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Asa’s Reforms
First Kings 15:9-15 and Second Chronicles 14:2 to 15:19

Asa’s reforms DIG: The kings of Judah and Isra’el had lots of influence over the people’s ideas about God. How did Asa witness his faith in ADONAI? Azariah delivered a dynamic message and got results. What was the impact on Asa? On the people? What political changes took place in the life of the nation as a result of “finding” the LORD? What was their reward?

REFLECT: Asa relied on ADONAI to fight his battle. What battle are you fighting right now? How can you rely on the LORD to fight it? Has a message ever changed your life and behavior? How so? How was Asa’s response to the message a model for people today? In what ways can you “take courage” after a message? What would it mean for God to “be found” by your nation?

Wholehearted, eager pursuit of God is expressed in terms of seeking Him.



The background of the king: **It was in the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Isra'el that Asa began his reign over Judah. He ruled forty-one years in Jerusalem; his grandmother's name was Ma'acah the daughter of Abishalom,** and the granddaughter of Absalom, who continued as **the queen mother** during **the reign** of **Asa** until **she** was deposed **(First Kings 15:9-10).** The account begins with the first **thirty-five years** of blessing in **Asa's reign**. **Asa's** positive achievements and the resulting prosperity during that time are emphasized. **Asa's forty-one year reign** probably included a three-year coregency with **his son Jehoshaphat**, perhaps made necessary by **Asa's illness** mentioned in **First Kings 5:23**. The author presents **Asa** in a positive light, even commenting that **Asa did what was good and** right in **God's eyes, as his ancestor David had done.** This meant that **he** had no use for idols. Only that **he** didn't totally remove **the high places** mars the author's assessment of **Asa's reign**.[366]

The significance of his reign: Humanly speaking, there was little reason to expect that **Asa** would be faithful to **God**. But the **Chronicler** began with a general characterization of **Asa** as one who **did what was good and right from the perspective of ADONAI his God, as David his ancestor had done.** Only two other kings, **Hezekiah** and **Josiah**, receive higher praise than **Asa**. It *was* possible to do **good and right from the view of ADONAI** once again. Purity of worship *could* be protected. Times of hope and reform **can** appear within a people plummeting to disaster.[367] Besides serving **YHVH Himself**, **Asa** attempted to end the pagan practices **Rehoboam** and **Abijah** had allowed, even encouraged. **For he expelled the male prostitute from the Land, removed the foreign altars and the high places** from the major cities**, smashing the standing-stones and chopping down the sacred poles that his ancestors had made.** The description of **Asa's** efforts closely follows **the mitzvot** of **Deut 12:1-3. The Chronicler** used **the king's** reforms in this traditional language to present **him** as an example of what **the kings** of **Judah** were always expected to do **(First Kings 15:11-12).**

In other words, **Asa** was a spiritual success in exactly the areas where **his father Abijah** and **grandfather Rehoboam** had failed. **Rehoboam** had introduced many pagan practices into **Judah's** worship: goddess worship, ritual prostitution, and the like. **Rehoboam's** son **Abijah** repeated the **sins** of **his father**. But **Asa** was a reformer. Like his great-grandfather **David**, **he** had a heart for the worship of the one true **God**. Therefore, **Asa** put an end to the worship of false deities and the

depraved practices of Canaanite religion. **Asa** brought spiritual reformation to the people of **God**. The only explanation for this surprising turn of events is the grace of **God**. **ADONAI** did not abandon this **family** to **their sins**, but raised a generation that was faithful to **Him**.

This gives us hope for the gracious work of **God** in our own lives and **families**. Humanly speaking, we may not seem very promising. Sometimes we fear that we are doomed to repeat the **sins** of our fathers and mothers, or that our children may not have the heart for **God** that they need to make a difference in the world for **Messiah**. But the **God** of **Asa** is a **God** of gracious intervention who has the power to bring new spiritual life. He is the **God** of the empty tomb, who raised **Yeshua** from the grave. Now the rising power of **Messiah** is available to everyone who believes: the power to heal, the power to save, and the power to transform.

> **Reforms and prosperity: He ordered Judah to seek ADONAI, the God of their ancestors, and to obey the Torah and the mitzvah.** As a result, **the kingdom was peaceful** under **his reign. Peace** is an important goal of **the Chronicler** set before **his** readers. As elsewhere in the TaNaKh, it is implied not only the absence of **war**, but economic prosperity and social well being. This portion of **Asa's** reign depicted the benefits of loyalty to **the covenant** for **God's** people – it brought **peace**. **Asa** was able to concentrate on **building fortified cities** since **the Land** was at **peace**. **"Let's build these cities," he said to Judah; "we'll surround them with walls, towers, gates and bars." The Chronicler** paused to make **his** theological perspective on these events plain. Why did **Asa** enjoy this period of peace? **The Land is there for us to use, because we have sought ADONAI our God; we have sought him, and He has given us peace on every side."** Many times **the Chronicler** pointed to divine activity as **the** ultimate cause of events in **Isra'el's** history. This period of prosperity was not the result of human effort; it was the divine response to **Asa's** faithfulness. **So they built and prospered (2 Chron 14:4-7).** As **the Chronicler's** readers heard these descriptions of **Asa's** time, they yearned to see those same blessings in their own day. Rebuilding and prosperity were their goals as well. **The Chronicler** left no room for misunderstanding the way that would lead to these results. Seeking **God** as **Asa** had done was the key to their desires.[368]

> **Asa's victory over Zerah: Asa had an** extraordinarily large **army of 300,000 men from Judah, equipped with shields and spears, and another 280,000 from Benjamin, with shields and bows; all were**

brave, strong men. In many respects this verse bridges the gap between the preceding conquest of **Asa's** blessing and this battle. The size and quality of **the king's** army was another example of **Asa's** prosperity.

But despite the size and quality of **Asa's** army, **his** enemy was even greater. **Zerah the Ethiopian came out to attack them with an army of a thousand thousands.** The Hebrew word translated **thousand** may be a technical term referring to considerably less than **1,000**. If this were the case, **Asa** may have had **290,000 soldiers** and **Zerah 500,000.** However one handles this calculation, **Asa** was greatly outnumbered. As in **Abijah's** conflict with **Jeroboam** (**to see link click Dj – Abijah King of Judah**), the enemy of **Judah** was nearly twice **their** size. Moreover, **Zerah** had **three hundred chariots** at **his** command. The motif of **Judah** facing an enemy with a larger army appears a number of times in **Chronicles**. In each case, the apparent inadequacy of **Judah's** army demonstrated that divine intervention was the cause of victory **(Second Chronicles 14:8-9a)**.

When Zerah arrived at Mareshah, Asa went out to fight him, and the forces were arranged for battle in the Valley of Zephathah near Mareshah. Even before **it** had begun, the faith of **Asa** was the turning point of the battle. **Asa cried out to ADONAI his God, "ADONAI, there is no one besides Yourself, strong or weak, who can help. Help us, ADONAI our God, because we are relying on You, and we are coming against this vast throng in Your name. You are ADONAI our God; don't let human beings stop you" (Second Chronicles 14:9b-11)!" Asa's** prayer of complete reliance of **God** as the protector of **Isra'el** aptly reflects **his** broader demonstration of **covenantal** faithfulness. As with **Abijah's** earlier prayer at the outset of battle against **Jeroboam**, and **Jehoshaphat's** later prayer **(Second Chronicles 20:3-12)**, **Asa's** prayer shows **Solomon's** intercessory prayer in action (see **Bn – Solomon's Prayer of Intercession**). **Asa** acknowledges in **his** prayer that he and the people of **Judah** are facing the army of **Zerah** in **God's name**. The idea of **the name (Ha'Shem)** of **YHVH** is interwoven with aspects of **God's** character as well as **His covenantal** relationship with **Isra'el**. As **Proverbs 18:10** notes: **The name of ADONAI is a strong tower; a righteous person runs to it and is raised high above danger.**[369]

For the first time **God** becomes a major character in the story:
So ADONAI struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the

Ethiopians fled. Three times **the Chronicler** mentioned that it was **the LORD's** action that defeated **the Ethiopians (14:12, 13** and **14). Asa and the army with him pursued them to Gerar, and the Ethiopians were defeated beyond recovery; they were shattered before ADONAI and His army, who carried off much spoil. The Israelites then attacked all the cities in the vicinity of Gerar, for a terror of ADONAI –** not **Asa – had overcome them. The Israelites plundered all the cities, for they were full of spoil. They also attacked the tents of those tending the livestock and carried off sheep and camels in abundance.** Having shown the miraculous victory brought about through prayer and reliance on **YHVH, the Chronicler** closed this story with a simple note: **Then they returned to Jerusalem (Second Chronicles 14:12-15).**

Prophecy and response: The Spirit of God came on Azariah the son of Oded; he went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin! ADONAI is with you, as long as you are with him; if you seek him, you will find him; but if you abandon him, he will abandon you! God allied **Himself** with **His people** only when **they** allied **themselves** with **Him**. The words of **the prophet** reflected the words of Scripture (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Be – Discipline and Torah**). **Asa's** response and obedience had a significant impact on others, including **Judah** as a whole **(Second Chronicles 15:15). For a long time,** during the period of **the Judges, Isra'el was without the true God, priests and Levites** who were supposed to teach the **Torah** were themselves becoming corrupt. Thus, widespread apostasy characterized that period. **Everyone did as they saw fit (Judges 21:25). But when, in their distress, they turned to ADONAI the God of Isra'el and sought Him, they found Him (Judges 3:9 and 15, 4:3, 6:6-7, 10:10** and **12, 15:18, 21:2-3).** In order to strengthen **his** argument, **the prophet** described **the distress** of the period of **the Judges**. **In those times people going about their business were insecure, and great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands; so that they were shattered to pieces, nation against nation and city against city, as God troubled them with every kind of distress (Second Chronicles 15:1-6).**

The Prophet's immediate concern in this passage becomes clear in **his** application to **Asa**. **But you, be strong, and don't give up.** Similar exhortations occur elsewhere in **Second Chronicles 32:7** and **First**

Chronicles 19:13, 22:13, 28:10 and **20. Azariah** didn't rebuke **Asa**, but encouraged **him** to continue with the full assurance that **his work would be rewarded (Second Chronicles 15:7).** Throughout most of **his reign, Asa** was a faithful **king**. Yet, more needed to be done. As the verses that follow explain, idolatry had spread throughout **the Land** and **the Temple** had been neglected. **Azariah** encouraged **Asa** to go further. If **he** did, even more blessings would come **his** way. **The prophet's** positive words to **Asa** easily applied to **the Chronicler's** readers. Like **Asa**, they had received deliverance from their enemies. Yet, much remained to be done. The prophetic word to **Asa** encouraged post-exilic readers to move forward in their restoration efforts. Initial successes were not sufficient. They had to continue by faith as they hoped for more blessings from **YHVH**.[370]

The Chronicler's record of the majority of **Asa's reign** continues with a series of reports on **the king's** response to **the prophet**. **When Asa heard these words prophesied by Azariah, he** took **them** to heart and **it gave him courage to throw the disgusting things out of the whole land of Judah and Benjamin and out of the cities he had captured in the hills of Ephraim (Second Chronicles 15:8).** While **the Chronicler** presented **Rehoboam** and **Abijah** positively, **Asa's** actions made it clear that neither of **them** stopped all idolatry. The first thing **he** did was to reform **Judah's** worship practices. **He repaired the bronze altar of ADONAI** (see **Bq – Solomon Builds His Palace**) **which was in front of the Sanctuary of ADONAI.** Apparently, during the very first years of **Asa's reign, Temple** maintenance had been neglected. The presence of idols and the disrepair of **the bronze altar** explain why **Azariah** encouraged **the king** to go further in righteousness. Many changes had to be accomplished and the work began with correcting the worship of **Judah**. The logical place to begin was **the bronze altar** where the sins of the people were atoned for. Once again, **Asa's** actions were a model for **the Chronicler's** post-exilic readers to follow. As the actions of several of the **kings** of **Judah** illustrate, worship was the place for **them** to begin **their** reforms as well.

Covenant renewal: Then the king gathered all Judah and Benjamin. As in other such assemblies, the actions taken here are a model for the post-exilic community. **Asa** led **Judah** in **covenant** renewal and **the Chronicler's** readers should learn to do the same in their day. **all Judah and Benjamin** came to **Jerusalem**, but along with **them** were representatives **from**

Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon. The Chronicler noted that the northerners were from among those **who were staying with him.** As in the days of **Rehoboam** (see **De – Rehoboam Received Many Blessings: Rehoboam received many defectors from the north**) **large numbers had defected to him upon seeing that ADONAI his God was with him (Second Chronicles 15:9).** This brings to mind **Asa's victory over Zerah** resulting from **YHVH** fighting on the side of **Judah**. This, and other migrations from the North, were very important to **the Chronicler**. They were foretastes of **the Chronicler's** ideal reunification of all **Isra'el** under the reign of **David's** family.

The renewal of **the covenant** forms the climax of **Asa's** reforms. **They assembled together at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's reign.** The date of **the third month** indicates that this **assembly** was probably part of the Festival of Shavu'ot (see the commentary on **Leviticus Ec – Hag Shavu'ot**). Unity was only possible when **ADONAI** was worshiped in the way that **He** had decreed, at **His** appointed time. **The Chronicler** specifically tied **Asa's covenant** renewal to the preceeding context. **That day they sacrificed to ADONAI 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep from the spoils they had brought** back from **their victory** over **Zerah**. The highlight of the gathering was **the people's** reaffirmation of the **covenantal** relationship with **YHVH** based on faithfulness and obedience. **And they entered into a covenant to seek ADONAI, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and with all their being.** This revealed that **the Chronicler** viewed **Asa's assembly** as the climax of **his** response to **the prophet Azariah**.

They also agreed that whoever refused to seek ADONAI the God of Isra'el should be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman (Second Chronicles 15:10-13). The idea of **death** for unfaithfulness and **covenantal** sin is not without precedent in the TaNaKh **(Exodus 22:20; Leviticus 17:2-14; Deuteronomy 13:60** and **17:27)**. As with all mitzvot regarding capital punishment, the motivation behind it was to rid **Isra'el** of evildoers who would lead others away from faithfulness to **the covenant**. In the Dispensation of Torah (see the commentary on **Exodus Da – The Dispensation of Torah**), religious and national policies were nearly inseparable. The judgments of the state of **Isra'el**, in compliance with the Torah, were the judgments of **God Himself**. As a result, one aspect of national

covenantal renewal was the purification of the nation. These executions are comparable to the practice of excommunication in the B'rit Chadashah, which itself is a purification of the believing community **(Matthew 18:17, First Chronicles 5:1-13; First Timothy 1:18-20;** and **Second Thessalonians 3:14)**.

The people were delighted with the even and **swore this to ADONAI in a loud voice, with shouting and blowing of trumpets and shofars.** Once again, **the Chronicler's** interest in connecting music and **joy** is apparent. As in similar passages throughout **his** book, **the Chronicler** emphasized the **joy** and splendor of this event to motivate **his** readers toward imitation. Instead of threats of judgment, this scene of celebreation offered positive incentive for **covenant** renewal. The wonder of **Asa's joyous** celebration would be theirs, if they would follow the example of **Asa's covenantal** faithfulness. **All Judah was full of joy at this oath. They** had gone far beyond external religious requirements and offered **their hearts** to **God**. **For they had sworn with all their heart and had sought Him with all their will . . . and they found Him. Wholehearted,** eager pursuit of **covenant** renewal is once again expressed in terms of seeking **(Second Chronicles 14:4, 15:2** and **12-13, 16:12)**. Finally, the result of **the assembly's joyous** and sincere devotion was that **ADONAI gave them rest on every side (Second Chronicles 15:14-15).** The encouragement of **the Chronicler's** post-exilic readers is evident. The delightful experiences of this **assembly** should have motivated them to eagerly pursue **covenant** renewal in their day. They had to go beyond mere external conformity to **wholehearted** devotion. Only then would the **joy** exhibited in this passage be theirs. And no less should it be ours today![371]