

ROYAL INTRODUCTIONS

Kings of the Past Who Point Us to the True King

ASA: Promising Start, Disappointing Finish

(1 Kings 15:9-24; 2 Chronicles 14-16)

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There was one standard by which all of the kings of Judah were measured, and that standard was established by King David. David was a **“man after God’s own heart.”** He had his failings, but he maintained his trust in Yahweh throughout his life and reign. Very few of the kings who followed lived up to that expectation. There were many who were faithful in the same vein that David was, though not to the same degree. Asa was one of those. **1 Kings 15:11** says of Asa, **“And Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as David his father had done.”**

Asa was the grandson of Rehoboam. His father was Abijam, who only reigned for three years over Judah. The evaluation Abijam got for his reign was not positive. **1 Kings 15:3** says, **“And he walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father.”** We are not told why his reign was so short-lived. He accomplished nothing of note in those three years, though in his relatively short life, he had 14 wives and fathered 38 children. One of those was Asa, who now sat on the throne.

Asa had a promising start. An army of Ethiopians came up against him with over 1 million men and 300 chariots. As Asa went out against the Ethiopians, seeing that he had little hope of defeating such a large force, the first thing he did was to pray. Hear his words in **2 Chronicles 14:11**, **“O LORD, there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, you are our God; let not man prevail against you.”** Yahweh heard his prayer. The Ethiopians were routed and Judah was saved.

Considering the family he came from, we don’t know who taught Asa about Yahweh, but somehow he knew where to turn in times of trouble. He did not trust his own strength. Neither did he fall into despair at the sight of such overwhelming odds. He called upon Yahweh to save him and His people, something that his father or grandfather did not readily do. And he received a great promise following this display of faith. Upon his return from the victory, Azariah, son of Obed, came to him with a great prophesy, which we find in **2 Chronicles 15:2-7**.

Through Azariah, Yahweh promised him two things. The first was, **“I am with you if you are with me.”** That was huge. Yahweh’s presence was His greatest blessing, because it meant protection, provision, and prosperity. Yet, all of this was contingent on Israel abiding in the LORD. This was a reciprocal covenant relationship. Yahweh promised the moon, but Israel had to trust Him to provide

and to protect them. They had to look to Him exclusively for all they needed. Still, this is a great bargain. Asa and his people would simply ask, and Yahweh would give everything necessary for them to prosper.

He also said this: ***“But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded.”*** That would be a great source of hope for a leader. Many times we wonder if all of the sacrifice and struggle we invest as a parent, as we sacrifice in ministry or at work, will actually be worth it in the end. If we knew that it would, our motivation would more likely remain strong and we could persevere through even the hardest struggle. Here, Yahweh is promising Asa (and I think us as well) that his work is seen, and the good that he does will indeed be rewarded. Faith clings to that promise and waits for its fulfillment.

In response to this promise and the encouragement that he received, Asa conducted a fairly thorough religious reformation through the land. All of the idols throughout Judah and Benjamin were removed. The altar in the temple in Jerusalem was repaired. All of the people covenanted together to follow Yahweh. Remarkably, he even ousted his own mother from being Queen Mother because she had erected a detestable idol for Asherah. That idol was taken down, crushed, and burned. Who of us would have the nerve to take such action against our own mother? Asa’s passion for Yahweh was impressive. He was on the way to becoming a truly godly leader for Yahweh’s people.

Yet, as often happens with these kings, that passion waned in his later years. When the northern tribes of Israel threatened Judah and began building a fortified city on their border, Asa became alarmed. Instead of praying as he did with the Ethiopian threat, he sent money to Damascus to convince them to break their treaty with Israel. This would distract Israel from Judah and halt the construction of these fortifications. The scheme worked just as Asa hoped.

He thought all was good until Hanani the Seer came to Asa with a rebuke. He had trusted Yahweh when Judah was threatened by the Ethiopians. Why did he not trust Yahweh now, against a threat not nearly so ominous? Asa was not happy with Hanani, and instead of humbly listening to him and repenting of his faithlessness, as David did with Nathan, he had Hanani thrown into prison and put in stocks. And this trend of trusting other means of help instead of trusting Yahweh continued through the end of his life. ***2 Chronicles 16:12*** reports that ***“In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe. Yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but sought help from physicians.”*** What a sad ending! He dies in agony and hopeless self-determination.

I think we all want to finish strong. David finished in many ways stronger than he began. Too often Judah’s kings did not. What happened? Did they simply forget all of the great things Yahweh did in their lives? Maybe, but I wonder if there is another dynamic at work. When we are younger and we fail, the fall we take is not necessarily that far down or costly. It is like an infant learning to walk. When they fall, they don’t get hurt much because they are so close to the ground. In our spiritual youth we are expected to be weak and frail, so our failings are not surprising. But, when we are mature, such failures are more serious. Mature

believers just do not do things like that. Repentance for the mature in some ways should get easier, because we experience more of God's grace and the work of His Spirit to transform us. In other ways, repentance becomes harder because the mature believer has farther to fall. A mature believer develops a reputation for better behavior and life practices. He has shown years of growth in faith and obedience. So, when sin comes, and it definitely will, the inclination to protect that reputation of maturity is strong. All that has been accomplished in his Christian life is now threatened. Too often, in this time, the mature believer can easily fall back on self-defensiveness and self-deception in order to guard the image of mature spirituality.

I don't know for sure that this is what Asa did. I do know that he had that great victory of faith early in his reign, and he then passionately pursued some deep religious reforms. He set the bar for himself pretty high. He had accomplished much that had to be protected. When he failed by trusting the Syrians instead of Yahweh, he reverted to self-defense. If he had just repented, as David had done when confronted with his sin, things would have been so much better.

Too often we think that Christian maturity is coming to the place where we no longer struggle with sin. The mature believer might not struggle with the same types of sin, but he will struggle none the less. His struggle will probably be with sin that is much more deeply rooted in his heart, and sin that presents a much more serious problem. Maturity means we refuse to stand on a false foundation of outward righteousness, and we quickly run to the cross of Christ with our sin, acknowledge our helplessness, and throw ourselves wholly on Jesus to protect us, provide for us, and to prosper us. Maturity means we know how to repent, and therefore can lead others towards a deeper repentance.

Our true King, in His last words and at His time of greatest trial and struggle, said, ***"Into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46)***. May we all finish our race with that kind of determined trust in the goodness, power, and grace of our Covenant God.