CHAPTER FIVE

THE NARRATIVE ON UZZIAH’S LEPROSY

(2 CHRONICLES 26)\(^1\)

The narrative on Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26) is a very interesting text, since it contains material unparalleled in the Deuteronomistic History. Whereas 2 Kgs 14:1–22; 15:1–7 devotes only nine verses to Azariah’s reign of fifty-two years, 2 Chronicles 26 has a circumstantial report of twenty-three verses on the same king, who is now called Uzziah.\(^2\) The Chronicler adopted 2 Kgs 14:21–22; 15:1–7 as the core of his narrative, but enlarged it with two major additions. He omitted the reference to the people’s worship in the high places (2 Kgs 15:4), and inserted at that particular point in his narrative an extensive report of [1] Uzziah’s successful reign (2 Chr 26:5–15) and [2] his being struck by leprosy (2 Chr 26:16–20). In so doing, the Chronicler created a two-part structure which he had also employed in the previous chapters:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King</th>
<th>Positive section</th>
<th>Negative section</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joas</td>
<td>2 Chr 24:2–14</td>
<td>2 Chr 24:15–27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amaziah</td>
<td>2 Chr 25:2–13</td>
<td>2 Chr 25:14–27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzziah</td>
<td>2 Chr 26:5–15</td>
<td>2 Chr 26:16–20</td>
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2 Chr 26:5–15

The positive section on Uzziah must be considered the Chronicler’s own explanation for the exceptionally long reign of this king, viz. fifty-two years. It opens with a clear statement:

\(^1\) This Chapter is a revised version of a contribution first published as ‘“They saw that his forehead was leprous”’ (2 Chr 26:20). The Chronicler’s Narrative on Uzziah’s Leprosy’, in: M.J.H.M. Poorthuis, J. Schwartz (eds.), *Purity and Holiness. The Heritage of Leviticus* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series, Vol. II), Leiden 2000, 61–72.

\(^2\) The name ‘Uzziah’ is used in 2 Chronicles 26; Isa 1:1; Hos 1:1; Amos 1:1; Zech 14:5; 2 Kgs 15:13.30.32.34, whereas ‘Azariah’ is found in 1 Chr 3:12; 2 Kgs 15:1.6.7.8.17.23.27. A.M. Honeyman, ‘The Evidence for Regnal Names among the Hebrews’, *JBL* 67 (1948), 13–25 argues that one should distinguish between a king’s regnal or throne name and his personal name; cf. Shallum/Jehoahaz (Jer 22:11); Eliakim/Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 23:34); Mattaniah/Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:17).
He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him on seeing God; as long as he sought the LORD, God caused him to prosper. (2 Chr 26:5)

The Chronicler, beyond any doubt, has woven his own idiom and theological approach into this statement, as it is both introduced and concluded by the verb דָּרַשׁ (‘to seek God/YHWH’), which is one of the Chronicler’s central themes.³

Uzziah’s success in foreign affairs is illustrated in vv. 6–8, whereas his prosperity in internal affairs is dealt with in vv. 9–15. Both accounts are given a strong coherence by the Chronicler with the help of two of his favourite verbs, viz. עזר (‘to help’) and חזק (‘to be strong’):

(26:7) ‘God aided him’
(26:13) ‘to help the king’
(26:15) ‘he was marvellously helped’
(26:8) ‘he had become very strong’
(26:9) ‘he fortified’
(26:15) ‘till he was strong’

Two times, viz. at the end of the pericope dealing with Uzziah’s foreign affairs (vv. 6–8) and at the end of the passage dealing with his internal affairs (vv. 9–15), there is a statement regarding his fame (שם): ‘His fame spread to the borders of Egypt’ (26:8); ‘his fame spread far and wide’ (26:15).⁶

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate whether, and to what extent, all data referred to in vv. 6–15 are reliable from the historical point of view. In fact everyone might agree with Sara Japhet that

⁴ The verb צלח hiphil (‘to prosper’) should be considered one of the Chronicler’s favourite motifs: 1 Chr 22:11.13; 29:13; 2 Chr 7:11; 13:12; 14:6; 18:11.14; 20:20; 26:5; 31:21; 32:30.
⁵ See C. Begg, “‘Seeking Yahweh’ and the Purpose of Chronicles”, Louvain Studies 9 (1982), 128–141; B.E. Kelly, Retribution and Eschatology in Chronicles (JSOTSS 211), Sheffield 1996, 46–53. The dissertation of G.E. Schaefer, The Significance of Seeking God in the Purpose of the Chronicler (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1972) was not available to me.
⁶ The expression שמו יצא (‘his fame spread wide’) as used in 2 Chr 26:15 reminds of 1 Chr 14:17, where it is said of King David.