

Lesson's for Today from King Asa 9-23-01

Because of the recent tragedy people are doing some serious thinking and examining of ideas and beliefs. I thought of the nation of Judah and how God dealt with it. America is not Israel nor is it the church. Israel as a nation had a covenant with God. We as the church have a covenant with God. America was founded on godly principles and has, throughout much of its history, sought the direction of God. But America is founded as a nation on religious freedom for all, recognizing that governments of man should be guided by faith, but can never enforce a particular faith without endangering their own. That is why we have separation of church and state. That has been taken to an extreme in this generation. It is important to recognize the state cannot make individuals believe or legislate righteousness. Faith comes from the heart, not a law or rule.

In Judah, the state and their faith were to be one under God, yet, the people insisted on a king. That brought in complexity that was not God's original plan for them. When a king was godly, the nation seemed to follow that leadership in a godly direction. When he was ungodly the nation readily followed. That is the nature of man, to follow. There are exceptions, when the people stand against a leader and refuse to follow – both for good and bad reasons. But more often than not, the people follow the direction of the leader.

With the difference in mind, the difference between our nation and that of Judah, let us consider the eternal truths in the reign of Asa. I was asking the Lord where to turn in regard to God working with Judah in the past and 2 Chronicles 15 immediately came to mind. I think the lessons there, are what God would have us focus on, but let us look at chapter 14, starting in verse 2 to get the background.

2 Chron 14:2-7 (NIV)² Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God.³ He removed the foreign altars and the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles.⁴ He commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to obey his laws and commands.⁵ He removed the high places and incense altars in every town in Judah, and the kingdom was at peace under him.⁶ He built up the fortified cities of Judah, since the land was at peace. No one was at war with him during those years, for the LORD gave him rest.⁷ "Let us build up these towns," he said to Judah, "and put walls around them, with towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours, because we have sought the LORD our God; we sought him and he has given us rest on every side." So they built and prospered.

First we note that Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He obeyed the covenant that his nation had made with God, in not worshipping foreign gods. His nation had compromised its promise with God by building the symbols of these foreign religions. Asa saw to it that they were destroyed, and so, they were at peace. He credits their existence as a nation to the fact that they have sought the Lord. The passage clearly tells us that it was the Lord that kept them at peace with their enemies.

Why? They sought Him. They did away with the compromising of their promises to God. Because of this condition of peace, they built and prospered.

We have lived in a period of peace. Many of our young people today have known only prosperity. The Gulf War was in defense of the innocent whose lives were being snuffed out in Kuwait by a totalitarian regime. We have had very few casualties on our home soil. We have built and prospered. We have been the recipients of the blessings that come from having peace on every side. King Asa attributed that to God and their obedience to Him.

2 Chron 14:8-15 (NIV)⁸ *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.*⁹ *Zerah the Cushite marched out against them with a vast army and three hundred chariots, and came as far as Mareshah.*¹⁰ *Asa went out to meet him, and they took up battle positions in the Valley of Zephathah near Mareshah.*¹¹ *Then Asa called to the LORD his God and said, "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."*¹² *The LORD struck down the Cushites before Asa and Judah. The Cushites fled,*¹³ *and Asa and his army pursued them as far as Gerar. Such a great number of Cushites fell that they could not recover; they were crushed before the LORD and his forces. The men of Judah carried off a large amount of plunder.*¹⁴ *They destroyed all the villages around Gerar, for the terror of the LORD had fallen upon them. They plundered all these villages, since there was much booty there.*¹⁵ *They also attacked the camps of the herdsmen and carried off droves of sheep and goats and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.*

When faced with an enemy that was superior in technology and numbers Asa looked to God. *"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..."* he prayed. Their trust was not in their ability but in God. *The Lord struck down the Cushites.* And so we have this clear and decisive victory because they sought God and relied on Him. Obedience gave them peace, and when enemies came, their reliance on God brought them victory. Asa was a great leader because he looked to God. That is the background. Now let's go to our focus, chapter 15.

2 Chron 15:1-2 (NIV)¹ *The Spirit of God came upon Azariah son of Oded.*

² *He went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you."*

A prophet spoke out for everyone to hear. His message was a simple thought expressed in three ways. The Lord is with you when you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you. If you forsake Him, He will forsake you. He was telling them they needed a continued dependence on God. The time when we need to hear this most is

after God has given us a great victory. That is when we need to be reminded. In defeat, or in facing great odds, we readily cry out to God for help, but when we win and prosper, look out. If they wanted God to continue to bless them, they had to continue to draw near to Him.

2 Chron 15:3-6 (NIV)³ *For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law.⁴ But in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, and he was found by them.⁵ In those days it was not safe to travel about, for all the inhabitants of the lands were in great turmoil.⁶ One nation was being crushed by another and one city by another, because God was troubling them with every kind of distress.*

Sounds like us today. Distress has caused many to turn to God. Those that turn to Him will be found by Him. Then because they turned to Him, God allowed the turmoil in the nations around them, so they would not be able to coordinate and attack. *"not safe to travel about, for all the inhabitants of the land were in great turmoil."* Sound familiar? God allowed the trouble to protect Judah from its neighbors. They are so busy fighting amongst themselves they don't have resources or time to plot against Judah. We could use this assistance from God today. How can we invite it? It comes when we turn to Him. We should understand that when the Scriptures refer to God troubling or distressing the people, it is not God Himself but His withholding of protection. (see Job 1) God is not the author of evil. He restrains it, unless it will do His people more good in the long run to have to face it so that they will turn to Him.

2 Chron 15:7-15 (NIV)⁷ *But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.⁸ When Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Azariah son of Oded the prophet, he took courage. 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. He repaired the altar of the LORD that was in front of the portico of the Lord's temple.⁹ Then he assembled all Judah and Benjamin and the people from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon who had settled among them, for large numbers had come over to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.¹⁰ They assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's reign.¹¹ At that time they sacrificed to the LORD seven hundred head of cattle and seven thousand sheep and goats from the plunder they had brought back.¹² They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul.¹³ All who would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, were to be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman.¹⁴ They took an oath to the LORD with loud acclamation, with shouting and with trumpets and horns.¹⁵ All Judah rejoiced about the oath because they had sworn it wholeheartedly. They sought God eagerly, and he was found by them. So the LORD gave them rest on every side.*

The next part of the prophet's message was to know that God saw and would bless the work Asa was doing in cleaning up His nation. That encouraged Asa. We need to encourage our leaders when they are going in a godly direction. It gives them courage to make the reforms that need to be made. The people of other tribes of Israel were

coming over to Judah because of the Lord and His blessing. This reminds me of our great number of immigrants. Together all these people renewed the covenant of their nation to seek the Lord with all their heart and soul. The threat of death to those who would not enter in this covenant is the flavor of the Old Covenant and the Law. In the age of the New Covenant we extend grace to all and share the Good News with all, pray for our enemy, and love them. But the nations of Islam are still under the Law of their book. Many of the Islamic states are a form of religious government. So, they, like Israel of old, have a death penalty for those in their nations who will not convert or who share with Muslims another faith. (See Galatians 4:30) At that time in Judah, all the people entered into the covenant of their free will and with their whole heart. *They sought God eagerly, and he was found by them. So the LORD gave them rest on every side.*

Again, because of the condition of their hearts, God gave them peace. They knew God in a personal way. What a wonderful time that must have been for their nation. 2 Chron 15:16-19 (NIV)¹⁶ *King Asa also deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive Asherah pole. Asa cut the pole down, broke it up and burned it in the Kidron Valley.*¹⁷ *Although he did not remove the high places from Israel, Asa's heart was fully committed [to the LORD] all his life.*¹⁸ *He brought into the temple of God the silver and gold and the articles that he and his father had dedicated.*¹⁹ *There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign.*

Who gives peace? It comes from God when His people have a relationship with Him. There is no need to let evil through to afflict them, so that they will look to God. They are already looking to Him. Notice Asa did not compromise even for family members. He took the authority God gave him and used it without compromising during this time. I think this is the emphasis God would place upon our hearts, during this troubling time in our country, when we are in distress. If we will seek God, He will be found by us. If we will depend on Him, He will fight our enemies. The next chapter leaves us with a warning.

2 Chron 16:1-6 (NIV)¹ *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.*² *Asa then took the silver and gold out of the treasuries of the Lord's temple and of his own palace and sent it to Ben-Hadad king of Aram, who was ruling in Damascus.*³ *"Let there be a treaty between me and you," he said, "as there was between my father and your father. See, I am sending you silver and gold. Now break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so he will withdraw from me."*⁴ *Ben-Hadad agreed with King Asa and sent the commanders of his forces against the towns of Israel. They conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel Maim and all the store cities of Naphtali.*⁵ *When Baasha heard this, he stopped building Ramah and abandoned his work.*⁶ *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 he built up Geba and Mizpah.*

His plan worked, but his method was a failure. One of the things King Asa had done early in his reign was to restore the instruments of the Temple. Now he is robbing

them to pay for an alliance with a foreign power. When the Cushites attacked, He relied upon God and was given a great victory. Why has he changed his tune? Prosperity has a way of dulling our senses, of softening our resolve.

⁷ At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: "Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand.⁸ Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the LORD, he delivered them into your hand.⁹ For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war."

The prophet of God told King Asa what he did not want to hear. His reliance on man, instead of God, in spite of the lesson he had earlier in his reign, meant Judah would lose that protecting hand of the Almighty. Verse 9 is a great promise to us today if our hearts are fully committed to Him. If not, it is a terrible warning of the consequence.

¹⁰ Asa was angry with the seer because of this; he was so enraged that he put him in prison. At the same time Asa brutally oppressed some of the people.

Asa's response was to get angry with the messenger. When we have hardened our heart, we resent anyone who will speak the truth and expose us. Once our heart is hardened toward God, it becomes hardened toward our fellow man. Even though king Asa had a bad finish, his people still honored him in death.

¹² 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.¹³ Then in the forty-first year of his reign Asa died and rested with his fathers.¹⁴ They buried him in the tomb that he had cut out for himself in the City of David. They laid him on a bier covered with spices and various blended perfumes, and they made a huge fire in his honor.

His heart was so hardened that two years of suffering would not turn him. The lessons from these chapters are clear and obvious. Though our nation is in a different relation to God than Judah was, there are eternal truths that apply. If we will seek God, He will be found by us. If we rely on God, He will go before us and defeat our enemies. If we are fully committed to Him, He will strengthen us. If we turn our hearts wholeheartedly to Him, He will bless us with peace.

On the other hand, if we harden our hearts and rely on man, bribes, and alliances alone, we will face more difficulty. That is the mercy of God to turn us to Him. Let us pray for our leaders, that they rely upon God and place the trust in Him alone, and that they can acknowledge His hand in the victory to be won. We recently went over the importance of the breath of God – the Spirit within – to guide our thoughts. Let us pray that our leaders be filled with the Spirit and seek to have their thoughts influenced by the Spirit.