

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 10

THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION

In the books of Kings, there appears a repeated pattern -- one king was succeeded by another and there ensued a threatening tendency to corruption and spiritual decline. Fortunately, in the south, this spiritual decline was arrested by the emergence of a goodly king in Asa. What resulted was a resurgence of true godliness and faith.

Throughout this study, we read about the constant war between the north and the south - brothers warring against brothers - a troubling and sad state of affairs.

As in the past, God always displays His longsuffering and tender mercies towards His people. He expects holiness from His people but when they fall short, He shows forbearance and gives them an opportunity to repent and change for the better. His loving-kindness transcends all comprehension!

The major part of chapter 15 features the reigns of two kings over Judah. King Abijam succeeded his father Rehoboam (15:1-8), and was in

turn succeeded by his son, Asa (15:9-24). The second part revolves around the kings of Israel. Nadab reigned over Israel when his father Jeroboam died (15:25-26). He was later slain by Baasha (not a descendant of Jeroboam) who took over as king over Israel (15:27-30; 16:1-7).

OUTLINE

1. Rehoboam's successor, Abijam (vv.1-8);
2. Asa, a Lamp in Jerusalem (vv.9-24);
3. Nadab King of Israel (vv.25-26);
4. Baasha King of Israel (vv.:27-34)

COMMENTARY

Rehoboam's successor

Abijam15:1-8

In the 18th year of the reign of Jeroboam, king over Israel in the south, Abijam the son of Rehoboam, began his reign over Judah (913-910). He was handpicked by his father from among his other brothers. Thus, he must have impressed his father as a person of considerable ability. He was also known as Abijah by the writer of 2 Chronicles (13:1). The name Abijah means "my father is YAHWEH" whereas the name Abijam means "my father is YAM." "Yam" was the name of a Canaanite sea-god.¹ Some Bible scholars suggested that perhaps he

¹ Russell H. Dilday, **Mastering the Old Testament** – 1, 2 Kings, (Dallas: Word Inc., 1987), p.179.

was a good king at the beginning of his reign but was eventually backslidden into moral and spiritual bankruptcy.

When he inherited his father's throne, there was already war between Judah and Israel (14:30). The writer of 2 Chronicles recorded that God gave Judah a resounding victory over Jeroboam (2 Chronicle 13:15, 16) despite the fact that they were hopelessly outnumbered.

Abijam had only 400,000 men whereas Jeroboam's army had 800,000 men. Before the battle, Abijam delivered a message to Jeroboam and his men. He reminded Jeroboam that God had given, through a covenant, the kingdom to David and his descendants. Abijam jeered at Jeroboam for building his administration upon "worthless men and base fellows" (2 Chronicles 13:7). He disdained Jeroboam's reliance on the golden calves to win the battle (2 Chronicles 13:8). He criticised that the offices of the priests were not held by the descendants of the priestly tribe of Aaron and the Levites. Instead Jeroboam had recruited anyone who could pay the price of a young bullock and seven rams to be priests to serve at his altars.

Abijam declared that his people had not forsaken the LORD. They had observed all the burnt offerings and sacrifices, which were required by the LORD. These rituals were performed by the descendants of Aaron and the Levites. He affirmed that the LORD was the Captain of his army, and the priests would sound the trumpets. Finally, he cautioned that Jeroboam

would not win the battle as he would be fighting against the LORD their God (2 Chronicles 13:12). Jeroboam was not swayed. He had mapped out his strategy and planned an ambush against Judah. But when the warriors of Judah realised that the Israelites were behind and before them, they cried out to the LORD for help. The LORD smote the Israelites, and they fled. The men of Judah slew 500,000 chosen men of Israel.

Undoubtedly, Abijam would have lost the battle if not for God's direct intervention. God kept His covenant with David that He would not allow the kingdom of Judah to be overthrown. He answered the cries of the men of Judah who put their trust in Him and pleaded for deliverance.

But Abijam "walked in all the sins of his father" and "his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father" (1 Kings 15:3). This would mean that he continued in the sins of idolatry and allowed sodomy to be practised in the land (14:23, 24). He did not do anything to change the moral and spiritual state of Judah. If he had been sincere at the beginning when he made the magnificent speech, he had now backslidden and turned away from the ways of God. This change might have been caused by his mother, Maacah the daughter of Abishalom (also called Absalom), who was an idolater (15:13). Like his father and grandfather, Abijam had many wives, 14 to be exact (2 Chronicles 13:21). It was, of course, easier to rule without carrying out unpopular reforms.

According to this view, Abijam who was also known as Abijah started well as a good king but later regressed to be a bad one. Another view is that Abijam was never a good king. His magnificent speech was not from his heart but merely a tool to use against Jeroboam. This second view is based on the fact that his speech to Jeroboam did not have any effect on himself personally.

Abijam deserved judgement from God for his evil ways but for David's sake, the LORD God "gave him a lamp in Jerusalem to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem" (15:4). The phrase for "David's sake" can be explained in two ways. Firstly, we know that David was not perfect -- he had sinned in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah. Nevertheless, God forgave him when he repented and made him a model of fidelity for subsequent kings to follow. King David was honoured by the LORD because he was a man after God's own heart! He repents of his sins whenever his sins were pointed out to him and his life was, to the best of his ability, right with God on all counts. This does not mean that there were no consequences of sins that King David regretted and had to live with.

Secondly, the covenant was kept according to the LORD'S faithfulness alone -- regardless of whether David's descendants walk in the ways of the LORD, they would accede to the throne of Judah. This promise that God made to King David of a continuous kingly lineage will

culminate in the King of kings. If Satan were to cut off this lineage at anytime of man's history, the Messianic line would have been cut off and man's salvation would have been thwarted.

The LORD would raise a king in David's line who would shine like a "lamp" in Jerusalem to establish the kingdom. The LORD promised that the next king would be such a person. He was Asa, Abijam's son. In the history of Judah, the LORD raised seven other such kings who brought about moral and spiritual reforms -- they were Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:41-43), Joash (2 Chronicles 24:1, 2), Amaziah (2 Kings 14:1-3), Azariah (2 Kings 15:1-3), Jotham (2 Kings 15:32-34), Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1-3) and Josiah (2 Kings 22:1, 2).

Despite knowing the part that the LORD had played in their victory against Jeroboam, Abijam did not walk right with God. He did not arrest the spiritual decline of the nation because his heart was not wholly true to the LORD. After just three years into his reign, he died and was buried in the city of David. His son, Asa, succeeded him.

Asa, a Lamp in Jerusalem-- 15:9-24

Asa, the son of Abijam became king (910-869 B.C.) over Judah while Jeroboam was still ruling in the 20th year of his reign over Israel. Asa ruled over Judah for 41 years. This made him the second longest reigning king. The longest reigning king was Manasseh who ruled over Judah for 55 years (696-642 B.C.).

Asa's grandmother, Maacah, held a position of influence and authority in the palace court as the queen mother. Asa was a good king who did what was right in the eyes of the LORD. He followed the example of "David his father". We all know that David was his great-great-grandfather. It was a common practice among the Jews to refer to their ancestors as their "father"². After Abijam's great victory over Jeroboam, the land of Judah enjoyed peace for 10 years (2 Chronicles 14:1). Asa took advantage of this time of peace to carry out moral and spiritual reforms in the nation. He banned the practice of sodomy by removing the male cult prostitutes from the land. He destroyed all the idols which his father had made. He removed Maacah, his grandmother, from her influential position in the palace court because she was an idolater and a worshipper of Asherah, a Canaanite goddess of fertility. He also destroyed her idols and burnt them by the Kidron brook. This was indeed very courageous on his part.

He restored the consecrated silver and golden articles to the Temple in Jerusalem. He urged the people of Judah to walk in the ways of the LORD and to obey His commandments (2 Chronicles 14:4). He fortified the land by building fenced cities. He built a national army of 580,000 warriors by choosing brave men from Judah and Benjamin (2 Chronicles 14:8). The LORD gave the

people "rest on every side" and prospered the nation.

In the 15th year of Asa's reign, Zerah an Ethiopian (modern Sudan), marched against Judah with an army of "a thousand thousand" warriors and three hundred charioteers. He gathered at Mareshah, a city in the plain of Judah about 35 kilometres south of Jerusalem. Asa led his army to meet him at the valley of Zephathah near the city of Mareshah. Asa cried to the LORD for help. He prayed (2 Chronicles 14:11): 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.

In his prayer, he acknowledged the Almighty power of God. He humbled himself and recognised his weakness in the face of such great odds, being sorely outnumbered but knowing that numbers did not matter to the LORD. He called out to Him for help and declared that they would go forth against the enemy in the name of the LORD. He pleaded with the LORD not to let any man prevail against Him.

Asa's prayer came straight from his heart. The LORD answered his prayer and destroyed the Ethiopians who fled in defeat. The men of Judah pursued the Ethiopians even unto Gerar about 30 kilometres south of Mareshah. The men of Judah ransacked the city of Gerar and took the cattle, sheep and camels back to Jerusalem. There was great celebration in Jerusalem where the

² For example, Jesus Christ is referred to as the son of David and the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1).

people offered sacrifices unto the LORD. They made a covenant “to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul”. Anyone who would not seek the LORD God of Israel would be put to death regardless of his age, status, and gender (2 Chronicles 15:10-14). Such was the extent of the reformation! For the next 20 years, there was no war.

Then in the 36th year of Asa’s reign, Baasha king of Israel built Ramah, which was just 5 miles northeast of Jerusalem. Baasha fortified Ramah as an outpost so that he could monitor his own people who made trips to Jerusalem -- many Israelites must have done that seeing that the LORD was with them after their victory against the Ethiopians. Baasha posed a threat to Asa.

Now Asa made a foolish move. Instead of going to the LORD for help just as he did in the battle against the Ethiopians, he sent his emissaries to Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria. He reminded Ben-Hadad of the treaty his father had made with them. In addition, Asa gave him “a present of gold and silver” (Hebrew word, *shahad*, which could mean “bribe or gift”) which he took from the Temple. He requested Ben-Hadad to break the treaty he had with Israel so that Baasha would not attack him (v. 18, 19). This was a political move on Asa’s part. Syria was to the north of Israel and with war against Israel. With a treaty with Syria, Asa would sandwich Israel between two armies! It was a logical and tactically strategic move. From a

human stand point, it was brilliant. But from God’s stand point, it was disastrous! Asa turned to the arm of the flesh instead of to the arm of the LORD for the protection of Judah and his kingdom!

Ben-Hadad readily agreed. He sent his armies against the cities of Israel in the north – Ijon, Dan, Abel-neth-maachah, throughout Chinneroth (the land bordering the western part of the Sea of Galilee), and the land of Naphtali. When Baasha heard of the attack against his northern cities, he withdrew from Ramah and returned to protect his capital city of Tirzah. Asa took advantage of Baasha’s retreat and conscripted all the people of Judah to transport the stones and building materials left in Ramah to build Geba and Mizpah in Benjamin.

For this foolish act, Asa was rebuked by the prophet Hanani who chided him for relying on the king of Syria instead of trusting the LORD his God who had delivered him from the Ethiopians. He told Asa that the LORD would strengthen whoever was perfect in His sight. He predicted that there would be more wars in Judah (2 Chronicles 16:7-9). Asa did not like the rebuke. He was angry with the prophet, Hanani, and ordered him to be imprisoned. Three years later, Asa was stricken with a foot-disease on both feet. The disease got worse and worse. He sought his physicians but they could not help. He should have repented and sought the LORD instead. It was a pity that he should end in this manner. He died and was buried with his fathers in the city of

David. He was given an honourable burial.

Nadab King of Israel– 15:25-26

The focus is now on the kings of the Northern Kingdom. In the second year of Asa's reign in Judah, Nadab ascended to the throne of his father Jeroboam (909-908 B.C.). He reigned for only two years. He made no changes and "did evil in the sight of the LORD". He walked in all the ways of his father Jeroboam. He not only sinned but caused the people of Israel to sin. In his military maneuver to expand his kingdom, he attacked Gibbethon which was a city occupied by the Philistines in Dan. In the midst of his siege, he was assassinated by his military commander, Baasha, who then declared himself king of Israel (v.27, 28). Baasha was not satisfied with killing just Nadab. In order to secure his position, he exterminated all the descendants of Jeroboam (v.29).

This was in fulfilment of the prediction by the prophet Ahijah (11:29) because of Jeroboam's sins against the LORD. But this did not excuse Baasha's own sins. What he had done on his own freewill were in violation of the Sixth Commandment.

Baasha King of Israel – 15:27-34

Baasha ascended to the throne of Israel when Asa was reigning in Judah in his 3rd year. Baasha ruled for 24 years (908-886 B.C.). His reign was the third longest reign in the Northern Kingdom. The other two kings were Jehu who reigned for 27 years (841-814 B.C.) and Jeroboam II who reigned for 40 years (793-743 B.C.).

Baasha shifted the capital city from Shechem to Tirzah. He was not a good king. He continued in the evil and sinful ways of Jeroboam.

Jehu, the son of the prophet Hanani, came to Baasha. He told him that it was the LORD who had raised him "out of the dust" implicating that Baasha was of lowly origin. The LORD made him king over His people Israel and gave him the opportunity to do good and turn the people towards the LORD, but he did nothing. The LORD through Jehu pronounced His judgement against Baasha. His descendants would be taken away as in the case of Jeroboam. In addition, a curse had been pronounced on them -- those who died in the city would be eaten by dogs (dogs were considered unclean) and those who died in the fields would be eaten by birds. Nothing more was said of Baasha. He died and was buried in Tirzah.

PRACTICAL VALUE

All parents want their children to grow up into morally upright and spiritually strong adults. However, they ought to realise that their children's character had to be moulded from young. In fact, parents exert a great influence on their children. From the cradle, their children would be observing their every move.

God is ever longsuffering and patient. Although He expects the utmost from us, He knows that sometimes we will fall short. In the case of Asa, the LORD sent his servant Hanani to rebuke him. If he

had repented, things would have turned out differently. When we fall, God gives us a chance to change and repent. And if we trust in Him and turn back to him, He will shower His blessings upon us.

God does not mince His words. He is no respecter of persons. His pronouncement of judgement against Jeroboam and Baasha should cause us to examine ourselves. At the same time, it is comforting to know that we can completely trust His word and that He will do as His word declares.

Asa's prayer in the face of overwhelming odds and God's faithfulness can be a source of great encouragement to us.

Finally, we also learn that no spiritual advancement can come until all our sins are dealt with. AMEN.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: 1 Kings 15:1-8; 2 Chronicles 13:1-20.

TUESDAY: 1 Kings 15:9-15; 2 Chronicles 14:1-15.

WEDNESDAY: 1 Kings 15:16-24; 2 Chronicles 15:1-19.

THURSDAY: 1 Kings 15:25-30; 2 Chronicles 16:1-6.

FRIDAY: 1 Kings 15:31-34; 2 Chronicles 16:7-12.

Discussion Questions

1. What does 15:3 teach us about the importance of influences in the family, work, school and the church?

2. How would you feel if God were to tell you that at the end of your ministry, your ministry continues on because of the obedience and faith of the founder or your predecessor? In other words, you did a terrible job. Your ministry should have been terminated but for the sake of someone else's life of faith and obedience, it has not been.

3. Can true blessings be found in God's people when they do not deal with sins in their lives though

still obeying the positive statutes of God's Word such as on prayer and attending Bible Study?

well? What practical steps can a believer take to keep himself from ending badly?

4. If your son or daughter wishes to marry an unbeliever, would you attend their wedding? Or if the pastor's son or daughter has become wayward or a Charismatic, would you chastise or take issue with the pastor if he allows his child to remain in the church as a member and not do anything about it? This is by way of application based upon what Asa did to his own grandmother.

6. What prediction was fulfilled by the action of Baasha? Does that make Baasha a man approved of God?

5. Which of the following is easier-- to begin well and then end badly or to begin badly and then end

7. Can a person be commended for deliberate sins when they fulfil the prophecies of God? Explain.

8. What have you learned from this chapter in terms of the sins to avoid?
