

2 Chronicles 15: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 28 September 2020

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[0 : 00] 2 Chronicles chapter 15 The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded, and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you while you are with him.

If you seek him, he will be found by you. But if you forsake him, he will forsake you. For a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law.

But when in their distress they turned to the Lord, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them. In those times there was no peace to him who went out, or to him who came in.

For great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. They were broken in pieces. Nation was crushed by nation, and city by city. For God troubled them with every sort of distress.

But you, take courage. Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded. As soon as Asa heard these words, the prophecy of Azariah the son of Oded, He took courage, and put away the detestable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and from the cities that he had taken in the hill country of Ephraim.

[1 : 07] And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was in front of the vestibule of the house of the Lord. And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, who were residing with them. For great numbers had deserted to him from Israel when they saw that the Lord his God was with him. They were gathered at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. They sacrificed to the Lord on that day from the spoil that they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep. And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul. But that whoever would not seek the Lord, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman.

They swore an oath to the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets and with horns. And all Judah rejoiced over the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart, and had sought him with their whole desire. And he was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest all around. Even Meacah his mother, King Asa, removed from being queen mother, because she had made a detestable image for Asherah. Asa cut down her image, crushed it, and burned it at the brook Kidron.

But the high places were not taken out of Israel. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was wholly true all his days. And he brought into the house of God the sacred gifts of his father, and his own sacred gifts, silver and gold and vessels. And there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa. Asa returns to Jerusalem after his victory over the vast Ethiopian army of Zerah. And in chapter 15, he and his men are addressed by Azariah, the son of Oded, who brings a message from the Lord to them.

The message is one of encouragement to them in their victory, but also a caution lest they should turn away from the Lord. It would be very easy for Judah to take the Lord's being on their side for granted, maybe particularly after such a great victory. They had the Davidic king, they had the temple, they had the Levites, and they had the true worshippers of the Lord. Surely the Lord would be on their side and would not leave them. It is very easy to take confidence in our privileges and the blessings that we have received from God in the past, and not actually seek his face as we ought to in the present. To such an attitude, Azariah gives the warning that those who seek will find, but those who forsake the Lord will be forsaken by him. There is no ground for presumption. Judah now faces a time of decision. God has blessed them, and now they must determine to dedicate themselves to his service.

[3 : 35] He gives a historical reminder of Israel's history. Israel was once without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law. Presumably he's referring to the period of the judges, where at many points Israel had turned away from the Lord to idols, and lacked faithful priests, and

the teaching of the law. At such times, when they had turned to the Lord, he was found by them, and he delivered them from their enemies. The languishing of Israel at those times seems to have had consequences for the surrounding nations and peoples. There was constant unrest, instability, and war, not just for Israel, but for the surrounding region. Our focus is naturally upon Israel, but when we think a bit more widely about how the other nations would have experienced that time, it was a time of perpetual inconclusive conflicts. Israel's faithfulness in turning to the Lord could lead to blessings and peace for surrounding nations that allied themselves with the people of the Lord, as we see in Hiram of Tyre and others. Asa and Judah were then encouraged and emboldened to faithfulness. Asa embarked upon a reformation of the land. He repaired the altar of the Lord, he removed idols from the various cities, he reforms parts of the territory of Israel and

Ephraim as well, parts that he now controlled. He gathers people together in Jerusalem in the third month. This is the time of Pentecost. It's a new Sinai event, a renewing of the covenant. As he restores the covenant, it is not just with Judah. Many people come down from Israel to join Judah in this renewal of the covenant. This of course was one of the concerns of Jeroboam, one of the reasons why he led Israel into idolatry. He was always concerned that his people might go south to join Judah in the worship of the Lord in the temple. One of the effects of faithful worship is that the southern kingdom is strengthened over against the northern kingdom. Israelites will migrate south to join the faithful Davidic king and to worship at the Lord's temple in Jerusalem.

The people swear an oath to the Lord with Asa with all their heart, having sought him with all of their desire. The description of their response to the Lord is a reminder of the sort of commitment called for in Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 4 to 5, the commitment called for in the Shema.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Asa's faithfulness is seen also in the thorough going character of his reforms. They stretched the removal of his own grandmother Meaca from her privileges as queen mother. Asa's destruction of his grandmother's Asherah should also remind us of the destruction of the golden calf. Just as there is a renewal of the response to the law of God given at Sinai, so there is a renewal of the action against idolatry that occurred at Sinai. Asa's commitment to true worship is a public one. The worship of the Lord was never merely a privatised matter. While the commitments of people's hearts are clearly important as we see in this chapter, it is also important that the public life of Israel be purged of idolatry. Treating the worship of idolaters with indulgence in the life of Israel and Judah would always have devastating consequences.

It practically undermined a commitment to monotheism and encouraged religious syncretism and all sorts of other perverse practices that arose from that. In Asa's approach to the reform of Judah, he is very much following the templates set by the book of Deuteronomy, not least in his privileging of faithfulness to the Lord over family ties. A question to consider. In this chapter we see some of the implications that the faithfulness of the Lord's people could have for those surrounding them, both for other unfaithful bodies of God's people and for the surrounding unbelieving nations. What lessons might we draw from this for our practice today?