

Kings and Prophets 13-06-14a

This is Friday, the 14th of June, 2013. We're in our study of Kings and Prophets, and we recently covered the reign of King Asa from the standpoint of 1 Kings chapter 16, actually the last part of chapter 15. And we're going to take another look as it is presented to us in Chronicles.

This will be 2 Chronicles chapter 15 and 16. So the chapter numbers are tracking fairly closely. We'll take a moment to dedicate our time and our concentration to the Lord, and then we'll begin.

Father, thank You for this opportunity for fellowship and worship and instruction in Your Word. We thank You for the benefits and blessings that we receive, the ministry that takes place through the operation of Your Holy Spirit in the function of our spiritual gifts and in speaking the truth to one another in love, sharing our enthusiasm and our love for Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and our thanksgiving for the work that He has done on our behalf, His ongoing ministry of intercession and the soon appearance when He will come and take us to Himself and we will enter a new phase and a wonderful time of opportunity for us in the ages that are to come. We thank You for this portion of Scripture and the truth that it contains and reveals.

We thank You for these examples that have been preserved for us to be used by the Holy Spirit to instruct us and to impress divine truth on our mortal hearts. We pray that we will be ready students, that we will have understanding, and that we will not only grasp the meaning, but that the pertinence and the applicability will become clear to us so that we can improve, so that we can grow in grace and knowledge, so that we can bear more fruit, reflect more of Your glory. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

King Asa has succeeded his father Abijah on the throne of the southern kingdom of Judah. This is in the 900 and crossing the century mark into the 800s time frame. He's going to reign for a total of 41 years and it's 930-something to 870-something, give or take.

It always confuses me working with centuries before Christ because if you say the late 900s and the early 800s, but the 800 numbers are high and the 900 numbers are low, as an English major, grappling with that math just confuses me. So I'm not going to say that. Pretend like you didn't even hear it.

But Asa has been presented to us in 1 Kings, in particular verse 14 of chapter 15. Nevertheless, Asa's heart was loyal to the Lord all his days and we paid very close attention to that throughout the rest of the chapter as he dealt with idolatrous practices in the southern kingdom, eliminating them, as he faced the threat from the north when Baasha started to try to fortify Ramah and he made an alliance with Ben-Hadad. And as a result of gathering all of the gold and silver that had been dedicated to the Lord and putting it into the temple, he had those resources available and he pretty much gathered all of it up and sent it to the king of Syria to renew and strengthen the alliance that both of their fathers had had.

And it is because of the Syrian relinquishing of their treaty with the northern kingdom and renewing the one with the southern kingdom that this threat from the north, Baasha has to remain in Tirza. He doesn't go to Ramah. The strategic stranglehold or choke point at that place is removed.

And there's this great pile of building materials, huge stocks and stores, which probably largely compensated for the loss of the gold and silver that he had removed from God's temple to send to the king of Syria. And it seemed like a good move. And I said at the end of the study last time that there is a question about, well, how smart a move was that? Was that the best thing he could have done? Shouldn't he have looked for a supernatural deliverance of some sort? Instead, he takes this expedient route.

And it seems to turn out well because with all of these building materials that he basically, he wouldn't exactly say he gets for free, but he sent all of his gold and silver to the Syrians. And then after this time of war, he has this tremendous stock with which he builds up the other cities in his kingdom, Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah. So we don't really have a negative report in this chapter of the Book of Kings on Asa.

We have a positive report. His heart was for the Lord all of his days, and things seem to have turned out well. Well, I said last time we would take a further look at this and see if we can ascertain anything further as we go through the parallel account in Chronicles.

So if you'll turn with me now over to 2 Chronicles 14, we'll quickly scan this. There is substantially more material in Chronicles. As you will recall, Chronicles is in fact the chronicles of the kings of Judah.

And so it spends quite a bit of its time looking at the happenings and details of the reigns of kings in the southern kingdom. And so as you come to this chapter 14, Abijah rested with his fathers. They buried him in the city of David.

Asa, his son, reigned in his place. In his days the land was quiet for ten years. This is a notation to which we will return.

We saw it also over in Kings. He doesn't have any real warfare for the first decade of his reign. Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God.

It goes on to detail taking down the foreign gods, the high places, breaking down the sacred pillars, cutting down the wooden images. He commanded, verse 4, Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers and to observe the law and the commandment. He also removed the high places and incense altars from all the cities of Judah and all the kingdom was quiet under him.

Now it seems to me that in Kings, the one sort of shortfall we saw was that he did not completely remove the high places. Remember that? Here it says he did remove the high places. So that's a little bit of a head scratcher, but I think things will become clear as we go forward.

He built fortified cities in Judah for the land had rest. He had no war in those years because the Lord had given him rest. Aha! For emphasis, if you highlight, circle, underline, or otherwise make notes in your Bible, you might notice in those years.

In what years? The first ten years. In the first ten years, Asa is gangbusters. He is kicking grandma out of the curb.

He's removing idols. He's taking down high places. He is on fire, loyal to the Lord and does what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord, his God.

Verse 7, he had no war. Verse 6, it says he had no war in those years. The Lord had given him rest.

This is a time of opportunity, point of application. I say again, point of application. If we find ourselves in a time of relative non-challenge, if things are going okay, we're not oppressed, we're not afflicted, we're not facing great pressures, what should we be doing? Consolidate strength.

Do what is right in the eyes of the Lord. Take that opportunity. The reason he is able to do these things is because God had given him rest.

Some people, when they have rest and ease, go lax. They relax. They take their pack off.

Their priorities shift and change. And because there is no extremists, because there isn't a big issue, everything kind of loosens up. Everything kind of takes ease.

Asa did not do that. Asa built momentum. Asa fortified.

Asa strengthened. Asa looked at the Word of God and tried to find ways to strengthen the kingdom. And isn't that his job as the king? He's the civil ruler of the land.

And he's also the spiritual king. He is one of those of the seed of David that is fulfilling the promise God made to David that he would not lack a man on the throne. So he is availing himself.

And we should do the same. You're not always going to have the luxury of attending a local face-to-face Bible class, especially you younger ones, when you leave the harbor and sail out the bay and go into the oceans beyond. There are going to be times in your life where you cannot find a good church.

Rare exceptions. But for most of us, this has happened. We've been places where you look around and you just cannot find a fellowship that gives you the opportunities you might want.

So when you find yourself in one, soak it up. Store goods in the summertime so that when the winter comes, you're not the grasshopper outside banging on the door saying, oh, little ants, let me in. Asa does this.

And we're going to see that things are going to change for him. That's why it says during the first 10 years. How long is he on the throne? 41 years.

So the first quarter, he has peace. And God gives him rest. And God, as it were, sort of stands there with folded arms to say, okay, what are you going to do with this rest? And Asa does what is right.

He does what is good in the eyes of the Lord, his God. Verse 2. Ask yourself this question. When God gives me rest, do I do what is good and right in his eyes? If not, now's the time to change.

Now's the time to set a fresh priority, a fresh commitment. If we've got rest, it's for a purpose. In this country in general, we know believers all around the world.

You read about the village ministries. You read about Dr. Eddy. You read about believers around the world who don't have it like we do.

Try coming to Christ in a Muslim environment. People die for their faith today. People are oppressed and cast out and ostracized, fired from their jobs, pushed from pillar to post, have to leave their country, lose their scholarships, lose their connections, lose everything for Christ.

Most of us are typically not called to anything that radical. Why is God giving us rest? Well, what are we doing with our rest? Asa says to Judah, verse 7, let us build these cities and make walls around them and towers, gates, and bars. Can you imagine some of the people saying, well, but look, we're at peace.

What's the rush? What's the hurry? What's the priority here? We're not at war. We have no threats. We've got a treaty with the Syrians.

The Egyptians aren't doing anything. Why gates and bars? And this doesn't seem like a good use of our taxes. Why don't we do something else with it? But Asa says we're going to build.

We're going to fortify. The land is yet before us. Because we have sought the Lord our God, we have sought and he has given us rest on every side.

Asa says because he has given us rest, we need to build and fortify. You see the loop that he has closed in his mind? He doesn't just sit there and say, wow, isn't this rest great? Let's have a banquet. Let's be like Belshazzar and just throw a feast every other week.

He says God has given us rest. We're going to do this with it. Asa had an army of 300,000 from Judah who carried shields and spears.

Remember, when you see the word thousand in a military context, think companies. Think reinforced platoons. These are not a literal thousand guys.

These are units. Back in these days, they didn't count noses precisely. They said, look, there's a big group.

That's an elephant. They didn't pay that much attention. Same thing with flocks of sheep.

When it says Solomon or somebody else sacrificed 7,000 sheep, these are probably seven flocks of sheep where there are a thousand in each flock. Nobody is going to sit there and, you know, what happens when you count sheep? They never could figure out how many were in there. So they just said that's an elephant.

That's an elephant of sheep. It's a big gaggle. So Asa has an army of 300 units, 300 reinforced platoons or company-sized groups, give or take, who carried shields and spears.

And from Benjamin, 280 of these units who carry shields and draw bows. All these are mighty men of valor. These are the elite forces.

Zerah, the Ethiopian, came out against him with an army of a million men. In Hebrew, this is eleph, elephim. It's a thousand thousands.

Okay? It's not a million men. You can't fit a million men in this area and get it to work. You just can't.

It's utterly and totally not possible. This wouldn't be a miracle of God. This would be a miracle of the Ethiopians to field a million-man army.

You're going to go up and attack this little small community of Judah with a million men? If you took it, you couldn't fit your army on the territory. It's a thousand units. They've got this 680,000, or let's see, 580 units.

This guy's got more than twice, or roughly twice as many as they've got. He's got a thousand units. Make sense? Exact number? By the time they counted, their million-man army, they would all have died of old age.

So, Zerah, the Ethiopian, comes out against them. This is Kushite in Hebrew, the land of Kush. He's got 300 chariots.

Notice, if you've got a million men, 300 chariots, what good is that going to do? You've got a million men, and you've only got 300 chariots? It's like, what is that? That's the honor guard that just has your flag? It would be microscopic by comparison. It's very disproportionate. The whole purpose of armor is to go and make a way for your infantry, just like we do with tanks and armored personnel carriers and so on.

You want to get them to the front? Well, this is what the chariots did. They would blast a hole in the line so the army could come through. Well, you need way more than 300 chariots.

Asa went out against them, and they set the troops in battle array in the valley of Zephatha at Maresha. And if you look at the geography again, you physically couldn't fit these guys. So Asa cried out to the Lord his God and said, Lord, it is nothing to... Now notice, verse 11.

You can stop right at the beginning. Here is an enormous Kushite army that has come up. Outnumbers them nearly two to one.

Is Asa ready? What has Asa been doing for 10 years? Fortifying, building up, training. He's got an army. This army isn't just conscripts on paper.

When it says he has this army, mighty men of valor, that means they've been trained. These guys know how to fight. They've demonstrated it.

They've drilled and they've practiced and they've sharpened their weapons and they've got a command structure and they've worked out the wrinkles and they've got their communication procedures. They've got their signals. They've got their tactics and their strategies worked out.

He's worked with the generals. He's had years to do this. But when the conflict arises and now there is no longer peace, this is the 10 years is over, and now there is a big crisis and a challenge, what does Asa do? Does he do a wrong thing or a right thing? He does a right thing.

Asa cried out to the Lord his God and said, Lord, it is nothing for you to help, whether with many or with those who have no power. Help us, oh Lord our God, for we rest on you and in your name we go against this multitude. Oh Lord, you are our God.

Do not let man prevail against you. This is how he views the battle. This is one of the finest, most elevated pronouncements by a king in Judah.

Anywhere in the Bible. It's superb. He does exactly the right thing.

His heart is for the Lord. So the Lord struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah and the Ethiopians fled. And Asa and the people who were with him pursued them to Gerar.

So the Ethiopians were overthrown and they could not recover, for they were broken before the Lord and his army. Asa dedicated himself and his men to the Lord and now it's the Lord's army. You know, I may never march in the infantry, but I'm in the Lord's army.

Well, these guys could legitimately sing that song because they were. And they carried away very much spoil. You've got a thousand military units running, broken and defeated, dropping all of their gear, their little gold necklaces and things are falling off of them.

They've abandoned their camp. Remember, they're going to encamp and then come out in battle array. Well, when they run away, their whole camp is there.

Their spare changes of clothes, the wheels for their chariots, you know, all of that stuff is all just there. There's just huge stockpiles. So there's a huge amount of spoil.

They defeated all the cities around Gerar, for the fear of the Lord came upon them and they plundered all the cities for there was exceedingly much spoil in them. So this is to the south. This is beyond the normal borders of Judah, but they despoil them.

They've got huge amounts of stuff. They attacked the livestock enclosures and carried off sheep and camels in abundance and returned to Jerusalem. Asa now not only has a military victory, but he is enormously well off, as is the kingdom.

Chapter 15. Now the spirit of God came upon Azariah, the son of Oded. He went out to meet Asa and said to him, Hear me Asa and all Judah and Benjamin.

The Lord is with you. Good job. Is that what it says? The Lord is with you while you are with him.

Why would Azariah come out and say this? Hasn't he just achieved this stupendously terrific victory? Hasn't he prayed the right prayer, expressed the right thoughts? Doesn't he have a track record of a decade? Why does Azariah come out and say, The Lord is with you as you have just seen while you are with him. What does the Lord know that he's communicating through Azariah to Asa? There is a potential. There is a weakness that Asa is susceptible to.

Because he's doing everything right, he gets a warning ahead of time. Don't you wish before you do something really stupid, the prophet of God would come in and say, Sam, behold, the Lord is with you while you are with him. And I say, while I'm with him? Hey, wait a minute.

I'm a good guy. Why would you say that? If I take that to heart and stop and think, God is fortifying me, giving me knowledge ahead of time, then I'm going to face a challenge that is going to be up to my limits and I better be ready. I've stuck with the Lord thus far.

I can't rest on my laurels. I need to continue to do that and concentrate on doing that because something else is coming. He doesn't just come and give him a big pat on the back and say, behold, I'm going to establish your throne after you under the ages.

You're like unto my servant David. This is kind of a warning. He says, the Lord is with you while you are with him.

In other words, the lesson to be learned from what has just happened is you were with the Lord, you appealed to the Lord, and the Lord was gracious to you. Please keep in mind that that's the reason all of this took place. That's the connection.

That's the, you know, they always say we're going to have an after action. Now in civilian companies they say, well, what's the takeaway? What's the takeaway from this episode? Well, that's it. The prophet comes and gives it to him verbally.

And it's important. The Lord is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you.

But if you forsake him, he will forsake you. And you could imagine, you know, the wrong kind of response to this would be, hey, what do you mean? Haven't I just done something that hasn't been seen since the days of my, you know, great grandfathers? What do you mean? Why are you giving me this warning? This is a great day. Look at the spoil.

Look at the plunder. Look at the victory. Look at the magnitude of it.

But the prophet is warning him, just because you have added success here doesn't mean that you can't fail and fail big. Keep in mind why this has happened. What is the cause and effect? If you seek him, he will be found by you.

But if you forsake him, he will forsake you. For a long time, Israel has been without the true God, without a teaching priest and without law. But when in their trouble, they turned to the Lord God of Israel and saw him, he was found by them.

And in those times, there was no peace to the one who went out nor to the one who came in. But in great turmoil, all the inhabitants of the land, nation was destroyed by nation, city by city. God troubled them with every adversity.

But you, be strong. Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded. Be strong and do not let your hands be weak.

This implies that your hands are going to tend to be weak or try to be weak or something's going to come along to weaken them. And you've got to not let that happen. There is some potential here.

And this is the third warning now, is it not? You've got a first warning. You've got a second warning in this speech. And now here's the third one.

When Asa heard these words in the prophecy of Oded the prophet, and remember, this is Azariah, the son of Oded. He took courage. Notice, he took courage.

He didn't take offense. He took courage. Removed the abominable idols from the land of Judah and Benjamin from the cities which he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim.

He restored the altar of the Lord that was before the vestibule of the Lord, which had fallen into disrepair. He gathered all Judah and Benjamin and those who dwelt with them from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, for they came over to him in great numbers from Israel. Remember that? Remember up in the north? God didn't want there to be war because there were still a lot of people up in the north.

But at this point, there's such a strong spiritual presence and ethos down in Judah that the people up north say, I'm going down there. That's the kind of nation I want to live in. That's the kind of king I want to follow.

That's where I want my tax money to go is a government that honors the Lord and a reign that God is obviously blessing. And so people packed up and moved to be there. It's extraordinary.

They came over to him in great numbers from Israel when they saw that the Lord his God was with him. So they gathered together at Jerusalem in the third month in the 15th year of the reign of Asa. And they offered to the Lord at that time 700 bulls and 7,000 sheep.

And again, is this actually 7,000 or is it just 7 big groups of sheep? I tend to think it's big groups. And from the spoil that they had brought. Then they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul.

Now look at verse 13. What do you think of this? Whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel was to be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. You either commit or die.

There's no commentary in the scripture on this particular aspect of the reforms of Asa. What do you think of it? Thumbs up, thumbs down. Commit to the Lord or I'll kill you.

If that makes it any clearer. John Calvin had a theological difference with a guy and basically got him sentenced to death. Some of the other reformers in the days of Zwingli and Hubmeier and that, you read that, there's some pretty ugly stuff going on there in Switzerland and parts thereabout.

Guys deciding you're not orthodox, you're not of the faith, you're a heretic, you die. Has God ever said, believe in me or die? This is harsh. Harsher, there are death penalty offenses in the law of Moses, but they are crimes that are committed.

This is forced conversion. Not unlike what you find in Islamic countries. You will be Muslim or you will die.

So this is really something of a warning note. If your zeal, and this is another point of application, if your enthusiasm and your zeal for God is legitimate, it will reflect not only comprehensiveness, like Asa does here, but also self-control and balance and recognizing what you cannot or should not do. Just because you have a heart for the Lord doesn't mean everything you do is right or everything you think of is inspired by God.

We constantly have to check. There's no record that they sought the Lord and said, oh Lord, should we kill anybody that doesn't enter into this covenant with you? At Sinai with Moses, was there any death penalty provision for anybody that didn't chant all the Lord has said we will do? This is an ovation on his part and this is one of the first minor, key warning music notes that we see on Asa. So they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers and to put to death small or great, man or woman who didn't go along.

Verse 14, they took an oath before the Lord with a loud voice, with shouting and trumpets and ram's horns. This is a second warning note, a second troubling detail. You know why? It is not the loudness of your oath.

It is not how long and fully you blow the trumpet. It is your understanding. It is your love for God and for His word demonstrated over time.

This is a momentary sort of a kumbaya moment for these people in Judah. They're flushed with victory. They're flushed with success.

They've been given great power and great wealth. And they really love God at this point. And anybody that doesn't love our God, we'll kill them.

And we're going to make a commitment. We're going to take an oath. And I'm not just going to take the oath.

I'm going to shout the oath. I'm going to blow trumpets over the oath. I'm going to put it on the loudspeakers and print it on billboards and make a big production out of it.

And you start to see Asa and the people making more of an issue of themselves than they do of God. It doesn't say they fell down on their faces and worshipped. It says they stood up and blew their trumpets.

Third point of application, relationship with God is founded on, is fulfilled in, is directed toward God, not us. We are not in any way essential to the forward progress of God's plan and purpose. He doesn't need our trumpets.

He doesn't need our bluster. He doesn't need our repetition. He doesn't need our verve and our sincerity.

He needs quiet commitment and action. This is a lot of bluster. And it's going to show later on.

So, you know, loud voice, shouting in trumpets and ram's horns. There's a lot of worship services today that could probably be described in this way. All Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and sought him with all their soul, and he was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest all around.

God is going to give them rest. They are in the general vicinity of right in giving God glory and credit, but it's just troubling that there is so much emphasis on them and their oath and their noise about it. Then you get the thing we already saw in verse 16.

He removed Maacah, the granny of Asa the king, from being queen mother because she had made an obscene image of Asherah. Asa cut down her obscene image, crushed and burned it by the brook Kidron. But the high places were not removed from Israel.

Now remember back in verse 3, he removed the altars of the foreign gods and the high places, broke down the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden images. Verse 5, he removed the high places and the incense altars from all the cities of Judah in the first ten years. Now he's had the great victory.

Now he feels like God's on his side. He's on God's side. Everything's great.

God's giving him rest all around. They've committed themselves fully to the Lord. But what about the high places? And behold, Asa did go and track down all the last of the high places and any new ones that had been built and burned and destroyed them.

No, he left them. All of this fluff and pomp and circumstance and now the actual obedience, the actual implementation is starting to fail. There's a lot more audio and video and a lot less reality to his commitment to God.

Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. This is largely good. If you were giving Asa a grade, you know, he'd probably get up in the low 90s maybe.

But there are some things he's starting to miss. There are some troubling signs. Why do we get to see this in the pages of Scripture? Because we can do the very same thing.

We love to dwell on our successes. We love to dwell on what it is we're doing right. We don't like to search around and find what remains.

What else can I improve? How can I get that last 5%, 7%, 8%, 9% and be a hundred-fold field and not just a 60-fold field? How can I drive out the rest of the Canaanites out of the promised land of my soul? We're so dazzled by the success and the blessing that God gives us that we don't push. This happens when you move. People that move, you move to a new house.

Everything's in boxes. You move in, and you get about 80%, 85%, maybe 90% unpacked. And then it's years before the last 10% of those boxes just sit in the garage for years and years and years.

Those of us that do construction projects, now, there are some exceptions. But me, I get 90% finished, but there's like one more piece of trim. There's one last piece of baseboard.

If you go in my office that I redid, put in all the floors and everything, all the baseboard's been done except one little piece under the window. Take some special trimming. I didn't have the right saw.

I never got around to it. Well, now, how long have I had that floor finished? There's still no baseboard. The third floor attic thing where Becca's room is, 95% complete, but didn't ever put the beadboard in the bathroom, didn't ever put the last piece of trim on the door.

You almost get there, and then it's like, ah, well, it's done enough. It's not good in home construction. It's not good in moving, and it's really not good in our spiritual life.

If there's one place where we want to finish the race, remember what Paul says? I have finished the course. I didn't run all the way up to the finish line and then start walking and then say, oh, Gatorade, and walk over, and here's the flying flags and the cheering crowds, and I just kind of got distracted, never bothered to do the last 10 feet of the race. This is Asa as our illustration.

He's like Maxwell smart. Missed it by that much. Let's pause here and take our break.