

The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

Two Kingdoms in Contrast

Readings: 1 Kings 15:8-11; 2 Chronicles 14:2-8; 1 Kings 14:19-20; 15:25-34; 2 Chronicles 14:9-15; 15:1-16; 1 Kings 15:13-22; 2 Chronicles 16:1-10; 1 Kings 16:1-34; 2 Chronicles 16:11-14; 1 Kings 22:41-47; 2 Chronicles 17:2-19

Reflections:

- The story of these kings can be frustrating to read through. Like many times in Israel's past, leaders flip flop between sin and seeking God so consistently that you feel like shouting, "will you never learn?" Seek God and everything goes well even through the tough times. Do your own thing, reject God and everything goes bad fast! This is all apart of showing us that the problem is the human heart and the need for an inside out transformation by God's Spirit.
- In Judah: Asa begins his kingship of Judah in all the right ways. Here are all the things that stand out as he walks in the way of the Lord:
 - He cleans the house of Judah from all the idols and idolatry.
 - He focuses on building up the security and fortresses of Judah.
 - When attacked by the Cushites, he completely relies on God and declares that "in your name we have come against this vast army." In other words, he declared that it was ultimately God's battle and all they could do is call out to their savior to rescue them. This demonstrates true faith and confidence in God. This is fully blessed by God.
 - He listens to the encouragement of Azariah the prophet and takes courage from these words of God. We will come back to this.
 - He leads the people to renew their covenant relationship with God with whole-hearted passion. "All Judah rejoiced about the oath because they had sworn it wholehearted. They sought God eagerly and he was found by them. So the Lord gave them rest on every side." This is the basic spiritual math of God. "Seeking God wholeheartedly (Faith in action)" + "Finding God" = "peace, rest, shalom"

- King Asa even has to go through the tough work of confronting his own grandmother and removing her influence in Israel. This is a reminder that some of our toughest battles may be confronting the unhealthy or sinful things that come into our lives through our own family members. It may be attitudes or values or things that they ask us to participate in that ultimately stand in conflict with what God wants for us.
- With all of these great things King Asa has done, you would think he would be the new glowing example of a great king. Nope! As the story continues we find that Israel moves into position to attack Judah. This time instead of calling out for God's help, he turns to Ben-Hadad, King of Aram (Syria). Notice that Asa empties out the storehouse of blessing to buy off the help of this Gentile nation. All of the wealth in the temple and his own palace becomes the payment for getting help from this foreign king and nation. Here is another lesson. When we turn to God for help, he not only helps us but he blesses us and ensures we keep the blessings he has already given us. When we try to save ourselves, we often lose the blessings God has given us in the effort to do it on our own. Rather than seeking God and looking for his provision, we look around at what we have in our own possession (our wealth, influence, wisdom, etc.) and we ask how we can use this to get ourselves out of this trouble. This approach to life is a recipe for disaster as Asa discovers.
- As Asa's heart hardens to God, even the warning from prophet Hanani does not bring repentance. In fact, Asa's heart gets harder as he throws the prophet in prison and begins to oppress the people. Another lesson to consider. One step away from God normally leads to two and three steps away from God. Within time someone who was once close with God can be far from him and acting in a completely contrary way to what they know in their head is what God wants for them. This should make us very careful not to take that first step.
- Asa's final days symbolically express his spiritual condition. Disease afflicts his feet and he only seeks the help of physicians (human solutions) and not the help of God. Asa's diseased feet help the reader understand that because of great sin he was unable to walk in the ways of God but rather ended his life under God's judgment. What started well ends miserably.
- Jehoshaphat, Asa's son becomes King and the reset button is hit. Jehoshaphat begins his reign as his father did by cleaning house of all idolatry, turning people's hearts back to the Torah (the Law) and by devoting himself whole-heartedly to God. He receives the blessing of property, peace and security (military strength). The stage is now set for one of the greatest stories in the Old Testament – the story of Elijah the prophet!
- In Israel: While all this is going on in Judah, what is going in Israel? Basically the place is a complete mess. Kings murdering their predecessors whole families, division, idolatry, suicide, division, you name it. The sinfulness of Israel culminates in the coming of Ahab,

a king so evil that his name and the name of his wife Jezebel will become symbolic of great rebellion and evil. Key statement: "There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by his wife Jezebel." Yikes!

- Summary: In this section, in the prophecy of Azariah, we find repeated again for the reader the basics of what it means to live in friendship or relationship with God: "The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you." In his prophecy we learn that God will use difficult experiences to try to drive us back to him and seeking him. And if we do turn to God and rely on him we can step into the future with confidence. "Be strong and do not give up (persevere), for your work will be rewarded." God is looking for people who love him so much that they only look to him for their provision and direction in life. He is seeking a people who trust him and his word so much that they will walk faithfully in line with what he has said and will not doubt and reject his promises. He desires an intimate relationship where people care only about what he thinks and abandons their preoccupation with what others think or how they might somehow save themselves. What we discover though is that unless God changes our hearts from the inside out, we always go back to just trying to do everything on our own. We try to become our own saviors and without fail, we mess everything up. Thank God for Jesus and for him rescuing us from ourselves!