing violate a vital Kingdom principle – “Push your own barrow to your destruction.”

### **3. Insisting on the space you think is yours.**

Any ‘space or influence you do enjoy is God’s gift to you. It is not fitting that we start assuming that somehow it belongs to us as of right.

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Any influence you have been given needs to be viewed as a point of responsibility rather than as a point of privilege.

### 4. Concern over the 'face' you have lost.

Whenever you are more concerned over 'face' than failure, you know your heart is lifted up.

Instead of acknowledging our mistakes we 'hedge' them and justify ourselves so as not to look bad.

Saul was concerned that Samuel offer the sacrifice so he looked good before the nation.

David was different when confronted by Nathan.

So few Sovereigns and authority figures down through History, confronted with the same circumstances, would have responded in the way David did.

One Historian commented;

- Mary Queen of Scots would have declared she was above the Law.

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- Charles 1st would have thrown over Bathsheba.
- James 2<sup>nd</sup> would have hired witnesses to swear away her character.
- Charles 2<sup>nd</sup> would have publicly abrogated the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment.
- Mohammed would have produced a revelation authorizing both crimes.
- Elizabeth 1st would have suspended Nathan the prophet.
- David fell on his face and said, "I have sinned."

Even at this late stage Uzziah could have cried out for forgiveness, but he didn't.

Pride is a 'capital sin.'

It killed something in him and he lost the full realization of Kingdom possibilities happening in him.

When we become sophisticated and mature – it's so easy to become lifted up.

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We lose the tenderness of soul that allows God to shape us.

We become like Uzziah and we pay the same price – the Kingdom is lost or at least it is not filled with all the fullness that God initially intended.

We become another victim of the 'Elvis Syndrome.'