

February 24th.] B. C. 765. [2 Chron. xxvi : 16-23,

UZZIAH'S PRIDE PUNISHED.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."*—Proverbs 16 : 18.

HOME READINGS.—M. 2 Chron. 25 : 1-13. T. 2 Chron. 25 : 14-23. W. 2 Chron. 26 : 1-15. Th. Isa. 2 : 1-22. F. Isa. 6 : 1-12. S. 2 Chron. 26 : 16-23. S. Numbers 16 : 1-35.

JOASH reigned well while his old and wise friend Jehoida lived to counsel him. Ch. 24 : 15 : but after his death he began to put his faith in worldly princes Ch. 24 : 17. Better for him had he trusted in the Lord; Ps. 118 : 9, He lapsed into idolatry, and, when reproved by Zechariah, caused the good prophet to be stoned to death : Ch. 24 : 21, Matthew 23 : 35 Swift retribution followed. He was smitten with "great diseases," and, in the end, the wretched man, who had made shipwreck of himself, was murdered in bed by his own servants. He reigned forty years. AMAZIAH, his son, of much the same character as his father, reigned 29 years. He too began by serving the Lord, but by singular infatuation was also drawn into the whirlpool of idolatry, and like his father met a violent death. What a sad contrast the kingdom of Judah now presented to the happy days of Jehoshaphat !

UZZIAH, elsewhere called *Azariah*, 2 Kings 15. 1., came to the throne at the age of 16, with great capacities for government. Under him Judah rapidly regained strength and prosperity. How eminent he was as an agriculturist, a soldier, and a mechanical engineer, see v. 1-15. He was successful in wars against the Philistines on one side, and the Arabians on the other. He restored Eloth, a famous port on the Red Sea, to Judah, v. 2. and, just as long as he sought the Lord, he prospered, v. 5. But his prosperity proved too much for him—"When he was atroph his heart was lifted up to his destruction, v. 16. He became proud and presumptuous, arrogating to himself the right of doing what God had expressly reserved to his consecrated priesthood. This appears to have been the one blot on his character. He is not charged with idolatry and the grosser vices of his predecessors. He fell into the opposite extreme, by intruding into the temple of the Lord to burn incense. Had he forgotten how Jeroboam had been punished for this very thing? 1 Kings 13 : 1-4. Was he not well warned of the sin he was going to commit? v. 18. Surely he knew the Law in such matters, 1 Chron. 23 : 13. That it was as much as his life was worth to do this, Numbers 3 : 10. Yet he persisted : flew into a passion : threatened, Josephus says, the priests with death if they interfered with him. In the very act, he is smitten with leprosy—like Gehazi, 2 Kings, 5 : 27. and incapacitated for his duties which developed upon his son Jotham. He lived, however, to an advanced age—his reign being the longest, but one, of any of the kings of Judah 5 years. Mention is made by Amos Chap. 1 : 1, and by Zechariah Ch. 14 : 5, of an earthquake during the reign of Uzziah which Josephus connects expressly with this sacrilegious attempt to offer incense. (Antiquities 9 : 10 Sect. 4.)

LEARN from the history of these three kings how easy it is for young men of good dispositions, fine abilities, and splendid accomplishments to make shipwreck of their souls, and how needful always the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." There is a good argument here for a properly ordained ministry : and, very obviously, we are taught a becoming reverence for sacred things. ONE SIN wilfully indulged in leads to ruin ; James 2 : 10.

March 3rd.] B. C. 740-726. [2 Chron. xxviii : 19-27.

AHAZ'S PERSISTENT WICKEDNESS.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*"And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord : this is that king Ahaz.—Verse 22."*

HOME READINGS.—M. Isa. 6 : 1-13. T. 2 Chron. 27 : 1-9. W. 2 Chron. 28 : 1-18. Th. Isa. 7 : 1-25. F. 2 Chron. 28 : 19-27. S. 2 Kings 16 : 1-20. S. Isa. 8 : 5-22.

JOTHAM, who acted as regent for his father Uzziah after he was smitten with leprosy, succeeded him at his death, and had a prosperous reign of 16 years. All we know about him is contained in Ch. 27—only nine verses, but from that, it may be inferred that he was both a pious and an enterprising prince.

AHAZ, his son, was twenty, or, as some think, twenty-five, when he began his reign of 16 years duration. Of all the kings of Judah he was the worst—his general character closely resembling that of Ahab, the wickedest king of Israel, 1 Kings 21 : 25. Others began well and, afterwards yielding to temptation—fell from grace : but Ahaz was bad from the very beginning. Notwithstanding the advantages of education, and the good example of his father, he plunged deeper into the mire at every step. In the first place, he became an undivided idolater, v. 2.—exercising his authority to extend it with the intensity of a passion, and with the ignorance of a heathen, sacrificing "to the gods who smote him," v. 23, and in defiance of God. See also 2 Kings 16 : 10-20. To complete his wickedness, as one divested of natural affection as well as religion, he burned his children in the fire to Moloch, v. 3. To these crimes he added the sin of sacrilege, for he cut in pieces the vessels of the temple, shut up its doors to prevent the worship of God, and made him idolatrous altars in every corner of Jerusalem. One of these altars is particularly referred to 2 Kings 16 : 10-12.

HIS PUNISHMENT.—The Syrians invaded his kingdom and in one day slew 120,000 of his valiant men. Modern warfare has no parallel to that. His neighbours, in the Northern kingdom, instead of sympathizing, seized the opportunity to manifest their undying hatred for Judah, joined the Syrian hosts, and returned from a marauding expedition bringing with them to Samaria 200,000 captives—men, women and children, v. 8. This, because they had forsaken God," v. 6, and in literal fulfilment of what Joshua had said long before, Josh. 24 : 20. The treatment, however, of these captives forms one of the most beautiful incidents in history, v. 15. Shewing there were still left some "good Samaritans." "At that time," refers to the period when, after a succession of 40 years, Ahaz was besieged in his capital. Then the Edomites and the Philistines took possession of the low country, v. 18. So Judah was "brought low," because of Ahaz, v. 19. Isaiah, who lived and wrote at this time gives a graphic account of some of these incursions, Isa. ch. 7. Even Ahab humbled himself when rebuked, 1 Kings 21 : 27 ; but Ahaz hardened his heart still more. Alarmed, he foolishly asks aid of TILGATHPILEZER, king of Assyria, who had already carried a large number of the Israelites into captivity, 2 Kings 16 : 29. But neither his obsequious appeal—"I am thy servant and thy son, 2 Kings 16 : 7 : nor the treasures stolen from the temple and offered as a bribe, availed. He helped him not. Had his reign not been cut short by his early death, Judah would have been at that time annihilated : but God had better days in store for the tribe which he loved.

LEARN how sad the case of those who despise the goodness and forbearance of God, Roman 9 : 4-5. What a fearful thing it is to be forsaken of Him in this life. Ps. 2 : 4 ; Prov 1 : 26. How utterly useless to suppose that such can by any possibility be restored to his favour in the next world. Heb. 10 : 26 ; Rev. 6 : 16-17.