

# King Asa

## A diligent man who chose to lean on God

Scriptures are taken from the New International Version, unless otherwise stated

Back in 1792, William Carey published an 87 page pamphlet stating the obligation of Christians to actively pursue the conversion of the heathen. Until then, the Protestants across Europe had spent two and a half centuries debating theology and consolidating the political benefits brought about by the Reformation. Carey urged Protestants to organize themselves to evangelize the world. “Young man”, said one of his many critics, “when God pleases to convert the heathen He will do it without your aid or mine.” Perhaps every Christian community lives this tension. There are the active men and women who go out and “do things” and also those devout believers who pray and wait for God to “do things.” The life of king Asa shows that both diligence and dependence are necessary.

At a fairly young age, Asa succeeded his father as king of Judah. He was committed to the Lord and implemented some very positive reforms. The main events of Asa's 41 year reign (910-870 BC) are outlined in 2 Chronicles chapters 14, 15 and 16.

### **1. Pleasing the Lord from the start 2 Chronicles 14:1-8**

How long do kings reign? How many years would Asa have to reform Judah? The future is always uncertain. The time for action, for obedience, for reform, is the present. As soon as Asa became king, he “removed the foreign altars and the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles” (14:3). Does something in your life need changing? Is your family or local church living spiritual decadence? Revival usually starts with conviction of sin and confession. This is followed by radical practical changes. What would the Lord have you “remove,” “smash” or “cut down” in your life? Like Asa, it is best to seek to please God from the start. If we postpone the correct action, we may become comfortable with the disorder. Are you starting something new? Found a new job? Moved to a new house? Recently married? Started in a new school? Don't wait, take concrete steps to please God now.

Revival is much more than destroying that which was evil. King Asa was also dynamic in encouraging the people in three good areas: (1) Relationship: “He

commanded Judah to seek the LORD” (14:4) – he knew that without a genuine relationship with the Lord, they would only have a dry mechanic religion. (2) Obedience: He instructed them “to obey” God’s “laws and commands” (14:4) – restoration begins in the heart but always requires some specific action. (3) Vision: He encouraged them to “build up these towns... and put walls round them, with towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours...” (14:7,8) – he taught them to appreciate, protect and build up their God given inheritance. What has God given you? A set of difficult children? A selfish partner? A boring job? A body with a frustrating weakness? A small struggling local church? Some day soon we shall enjoy perfection. In heaven. But now, while here on earth, we are called to appreciate, to protect and to build up what the Lord has given us: “The land is still ours.”

## **2. Relying on the Lord while facing uncertainty**

### **2 Chronicles 14:9-15**

To defend the southern kingdom, Asa strengthened his army. “Asa had an army of three hundred thousand men from Judah, equipped with large shields and with spears, and two hundred and eighty thousand from Benjamin, armed with small shields and with bows. All these were brave fighting men” (14:8). But soon a serious threat arrived from North Africa: “Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots” (14:9 RSV). Asa was outnumbered! However well we prepare ourselves, unexpected surprises and overwhelming difficulties may come our way. For some, it may be the announcement of cancer, the reality of divorce or the unexpected death of a loved one. For others it could be failing an important exam, the negation of a visa, the loss of a job, bankruptcy, or an emotional division in the local church.

King Asa was facing likely disaster. What options were available to him? He could have run away. He could have tried to seek alliance with Zerah or another king. He could have charged forward with suicidal determination. But Asa decided to pray: “LORD, there is no-one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O LORD our God, for *we rely on you*, and in your name we have come against this vast army. O LORD, you are our God; do not let man prevail against you.” (14:11). Asa chose to rely, to lean, to trust on the Lord. That choice is also open to us. In fact, when we feel small, weak, alone and helpless before the uncertain future, we are best positioned to lean on the Lord. The Lord Himself made this very clear to the apostle Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” And Paul experienced this strength that comes by choosing to rely on the Lord: “for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9,10).

Relying on the Lord does not imply inactivity. After expressing their weakness and their dependence on the Lord, Asa and his brave soldiers still had to face the enemy and fight. And as they fought, “the LORD defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah” (14:12 RSV). If you are presently facing uncertain and difficult times, like Asa, consciously choose to rely on the Lord. Then calmly, with the peace and strength that He gives, courageously face the future. When we rely on Him, we allow

Him to work. Diligent dependence is an essential trait of all “God's fellow-workers” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

### **3. Listening to the Lord through others 2 Chronicles 15:1-8**

The next important event is the encounter between king Asa with Azariah. Differences between translations make it unclear if Obed was the prophet and his son Azariah a messenger, or if Azariah was the prophet or if perhaps both were prophets (15:1, 8). The fact was that at this point Asa was feeling tired and somewhat discouraged. The Lord noticed this and sent Azariah with an encouraging message. He assured him of (1) His presence: “The LORD is with you when you are with him” (15:2) and (2) a reward: Asa’s hard work and obedience was noticed: “But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for *your work will be rewarded*” (15:7). Perhaps most of us go through times of tiredness and discouragement. The apostle Paul sensed this among some saints at Corinth. He wrote, “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58). We also need to reflect, absorb and believe these promises. “When Asa heard these words... he took courage” (15:8).

But why didn’t the Spirit of God come directly upon king Asa? (15:1). Why does God speak through another? Sometimes the Lord speaks to our heart directly. When Elijah was unfocused and discouraged, the Lord gently dealt with him Himself. But quite often, the Lord chooses to speak to us through others. Here God chose to speak to Asa through Azariah. King Asa could have rejected him. Perhaps he could have considered Azariah too young to speak to a king. He did not have the credentials of significant prophets like Elijah and Elisha. Asa could have despised the prophet for not being one of the “brave fighting men.” If we are not careful, we can miss the Lord’s word to us because we reject the packaging or the vehicle. We should not forget that the Lord Himself chooses the messenger. He may desire to encourage, correct or challenge you through that fragile old sister, through that young inexperienced preacher, through that boring or boisterous singer, through that Christian you doctrinally disagree with. Using Azariah was the Lord’s way of encouraging king Asa while forcing him to listen to others. If the Lord required perfection in life and doctrine of His messengers, He would not use any of us! By grace He chooses to speak. By grace He chooses His messenger. We must also exercise grace if we are to hear the Lord through others.

### **4. Moving others by personal example 2 Chronicles 15:9-19**

Once Asa was encouraged, he pressed on with his reforms. Two actions are highlighted: (1) Cleanliness: “He removed the detestable idols from the whole land of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns he had captured in the hills of Ephraim” (15:8) – Asa removed that which was offensive to the Lord even within his own family (15:16), and (2) Worship: “He repaired the altar of the LORD that was in front of the portico of the LORD’s temple” (15:8) – Asa prepared the infrastructure so that the people of God could worship Jehovah and offer Him sacrifices. Seeing these

changes, God-fearing men and women from other tribes moved to Judah, “for large numbers had come over to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him” (15:9). Do others find your Christian lifestyle attractive? Is the presence of God felt in some way in your home and Christian meetings? True Godliness, genuine holiness, is life-giving and is attractive. It is instructive to reflect for a moment on why a holy Jesus attracted publicans, prostitutes and sinners. Why did they enjoy His company? Would such feel comfortable and warmly welcomed in your local church?

How did the kingdom of Judah respond to Asa’s initiatives? (1) They worshiped: “They assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa’s reign. At that time they sacrificed to the LORD seven hundred head of cattle and seven thousand sheep and goats” (15:10,11). Now that the altar of the Lord was repaired, there was renewed joy and spontaneous generosity in offering to the Lord. A desire to worship is a sign of renewal. (2) They recommitted themselves: “They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul... All Judah rejoiced about the oath because they had sworn it wholeheartedly. They sought God eagerly, and he was found by them” (15:12-15). Asa’s devotion to the Lord moved others to a deeper spiritual experience.

The words and actions of King Asa inspired and changed a whole nation. You and I may not move a nation, but we do have a sphere of influence. Does your devotion to the Lord inspire those around you? Your level of preparation and interest in your weekly Bible study group, your participation in the prayer and worship meetings, the tone of your voice as you sing to the Lord, your degree of interest and commitment to fellow-Christians in your local congregation, your practical concern for those in need... these actions move others in one way or another. “Set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity... Do not neglect the gift you have... Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress” (1 Timothy 4:12-15 RSV).

## **5. Relying on cleverness and experience**

### **2 Chronicles 16**

After the nation of Israel divided, there was constant rivalry and frequent aggression between Israel (the northern 10 tribes) and Judah (the southern 2 tribes). “In the thirty-sixth year of Asa’s reign Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and fortified Ramah to prevent anyone from leaving or entering the territory of Asa king of Judah” (16:1). The date of this offensive presents a little difficulty, since we know that king Baasha died in the twenty-sixth year of Asa’s reign (1 Kings 15:33). Technical commentaries offer possible explanations, but the prime purpose in recording this war narrative is to show a contrast with the way Asa fought his first war. Experience provides calm confidence but easily erodes our need to be dependent on the Lord. In this chapter, king Asa chooses to trust in his own strength and cleverness.

(a) Asa’s freedom was threatened. King Baasha moved south and began to fortify Ramah, a city about 6 km north of Jerusalem. This represented a serious threat to Asa’s freedom and future. In the first war, when Asa had little experience, he prayed to the Lord, asked Him to help. But this time, Asa sent messengers to a gentile king

in Damascus saying “Let there be a treaty between me and you... See, I am sending you silver and gold. Now break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so that he will withdraw from me” (16:3). This clever strategy worked. Israel was attacked from Damascus and Baasha was forced to withdraw from Ramah. “Then King Asa brought all the men of Judah, and they carried away from Ramah the stones and timber Baasha had been using. With them Asa built up Geba and Mizpah” (16:6). In this way, Asa recovered some of his initial investment and was rid of the threat from the king of Israel. How did the Lord view this line of action? He sent a prophet named Hanani to Asa to help him see the difference between the two wars. When attacked from North Africa, “you relied on the LORD, he delivered them into your hand” (16:8). But in this war, he relied on astuteness, silver, gold, and unhealthy alliances. When your freedoms are threatened, how do you respond? When you engage in Christian service, do you still choose rely, lean, and depend on Him? “Lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him... Do not be wise in your own eyes” (Proverbs 3:5-7). Do not forget the danger of experience!

(b) Asa’s reputation was threatened. Once the crisis blew over, Asa must have felt quite pleased and satisfied with himself. His experienced political maneuvering had brought peace and allowed for more prosperity. Perhaps many had already told Asa how happy they were to have such an intelligent king. He was a success. But prophet Hanani assessed the situation differently: “You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war” (16:9). Leaders and politicians do not like to be accused of foolishness, and specially not when enjoying high support ratings. Hanani’s view was very sound. Why had Asa chosen to rely on man and not on God? God is good. He wants to bless. “For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him” (16:9). But now Asa’s reputation was at stake. He could not admit failure. Instead of humbling himself, “Asa was angry with the seer because of this; he was so enraged that he put him in prison” (16:10). How do you react when your reputation is threatened? Do you invite, listen and benefit from criticism? Remember that there may be a word of the Lord for you hidden among those hurtful comments.

(c) Asa’s health was threatened. “In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the LORD, but only from the physicians” (16:12). Here we see a king reaching the end of his days. Old age brings its weaknesses and limitations. Clearly these can be frustrating. With severe disease in his feet, Asa’s comfort, mobility and ability to fight were lost. What do you do when faced with painful limitations? The above verse should not be understood as dismissive of doctors and physicians. Jesus approved of the role of doctors when he said. “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick” (Matthew 9:12). What did Asa do wrong? When his health was threatened, he did not seek the Lord but leaned on the physicians. Faith does not dismiss the need to plan, to work, to fight and to seek medical attention. Faith is trust. We must be diligent - but trusting, depending, leaning on our good Lord.

## Conclusion

It is clear that Asa was no perfect king. And yet the Lord's verdict was: "Nevertheless the heart of Asa was blameless all his days" (15:17 RSV). You and I may also have moments of sad failure, we may leave important jobs unfinished, we may not always live up to our calling... but does our heart continue to lean on the Lord? Fortunately we serve a very gracious God: "He will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same *diligence to the very end*" (Hebrews 6:10-11). The Lord still blesses diligent dependence. So let's press on, consciously choosing to depend on Him.

The 3000 year old promise still stands: "But as for you, be firm and let not your hands be weak; for there is a reward for your deeds" (2 Chronicles 15:7 DBY).

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