

2 Chronicles 26 — The King Who Was Strong to His Own Undoing — Uzziah's Rise, the Hinge of Strength, and the Censer That Bred Leprosy

2 Chronicles 26: Uzziah (also called Azariah) becomes king of Judah at sixteen and does right in the sight of the LORD, seeking God in the days of Zechariah and prospering while he sought Him — winning wars, building towers, digging wells, and fielding a mighty army with engines of war, until his name spreads far abroad. Then, at the summit of strength, his heart is lifted up: he enters the temple to burn incense, is withstood by fourscore priests, and struck with leprosy in his forehead, dying a leper in a several house. Uzziah's long reign, c. 792–740 BC (scriptural chronology; the contemporary of Isaiah, whose call comes 'in the year that king Uzziah died').

Some lives break at their lowest point, and we understand why — hunger, fear, defeat, the long grinding of adversity. Uzziah's life breaks at its *highest*. He does not fall in a famine or on a battlefield or in an hour of national collapse. He falls at the very top of a fifty-two-year reign, with the Philistines beaten, the walls repaired, the wells dug, the army mustered, the towers armed with the most advanced weaponry his engineers could devise, and his name — the ancient measure of a man — spread all the way to the border of Egypt. He falls the moment after the Chronicler writes the single most dangerous word in his whole story: *strong*.

Hebrew Word Studies

darash (H1875) (דָּרַשׁ) — **to seek, inquire, search out, consult, resort to v. 5.** *Darash* is the seeking verb, and it is active to its core — not a mood but an errand. It is the word for consulting the LORD through a prophet (Gen. 25:22), for searching a matter out until you find it (Deut. 13:14), for the diligent pursuit the Chronicler makes the single test of every king he weighs. Its whole grammar refuses the idea of a faith you can bank and stop tending: you *darash* today or you do not, and verse 5 makes prosperity ride on the present tense of it — "*as long as he sought the LORD.*" The moment the seeking stopped, the sentence had already told us, the prospering would stop too. It is the same verb behind the promise the risen Lord gave a later people: "if ye will seek me ye shall find me; and I will be found of you" (D&C 88:63) — and behind Amulek's warning that there is no banking it against a later day, no "procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end" (Alma 34:33). Seeking is the rent on the blessing, and Uzziah paid it faithfully for years — right up until he was strong enough, he thought, to stop.

chazaq (H2388) / chozeq (H2393) (חָזַק / חֹזֶק) — **to be strong, to strengthen oneself, to prevail, to grow firm / strength, might vv. 8, 9, 15, 16.** One root carries the whole hinge of the chapter, and watching it turn is watching the tragedy happen. On the ascent it is a virtue: Uzziah "*strengthened* himself exceedingly" (v. 8), he "*fortified*" his towers (v. 9), he was helped "*till he was strong*" (v. 15). *Chazaq* is a good and vigorous word — it is the LORD's own command to Joshua, "be strong and of a good courage" (Josh. 1:6), and the encouragement Hezekiah later gives his captains (2 Chr. 32:7). Strength is not the sin. But at verse 16 the noun form *chozeq* arrives — "*when he was strong*" — and the same firmness that fortified a wall now hardens a heart. The difference is entirely a matter of direction: strength that keeps seeking (v. 5) is help; strength that stops seeking is destruction. Scripture never asks us to be weak; it asks us to remember. "Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God... lest when thou hast eaten and art full... then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD" (Deut. 8:11–14) — Moses could have been narrating verse 16 four centuries early. The strong man's danger is not that he is strong but that he forgets he was *made* strong.

gabahh (H1361) / shachath (H7843) / ma'al (H4603) (גָּבַהּ / שָׁחַת / מָאַל) — **to be high, lifted up, exalted / to ruin, corrupt, destroy / to act treacherously, trespass, violate a trust v. 16.** Three words carry the fall, and taken together they are a whole theology of pride. *Gabahh* — "his heart was *lifted up*" — is not automatically sin; it is the neutral verb for height, and Jehoshaphat's heart was "*lifted up* in the ways of the LORD" (2 Chr. 17:6) as pure commendation. The identical elevation is praise when it rises toward God and ruin when it rises toward self; pride and righteous aspiration are the same motion pointed opposite ways. *Shachath* — "to his *destruction*" — is the verb of spoilage and decay (the wickedness that brought the Flood, Gen. 6:11–12), and the Chronicler's grammar makes the lifted heart and the destruction the same event: the ruin is not a later punishment but the immediate inside of the pride. Then *ma'al* — "he *transgressed*" — the treachery-word, used of marital infidelity (Num. 5:12) and of Achan's sacrilege (Josh. 7:1); it frames Uzziah's act not as a policy error but as a betrayal of intimate covenant. The Lord distilled all three into one commandment for a strong people: "Beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old" (D&C 38:39). Uzziah is the Nephites of old, one man, one reign — a heart lifted, a trust betrayed, a life spoiled, in a single verse.

qatar (H6999) / kohen (H3548) (קֹהֵן / קָטַר) — to burn incense, offer in smoke / priest vv. 16, 18, 19. The whole tragedy turns on a single verb Uzziah had no right to. *Qatar* means to send something up in smoke — to burn incense or sacrifice — and in the Law it is fenced to exactly one family: "the priests [*kohanim*] the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense [*qatar*]" (v. 18). Incense was a deliberate picture of prayer ascending — "let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense" (Ps. 141:2) — so the man authorized to send it up stood, in that moment, between Israel and God. And that mediating *place*, not a golden object, is what Uzziah seized. His trespass was not vandalism; it was self-ordination, appointing himself to an office heaven had assigned to another line. The eighty priests who withstood him were not guarding a guild privilege but the order of God, which does not let a man install himself in a sacred calling however capable, popular, or successful he has become. The New Testament states the very principle Uzziah broke: "no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron" (Heb. 5:4); the Restoration echoes it in the fifth Article of Faith — a man must be "called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands." Uzziah is that doctrine's cautionary shadow: authority in the kingdom of God is *given*, never grasped, and the incense a king burns without being a priest does not rise as prayer — it comes down as leprosy. His strength qualified him for many things; it could not consecrate him for this one.

From the Chapter's Architecture

And the whole structure pivots on a single repeated word doing opposite work. "As long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper" (v. 5) is answered by "when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (v. 16). Two temporal clauses, two hearts, one hinge between seeking and strength. The chapter's argument lives in the gap between those two "when"s — the moment the seeking stopped and the strength took over. There is no chiasm here to draw, and I will not invent one; the artistry is a mountain, not a mirror. A long climb, a sharp summit, a fast fall. The reader is meant to stand at verse 15 admiring the view, and then to learn in verse 16 that the view was the danger all along.