

2 Chronicles 26 • Holding Leaders Accountable

Introduction

Especially in western cultures, there's a tendency to ignore the teachings of Scripture regarding the roles, responsibilities, and scope of power of leaders and attribute to them the corresponding power and authority of a business executive. In a business environment, it's very unlikely that one of the workers would confront the CEO to make them accountable for their moral or spiritual actions. From the outset of Israel demanding a king, it was made clear to them that one of the consequences was that not only did the people have to maintain their personal and corporate spiritual faithfulness in order to remain in a right relationship with God, but so now did their kings. God further instructed that the kings should consider themselves shepherds to the people God entrusted to them. Spiritual leadership in **BOTH** Testaments has a two-way component wherein each party is responsible to hold the other accountable to God's Word and ways.

¹And all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the place of his father Amaziah. ²He built Eloth and restored it to Judah after the king slept with his fathers.

³Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Jechiliah of Jerusalem.

⁴He did right in the sight of the LORD according to all that his father Amaziah had done. ⁵He continued to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding through the vision of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God prospered him.

⁶Now he went out and warred against the Philistines, and broke down the wall of Gath and the wall of Jabneh and the wall of Ashdod; and he built cities in the area of Ashdod and among the Philistines.

⁷God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians who lived in Gur-baal, and the Meunites. ⁸The Ammonites also gave tribute to Uzziah, and his fame extended to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong.

⁹Moreover, Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate and at the Valley Gate and at the corner buttress and fortified them. ¹⁰He built towers in the wilderness and hewed many cisterns, for he had much livestock, both in the lowland and in the plain. He also had plowmen and vinedressers in the hill country and the fertile fields, for he loved the soil.

[Read v.1-5]

Q: What is the significance of restoring Eloth?

A: Eloth was a port on the Red Sea originally belonging to Edom, but taken by David and maintained by Solomon. Whoever owned it became a type of "super-power" in the ancient world in being able to extend their trade and influence out to the very edges of the known world, bringing in substantial wealth. Ancient readers of this text would instantly recognize not just its association with great wealth and influence, but link it with the kind of power wielded by David and Solomon. It would be a very powerful testimony to the extraordinary strength and stature of King Uzziah by likening his accomplishments to those of David and Solomon.

Q: What was Zechariah's greatest benefit to King Uzziah? How did this compare to his restoration of Eloth?

A: Zechariah provided great, spiritual "understanding". Eloth represented Uzziah's tremendous earthly power and influence matched by equally impressive spiritual blessings in Zechariah.

Q: But what were these blessings, both earthly and spiritual, dependent upon?

A: They were equally dependent on the quality of Uzziah's personal faithfulness.

[Read v.6-15]

Q: What areas are these places describing? Where was the main thrust of Uzziah's activities?

A: To the west along the Mediterranean from Jabneh (near Joppa) down south through Philistia into the southern regions from Gur-baal (below Beer-sheba) over to the areas around the Dead Sea bordering Edom and Moab. Basically Uzziah took control of everything between Judah and Egypt as indicated by the fact that "his fame extended to the border of Egypt".

Q: What might this represent spiritually?

A: Uzziah restrained and/or eliminated the bad spiritual influences of those around them. The taming of the literal wilderness areas represented taming their spiritual wilderness.

Q: How would you contrast the actions Uzziah took to subdue his enemies in v.6-8 vs. those actions described in v.9-10?

A: The actions against his enemies were offensive in nature, whereas his actions to fortify cities and build up food and supplies were more defensive in nature.

¹¹Moreover, Uzziah had an army ready for battle, which entered combat by divisions according to the number of their muster, prepared by Jeiel the scribe and Maaseiah the official, under the direction of Hananiah, one of the king's officers. ¹²The total number of the heads of the households, of valiant warriors, was 2,600. ¹³Under their direction was an elite army of 307,500, who could wage war with great power, to help the king against the enemy.

¹⁴Moreover, Uzziah prepared for all the army shields, spears, helmets, body armor, bows and sling stones. ¹⁵In Jerusalem he made engines of war invented by skillful men to be on the towers and on the corners for the purpose of shooting arrows and great stones. Hence his fame spread afar, for he was marvelously helped until he was strong.

¹⁶But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. ¹⁷Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the Lord, valiant men. ¹⁸They opposed Uzziah the king 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. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the Lord God."

¹⁹But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense. ²⁰Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the LORD had smitten him.

²¹King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off

Point: *Having removed the bad spiritual influences, the work continued to firmly establish the people both physically and spiritually.*

Q: What is significant about an army that could enter "combat by divisions according to the number of their muster"?

A: First, many ancient armies were more like mobs organized at the time a king decided to go to war. Uzziah's army would be organized, trained, and disciplined, a far more effective force than even the largest "mob" type of army.

Second, it indicates that elements of the army were regularly called up to active duty so that there was always a trained, professional force on duty and alert against any potential enemy. Again, this was much more powerful than a king hurrying to muster an army in response to a coming threat, unable to repel an invader in time.

Q: So how do we know that all these activities, preparations, and tools were a reflection of their spiritual condition?

A: "For he was marvelously helped until he was strong." The physical accomplishments were made possible only by their spiritual commitment.

Point: *There have been great and even powerful organizations built and dedicated to the Lord throughout the history of the church. We can see many examples today in mission organizations, outreach ministries, and so forth. The key factor contributing to their growth and sustaining power is often a reflection of the quality of their spiritual commitment. Size and strength don't automatically mean they're rightly committed, but a Christ-like organization doesn't attain such things without pursuing and maintaining the right spiritual priorities.*

[Read v.16-23]

Q: So what's wrong with Uzziah trying to "burn incense on the altar of incense"? Haven't we seen other kings do things in the temple?

A: We've seen other kings offer sacrifices and participate in dedications, but never doing what God's Word restricts to something only the high priest can do – offer incense on the altar of incense.

Q: Has anyone else tried such a thing before?

A: Numbers 16 records the incident wherein 250 leaders of Israel from various tribes rose up against Moses, insisting on elevating themselves at least to Moses' and Aaron's position. They were all offering incense together versus Aaron the high priest alone opposite them when God confirmed the error of their assertion by having the ground open up and swallow them in front of everyone.

Q: What is different about Uzziah's rebellion compared with that of other kings recorded in Scripture?

A: The "normal" spiritual fall of a king has been to reject God's Word and ways in order to embrace those of a false god/false religion. They seek to substitute the One True God with something else. Uzziah instead rejects God's Word and ways in the pursuit of the religion of the One True God.

Point: *Whether pursuing a substitute for God or pursuing the very things of God, the result of failure is the same because the root cause is the same: disobedience to God's Word and ways.*

from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son was over the king's house judging the people of the land.

²²Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first to last, the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, has written.

²³So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the grave which belonged to the kings, for they said, "He is a leper." And Jotham his son became king in his place.

Q: How does Uzziah's response to Azariah's chastisement reveal that Uzziah is definitely not a righteous man at this point?

A: A righteous man is not perfect and, when he makes a mistake, will respond with sincere repentance and actually be appreciative of being corrected. Uzziah instead responds with threats and anger.

Q: What is leprosy representative of spiritually in Scripture?

A: It's representative of sin and its bearer underwent the same kind of physical things that represented what sin does to a person spiritually: they become unclean, cut off and isolated from God's people, and cannot enter into God's presence in this condition.

Point: *Earlier, Uzziah's earthly accomplishments mirrored his spiritual accomplishments. Now, likewise, his spiritual failures are mirrored in his earthly condition. Uzziah's earthly rise matched his spiritual faithfulness, whereas his earthly demise matches his spiritual unfaithfulness.*

Q: How was the role of Azariah and the other priests limited?

A: They could only confront and remove Uzziah; actual judgment and the final consequences for his sin could only be visited upon him by God alone.

Q: How does this serve as an example for confronting spiritual leaders who have gone astray?

A: They must be confronted with the truth, they must be confronted publicly, they must be removed from the body of Believers. But the true punishment and consequences will be meted out by God according to His will and ways.

You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

1 Corinthians 5:2-5

Point: *Our role is limited to accountability and, if necessary, removal from the body. The rest is in God's hands, not ours.*

Overall Application

- *Some things start out right but go astray due to forsaking God's Word and the things of God for something else; others begin right but are diverted by misusing the very things of God. Do you know of examples where this has happened?*
- *Have you ever wondered why a prominent Christian leader appears to have veered off course? Is it possible that no one in their organization is holding them spiritually accountable?*
- *Why does spiritual accountability not only provide the opportunity for a leader to repent and mend their ways, but also protects the flock at large in their care? What is the responsibility of followers in regards to their leaders?*