

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 12, Part 3, 1 Kings 14-15, Part 3

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The third section of our study today is Asa . At this point, when Abijah dies after a very short reign, maybe part of one year, a whole year, part of another year, so the Bible says three years, but maybe actually only part of two, the question is, is Judah going to go down that same route? The route that the North has taken. In many ways, everything's hanging in the balance here.

And Asa comes to the throne—and Asa rules for 41 years. We're going to see next week how, during those 41 years, the North just went through upheaval after upheaval after upheaval, just chaos.

But in the South, in the South, an anchor. And in many ways, I think Asa is the reason why Judah survived as long as they did. He, who is described as a good man, as we'll see in a moment, gave that stability, stability for the Lord that I think laid the foundation, hooked the anchor in, and made it possible for them to survive as long as they did.

I want to be an Asa. In the 20th year of Jeroboam, king of Israel, Asa became king of Judah, and he reigned in Jerusalem for 41 years. Now, this is a bit of a question.

His grandmother's name was Maka, daughter of Abishalom. Well, that's because the same thing is said of Abijah. Well, actually, the text says his mother because Hebrew doesn't have a word for grandmother.

It's his female ancestor. So, there's an interesting question here. Is it possible that mother and daughter had the same name and the same father and grandfather? Don't know for sure, but interesting to think about.

Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done. All right. Good man, did what was right.

But he also put a stop to some stuff that had started under Rehoboam. He expelled the male shrine prostitutes from the land. He got rid of all the idols his ancestors had made.

He even deposed his grandmother, Maacah, from her position as queen mother because she had made a repulsive image for the worship of Asherah. Wow. Now, queen mothers were very powerful in Judah.

It's pretty obvious. So, this was a fairly risky thing he did. Asa cut it down and burned it in the Kidron Valley.

Wow. Yes. He did right.

He was a good man. And he also exercised his influence on the nation as a whole and the people in the nation. So here is the Deuteronomic philosophy that we've seen.

He worshipped the Lord wholeheartedly. He did not make idols. He destroyed the idols.

He did not sponsor pagan worship. In fact, he tried to put a stop to it. And we're not told here how he treated the poor, but that's understood in that doing right.

Now, I want you to look at verse 14. I think quite an important verse. Although he did not remove the high places, Asa's heart was completely God's, perfect toward the Lord all his life.

Yes. The very opposite of what was said about his father. His father had a divided heart.

Asa has a heart that is whole for the Lord. No ifs, no ands, no buts. Sold out for God.

And clearly these actions then come out of that heart that is whole. But wait a minute. He didn't get rid of the high places, but his heart was perfect.

How are we to understand that? I think we're to understand it as ignorance. These were not clearly places where pagan gods were worshipped. They were places where Yahweh was worshipped around the country.

Now, Deuteronomy had said, you're not supposed to do that. You're supposed to worship me in one place. As we've talked before, worshipping him in several places ran the danger of dividing him up into local gods.

But I think what we're saying is that even though Asa's performance lacked something, his commitment lacked nothing. And frankly, that's an encouraging word for me. Maybe I don't always perform at the highest level.

Now, again, I think we're not talking intentionally here. We're talking unintentionally. Maybe I don't always perform at the highest level.

Maybe I fall short in this area or that area. But that doesn't mean I can't be sold out to God. Now, sold out to God means our performance ought to be improving.

That's what the Bible calls growth in holiness. If I'm really his, then I'm going to be sensitive to him. And my performance ought to be improving.

I don't want to make this an excuse for lousy living. Well, I love the Lord wholeheartedly, so you can't expect much out of me. No, no, no.

But on the other hand, I want to say we can be delivered from a biting conscience that says, well, you didn't do enough of that. Well, you ought to be better here. You ought to, oh, we don't have to live there.

We can say I'm God's, and God can do with me what he wants. And I want to be more his tomorrow than I am today. Asa's heart was perfect toward the Lord.

Oh my, a king who rules for 41 years and has a perfect heart, that's good news. We're going to have some other kings in these stories who ruled for a long, long time without a perfect heart, and that was bad news. But a long reign and a perfect heart, oh, that's good news.

That's good news. However, there's war. Now it's interesting. I didn't comment on it, but in both Rehoboam and Abijah's death notices, it is said there was war with Jeroboam.

Clearly, the North and the South are duking it out with each other. And that's continuing now when Jeroboam's successor, Basaha is on the throne. Again, Jeroboam had a very short son's reign.

Nadab, we're going to see this next week. Nadab rules for a very short time before Basha assassinates him, puts an end to the Jeroboam dynasty, and starts his own dynasty, the Basha dynasty. Well, the war continues.

Baasha seems to have been maybe a better warrior than Jeroboam because he is really threatening Judah. He's pushing his border southward, closing the border off, and Asa is concerned.

So, Asa, we're told here, collects a lot of money, and he sends it to the king of Syria. You are looking at the map; Syria is up here, and Jerusalem is down here. He sends his money to Syria and says, would you please attack Israel and get them off my back? And the king of Assyria agrees to that.

When Baasha pulls back, Asa organizes the whole nation. They go and build fortresses on the new northern border of Judah, and everything is well. However, here's an example of Asa's faith: 2 Chronicles 14:11. Oh Lord, there's none like you to help between the mighty and the weak.

Help us, oh Lord, our God, for we rely on you. And in your name, we've come against this multitude, oh Lord, you are our God. Let not man prevail against you.

This was his prayer when the Ethiopians were coming up from the south, and he led his people into battle, trusting in God, and there was a great, great deliverance. But now he collects this money and sends it off, and he is confronted by Hanani, the seer. He came to Asa, king of Judah, and said to him, because you have relied on this king of Assyria and didn't rely on the Lord, your God, the army of the king of Assyria has escaped you.

You didn't have to worry about Basha as much as you had to worry about Syria. They're the more dangerous ones. And you weren't alert to that.

You made a deal with him. We're not the Ethiopians and the Libyans, a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen. Yet, because you relied on the Lord, he gave them into your hand for the eyes of the Lord to run to and fro throughout the whole earth to give strong support to those whose hearts are complete toward him.

You've done foolishly in this. From now on, you'll have wars. Asa was angry with the seer and put him in stocks in prison, for he was in a rage with him because of this.

When you've been on the throne for 30 or 40 years, you kind of begin to believe that you are supreme. People can't tell you off. Asa inflicted cruelties upon some of its people at the same time.

What does this say to us? I think it says two things. Number one, it is not wrong to rely on earthly help if that's what God wants to do. Asa's mistake here, his sin was to say, oh boy, Bashan is coming against us.

What are we going to do here? Oh, oh, I know, I know. We'll send a bunch of money to Syria, and they'll help us. Yeah, yeah, let's do it quick.

Rather than, Lord, what do you want to do here? How do you want to solve our problem? It's a serious problem. It's a terrible problem. What do you want to do? Now, I don't know about you, but I find that word coming to me again and again.

Stop running ahead of me. Stop solving your problems your way. Solve them my way.

God's way may very well have been to make a deal with a surrounding, a neighboring nation, and we'll do that. You see examples of that throughout the Bible, such as God making use of earthly means to accomplish his purposes. But the question is, have we ascertained beforehand that that's what he wants to do? That's why, again and again, in the Bible, we should wait and trust our synonyms.

Lord, what do you want to do? You're not telling me. I'm afraid the pressure is rising. God, come on, come on.

In his own time, in his own way. Not in my time, not in my way, not in my strength, but in his. So, what we find here is the first of a very sad pattern.

A good king, the report of whose reign ends on a dark note. In fact, this is true of every good king. Now, as I've told you before, there are no good kings in Israel.

None, not one. There are five, or if you count Uzziah, six in Judah. Six good men.

Here's the first one, Asa. And yet the report of every one of those good men ends on a dark note. A moral failure, a human failure in terms of leadership, guidance.

Now, what's going on here? Well, number one is realism. The reporter is simply saying that this is the way it happened. Now that's important.

One of the remarkable things about the Bible is all its heroes have clay feet. Ancient literature, oh, the hero, oh my. He has no failures whatsoever.

Or if he does, they're celebrated. Wow. It's like a movie magazine, not the Bible.

He's a hero. He's a great man. He's a good man.

But he failed. Sadly, tragically, gloomily. Why is that? Oh, I think I know the answer.

Our hope is not in any human being. No matter how good they are, no matter how fine they are, if we put our hope in a human, he or she will fail us. Our hope is in Yahweh and in his son, Jesus Christ.

There's hope for you and me. Thank God for good people. Thank God for their example and their influence in our lives.

But friends, don't hang your star on them. That goes for this one too—feet of clay.

The hope of the world is not in human perfectibility. The hope of the world is in the grace of the God who never fails. That's what we're being told here.

Thank God for good people. Thank God for an Asa who gave Judah a future. But in the end, our hope is not in the Asas.

Let's pray.

Thank you, Lord, that our hope can be in you. Thank you for having proven yourself faithful and true across endless centuries.

Thank you for never failing. Forgive us, Lord, when we demand that you do what we want and do it now. Forgive us when we're unwilling to wait for you in trust.

Thank you. Thank you for those hours when you have given us the ability and the willingness to wait. And you have demonstrated your trustworthiness in your time.

Thank you. Thank you. As we think about Christmas, how many long years did the people wait? And in the end, when you did demonstrate your trustworthiness, it was in a very surprising way.

But you did, and you have. Thank you. So, Lord, help us to learn from these lessons.

Help us to have hearts that are complete, completely yours, and therefore, be enabled to touch the world for good. In your name, we pray. Amen.