

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: 2 CHRONICLES 26 & EPHESIANS 2:1-10**

To better understand what true Christian freedom means.

Read the Text:

And all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. 2 He built Eloth and restored it to Judah, after the king slept with his fathers. 3 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. 5 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. 6 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. (2 Chronicles 26:1-7, ESV)

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. 16 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. 17 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." 19 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. 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. 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. 22 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. (2 Chronicles 26:15-23, ESV)

Study the Text:

A Story About a King

2 Chronicles 26 describes the meteoric rise of the sixteen-year-old king, Uzziah. To understand how he becomes king, a few details are worth noting. Uzziah's father, Amaziah, becomes king after the assassination of his father, Joash (2 Chron. 25:1). Following his ascension to the throne, Amaziah reigns for 29 years (2 Chron. 25:1). After his victory over Edom, he falls into idolatry and later provokes a disastrous war with Jehoash, who defeats him and plunders Jerusalem (2 Chron. 25:14–24). Eventually, a conspiracy forms against Amaziah in Jerusalem. He flees to Lachish, where he is assassinated (2 Chron. 25:27–28). However, 2 Chronicles 26 is a bit confusing, because it begins with Uzziah being made king "instead of his father Amaziah" (2 Chron. 26:1). But wait, I thought Amaziah already was king? This is where the story gets a little confusing.

A MISSING DETAIL

It turns out that Chronicles omits some details that the Book of Kings provides. According to 2 Kings 14:17, “Amaziah lived fifteen years after the death of Jehoash king of Israel.” That means Amaziah continued to live for many years after his defeat but was politically weakened. During this period, many scholars conclude that Uzziah (also called Azariah in the Kings) was installed as co-regent, or co-ruler, to keep the kingdom afloat. And Uzziah... was sixteen years old when it happened. Think for a moment about your life at sixteen; I’m guessing you were hardly the ideal ruler of a nation (I know for certain I wasn’t). However, Uzziah is blessed by God because “he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD” (2 Chron. 26:4). As a result, Uzziah reigned for 52 years and achieved tremendous military success.

A KING’S DEMISE

However, his reign was not entirely a success. While Uzziah is widely seen as a “good king” of Judah, his success eventually gets to him, and he begins to disregard God’s commandments. The chief example is his disregard for the priestly duties to offer incense, which he took upon himself, though he was not a Levite (2 Chron. 26:16). Being from the tribe of Judah, Uzziah was not permitted to act as a priest (Heb. 7:14). After being withstood by the priests for his insolence (2 Chron. 26:17-18), Uzziah stormed out with the censer and was immediately struck with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:19). Uzziah never recovered (2 Chron. 26:21).

A FAMILIAR NAME

While reading this chapter, there are a couple of names that might stand out. First, Uzziah has the counsel of an individual named “Zechariah” (2 Chron. 26:5). It might be tempting to connect this to the prophet who wrote the Book of Zechariah, but this would be incorrect. Uzziah reigned in the 8th century BC, whereas the prophet “Zechariah, son of Berechiah” (Zech. 1:1) ministered after the Babylonian exile, around 520–518 BC, alongside Haggai during the rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel, over two centuries later. However, there is another familiar name that appears in verse 22: “Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz.” This is, in fact, the prophet Isaiah, who wrote the Book of Isaiah. One of the most well-known passages from Isaiah is Isaiah 6:1, which says: “In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.” This is the same Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26.

What About Now?

The story of Uzziah is an important warning against pride. Uzziah had *real* success. God blessed him and increased him because he was genuinely obedient, doing only what God instructed him in Scripture. But at some point, his success got to his head, and he began to think he could do whatever he wanted, *regardless* of Scripture. His “freedom” to do whatever he wanted cost him his health and ultimately his honor. Freedom that is independent from God and His Word is actually not freedom at all. It’s a prison.

Read the Text:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ —by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:1-10, ESV)

Study the Text:

A Story About a Prisoner

While 2 Chronicles 26 is about a king whose freedom leads to his demise, Ephesians 2 is about a prisoner whose submission leads to his freedom. Below is a breakdown of some key details.

BAD NEWS

The first three verses of Ephesians 2 couldn't get much worse. Paul says, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). Why are you "dead" in them? Because "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Beyond that, Paul says that we have all become followers of both the world and Satan (Eph. 2:2). We are, apart from God's gracious acts in our lives, under the Satanic spell of the world. Finally, Paul writes that it isn't just us readers who suffer this fate; every single person in the world (except Jesus, obviously) is subject to this eternal destiny of darkness. Paul is describing the fallen state of all mankind. Everyone born is born with a fallen nature bent towards our own independence. And yet, this independence from God only leads to our destruction (see: Rom. 1).

GOOD NEWS

After the devastating news of verses 1 through 3, verse 4 bursts forth: "But GOD" (Eph. 2:4). Because of his mercy, God has done for us what we could never do for ourselves: loved us (Eph. 2:4), made us alive with Christ (Eph. 2:5), and exalted us with Christ (Eph. 2:6). But how? By grace through faith: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). God has done all the work. Grace, the Greek term χάρις (charis), means "a charitable act, a generous gift" and is generally understood to be "unearned." And this grace comes "through faith," or "right belief" in God. What does it mean to rightly believe in God? It means to agree with all He has said about Himself in His Word, which is that He is the supreme ruler over all things on whom we are totally dependent. In other words, right belief entails dependence on God and submission to Him.

FREEDOM

To be dependent on God is true freedom. We often think of freedom as total independence from all authority, and the ability to do whatever we want whenever we want. But Uzziah showed us that this is not freedom, but a prison that leads us to further separation from God and others. Actual biblical freedom is not independence from all but dependence on One.

What About Now?

The main takeaway is counter-intuitive: freedom begins with submission. Whenever we submit to God and His Word, we find true freedom from sin and suffering. God has decreed what is true and what is good, and to ignore this only leads to self-destruction. Another takeaway is the reality that only God can give true freedom. There is nothing we can do that brings any modicum of freedom to our lives. In fact, it's a bit paradoxical because the more you try to earn your freedom, the further away you move from it. Finally, because God is "pure act," God is not only the giver of freedom but also freedom itself. In other words, to know God is to know freedom.

Discuss the Text!

Discussion: Pride & Humility

The downfall of Uzziah was his pride, and yet submission to God begins with humility. Talk as a group about the ways in which pride has caused you problems and humility has led to blessing in your life.

1. Icebreaker: What's the most prideful thing you've ever done?
2. What is the first thing you think of when you hear the word "prideful?" What is the first thing you think of when you hear the word "humility?"
3. When you think about "freedom," what is the first thing that comes to mind? Is this the same thing as the biblical freedom we've learned about in this study guide?
4. How do you war against pride in your life?
5. How do you develop humility in your life?
6. Who is the most humble person you know? What makes them humble?

Takeaways:

1. Pride can lead to independence, and independence leads away from God.
2. Freedom in Christ begins with submission to Christ.