

“Asa, the Lamp in Jerusalem”
1 Kings 15:9-24
(Preached at Trinity, April 11, 2021)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I pointed out in an earlier sermon, the writer of 1 Kings moves quickly through the kings of Israel and Judah, moving back and forth in a synchronized fashion that can leave our heads spinning.
The author is not primarily concerned about their achievements--their victories in war, their building projects or the size of their economy. He is most concerned about their faithfulness to God. This is the high question of life—for them and for us. This is the great question we must consider.
2. After spending two chapters on Jeroboam and his wickedness, his death is recorded in 14:20 and his son Nadab reigned in his place.
The author then quickly shifts his attention to the Southern Kingdom and gives us a brief summary of Rehoboam's reign. We are told that he too reigned in wickedness. His death is recorded and his son, Abijah followed him as king. Sadly, we are told he walked in the sins of his father. Children often imitate their parents. Sin is generational. Our children learn from our sins. This is why we must spend much time on our knees.
3. Occasionally, however, God raises up a child of faith out of a family where none follow God. This is what we see in this passage.
God lights a lamp in Jerusalem - Abijah is replaced by his son Asa.
This was an act of God's mercy. Asa's father was wicked. His grandfather was wicked. Even his grandmother was wicked. Yet God raised up Asa.
1 Kings 15:11 NAU - "Asa did what was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father."
4. Due to the idolatrous sins of Judah, God would have been just to destroy them.
We are told in **Verse 4** the reason God did not end His relationship with Judah.
1 Kings 15:4 NAU - "But for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem."
It was for David's sake. On one hand God remembered the faithfulness of David. But this was not the ultimate reason. God remembered His covenant promise with David. God raised up Asa to begin reforms, even though we'll see that Asa is far from perfect.
Dale Ralph Davis described it well:
“God had made a promise, and in that very promise he seemed to recognize that David's descendants might well be scoundrels (2 Sam. 7:14b). But the kingdom remains—not because man obeys but because God has decided. Why don't the kingdom and people of God vanish into the mists of history? Because God will not permit it. He has decided that his kingdom *will* come. Grace is not only greater but more stubborn than our sins.”¹

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 172.

4. Asa is introduced in **Verses 9-11**

1 Kings 15:9-11 NAU - "So in the twentieth year of Jeroboam the king of Israel, Asa began to reign as king of Judah. ¹⁰ He reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Maacah the daughter of Abishalom. ¹¹ Asa did what was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father."

A. We are told his mother's name was Maacah. As I've pointed out before, at times the Hebrews sometimes used the terms father, grandfather, mother, grandmother interchangeably. In other words, Maacah was the mother of Abijam and the grandmother of Asa.

Some have suggested that Asa was the product of an incestuous relationship between Abijam and his mother, thus Abijam and his son Asa shared the same mother. This would be consistent with the corruption of the sons of Solomon and bring us to marvel even more at God's mercy.

B. The other important piece of information is in Verse 11 – Asa did what was right in the sight of the LORD. This is a stunning statement of God's grace. We should expect Asa to follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, but God raised him up as a lamp in Jerusalem.

I. Asa immediately began radical reforms in Judah

A. Asa was bold in his efforts to purify the kingdom.

1. He removed the pagan false religion practiced by his predecessors.

1 Kings 15:12 - "He also put away the male cult prostitutes from the land and removed all the idols which his fathers had made."

2. His reforms even extended to his own family. He removed the honored position of his grandmother because of her idolatrous practices. You can imagine the pressures Asa was under to look away from her sin.

1 Kings 15:13 NAU - "He also removed Maacah his mother from *being* queen mother, because she had made a horrid image as an Asherah; and Asa cut down her horrid image and burned *it* at the brook Kidron."

B. In his reforms Asa was a model of faithfulness to God – **Verse 15**

"the heart of Asa was wholly devoted to the LORD all his days."

1. **Verses 11-15** display the righteousness of Asa. He was careful to purge his kingdom of that which was abominable in the sight of God.

2. This is how we should live our own lives—purging everything that does not honor God.

3. And how important it is for every church to be as diligent as Asa in purging all forms of worship that detract from the honor of God.

4. Asa's reforms were not complete, however. The high places were not removed. God commanded that the temple at Jerusalem was the only place of worship. The high places were secondary places. Asa was not totally true to God in this.

5. But Asa stands as a testimony to God's promise to preserve Jerusalem from falling into utter destruction.

- a. We saw in 2 Samuel that David was referred to as God's lamp – the shining testimony to His promise.
2 Samuel 21:17 NAU - "Then the men of David swore to him, saying, "You shall not go out again with us to battle, so that you do not extinguish the lamp of Israel."
- b. Now we see that Asa was God's lamp.
1 Kings 11:36 NAU - "But to his son I will give one tribe, that My servant David may have a lamp always before Me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen for Myself to put My name."
- c. Even in the midst of wicked kings, God maintained His lamp.
2 Kings 8:19 NAU - "However, the LORD was not willing to destroy Judah, for the sake of David His servant, since He had promised him to give a lamp to him through his sons always."

II. Asa was less successful in his faithfulness to God as a political leader

- A. Israel and Judah remained at war
1 Kings 15:16 NAU - "Now there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days."
 - 1. Baasha began fortification of Ramah, which was only five miles from Jerusalem. It positioned Baasha to form an economic blockade to Jerusalem.
 - 2. Sadly, he trusted more in his political maneuvering than in God's all powerful hand.
Verses 18-20 – He emptied the treasuries to pay for an alliance with Ben-hadad.
 - a. **Verse 19** refers to it as a “present.” It is more accurately a bribe which is how it is most often translated (18 out of 23 times in the NASB):
Exodus. 23:8 NAU - "You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just."
Deuteronomy 16:19 NAU - "You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous."
Deuteronomy 27:25 NAU - "Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'"
This was not a “gift.” It was a bribe.
 - b. Moreover, the word for “treaty” in **Verse 19** is בְּרִית, the word for covenant. Covenants should be taken seriously and not easily broken. Asa is using his bribe to convince the king of Aram to break covenant with Israel.

- c. We must not overlook that Asa was responsible for funding the takeover of part of the Promised Land.
1 Kings 15:20 NAU - "So Ben-hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah and all Chinneroth, besides all the land of Naphtali."
3. On one hand it was a shrewd military/political decision, and it worked. Ben-hadad turned his allegiance from Baasha to Asa and Baasha was forced to give up his plans.
- a. From the outside observer one would have to conclude that Asa's plan was a huge success. But we must not judge ever action by the judgment of pragmatism. Just because our action achieves success does not mean it is approved by God.
- b. It is true we are supposed to be wise as we walk through this world. Asa's actions were shrewd, but they weren't righteous. They were faithless.
- c. We don't find Asa seeking God for wisdom and protection. His fear was greater than his faith. That is a threat for all of us.
Proverbs 3:5-7 NAU - "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil."
4. Asa took advantage of his victory
- a. He gathered the stone and timber from Ramah and used it to fortify the other cities of the kingdom.
- b. He was a wise and resourceful king, but it was worldly wisdom. Worldly wisdom is wisdom that forgets the sovereignty and dominion of God. It is faithless wisdom.
- B. Worldly wisdom is never a substitute for dependence upon God.
1. The author of 1 Kings is silent regarding Asa's behavior. We must not presume that his silence signals approval of Asa's actions. Asa's actions were condemned by God.
2 Chronicles 16:7-9 NAU - "At 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. ⁸ "Were 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. ⁹ "For 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."
2. To add to his sin and shame his response to God was to punish God's messenger.
2 Chronicles 16:10 NAU - "Then 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."

Conclusion:

1. Once again, we find it is not nearly as important in how we begin our life as how we complete it. Asa did that which was right in the sight of God and destroyed the pagan religion from the land, but he did not finish well.
2. Asa's life is hard to evaluate. In terms of his religious reforms he is to be commended. God commends him.
1 Kings 15:14 NAU - "the heart of Asa was wholly devoted to the LORD all his days."
3. But like each of us, there were times Asa acted more on his own wisdom than out of faith in God. And in this his life did not end well. Asa died under God's displeasure.
4. He died under God's displeasure, yet we must not dismiss God's evaluation of Asa's life.
"the heart of Asa was wholly devoted to the LORD all his days."
We also read of David:
1 Kings 15:5 NAU - "David did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the case of Uriah the Hittite."
We read David in light of God's amazing grace.
5. We are reminded of God's covenant grace that can only come through the Lord Jesus Christ. Not one of us have lived perfectly before God. Our compromising sins have devastating consequences, yet for the sake of Christ God does not forsake His own.
6. David's sin had lasting consequences for himself and for his family.
Asa's sin also had consequences. The last we read of him is, "He was diseased in his feet." We are supposed to connect this to his sin, faithless sin that the disease did not cure.
2 Chronicles 16:12 NAU - "In 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."
7. In Asa we find a good king, but flawed king.
He made reforms in the Kingdom but did not remove the high places.
He emptied the treasures of the house of the Lord to be used as a bribe instead of trusting God.
He was responsible for the loss of territory in the Promised Land to a pagan king.
8. Asa was not a perfect king. No earthly king has ever escaped the ravages of sin. It makes us turn our eyes to the King of kings whose Kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness.