

2 CHRONICLES 26:15, 16

THE DANGER IN GROWING STRONG

“In Jerusalem [Uzziah] 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 marvellously helped, till he was strong.

“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.”¹

Uzziah, also known as Azariah, was arguably counted as one of the greatest kings to rule Judah. Despite international respect for his wise reign, and despite the glorious heights to which he guided the nation, he died in ignominy. Excluded from the Temple, unable to rule from his throne, forced to live in a separate house the king ended his days without experiencing warm companionship, without the courtiers to whom he had grown accustomed, without feeling a human touch in his final hours, without anyone to soothe his fevered brow in his final hours. This was his fate despite his might, despite growing strong; his life ended in this fashion because he was unable to rule his own heart.

God warned Israel through Moses, “Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God” [DEUTERONOMY 8:11-20]. It is never a good thing to disregard God’s warning.

UZZIAH’S MIGHT — “In Jerusalem [Uzziah] made machines, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and the corners, to shoot arrows and great stones” [2 CHRONICLES 26:15a]. His fame spread because of all he accomplished. Uzziah became ruler of Judah when he was but sixteen years of age. For fifty-two years he reigned in Jerusalem. During that time, and especially during the early days of his reign, Uzziah accomplished some significant tasks.

The Chronicler reveals the secret for the success Uzziah experienced during his reign. “[Uzziah] did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. He 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” [2 CHRONICLES 26:4, 5].

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

I need to take a moment to note something that I had never noticed before. I read in this fifth verse that “[Uzziah] set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God” [2 CHRONICLES 26:5a]. I read the name Zechariah, a man denoted as instructing the young king in the fear of the LORD. I cannot help but wonder who this man might have been. My curiosity drove me to invest time researching who Zechariah might have been. In the previous chapter we meet an unnamed prophet [see 2 CHRONICLES 25:15, 16]. This prophet boldly rebuked Amaziah the king when he dishonoured God. We also read of someone, perhaps the same man, who is identified as a “man of God,” who counselled Amaziah when he had attempted to hire Ephraimites to serve as mercenaries in his army [see 2 CHRONICLES 25:9]. Amaziah, though ending his days in disgrace, had people around him who attempted to direct him to walk in the straight paths of the LORD.

When Amaziah was assassinated because he had turned away from the LORD, Uzziah his son ascended to the throne. The young man was blessed by the presence of a godly man who instructed him in the fear of the LORD. It is quite possible that this was the “prophet” who rebuked Uzziah’s father and that he was also the “man of God” who provided sound counsel to depend on the LORD for success—counsel that Amaziah ultimately rejected. My purpose in emphasising this man at this point is to encourage the people of God.

There are always people among the servants of the Living God who labour in the shadows. These people have an impact far out of proportion to their status. Nobody remembers who Zechariah was, but he had an impact in the life of the king. Nobody can tell us who this man was or even if he had a position in the king’s court, but he accomplished something greater than he might ever have imagined. Just so, perhaps you teach children, lead music or provide instrumentation, pray for the services of the congregation, serve as an usher handing out bulletins and assisting people as they enter the House of the Lord, or ensure that the building is clean. Perhaps you wonder whether your service has meaning, has any lasting impact on others. Let me encourage you that though you imagine that no one knows your name, God knows you. Your service honours the Lord who laid it on your heart to do what you are doing. The impact you have on the life of some other person may be far greater than anything you could otherwise imagine. I urge each of you to be a Zechariah! You got that for free; I’m not charging for it.

What success Uzziah enjoyed! “He built Eloth and restored it to Judah... 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. God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabians who lived in Gurbaal and against the Meunites. The Ammonites paid tribute to Uzziah, and his fame spread even to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong. Moreover, Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate and at the Valley Gate and at the Angle and fortified them. 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. 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. The whole number of the heads of fathers’ houses of mighty men of valor was 2,600. Under their command was an army of 307,500, who could make war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy. And Uzziah prepared for all the army shields, spears, helmets, coats of mail, bows, and stones for slinging. In Jerusalem he made machines, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and the corners, to shoot arrows and great stones” [2 CHRONICLES 26:2, 6-15].

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Let's establish a sobering truth—*no nation can grow strong without God's permission*. Repeat the concept to firmly establish it—*no nation can grow strong without God's permission*. God oversees the advance of nations—if a nation grows strong, it is not because of their superior national character. There is a God in Heaven who may permit a nation to prosper for a while. The Living God works to accomplish His will through the nations.

The Psalmist has spoken of man's false hope:

“The LORD looks down from heaven;
he sees all the children of man;
from where he sits enthroned he looks out
on all the inhabitants of the earth,
he who fashions the hearts of them all
and observes all their deeds.
The king is not saved by his great army;
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.
The war horse is a false hope for salvation,
and by its great might it cannot rescue.”

[PSALM 33:13-17]

We must not imagine that Canadians are superior to other nations because of greater intellect, because of greater abilities, or because we are better in any other way. God has blessed us with the ability to accomplish great things and to enjoy good things; the Lord has showered His mercy on us. Moses reminded God's ancient people, “You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth” [DEUTERONOMY 8:18].

In that same vein, Solomon asserted:

“The horse is made ready for the day of battle,
but the victory belongs to the LORD.”

[PROVERBS 21:31]

The LORD made a promise to Israel, presenting a principle that applies until this day. “If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely. I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. You shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. I will turn to you and make you fruitful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you. You shall eat old store long kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new. I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people” [LEVITICUS 26:3-12]. God blesses us in saving us when we turn to Him in faith. If we would see continued blessing, it will be because we honour Him and glorify His Name. Obedience on our part is the key to continued blessing.

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In the Psalms we find a precious benediction, a benediction I wish we could appropriate in this day for our own beloved nation.

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD!”

[PSALM 33:12a]

This benediction was immediately applicable to Israel when the Psalm was written, and I am certain it continues to be true for the nation that honours God, even today. I pray that Canada will again be that nation, though I confess that I am hard-pressed to believe that the LORD God receives much credit for the blessings the nation enjoys today. Tragically, it appears that we have become a nation focused on gaining what we can through unholy means, through ignoring righteousness and through exalting evil. As a nation we exalt unrighteousness, advancing our own desires as the summum bonum of life and depreciating the righteous as enemies of national happiness.

UZZIAH’S SECRET — “[Uzziah’s] fame spread far, for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong” [2 CHRONICLES 26:15b]. Do you remember how we saw that Uzziah set his heart to fear the LORD from earliest days on the throne of Israel? A godly man named Zechariah instructed Uzziah, guiding him in the paths of righteousness. Apparently, this early training was effective, for it provided a solid foundation for fifty-two years of his reign.

Ignore the final clause of this statement for the moment. Focus, instead, on the initial affirmation: “[Uzziah’s] fame spread far, for he was marvellously helped.” God blessed Uzziah, and through him, the LORD blessed the nation; the divine infusion of might and wisdom for governing was evident to all who witnessed Uzziah’s reign. Uzziah had an open secret for his might and for the fame that his rule justly deserved.

I fear greatly for my natal land, and I fear for my adopted country. God blessed the United States and Canada during the dark days on the First World War and He blessed them again during the dark days of the Second World War. God graciously kept the two great nations from suffering invasion and conquest during those trying days just as He kept them during the Korean Conflict. We were mighty in battle and graciously preserved. But we have grown proud; we imagine that our might has kept us safe. We have convinced ourselves that we are unconquerable, powerful. We have lived as though wealth and ease of life is our due. I would caution any who hear these words that this is a dangerous position for any nation to occupy.

Uzziah was greatly blessed throughout his reign; whatever he put his hand to, he succeeded. This is the reason that the Chronicler has written, “*As long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper*” [2 CHRONICLES 26:5b]. It is the reason we read in our text that Uzziah “was marvellously helped, *till he was strong*” [2 CHRONICLES 26:15b]. I read those statements and I want to shout out a warning to the king, “Uzziah! Don’t forget why you are prospering! Uzziah! Give God praise!” Indeed, as the Psalmist has stated:

“God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.”

[PSALM 46:1]

There are some people listening now who need to hear this reminder, “Don’t forget why you have prospered! Give God praise for the mercies you now enjoy!”

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I know some of us don't want to appear overly emotional or to loudly praise the Lord. "We're Canadian; we're not like those excitable Baptists down there in Texas. We don't shout." Yeah, and we never get excited at a hockey game. I'm being sarcastic, of course. Listen, some of us strain to give a holy grunt. Nevertheless, you know God has been good to you. You know that the Lord has blessed you. You woke up this morning. Hasn't He been good to you? You have a job. You may complain that it isn't all that you want in a job, but you do have a job! Hasn't God been good to you? You may have some aches and pains to complain about, but you can still walk. You can still manage to eat, and God has provided you with food—more food and a greater variety of foods than the vast majority of peoples throughout the world have. Hasn't the Lord been good to you! Because you have prospered, you need to remember the One Who has caused you to prosper. Don't ever forget that it is because you sought the Lord that He has blessed you! Never forget that God "rewards those who seek Him" [HEBREWS 11:6b].

Do not ever forget the words of the Psalmist:

"Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
whom he has redeemed from trouble"

[PSALM 107:2]

The redeemed are vocal because they are redeemed. Throughout Scripture we see that God's people are a noisy people.

I disturbed a few people on one occasion when I cited the 150th Psalm.

"Praise the LORD!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens!
Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his excellent greatness!

"Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!
Praise him with tambourine and dance;
praise him with strings and pipe!
Praise him with sounding cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD!"

[PSALM 150:1-6]

I commented that Hebrew worship was quite obviously noisy. I continued by noting that if we would emulate our spiritual forebears, we would be excited in our worship. We might even shout, "Hallelujah!" At the time, the services were televised across Canada. I was always astonished by our viewership in Ontario and in the Maritime Provinces.

When that particular service was broadcast, a viewer in Halifax complained in an E-mail that I was wrong; he knew Hebrew worship was quiet. He suggested that I must be Pentecostal. I guess he had nothing for which to praise the Lord. All I could say was, "Guilty as charged." No, I'm not a Pentecostal, I'm a Baptist by conviction; but I do believe it is proper to praise God!

I encourage Christians who are serious about serving God to praise His Name; so long as you seek the Lord, God will help you. And as the Lord helps you, people will recognise God's blessing, even if they don't salute your particular flag. Among the Proverbs is this one:

“When a man's ways please the LORD,
he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.”

[PROVERBS 16:7]

Even those who stand opposed to righteousness are compelled to recognise the individual who honours the Lord. The Apostle Peter makes the same point more forcefully when he writes, “Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame” **[1 PETER 3:13-16]**.

I am labouring to ensure that our people see this truth—none of us deserve God's blessing because of education or because of some ability which we hold as administrators of the grace of God. You do not have a place to live and a vehicle to drive because you are Canadian. The Lord blessed you and has provided you the means to live in that house and the vehicle you drive. You are not well-fed because God owes you something—God owes us nothing. All that you have, you have because of God's blessing. And you are responsible to use what God has entrusted to you for His glory. You are responsible to praise Him for the blessings He has showered on you. Far too many of the professed people of God imagine that the Faith consists of doing what they have decided to do, living life on their terms, so long as they attend a church service on Sunday morning. I've said it many times, and I'm going to say it again—going to the church no more makes you a Christian than living in a garage makes you a Mercedes Benz.

Do you imagine that we are better than people living in Kenya? Do we deserve the blessings we now enjoy more than a fellow believer living in the Philippines? We must learn to hold the things of this life loosely, carrying them on our fingertips, knowing that they are given by God so that we can be free to honour Him. When we cease to honour Him, when we cease to serve Him, there will be little reason for Him to continue blessing us as richly as He has.

Uzziah grew mighty. Among the reasons that could be given for the might of the nation he led was a stable government. You see, Uzziah reigned for fifty-two years in Jerusalem; then for two years, though still king, Uzziah lived apart from the royal palace because he was a leper. He was removed as king and his son reigned. It seems quite reasonable to believe that Uzziah was less involved in the day-to-day oversight of the government after this removal from the throne, though he must have been kept apprised to what was going on and having some input into the direction of the nation.

UZZIAH STUMBLES — “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” **[2 CHRONICLES 26:16]**. In the midst of his strength, something dreadful happened to Uzziah. He ceased obeying the LORD and began to do his own thing. Uzziah forgot that he was a king, and not a priest. While the ruler may be blessed by God, the blessing poured out on him will be in the sphere of government, and not in the realm of the Faith.

It would be instructive to note what is written in the account of his rebellion against God. Isaiah, the Prophet of God, helped by providing an accurate account of what was happening. Therefore, we read, “[Uzziah] was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. But Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the LORD who were men of valor, 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.’ Then Uzziah was angry. Now he 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. 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. 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” [2 CHRONICLES 26:16b-21a].

I suspect that when we read this account, our modern minds don’t really understand why this one act would be all that objectionable to the LORD. All Uzziah wanted to do was to burn incense on the altar, to take the lead in worshipping God. However, this one act, what we would call an insignificant act, brought a terrible judgement upon the king. This highly successful king, this brilliantly blessed ruler of the nation, was disqualified, removed from office, by a divine act.

Uzziah seems to have thought that he could dictate to God what needed to be done, rather than waiting on the LORD God to see what should be done. He pushed his way into the sanctuary where he intended to burn incense as though he was the priest anointed by God to perform that duty. Azariah opposed him and sought to debar the king, but the king would not be dissuaded. He was intent on doing what he wanted to do. Reading the account leads me to believe that the king was attended by soldiers since eighty priests, described as men of valour could not stop the king. In effect, Azariah sought to merge Faith and government, church and state, making the state superior to the Faith. When Azariah told him, “No!” Azariah became angry with the priests. It was the final act of defiance so far as God was concerned. Leprosy broke out on his forehead. God had had enough of such insolence. There would be no farther defiance from Uzziah. From now on he would live as a leper, marked by this dreadful judgement.

You may recall another instance when a prominent person was judged in this same way. Miriam and Aaron were because Moses had married a black woman, a Cushite. In their disdain for this woman, they ventured into the realm of God’s appointment. They groused, “Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also” [NUMBERS 12:2]? The text simply notes, “And the LORD heard it.” God heard their complaining and the implied threat that they would begin to hold services as they saw fit, and He acted. God called them out to the Tent of Meeting where He rebuked them. When the LORD withdrew from their presence, Miriam was leprous. Aaron was horrified, and perhaps worried at what would happen to his own person. He cried out to Moses, “Oh, my lord, do not punish us because we have done foolishly and have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes out of his mother’s womb” [NUMBERS 12:11, 12]. God doesn’t treat rebellion lightly.

Uzziah suffered an appalling, a horrifying judgement because he failed to remember how he had been richly blessed; he wanted a little more, and so he attempted to usurp the place of the priests. It was not enough that he was king, that God had richly blessed him throughout his long reign, he presumed against God and tried to act as the LORD’s priest. God saw this, not merely as a faux pas, but as rebellion. The text states that he was “unfaithful to the Lord his God.”

One of my great fears for those who declare the Word of God, and especially for myself, is how easily we can jeopardise our standing with the Lord God. Paul has given sound advice that is too often ignored, when he said of his own life, “I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” [1 CORINTHIANS 9:27]. Whenever a Christian begins to think that she is indispensable, whenever he begins to excuse wickedness in his life, whenever any of us begin to justify evil choices as servants of the Risen Saviour, we are daring the Lord to hold us accountable. He will hold us to account, disciplining us rather than permitting us to dishonour His Name. Haven’t we witnessed that very judgement from the televangelists of some decades back to the removal of prominent preachers in this day? God will not be silent forever when His own people dishonour His Name.

I grieve whenever I read of a prominent minister who has been ensnared in grievous sin. Recently, you may have read of the pastor of a megachurch that was compelled to resign because of multiple accusations of a salacious, scandalous nature. This resignation comes after the pastor of another megachurch was removed by his elders for similar actions only a year or so prior to this. As I read of these failures, coming within months of the failure of yet another noted preacher, I found myself praying, asking that God would give them grace to confess their sin for the welfare of the Faith. I found myself musing how vulnerable any of us can be, how vulnerable I am, should I cease to watch my walk with the Master. After the fact, the choices that led to ruin seemed so obvious to me. And yet, I realised how easy it is to rationalise the choices that these men made. Step-by-step they stumbled into error, and no one loved God enough, no one loved them enough, to warn them to turn from their maddened pursuit of “self.” I am humbled at the knowledge of the power of the enemy and at the weakness of the flesh.

As I wrote these words, my mind turned to God’s provision as revealed through His prophet, Zechariah. This is what Zechariah the Prophet wrote. “[The angel who was speaking with me] showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, ‘The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?’ Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Remove the filthy garments from him.’ And to him he said, ‘Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.’ And I said, ‘Let them put a clean turban on his head.’ So, they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by.

“And the angel of the LORD solemnly assured Joshua, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here’” [ZECHARIAH 3:1-7]. That is what I need, each of us needs such mercy, as we struggle to be holy, to be godly in the midst of a world that constantly allures us, always tempts us, attempting to draw us from righteousness. We need the Angel of the LORD to stand before the Lord pleading for us.

God has indeed provided us with an Advocate, One who stands to plead for us and to intercede for us. Throughout the pages of the Old Covenant, a mysterious personage identified as “the Angel is the LORD” strides across the pages. That One speaks as though He is the LORD, and He has power that God alone would have. When I come to the New Testament, I meet that One when Jesus reveals to some Jewish interlocutors, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad” [JOHN 8:56]. They ridiculed Him, but He responded, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” [JOHN 8:58]. Jesus was identifying Himself as the Angel of the LORD, and He is our Great Advocate before the Father’s throne.

What a comfort is the assurance Christians are given. John testifies, “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” [1 JOHN 2:1,2]. When we read of the Angel of the LORD who assured Joshua, we are reading of the Lord Jesus who stands on our behalf before the Father’s throne.

Some of you listening to this message are feeling mighty low. You know your garments are soiled. You are confident that you are redeemed—you know you are saved; however, you struggle to gain victory over some besetting sin. Your efforts seem so feeble, you wonder if you will ever have victory. Here is the exciting part of the message—you have victory now, though you may not necessarily feel as if you have victory. Before the Father’s throne, Christ the Lord has stood pleading your case. You were forgiven at the cross because you put your faith in Christ the Lord. As you confess your sin, the Saviour cleanses you. Amen! Amen, indeed!

I know that the Lord Jesus intercedes for those whom He has redeemed. Even now, as He stands before the Father, He pleads for each of His twice-born followers. This does not excuse us from keeping short accounts with the Living God. This is the basis for what we read in John’s first missive. There, we read this admonition, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” [1 JOHN 1:9].

Hasn’t God warned us to guard ourselves because He has blessed us? Long years ago, the LORD God spoke through Moses, warning any who would follow the LORD. “When the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” [DEUTERONOMY 6:10-12].

This warning was iterated when God, through Moses warned, “Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day” [DEUTERONOMY 8:11-18].

Haven’t we witnessed people who grew strong in the Faith only to quit walking with us when they thought they were strong? Haven’t we seen people whom we knew to be blessed by God turn and pursue their own desires to their own detriment? The story of Uzziah is played out repeatedly among the churches of the Lord to this day. It is a story as old as sin itself. God blesses a man. The man is greatly used by God until he begins to rely on his own intelligence, until he begins to think of his ability as more important than obedience to the Lord’s will. God withdraws His blessing and the man continues in his own will, thinking that nothing has changed. Then, the world comes crashing down on that man. Until he repents, until he turns from his own self-willed way, he is no longer of use in the Kingdom of God.

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I suggest that we would be well advised to learn to pray as did the Wise Man,

“Remove far from me falsehood and lying;
give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with the food that is needful for me,
lest I be full and deny you
and say, “Who is the LORD?”
or lest I be poor and steal
and profane the name of my God.”

[PROVERBS 30:8, 9]

The message concludes with a plea to the people of God. Recognise the blessings you have already received from the hand of a gracious Father. Give Him praise for what He has done. Then, honestly assess your walk with Him. Where you may have stumbled, confess that sin and seek His forgiveness. Though He has pleaded your case before the Father, take the initiative to confess your sin to Him so that He can cleanse your life and restore you to His service. What is required in these dark days are not more saints who beat themselves down, castigating themselves because of their failures; what is needed are more saints who walk in the knowledge of God’s forgiveness and in the strength that He alone gives to the redeemed. Let the Saviour be glorified in your life today. Amen.