

2 Chronicles 15-16 • Asa Part II: A Study in Faithfulness

Introduction

As with the rest of life, our spiritual walk has peaks and valleys which don't just represent emotional swings, but small and large events which come our way. There are some people who "rise to the occasion", some who shrink from the occasion, and yet our goal is supposed to be consistency through them all. In the course of King Asa's reign, although there were occasional, major events which needed to be specifically addressed, peace was experienced for long periods of time in between. In this we have a biblical example that spans an entire lifetime, providing insight into what it means to faithfully walk with the Lord consistently through all seasons, and how to deal with situation consistently according to God's Word.

^{15:1}Now the Spirit of God came on Azariah the son of Oded, ²and 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. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. ³For many days Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law. ⁴But in their distress they turned to the Lord God of Israel, and they sought Him, and He let them find Him. ⁵In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. ⁶Nation was crushed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress. ⁷But you, be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work."

[Read 15:1-7]

Q: On what occasion is the prophet Azariah delivering this message from God?

A: It was immediately after God's provision of a supernatural victory over the vastly larger Ethiopians in the previous chapter. Notice that he goes out to meet them either shortly after the battle or on their return home while they're still together as a group.

Q: To whom is he speaking? Is it to King Asa alone?

A: It's to "Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin". Because they're still together, Azariah has the opportunity for everyone to hear God's Word simultaneously.

Point: Obedience to God's Word is a shared commitment. It isn't the sole domain of the pastor, but a equally shared responsibility by all.

Q: What is the example that proves Azariah's opening statement in v.2 that "the LORD is with you when you are with Him"?

A: That's exactly what just happened. They had 10 years of peace under Asa, during which time they strengthened themselves both militarily and spiritually. When they finally had to go to battle, they recognized the true nature of the battle as concerning God's name and glory rather than their own and God responded likewise in their favor.

Q: Why designate the need for a "teaching priest"?

A: Sometimes in Israel's history the priests receded from interaction with the people, just carrying on the duties of the tabernacle/temple. (Or less.) The implication here is that they need to **LISTEN** to the priesthood.

Q: What is the main point that God through Azariah is trying to get across?

A: That they have learned a valuable lesson which needs to be continued, that they need to be vigilant and faithful during **ALL** times to God's Word so as to avoid having to be disciplined like their forefathers.

Q: If this is what they'd been doing all along, why do you suppose they needed to hear this message now?

A: There's a human tendency to relax one's guard, especially after large events like the victory they just experienced. They needed to be reminded not only how that came about, but how continuing in that direction would continue to pay off spiritually. It prevented a kind of "let-down" which often occurs at such times.

Q: How is this revelation characterized? What words defines it?

A: According to v.7, "your work".

Point: First they had the initial “work” of faithfulness to God’s Word during the 10 year reign of peace, and then continued this “work” in confronting the Ethiopians. God is encouraging them to not let up and to realize this is what they’re supposed to do continually through all things.

Application: How strong would your faith be if you only turned to God’s Word in times of trouble? Would you even have time to do it then? What is the advantage of obedience in times of peace when times of duress come?

[Read 15:8-19]

⁸Now when Asa heard these words and the prophecy which Azariah the son of Oded the prophet spoke, he took courage and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had captured in the hill country of Ephraim. He then restored the altar of the LORD which was in front of the porch of the LORD.

⁹He gathered all Judah and Benjamin and those from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon who resided with them, for many defected to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.

¹⁰So they assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa’s reign. ¹¹They sacrificed to the LORD that day 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep from the spoil they had brought. ¹²They entered into the covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and soul; ¹³and whoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman. ¹⁴Moreover, they made an oath to the Lord with a loud voice, with shouting, with trumpets and with horns. ¹⁵All Judah rejoiced concerning the oath, for they had sworn with their whole heart and had sought Him earnestly, and He let them find Him. So the LORD gave them rest on every side.

¹⁶He also removed Maacah, the mother of King Asa, from the *position* of queen mother, because she had made a horrid image as an Asherah, and Asa cut down her horrid image, crushed it and burned it at the brook Kidron. ¹⁷But the high places were not removed from Israel; nevertheless Asa’s heart was blameless all his days.

¹⁸He brought into the house of God the dedicated things of his father and his own dedicated things: silver and gold and utensils. ¹⁹And there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa’s reign.

Q: How would you characterize Asa’s first step in v.8?

A: He first removed all the worst spiritual influences in all the territory under his control, and then by restoring the altar reinforced the right spiritual influence of the temple.

Q: What was Asa’s next step in v.9-13?

A: He secured a personal, spiritual recommitment from the people. This wasn’t just a verbal nod, but “they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD...with all their heart and soul”.

Q: How did they follow up their personal commitment to God from the heart?

A: According to v.14-15, they made a corporate commitment as a whole. It, too, was characterized as “with their whole heart”.

Q: What is significant about the fact that this occurred “in the third month”?

A: This would have been the Day of Pentecost. There’s probably deeper meaning for us, especially with how the church came to be born on the Day of Pentecost. In Acts, just like Asa’s time, the church would be identified with giving up the things of the world and experiencing first an individual commitment followed by a tremendous group commitment which identified them to everyone around them.

Point: This is a biblical model of the work of Believers on earth to be both personally and corporately faithful, shunning the influences of this world at the same time God’s Word and will is actively pursued from the heart.

Application: How long do you suppose you can keep an oath or commitment without removing yourself from the influences prohibiting you in the first place? How effective is a group commitment without equal, individual commitment? How is this an example for how a church or group should function?

Q: What did Maacah’s removal prove concerning King Asa?

A: The depth and quality of his faithfulness to keep the covenant they all swore, even when it meant going up against a close family member.

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.”

Matthew 10:37-38

Q: How is King Asa’s personal faithfulness further proved?

A: He brings his father’s and his own “dedicated things” into the temple. In other words, he’s being a good steward of the things that have come his way and not unduly influenced by the things of this world.

^{16:1}In the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah and fortified Ramah in order to prevent *anyone* from going out or coming in to Asa king of Judah. ²Then Asa brought out silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the LORD and the king's house, and sent them to Ben-hadad king of Aram, who lived in Damascus, saying, ³"Let there be a treaty between you and me, *as* between my father and your father. Behold, I have sent you silver and gold; go, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so that he will withdraw from me."

⁴So Ben-hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and they conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim and all the store cities of Naphtali. ⁵When Baasha heard of *it*, he ceased fortifying Ramah and stopped his work. ⁶Then King Asa brought all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber with which Baasha had been building, and with them he fortified Geba and Mizpah.

⁷At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, "Because you have relied on the king of Aram and have not relied on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Aram has escaped out of your hand. ⁸Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim an immense army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the LORD, He delivered them into your hand. ⁹For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars."

¹⁰Then Asa was angry with the seer and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him for this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time.

Application: One of the hallmarks of spiritual faithfulness is placing God above all other relationships and all other things. What things come to mind personally when you consider this?

[Read 16:1-6]

Q: How does THIS enemy (Baasha of Israel) compare with the Ethiopians who previously attacked Judah? What is significantly different between them?

A: Whereas Ethiopia was a declared enemy who came out, bent on conquering Judah, Israel is still related to Judah and has no intention of attacking Judah, but merely preventing people from passing between the two kingdoms. It's not a military threat so much as political.

Q: What stands out right away to show how King Asa is handling this situation far different from the previous?

A: God's Word and will was sought in the course of the first, whereas this time they seem to have left God out of the equation.

Q: Why do you suppose that is?

A: Perhaps they were so "secure" in their spiritual commitment that they began to feel superior and not in need of inquiring of the Lord. They just **assumed** they were in the right.

Q: In reality, who really carried out an attack?

A: Even though Judah didn't directly attack Israel, they were responsible for hiring, in effect, those who did.

Application: When do we always begin to get into trouble? When we fail to go to the Lord to verify His will and desires and assume that whatever course of action we take will be fine with Him.

[Read 16:7-10]

Q: What was wrong with making a treaty with another nation such as Aram?

A: It was specifically forbidden in God's Word. To make a covenant or treaty with another country was a kind of guarantee of protection which they were only supposed to seek from God alone. Furthermore, such agreements in those times weren't strictly political, but usually included the false gods of those nations.

Q: What is the sad irony of their bad decision to use Aram against Israel?

A: Since they didn't inquire of the Lord, they didn't know that the Lord had plans for them regarding Aram. In reality they made an agreement with a nation – a **true** enemy – which God would have given over to Judah.

Q: How did Judah compound this problem further?

A: By **PAYING** Aram, they provided Aram with the resources to continue harassment of **BOTH** Israel and Judah for some time to come. They not only fought the wrong enemy, they armed the real one.

Point: When you ally yourself with someone who is agreement with you on a single issue, but not allied with your doctrine, the results are usually disastrous. It's like a church that aligns itself with, and financially supports, a community program against abortion and later finds itself fighting that same organization when it tries to eliminate all references to Christ from Christmas. They were in agreement on one issue, but weren't really allies because their doctrine was far

apart. In the end, the church actually supported an enemy which would attack it with their own resources at a future date. This is what happens when you don't fight God's battles according to His terms and guidance, instead engaging what feels right at the time. We are not supposed to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

2 Corinthians 6:14

Q: What is the test they failed here which they passed in the last chapter?

A: According to v.9, their heart was no longer completely God's. They actually failed a test of their faithfulness.

Q: What is obviously different about King Asa's reaction now as compared to previous times?

A: Instead of embracing the prophet (God's Word), he doesn't simply reject him, but persecutes him. He is no longer embracing the message but trying to eliminate the messenger.

Application: *The cure for disobedience is always nothing less than obedience. The cure for unfaithfulness is always nothing less than faithfulness. Have you ever tried to "resolve" an issue by silencing the messenger instead of rightly responding to the message?*

[Read 16:11-14]

¹¹Now, the acts of Asa from first to last, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel.

¹²In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians. ¹³So Asa slept with his fathers, having died in the forty-first year of his reign. ¹⁴They buried him in his own tomb which he had cut out for himself in the city of David, and they laid him in the resting place which he had filled with spices of various kinds blended by the perfumers' art; and they made a very great fire for him.

Q: How was God using King Asa's disease? How should he have responded?

A: It should have been received as discipline from the Lord to personally return to his original days of faithfulness. King Asa was ultimately unresponsive to the Lord's discipline.

Q: In 1 Kings 15:14 and 2 Chronicles 14:2, the beginning of each account of King Asa's reign, he is described as one of the good kings of Judah whose heart was in the right place. Why do you suppose he was still considered a "good" king even though his last years seemed to be so dismal?

A: When a king went "bad", he led the people en masse back into idolatry and the worship of false gods. King Asa had a personal lapse, but it never extended to leading the whole nation astray.

Overall Application

- *What have you learned as examples for your own, personal faithfulness?*
- *What have you learned regarding the role of faithfulness in a church or organization?*
- *How did God's Word play a significant role in every situation, good or bad? How can you personally apply this?*
- *What is your obligation as an example to others?*