

## GOD WITH US

### Part 6: *Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Ridiculous Love* Kings & Prophets thru 722 B.C.

#### Message 2 – The Heart God is Looking For Asa, Azariah and Hanani 2Chronicles 14-16; 1Kings 15:9-24

##### Introduction

In the southern kingdom (Judah), Rehoboam was succeeded by his son Abijah (or Abijam) for 3 years. While Abijah's reign was short, it was eventful in that he defeated Jeroboam in a massive war (2Chronicles 13). *"The sons of Judah conquered Israel because they trusted in the Lord, the God of their fathers"* (13:18). Then Asa followed his father Abijah, reigning for 41 years. Asa was one of the longest reigning, most influential kings in the Southern Kingdom. Since 3 full chapters of the Bible are devoted to his story, we will focus our attention on him.

Asa was *the model* of devotion to the Lord for most of his reign, removing vestiges of idolatry and leading the people to walk in God's ways. Yet, near the end of his life he faltered in his faith and became *the* prime example of a man who did not finish well. The famous verse grows out of the story of Asa's final years: *"For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His"* (16:9). Sadly, Asa's heart was *not* completely His during his final years. In Asa, we receive an important warning about our hearts: ***It's the hidden stuff that can take us down.***

##### Asa's initial reforms: 14:1-8

Asa started off so well, beginning with a *spiritual reformation* of Judah. He knew that faithfulness to the covenant with Yahweh was key to the success of his reign and the peace/prosperity of the kingdom. He had to overturn many of the idolatrous practices instituted by his father Abijah and grandfather Rehoboam.

***"Asa did good and right in the sight of the LORD his God, for he removed the foreign altars and high places, tore down the sacred pillars, cut down the Asherim, and commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers and to observe the law and***

***the commandment. He also removed the high places and the incense altars from all the cities of Judah. And the kingdom was undisturbed under him” (14:2-5).***

He also led the people to build walls around their cities because . . .

***“. . . the land is still ours, because we have sought the Lord, and He has given us rest on every side” (14:7).***

Asa declared to the people that honoring God had resulted in God’s protection and blessing.

### **Asa’s victory over the Ethiopians: 14:9-15**

The hallmark of his early years came in year 10 of his reign. He was attacked by a massive million-man Ethiopian army. Yet, he did not trust in his own strength, nor did he turn to foreign allies for help. He placed his trust in the Lord and was granted a tremendous victory.

***Then Asa called to the LORD his God and said, “LORD, there is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O LORD our God, for we trust in You, and in Your name have come against this multitude. O LORD, You are our God; let not man prevail against You.” So the LORD routed the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled (2Chr.14:11,12).***

Notice Asa’s words: *“There is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength.”* He had an army of half a million men; but he was still humbly dependent on the Lord. This was his declaration of absolute dependence. We are weak . . . but YOU are strong! Yes, Asa and his men fought hard; but their *hope, trust and dependence* were ultimately in the Lord, not themselves. The Ethiopian army was completely routed by Asa, with God’s strong hand of help. *“They were shattered before the Lord, and before His army” (14:13).*

God often sends a “test” as a way of examining our dependence upon Him and to strengthen our resolve to trust in Him more fully. “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands” (Deuteronomy 8:2). Has God allowed a trial or a test to come into your life recently? Have you considered that this is God’s invitation to you to trust Him more?

## A warning to Asa from God: 15:1-7

In year 15 of his reign, Azariah the prophet was sent to Asa with a special message. The message had the tone of a warning. The essence of God's word to Asa was that there would be *great reward* IF they *continued* in the path of seeking the Lord with complete dependence. But there would be great loss IF they stopped depending on God.

***“Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the LORD is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. For many days Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law. But in their distress they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and they sought Him, and He let them find Him. In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. Nation was crushed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress. But you, be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work.”***

Why this message to such a faithful, godly king? Was Asa losing courage in his attempts to bring spiritual reform to Judah? Was he doubting the effectiveness of his efforts? It is likely that God saw *something* in Asa's heart that could, potentially, compromise his faith and devotion. Remember the principle: ***It's the hidden stuff that can take us down.*** Thus, God sent Azariah to tell Asa: *Be strong and DO NOT LOSE COURAGE!* (The Hebrew reads: “do not let your hands drop.”)

\*Note: God says in the New Testament: “*I will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you*” (Hebrews 13:5). So, why does God say that IF Asa and the people turn away, He will “forsake them” (2Chron.15:2)? God was speaking to Asa about the possibility of withdrawing His blessing, favor and protection upon *Asa's kingship* and upon *Israel's life* as a nation. As we saw with King Saul, God's “anointing” upon a king could be withdrawn due to unfaithfulness. And, God blessings upon the nation Israel could be withdrawn due to disloyalty to the covenant (Deut.28). But on the *personal level*, in terms of our *relationship with God*, He will never leave us or forsake us. In New Testament terms: Our *relationship* with God is always secure; but our *fellowship* with God (our experience of the blessings that come from the relationship) can change over time.

In Azariah's message to Asa we hear the reciprocal principle of Scripture: God will draw near to us IF we draw near to Him (see James 4:8; Zechariah 1:3; Malachi 3:7; 2Chronicles 15:2). A.W. Tozer put it this way: "God waits to be wanted." It is true. God waits to see if our hearts will turn toward Him. When our hearts do turn toward Him, He makes Himself known to us and comes to strongly support us (2Chronicles 16:9). On the other hand, when our hearts forsake Him, it is almost as if He hides His face from us. How about you? Are you seeking Him in your current season of life? Are you seeing God show up for you?

### **Asa's response to the message: 15:8-19**

Asa "took courage" (15:8) after hearing this message from the Lord. He undertook further reforms, removing idol altars and restoring the Lord's altar at the temple. He even removed his own grandmother from her position as Queen. He publicly crushed her favorite idol, burning it and throwing the ashes in to the Kidron brook! To commemorate these reforms, he called for a national assembly to renew covenant loyalty with the Lord.

***"So they assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's reign" (15:10).***

After making a massive sacrifice to the Lord, all the people took a solemn oath to seek God with their whole hearts:

***"Moreover, they made an oath to the LORD with a loud voice, with shouting, with trumpets and with horns. All Judah rejoiced concerning the oath, for they had sworn with their whole heart and had sought Him earnestly, and He let them find Him. So the LORD gave them rest on every side" (15:14,15).***

The final line speaks of God's favor, bestowed upon Asa and the kingdom of Judah for seeking Him with their whole heart:

***"And there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign" (15:19).***

The "best" years of our lives will always be those where we have been walking with Lord. Those years will contain wonderful experiences, but will certainly also contain suffering and trials. Yet, they will be blessed years – blessed by God's presence and favor over us. The experience of these "blessed years" depends upon our attitude toward the Lord. Remember . . . all of this happened to Asa and the people "because they had sought Him with their whole desire" (15:15).

## Asa's fall: 16:1-14

It is incredibly difficult to reconcile the first 35 years of Asa's reign with the last 6 years. For 35 years he was a model of faith and dependence upon the Lord (*"There is no one besides You to help in the battle ..."*). Yet, in the last 6 years of his life he turned to everyone and everything *except God* to help him win his battles and overcome his challenges.

### - He trusted in the Syrians for protection: 16:1-4

Judah was threatened by Baasha and the northern army of Israel. They came to within 5 miles of Jerusalem. Instead of turning to God, as he had in the past, he turned to the Syrians, sending them a great deal of silver and gold out of the Lord's temple and his own palace. He paid them to break their treaty with Baasha and come over to his side.

### - He trusted in the failed weapons of Baasha: 16:5,6

When Baasha and his northern kingdom saw the Syrians helping Asa, they withdrew, leaving behind many weapons of defense. Asa gathered the very stones and timbers that had been used by the now defeated northern invaders and he constructed his own defenses out of them!

### - He trusted in his own power and anger: 16:7-10

When the prophet Hanani came and rebuked Asa for relying on the king of Syria and failing to trust in the Lord, Asa responded with rage, imprisoning the prophet and oppressing his own people (who, presumably, agreed with the prophet). While earlier his heart had been responsive to God's word (recall 15:8-19), he now had no room for any "word from God" that countered his choices.

*It takes courage to speak the truth in a difficult situation. God sent Hanani to approach king Asa with a rebuke. Only God knew whether Asa would respond with humility or anger. Hanani had to choose to walk in faith and obedience to God, regardless of Asa's reaction. He paid a high price for his faith and obedience to God – he was put in prison by Asa! Speaking the truth in a difficult situation can be costly; but God celebrates over His children whom He can count on to be faithful representing His truth. Is God calling you to speak truth in a difficult situation?*

## **- He trusted in the physicians: 16:11-13**

Near the end of his life, he incurred a very severe foot disease. Even in this, he would not turn to the Lord and humble himself, asking God for forgiveness and help. He turned *only to the physicians*. (Not that seeking physicians was wrong; but the point is that he did not combine dependence upon God with his dependence upon his doctors' help.) This ailment could have been God's invitation to once again walk with Him.

## **- He trusted in his own legacy: 16:14**

When Asa died, he was buried in a very extravagant tomb that he had prepared for himself in Jerusalem. He had filled his own tomb with special spices. They also had a very great fire ceremony at the time of his burial. It seems that he was preparing ahead of time to protect and preserve his own legacy as a "great king" in Judah.

Sadly, a very famous verse of the Bible grows out of the context of Asa's failure to trust God, rather than his earlier track record of depending entirely upon Him:

***"For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars" (2Chronicles 16:9).***

### **Summary: *It's the hidden stuff that can take us down.***

The story of Asa reveals a pattern that repeats in the lives of many biblical characters: They start off strong in faith and may even continue strong for many years; but in the end, they have some kind of faith decline or blowout. Solomon was weakened when he became old, and he allowed women to pull his heart away from God. David fell into the sin of pride and numbered his troops when he was old. Moses grew weary and impatient with the Israelites when he was old. Asa stopped trusting God when he was old. This raises some important issues we each must face:

1. There are "blind spots," "secrets" or "hidden things" that could take you down. There are issues that you are not facing that could, at some point, threaten your faith and wreck God's work in and through your life. Can you identify any at this time? (See the Johari Window diagram below.)

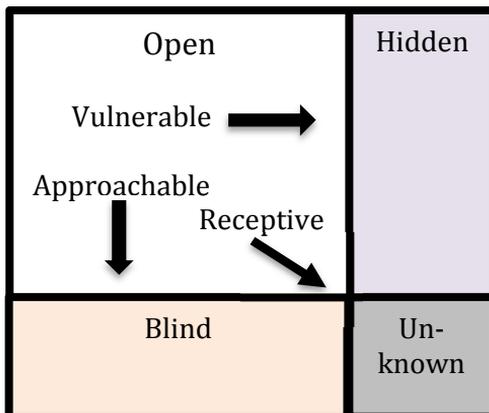
2. Ask the Lord to reveal to you the unseen things that He sees. Commit to an openness to invite and receive that awareness through other people. (1John 1:5-10).

3. What factors could lead to us weakening in faith even after many decades of faithfulness? Lethargy? Pride? Counting our victories? Protecting our legacies? A desire to grab for a little bit of “life” before it’s over? Temptation from Satan? A divided heart?
4. What guards can we place around us so that we are less likely to wander away from the path of faith? Accountability partners? Spiritual practices that we will not slack on? Having people who can help us become aware of our blind spots?

### The Johari Window Model of Self-awareness

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|---|--|
| <p>Open:<br/>Known to self<br/>and to others</p>          | <p>Hidden:<br/>Known to self<br/>but not to<br/>others</p> |
| <p>Blind:<br/>Known to<br/>others but<br/>not to self</p> | <p>Unknown:<br/>Not known to<br/>self or others</p>        |

As we become more *vulnerable* about our secrets, more *approachable* about our blind spots, and more *receptive* to the light of God’s Spirit in our unknown areas, we increase the “open” area of our life. We are, as time goes on, more authentic people.



## Discussion Questions:

This message has focused on the theme: *It's the hidden stuff that can take us down.*

1. What impacted you most from the story of King Asa? (His early years of passion for God and strong influence? His subtle decline and taking matters into his own hands? His huge reaction of rage and vengeance toward Hanani? His unwillingness to repent at the end? Other?)

2. In 2Chronicles 16:8,9, Hanani reminded Asa of when he had fully trusted in the Lord with his whole heart and God had strongly supported him. Have you experienced times where God strongly supported you in impossible situations? If so, write down a few and take encouragement. Give thanks to God for His strong support in these situations.

3. As the Johari Window illustrates, the more you invite God and others to speak into your life, the more you will “walk in the light” (1John 1:5-10). Who have you invited to speak truth to you? How have you reacted when people have attempted to speak into your life in the past? God is faithful and loving to give you plenty of “taps on the shoulder.” What is He currently revealing to you? Be still and ask Him to bring hidden things into the light.

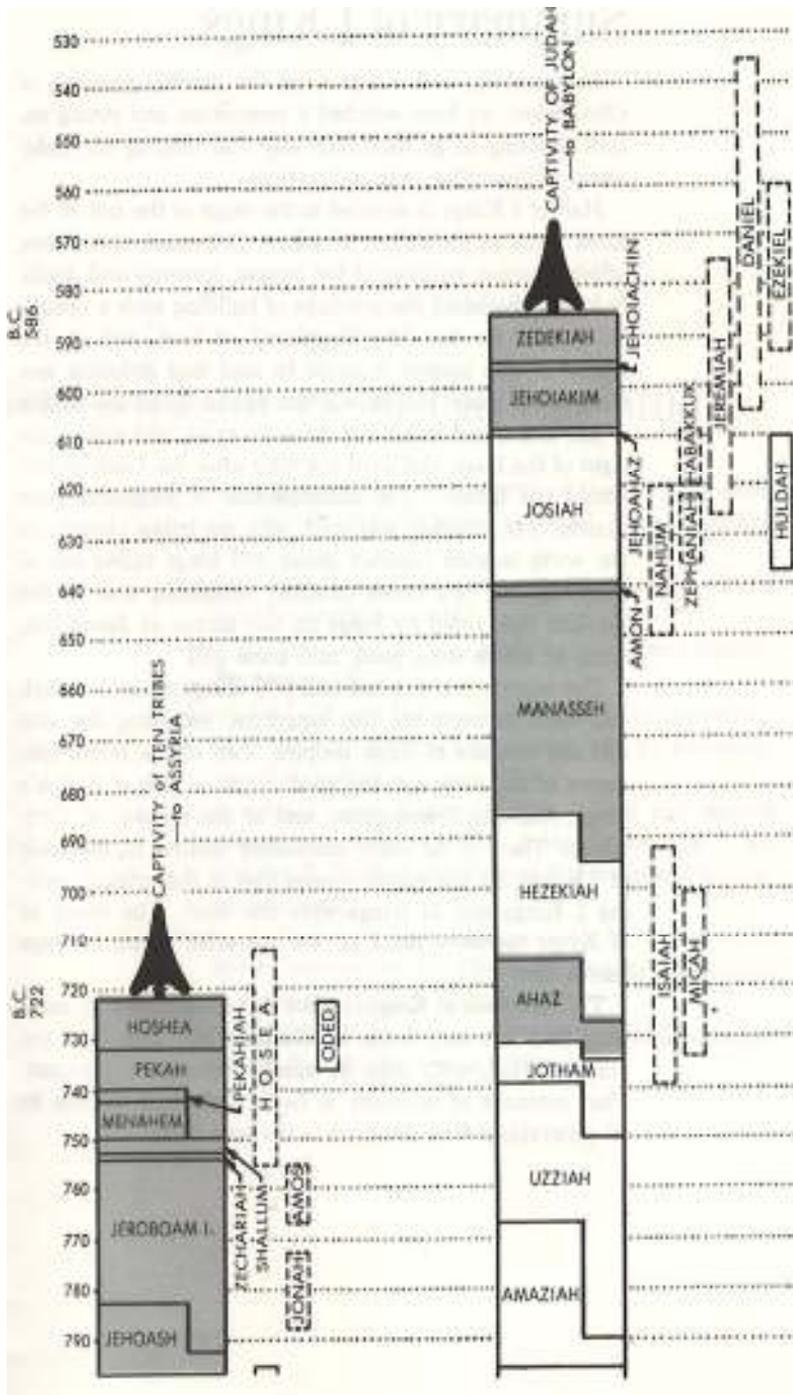
4. What have you learned from the prophet Hanani's courage in speaking God's truth to the king? And the consequences he faced? How was John the Baptist's experience similar (Matthew 14:3-5).

Note: There are further thought/discussion questions in each of the boxes in the commentary.

**FALL SCHEDULE OVERVIEW**  
**KINGS AND PROPHETS DATES/TITLES/SCRIPTURES**  
**OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2017, PART 6**

1. Oct.7/8 Divided hearts – Divided kingdom  
Solomon, Rehoboam and Jeroboam  
(1Kings 11-14 and 2Chronicles 10-12)
2. Oct.14/15 The Heart God is Looking For  
Asa, Prophets: Azariah and Hanani  
(1Kings 15:9-24; 2Chronicles 14-16)
- + Oct.21/22 *How to determine God's Will.* Charlie Koopman  
(1Kings 12:1-20, 25-33; 13:1-30; 14:1-18; 2Chron 16:7-10)
3. Oct.28/29 The Wicked Power Couple (*and God's amazing grace*)  
Ahab and Jezebel  
(1Kings 16:29-34; chs.17-21; 22:1-40; 2Chronicles 18)
4. Nov 4/5 Standing against the Tide  
Elijah the Prophet  
(1Kings 17,18,19, 21:17-29; 2Kgs 1:1-2:12; 2Chron 21:12-15)
5. Nov 11/12 The 'Come-Back' King  
Jehoshaphat, Prophets: Jehu and Eliezer  
(2 Chron. 17-20; 1Kings 22:1-33, 41-50; 2 Chron. 22:9)
6. Nov 18/19 'All In' – Faithful Disciple, Faithful God  
Elisha the Prophet  
(1Kings 19:16, 19-21; 2Kings 2 - 8:15; 9:1-3)
- + Nov 25/26 Is Thanksgiving Over? Kurt Alber
7. Dec 2/3 The Godly Power Couple (*and the king of little faith*)  
Jehoiada, Jehosheba, Joash and Zechariah  
(2 Chron. 22:10-12; 23; 24; 2Kings 11; 12)
8. Dec. 9/10 Minor Prophets – Major Messages  
Obadiah: *Brotherhood*, Amos: *Social Justice*,  
Joel: *Repentance*, Jonah: *Compassion*
9. Dec 16/17 God's Ridiculous Love (*inspite of betrayal*)  
Hosea and Gomer





(Irving L. Jensen Study Guide on Kings and Prophets)