

Lessons from Old Testament Kings - Asa

Reading: Romans 15:4 “... whatever things were written before were written for our learning”

Introduction:

This lesson is a continuation of the series where we are looking at some of the Old Testament Kings, both good and bad, and drawing some practical lessons from both their lives, and events that occurred during their reigns, in order to help us in our walk with God (**Ephesians 5:8**).

In this lesson, we will be looking at King Asa. He was the third king of Judah after the nation split during the reign of Rehoboam – refer to Annex A of this lesson. The scriptures summarise his life by saying; “*Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did his father David*”¹ (**1 Kings 15:11**). Asa was not perfect, as we will see later in the lesson, but generally, he was a good king, seeking to do what was right.

LESSON

1) The background leading up to Asa’s reign

a) Judah under the reign of Rehoboam

Under the reign of Rehoboam, Judah started going down the path of apostasy – they rebelled against God and turned to idolatry (**2 Chronicles 12:1**). We read the following in **1 Kings 14:22-24**;

“²²Now Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked Him to jealousy with their sins which they committed, more than all that their fathers had done. ²³For they also built for themselves high places², sacred pillars, and wooden images³ on every high hill and under every green tree. ²⁴And there were also perverted persons⁴ in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord had cast out⁵ before the children of Israel”.

Judah had now turned to the idolatrous practices of the Canaanites who had previously occupied the land - practices which God had specifically commanded them not to do (**Deuteronomy 7:5; 18:9-14**). At some point, Maachah, King Rehoboam’s favourite wife (**2 Chronicles 11:20-21**), had made an obscene image of Asherah – a Canaanite goddess (**1 Kings 15:13**).

During the 5th year of Rehoboam’s reign, God used Shishak, Pharaoh of Egypt, to inflict punishment on Judah. The fortified cities of Judah were taken, and Jerusalem itself was threatened (**2 Chronicles 12:2-4**). The people realised the error of their ways and cried out to the Lord. God heard their prayers, and Jerusalem was spared. However, Shishak took away treasures from both the king’s house and from the Temple, including the gold shields which Solomon had made⁶ (**2 Chronicles 12:5-9**).

¹ Biblical quotes are from the New King James Version (NKJV) Bible.

² Places of worship, usually up on a hill or ridge.

³ Most likely images of Baal and Asherah, Canaanite gods.

⁴ NKJV footnote says, “one practicing sodomy and prostitution in religious rituals”.

⁵ For example, **Leviticus 18:24-30** and its context.

⁶ Refer **1 Kings 10:16-17**.

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b) Judah under the reign of Abijah

After the 17 year reign of Rehoboam, Abijah his son came to the throne and ruled for 3 years (**1 Kings 14:31 – 15:2**). However, he “... *walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him; his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God*” (**1 Kings 15:3**). It appears that the religious practices commanded under the Law were still being followed to some extent in Judah – Abijah mentions that fact in his speech to Israel before the battle at Mount Zemaraim (**2 Chronicles 13:4-11**). However, the idolatry remained, for it was still there when Asa came to the throne.

However, God allowed Judah to remain as a nation (for now), not because Judah was faithful, because it wasn't, but because of David - God had promised David that he would establish his throne over Israel forever (e.g. **2 Samuel 7:8-16; 1 Kings 9:5**).

2) The reign of Asa

a) Asa instituted reform to get the nation back to following the Lord

When Asa came to the throne, Judah had been engaging in idolatry for most of the previous twenty years⁷. Asa himself had been raised in a palace where he had a father who was unfaithful to God (**1 Kings 15:3**), and a grandmother who was into idolatry (**1 Kings 15:13**). But Asa differed from his immediate predecessors in that he “... *did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God*” (**2 Chronicles 14:2**). He did the following to restore the nation back to the Lord;

- banished the perverted persons from the land (**1 Kings 15:12a**),
- removed all the idols that his fathers had made (**1 Kings 15:12b**), plus the ones that existed in the cities that he had taken in Ephraim (**2 Chronicles 15:8b**),
- removed Maachah his grandmother from being queen mother because she had made an obscene image of Asherah⁸ (**1 Kings 15:13a**),
- burned the image of Asherah by the Brook Kidron⁹ (**1 Kings 15:13b**),
- removed the incense altars from the cities of Judah (**2 Chronicles 14:5**),
- restored the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem (**2 Chronicles 15:8b**),
- commanded Judah to seek the Lord and observe the Law (**2 Chronicles 14:4**),
- brought into the house of the Lord all the things that both he and his father had dedicated to the Lord – silver, gold, utensils (**2 Chronicles 15:18**).

Not all of the high places were removed¹⁰. However, “... *the heart of Asa was loyal all his days*” (**2 Chronicles 15:17**).

⁷ Rehoboam reigned for 17 years (**1 Kings 14:21**), and Abijah for 3 years (**1 Kings 15:2**).

⁸ Asherah was a Canaanite goddess.

⁹ The Kidron Valley runs between the east side of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives.

¹⁰ **2 Chronicles 14:3** appears to contradict **2 Chronicles 15:17** and **1 Kings 15:14** regarding the removal of the high places. However, the answer is that Asa removed the pagan high places, but not the high places which were devoted to God – ref: “The Books of History” by James E Smith, Third printing 2005, page 489.

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But Asa wasn't just concerned about his own faithfulness. He wanted the people to return to God as well. In his 15th year, he gathered them together at Jerusalem. Here they offered sacrifices to God and re-committed themselves to serve the Lord with all their heart and with all their soul (**2 Chronicles 15:10-15**). Then the Lord gave them rest.

b) Asa's lapse of faith

Relations between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah were often hostile after the nation had split (**1 Kings 14:30; 15:7b**). Both Abijah and Asa had been successful in taking some territories from Israel (**2 Chronicles 13:19; 15:8b**). When Baasha¹¹ became king of Israel, he built Ramah¹² to prevent people going to or coming from Asa (**2 Chronicles 16:1**) – *i.e.* to seal off the northern approaches to Judah.

As a response, Asa turned to Syria for help against Baasha. At the time, Syria had a treaty with Israel, but Asa sent silver and gold from the Temple and his own house to Syria as payment for them to break their treaty with Israel and to help Judah instead. Syria obliged, and attacked the northern part of Israel. Because of these attacks, Baasha was forced to abandon his southern city of Ramah. Judah then took the materials at Ramah and used them in their own fortifications (**2 Chronicles 16:2-6**).

Now, from a worldly perspective, Asa's arrangement with Syria might have looked like a smart move. However, it showed a lack of faith by Asa – a lack of faith in God to protect him. God had previously helped Asa to defeat a huge army from Ethiopia (**2 Chronicles 14:9-12**). But now, he was turning to man for help, not God¹³.

The prophet Hanani rebuked Asa for his foolishness, and told him that as a consequence of his putting his trust in man rather than in God, he would continually face wars (**2 Chronicles 16:7-9**). But instead of repenting, Asa threw Hanani in gaol, and also oppressed some of the other people at the same time (**2 Chronicles 16:10**).

3) Lessons for us

There are various lessons that we can learn from the life of Asa¹⁴, but for now, I just want to briefly look at three of them.

¹¹ Baasha was the third king of Israel.

¹² Ramah was on the southern edge of Israel, about 8 km north of Jerusalem.

¹³ Towards the end of his reign, when Asa became diseased in his feet, he again turned to man for help, instead of to God (**2 Chronicles 16:12**). Compare Asa's actions with those of Hezekiah when the latter had a terminal illness (**2 Kings 20:1-7**).

¹⁴ Other lessons that we can draw from the life and times of Asa's are:

- Asa used the time of peace to strengthen his military defences (**2 Chronicles 14:6**). We should use the opportunities we have to build up our spiritual defences by spending time with the Word and living righteously (**Ephesians 6:11-18; Hebrews 5:14**).
- Because of his deal with Syria, Asa would face on-going wars (**2 Chronicles 16:9**). Foolish decisions can have adverse consequences that we later have to live with.
- God keeps His promises. In spite of the fact that previous kings were evil, God kept His promise to David about keeping his descendants on the throne (**1 Kings 15:4-5**).

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- a) If things are not right in your life (or in the church), then restore them to the way they should be as per God's Word

When Asa came to the throne, idolatry and perverted religious practices had been established in the land for many years. His forebears had done nothing to correct the situation. But Asa did not accept the status quo and use it as an excuse for doing nothing. What was being practiced was wrong, he knew it was wrong, and so he set about restoring what was right. He removed the things that were wrong, and also encouraged the people to repent of their sins and rededicate themselves back to God.

All of us wrestle with the issues of this life and battle with temptation. Sometimes, we inadvertently make decisions that lead us away from the ways of Christ. Sometimes, we respond to adverse circumstances in a way that gives Satan the opportunity to put unwholesome thoughts and attitudes into our minds. And sometimes we allow the influence of the world to affect our better judgement when choosing a course of action.

The result of this is that we can end up with troubled lives, out of harmony with God's Word.

God created us (**Genesis 1:27**). He knows what is best for us (**Psalm 23:2-3**). He wants us to have a full and abundant life (**John 10:10**) in truth and righteousness (**Psalm 106:3**). His Word will guide us in all things relating to life and godliness (**2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3**) – whether it be by explicit command (e.g. **Colossians 3:9**) or a general principle (e.g. **Luke 6:31**). When we go astray, we need to repent and hasten back to the Lord and His Word.

- b) Maintain your faith in God – don't turn back to the world

Asa started out well, doing great things for God. But as time went by, he showed a lack of faith in God and put his trust in man.

Complacency and neglect can have a devastating effect on a Christian's faith. Our love can grow cold (**Revelation 2:4**), and we can end up just "going through the motions". We are surrounded by worldliness, and if it creeps into our lives, our "light" will eventually flicker out (**Matthew 5:14-16**).

Repeatedly, throughout the scriptures, words such as "watch", "vigilance" and "be diligent"¹⁵ are used. Satan is always looking for an opportunity to make us fall (**1 Peter 5:8**), hence the need to keep sober and alert (**2 Peter 1:10**).

Therefore, having put our hand to the plough, let us not look back (**Luke 9:62**). Our citizenship is in heaven (**Philippians 3:20**). We need to help and encourage each other to keep pressing on to the goal (**1 Thessalonians 5:14; Hebrews 10:24-25**), putting aside anything that hinders us (**Hebrews 12:1**). If we are faithful unto death, then the Lord will give us the crown of life (**Revelation 2:10b**).

¹⁵ For example (depending on your Bible translation), **Acts 20:31; 1 Corinthians 16:13; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; Hebrews 11:6; 12:15; 1 Peter 4:7; 2 Peter 1:5**.

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- c) Don't react adversely when someone tells you the truth about your failings

Asa wasn't too happy about being told of his failing. He did what we call "shoot the messenger", rather than address the real issue – his lack of faith.

We too don't always like our failings being pointed out to us – we can often tend to be defensive. But if we have done something wrong, then we need to address the wrong and not try and hide it or pretend it never happened. If we have sinned, and others are aware of it, then they have a God-given duty to speak to us about it (**Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1**). The reason is not to criticize, or "put down" or embarrass us. It is to help us to repent and overcome the problem so that we will again be in a right relationship with God. But even if the person approaching us does so with the wrong motives (on their part)¹⁶, it doesn't change the truth about our failings.

When confronted with our sins, we need to acknowledge them (**2 Samuel 12:13a**), repent of them (**Acts 8:22**), confess them to our Father and He will forgive us (**1 John 1:9**).

¹⁶ If the person approaching us has wrong motives, then they will have to answer to God for that. But if what they are saying is true, then the person's motives are beside the point and don't change things regarding the issue(s) they have raised.

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Annex A - Kings of Judah and Israel

Combined nation	Year BC (approx.)	
Saul	1050	
David		
Solomon		
Judah	Kingdom splits	Israel
Rehoboam	930	Jeroboam
Abijam		Nadab
Asa *		Baasha, Elah, Zimri
		Omri
Jehoshaphat		Ahab, Ahaziah
Jehoram		Jehoram
Ahaziah	840	Jehu
Athaliah		
Jehoash		Jehoahaz
Amaziah		Jehoash
Uzziah		Jeroboam (ii)
		Zechariah, Shallum,
Jotham	740	Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah
Ahaz		Hoshea
Hezekiah		Fall of Israel - 722
Manasseh		
Amon		
Josiah	640	
Jehoahaz		
Jehoiakim		
Jehoiachin		
Zedekiah	586	
Fall of Jerusalem - 586		

*the subject of this lesson