

February 2007

## **Chronicles Series**

### **Lesson Five: The Reign of Asa**

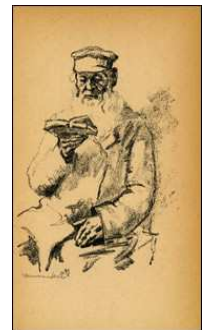
2 Chronicles 14-16

#### **Message A: Asa Seeks the Lord** (2 Chronicles 14:1-15)

**Introduction:** Asa became king in 911 BC and reigned longer than all but two of the southern kings. His long reign included the last year of Jeroboam's reign, and the entire reign of six northern kings, and the first four years of Ahab's reign. Asa's reign spanned the reign of eight northern kings (of 20 altogether!).

He is described as a good man both in Kings and Chronicles: "*Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as did his father David.*" "*And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God.*" Asa was a man who relied on the Lord God (14:11, 16:7-8), and who sought the LORD God (the term is used 8 times of him, more than any other southern king). A Christian today does the same thing when he genuinely prays, reads and studies the Word, and fellowships with God's people.

There are two Hebrew words translated *seek* in Chronicles. The first term (**vrđ**) means to seek after God *carefully*, the way an archeologist carefully recovers a fossil or a surgeon carefully seeks a tumor. Why is care needed in our seeking after God? The second word (**vqb**) means to seek God *earnestly*, as a father would his lost child. This word means to seek until you find what it is you are looking for, to seek with determination. Why is determination needed in seeking after God? Determination is needed because that is what God requires of us before we find Him (see Deuteronomy 4:29 "...*thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul*"). Ezekiel 34:6 uses both terms (in the order mentioned above) together: "*My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.*"



The fifteen verses of this chapter are divided in half. In the first eight verses the works of Asa's faith are described, and in the last seven verses a single example of his faith is described.

#### **Asa's Works**

1. What *good and right* thing did Asa do in verse 3? \_\_\_\_\_  
"*And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God: 3 **For** he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves.*" Note the connector beginning verse 3. This tells the reader that verse 3 is an example of the good and right heart attitude which characterized Asa. It may have been from Solomon's day (he died 20 years before Asa became king), or Rehoboam's, or just from Abijah's, but they had allowed altars to foreign deities in Judah and Jerusalem. These Asa removed. Then, he removed the *high places*. These (**hmb**) were places of worship, most often on a summit or ridge where incense was burned, sacrifice was made, sacrificial meals were eaten, and praying, child sacrifice and prostitution to false deities were practiced. Some high places were used for genuine worship of Yahweh (as in 1 Kings 3:2), but after the Temple was built, they were associated with the cultic worship of false gods. Asa removed these places. In so doing he destroyed the idol images and the *asherah* poles (on which were carved various images of Baal's fertility goddess, much like a totem). According to verse 5, how thorough was he in doing this? "*Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images.*"

2. What positive work did Asa do in place of the destruction of idol worship? \_\_\_\_\_  
"*And commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment.*" (verse 4). He sent out an edict for the people of Judah to seek Yahweh. This could not be done apart from *doing* the law and commandment. Remember in 12:1 that Rehoboam *forsook the law of*

*the LORD*. Then when Shishak destroyed a number of Judean cities, and stood at the gate of Jerusalem, Shemaiah came and told him: *You have forsaken Me*. One cannot seek God apart from His Word. This was true under the Old Covenant as well as the New. So the command to seek God means a command to order one's life according to His commandments, to know what He commands and then to do it.

However, seeking the Lord is more than an external conformity to a set of regulations. When a young man seeks a young woman, he is glad to conform himself to those things she requires for the display of her favor. But his is not a mindless devotion. It is devotion fueled by loving commitment, and it is reciprocated by a similar loving commitment. Therefore, one ought to seek and obey God's commandments because they represent the greatest good to the soul, but it ought also be a willing obedience to the God who shows favor in such remarkable ways. For this loving devotion to God in His Law, just consider some of the more devotional statements of Psalm 119 (47-48, 92, 97).

When a king like Asa (or a parent, by application) insists on, issues an edict requiring, obedience to the Law he has two things in mind. (1) First, God is pleased to bless the nation which seeks to honor His Word. In issuing such an edict, it is reasonable to assume that Asa sought to secure Yahweh's blessing on Judah (just as He does the parent). (2) Second, in issuing such an edict Asa desired also that the people would not observe the Law in a merely perfunctory manner, but rather with a heart of love for God (as parents hope for their children). Bear in mind that during the Millennium Jesus Himself will command observance of the Law, and completely prohibit both its neglect and any other religion.

Being a devoted follower of God under the Old Covenant involved exactly the same heart attitudes as it does under the New Covenant. The difference is that we have more revelation than they did.

3. Verse 5 says: "*Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images: and the kingdom was quiet before him.*" What does this verse add to what was already said in verse 3? \_\_\_\_\_ Verse 5 adds the fact that Asa did this in "*all the cities of Judah.*" Asa was determined to make it as easy as possible for all of his people to seek the Lord by removing every temptation to other religious observance. He had already taken the *high places* out of Jerusalem, and now he removed them throughout the rest of the land. It is likely that Solomon, Rehoboam and/or Abijah had allowed these (or even authorized and funded their construction) in order to secure the people's approval. But now God uses Asa to remove them, in accordance with Leviticus 26:27-30 (READ).

4. Verses 6-8 describe Asa's mobilization for war. Why, according to the text (verse 1, 5, 6 (twice), & 7) were they able to do this? \_\_\_\_\_

*"And he built fenced cities in Judah: for the land had rest, and he had no war in those years; because the LORD had given him rest."* They were able to build and successfully mobilize for war because they were at *rest*. This is a sense of social & political *tranquility* (jqv). Because they were not at war, they did not have to *move around* (xwn). God did the same thing for Jehoshaphat, Asa's son (20:30), and after Athaliah was killed (23:21). How long did this peace last? Verse 1 tells us that it lasted ten years. If that does not seem long, consider how little is the peace Middle Eastern countries today enjoy. And why did they have this peace, according to verse 6? They had this peace because God providentially gave it to them. And according to verse 7, why did God give it to them? God gave it to them because they sought Him, and His blessing on them for seeking Him, He gave them peace. Asa used it wisely. Do we (1 Timothy 2:2)? Verse 7: "*Therefore he said unto Judah, Let us build these cities, and make about them walls, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is yet before us; because we have sought the LORD our God, we have sought him, and he hath given us rest on every side. So they built and prospered.*" Verse 8 says: "*And Asa had an army of men that bare targets (shields) and spears, out of Judah three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin, that bare shields and drew bows, two hundred and fourscore thousand: all these were mighty men of valour.*" In a time when the size of an infantry was critical, 580,000 men was a comfortable sized army.

## **Asa's Faith**

5. From verses 9-15 we have an example of Asa's faith that mirrored that of his father Abijah. How large was the army of Ethiopians that came out against Asa, according to verse 9? \_\_\_\_\_

*"And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots; and came unto Mareshah."* One million men with a central phalanx (likely) of 300 chariots came out against them. Hearing the army was on its way, Asa (verse 10): *"went out against him, and they set the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah."* Knowing where Ethiopia is, in what direction from Jerusalem would you expect the battle to have been joined? To the southwest, which is precisely where Mareshah (hapaxlegomena) is located just three miles NE of Lachish. The battle was set in a valley running east to west north of the town. We find out in 16:8 that there were also Lybians in this great army (Lubim).

6. What was Asa's strategy, according to verse 11? \_\_\_\_\_

*"And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee."* Asa's strategy was to pray. He did mobilize the army, but in the face of such overwhelming odds, he sought the Lord. He did so earnestly (qal imperfect of **arq**) and repeatedly, which demonstrates his faith in the willingness of God to answer prayer.

He opens his prayer with an Encouraging Reminder: *"LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power."* God does not depend on man's strength to effect a victory over His enemies. Perhaps Asa has Jonathan's words in mind (1 Samuel 14:6 *"It may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few."*) It was indeed an encouraging reminder. Asa could be certain that God would fight for them because he was doing exactly what Solomon said in his prayer of dedication (see 6:34-35 *"When Your people go out to battle against their enemies, wherever You send them, and when they pray to You toward this city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name, 35 then hear from heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause"*).

The second part of his prayer contains an Earnest Request: *"Help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude."* You are able and willing, and so we plead for your help. Support us, come to our aid, give us help in this battle. Why? Because they *rested* (same word as *rely* in chapter 13) on God, believed in Him, trusted Him. What is the greatest need in your life right now? Are you resting on God for that thing? They were fighting in the name of Yahweh.

He concludes his prayer with an Effective Reason: *"O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee."* This is now God's battle. They have sought God, and so to call Him their God is no idle claim. They will go and wield weapons, but they are utterly dependent on God to make them effective.

Do we pray this way?

7. What happened as a result of Asa's strategy (12-15)? \_\_\_\_\_

*"So the LORD smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled. 13 And Asa and the people that were with him pursued them unto Gerar: and the Ethiopians were overthrown, that they could not recover themselves; for they were destroyed before the LORD, and before his host; and they carried away very much spoil. 14 And they smote all the cities round about Gerar; for the fear of the LORD came upon them: and they spoiled all the cities; for there was exceeding much spoil in them. 15 They smote also the tents of cattle, and carried away sheep and camels in abundance, and returned to Jerusalem."* Yahweh struck the Ethiopians (cp. 16:8) so that they fled, just as He had done for Abijah. He did it *before* Asa's army. Asa pursued and slaughtered for 30 miles to the SW to Gerar. They never recovered strength, and Judah plundered them. Terror filled Israel's enemies, and they defeated and plundered the villages around Gerar. They returned to Jerusalem in victory.