

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

2 CHRONICLES 11-17

When two Civil War veterans got together they would ask each other, “Where did you lose your grin?” It was another way of saying, “Where did you fight your first battle?” For once the firing began, and the bullets started to fly, the fun was over. War is a nightmare - *and that’s for the side that wins.*

Between 1861 and 1865, 600,000 Americans lost their lives in a violent, brutal civil war. More Americans died in the Civil War than all our other wars combined.

It’s been said, “War is a hellish way to settle a disagreement.”

This was also true in the days of Rehoboam, king of Judah. When Solomon’s son raised taxes the northern tribes lowered the boom. They seceded from the union. Within three days of his inauguration Rehoboam lost half his kingdom.

The tension escalated further when Rehoboam sent the Secretary of the Treasury to work out the dispute. The rebel tribes had him assassinated.

And that was the final straw. It would take an act of God to avert a civil war.

But that’s what happened. God acted, and stopped the senseless bloodshed before it began. The last sight God wanted to see was brother killing brother.

In chapter 11 God stops the Hebrew Civil War before it begins...

“Now when Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled from the house of Judah and Benjamin 180,000 chosen men who were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might restore the kingdom to Rehoboam.” Today, the United States has 162,000 troops in Iraq – 180,000 Hebrews were quite a force...

“But the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, "Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "You shall not go up or fight against your brethren! Let every man return to his house, for this thing is from Me." Therefore they obeyed the words of the LORD, and turned back from attacking Jeroboam.”

A prophetic word through a man named Shemaiah ended to the hostilities.

Shemaiah is a man we don't hear much about – he doesn't get listed as a great prophet... yet who knows how many of the 180,000 soldiers were save because Shemaiah did nothing more than speak the plain, clear, simple Word of God?

Never underestimate the power of the plain, clear, simple Word of God.

“Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and built cities for defense in Judah.”

And each of the cities mentioned laid west and south of Jerusalem. Evidently, Rehoboam was concerned about Egypt – and a possible Egyptian invasion.

Verse 11, “He fortified the strongholds... with men, and food, and weapons.

Verse 12, “Having Judah and Benjamin on his side.” Sadly, this was all that was left of his dad’s kingdom. Only 2 of 12 tribes stayed loyal to David’s house.

“And from all their territories the priests and the Levites who were in all Israel took their stand with him.” The priests and Levites flocked to Judah. They were tied to the Temple, and the Temple was in the southern kingdom of Judah.

“For the Levites left their common-lands and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them from serving as priests to the LORD.” The leader of this uprising was a man named Jeroboam.

And Jeroboam knew his biggest obstacle in creating an independent state among the northern tribes was religion. The Jewish Law required all Hebrew males to visit the Temple in Jerusalem 3 times a year. If his subjects were obligated to the Temple their hearts would remain loyal to Rehoboam.

To break this bond Jeroboam decided to invent his own rival religion.

“Then he appointed for himself priests for the high places, for the demons, and the calf idols which he had made.” *Holy Cow...* here is the sin of Jeroboam!

He reverts back to the graven images used by Israel in the wilderness. He sets up two golden calves in Dan and Bethel. These calves were suppose to represent Jehovah, but they violated God’s second commandment, “You shall not make

for yourself a carved image... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.”

God considered these golden calves to be idols – inspired by demons.

Jeroboam substituted the Temple with the high places – the Ark with the gold calves – the Levites with his own priests... it was an alternative religion for the northern tribes - and it accomplished its goal. It cut off north from south.

Understand Jeroboam claimed to worship God, but not in the way God wanted to be worshipped. He devised a system of worship that served his own interests.

This is what many people have done today. They call themselves “Christian” - and claim to follow Jesus. But they’ve never taken seriously the demands of Jesus in the Scriptures. Their Christianity is a religion built around their own convenience.

We talk about this often – true love is the willingness to love someone the way they want and need to be loved – not just in the way that’s convenient to me. The same is true in our relationship with God. Jeroboam concocted a “*me-first religion.*” His religion served his own interests – not God... And God considered it demonic.

Jeroboam’s religion became a permanent fixture in the northern kingdom. All 18 successors followed in his footsteps. It’s why God eventually judges Israel.

“And after the Levites left, those from all the tribes of Israel, such as set their heart to seek the LORD God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD God of their fathers.”

The true believers followed the migration of the Levites. They saw through Jeroboam's scheme, and were determined to worship God in purity.

And their influx “strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong for 3 years, because they walked in the way of David and Solomon for 3 years.” Rehoboam reigned for 17 years – sadly, the godly influence of these true worshippers only lasted for 3 of the 17 years. He too fell into idolatry.

“Then Rehoboam took for himself as wife Mahalath the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David, and of Abihail the daughter of Eliah the son of Jesse. And she bore him children: Jeush, Shamariah, and Zaham. After her he took Maacah the granddaughter of Absalom; and she bore him Abijah, Attai, Ziza, and Shelomith.

Now Rehoboam loved Maachah the granddaughter of Absalom more than all his wives and his concubines; for he took 18 wives and 60 concubines, and begot 28 sons and sixty daughters.” Of course, next to his father, Solomon, the old boy was a picture of restraint. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

I always thought a man could only marry 16 wives... Hey, in the wedding vows the pastor always says, “Four better, four worse, four richer, four poorer...”

“And Rehoboam appointed Abijah the son of Maachah as chief, to be leader among his brothers; for he intended to make him king.” He chose a successor.

“(Rehoboam) dealt wisely, and dispersed some of his sons throughout all the territories of Judah and Benjamin, to every fortified city; and he gave them provisions in abundance. He also sought many wives for them.”

Rehoboam failed to obey Deuteronomy 17. In the Law, God prohibited the king from accumulating multiple wives. Rehoboam not only breaks God’s law, but leads his sons into sin... *And polygamy is a sin that has its own inherent punishment...*

“Think about the negatives... Do you want to have to remember 18 birthdays and anniversaries?... Kissing your wife good-bye in the morning would take 30 minutes. You’d have chronic chapped lips... Imagine, having to buy 18 dozen roses on Valentines’ Day... Do you want to deal with PMS 18 times a month.”

These are many good reasons why polygamy is not a good idea.

In fact, polygamy was Solomon’s downfall. His foreign wives were the result of peace treaties he signed with foreign nations. These wives introduced him to their foreign idols and evil ways. Polygamy probably had the same effect on his son.

Chapter 12 recounts Rehoboam’s downfall and punishment, “Now it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself, that he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel along with him.”

Remember Egypt had been a threat for sometime. That’s why Rehoboam fortified the border towns south and west of Jerusalem, but now Egypt attacks...

“And it happened in the fifth year of King Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD, with 1200 chariots, 60,000 horsemen, and people without number who came with him out of Egypt - the Lubim and the Sukkiim and the Ethiopians.

And he took the fortified cities of Judah and came to Jerusalem.” Shishak is known in Egypt as Sheshonk I of the 22nd dynasty. Today, you can read his account of this conquest. It’s engraved in the wall of his temple in Thebes.

“Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the leaders of Judah, who were gathered together in Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, “Thus says the LORD: ‘You have forsaken Me, and therefore I also have left you in the hand of Shishak.’” Notice the reason given for Egypt’s aggression - *it’s not the ambition of Shishak, or the division and weakening of the Israeli kingdom...*

Although if you’d been around at the time I’m sure those would be the reasons to which the politicians and pundits would point. But behind the scenes the course of Israel’s plight was determined by spiritual factors... *obedience and rebellion.*

For the next 350 years Judah’s success or failure will hinge on its obedience to God. One historian writes, “Whether Abijah of Judah is fighting Israel, or Asa is battling the Ethiopians, or Jehoshaphat is struggling with the Moabites, or Hezekiah is wrestling the Assyrians, the point is always the

same: only God can bring victory. The success of Judah is invariably related to her trust in God.”

I wonder if God wrote our history if it wouldn't hang on similar points.

Rather than superficial issues - are there more underlying causes? How much of our plight is tied to our obedience and faith - or lack thereof?

But notice how *Israel reacts* to the *Shishak attack*... “So the leaders of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, “The LORD is righteous.”

Now when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, “They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance. My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak.” Notice, God promises them, “some deliverance.” Not a complete deliverance, but a partial deliverance.

“Nevertheless they will be his servants, that they may distinguish My service from the service of the kingdoms of the nations.” God spares Jerusalem, but He allows Shishak to oppress Judah. He wants them to learn that it's a lot easier to serve the Lord, than Shishak. Many of us need to learn the same lesson...

Both Shishak, and the sin he represents, are cruel taskmasters. Sometimes we forget, “everybody serves somebody or something.” God is a kind and benevolent master who builds up His people. Sin and Satan will chew you up and spit you out.

It's sad, but true – we humans are prone to forget the joy of serving God, until we're forced to serve someone else. Here's a lesson we should spare ourselves.

Verse 9 “So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house; he took everything. He also carried away the gold shields which Solomon had made.”

Remember the 500 gold shields Solomon placed in his palace in Lebanon.

These were ornamental shields – they showed off Solomon's glory. But all Solomon's wealth and power couldn't *shield* Judah from God's judgment.

“Then King Rehoboam made bronze shields in their place, and committed them to the hands of the captains of the guard, who guarded the doorway of the king's house. And whenever the king entered the house of the LORD, the guard would go and bring them out; then they would take them back into the guardroom.”

This was horrible. Rather than trust God, and fight Shishak, and take back the golden shields – Rehoboam opted for bronze shields – an inferior substitute.

Understand throughout Scripture gold is a symbol of God's work. It comes from the earth. It's a gift from God. Whereas bronze is an alloy of zinc and copper – it's man's work. Gold represents the work of the Spirit. Bronze is a work of the flesh.

And what Rehoboam does many Christians mimic... Rather than go for the gold we settle for bronze. Instead of insisting on God's best, we settle for cheap substitutes... we rely on our own *willpower*, not *God's power* – the *moving of emotions*, not the *transforming of lives* – *compromise* not *change* – *appeasement* not *victory*. We rely on what we can do, instead of trusting in what God can do.

Rehoboam should've gone after the gold, but he settled bronze. Let's not repeat his mistake in our hearts, our homes, our church... walk in the Spirit!

Verse 12, "When he humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him, so as not to destroy him completely; and things also went well in Judah.

Thus Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem and reigned.

Now Rehoboam was 41 years old when he became king; and he reigned 17 years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there. His mother's name was Naamah, an Ammonitess.

And he did evil, because he did not prepare his heart to seek the LORD.

The acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer concerning genealogies? These are books that were popular at the time, but have been lost to antiquity...

"And there were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days."

North and South never reconciled. Rehoboam's greed and foolishness broke up the nation for good. "So Rehoboam rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David. Then Abijah his son reigned in his place."

Chapter 13, "In the 18th year of King Jeroboam, Abijah became king over Judah. He reigned 3 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Michaiah the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam."

"Abijah set the battle in order with an army of valiant warriors, 400,000 choice men. Jeroboam also drew up in battle formation against him with 800,000 choice men, mighty men of valor." Notice, Abijah and Judah are outnumbered 2 to 1.

"Then Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, and said, "Hear me, Jeroboam and all Israel:..." Abijah is the aggressor. He's moved his army into the northern kingdom – the mountains of Ephraim.

But before he wages war, he calls out Jeroboam, and gives him a tongue-lashing. "Should you not know that the LORD God of Israel gave the dominion over Israel to David forever, to him and his sons, by a covenant of salt?"

Salt is the universal preservative. Thus a covenant of salt spoke of longevity and perpetuity. The covenant with David is still in force.

"Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, rose up and rebelled against his lord. Then worthless rogues gathered to him, and strengthened

themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and inexperienced and could not withstand them.”

And now you think to withstand the kingdom of the LORD, which is in the hand of the sons of David; and you are a great multitude, and with you are the gold calves which Jeroboam made for you as gods.” Jeroboam is trusting in idols.

“Have you not cast out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and made for yourselves priests, like the peoples of other lands, so that whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams may be a priest of things that are not gods?” Jeroboam concocted a system where you could buy a priestly position with a bull and 7 rams - be your own priest.

“But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and the priests who minister to the LORD are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites attend to their duties. And they burn to the LORD every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense; they also set the showbread in order on the pure gold table, and the lampstand of gold with its lamps to burn every evening; for we keep the command of the LORD our God, but you have forsaken Him.”

Unlike Jeroboam who made up his own rules - the southern kingdom continued to worship God according to His Law. This is the problem today. Too many church leaders have abandoned God’s ways and methods, and make it up as they go...

We should never forget there’s a rule book. God left an owner’s manual.

Abijah continues, “Now look, God Himself is with us as our head, and His priests with sounding trumpets to sound the alarm against you. O children of Israel, do not fight against the LORD God of your fathers, for you shall not prosper!” I love what he’s saying, “God Himself is with us as our head...”

And *when God is your head, you’re bound to get ahead.* Guys, who’s your head? Who mans the bridge on your ship? Who calls the shots in your life?

“But Jeroboam caused an ambush to go around behind them...” While Abijah had been talking, the shrewd Jeroboam had been maneuvering his troops.

“So they were in front of Judah, and the ambush was behind them. And when Judah looked around, to their surprise the battle line was at both front and rear; and they cried out to the LORD, and the priests sounded the trumpets.”

Jeroboam had cut off the escape route back to Judah for Abijah’s army.

“Then the men of Judah gave a shout; and as the men of Judah shouted...” The army of Judah is suddenly surrounded – all they can do is cry out to God.

I love what FB Meyer says at this point, “The point to remember is that our enemies may shut us in on all sides, preventing reinforcements from north, south, east, and west; but no earthly power can ever shut off God from above us...”

The way upwards is always kept clear; the ladder which links the beleaguered soul with God and heaven can never be blocked, except by our own sin.”

Verse 15 records the outcome, “It happened that God struck Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah.” How God struck them we’re not told. Maybe a lightning storm – or a flurry of hailstones – or a meteorite shower – or an angel of God brandished his sword – whatever means God used it did the trick.

“And the children of Israel fled before Judah, and God delivered them into their hand. Then Abijah and his people struck them with a great slaughter; so 500,000 choice men of Israel fell slain.” Almost as many men as died in the US Civil War.

“Thus the children of Israel were subdued at that time; and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the LORD God of their fathers.” Hey, why did Judah prevail? For the same reason you will prevail - “they relied on the Lord.”

“And Abijah pursued Jeroboam and took cities from him: Bethel with its villages...” Remember, one of Jeroboam’s golden calves was stationed in Bethel. Jeroboam’s false god was unable to defend his own hometown.

He also took “Jeshanah with its villages, and Ephraim with its villages.”

“So Jeroboam did not recover strength again in the days of Abijah; and the LORD struck him, and he died. But Abijah grew mighty, married 14 wives, and begot 22 sons and 16 daughters.” *Can you imagine planning and paying for 16 weddings?* Abijah needed the wealth of a king... “Now the

rest of the acts of Abijah, his ways, and his sayings are written in the annals of the prophet Iddo.”

By the way, did you hear about the father of the bride who was asked the question, *“How do you feel about losing your daughter?”*

He answered, *“I’m not losing a daughter. I’m gaining a bathroom.”*

Chapter 14, *“So Abijah rested with his fathers, and they buried him in the City of David. Then Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land was quiet for 10 years.”*

Benjamin Franklin said, *“There was never a good war or a bad peace.”*

King Asa was good and godly king – and through him peace came to troubled land. *“Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God, for he removed the altars of the foreign gods and the high places, and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the wooden images.”* The Canaanite fertility idols...

“He 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 quiet under him.

And he built fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest; he had no war in those years, because the LORD had given him rest.” Asa was a smart ruler. He understood that in a fallen world - war is inevitable. It’s been said, *“Peace is that time when everyone reloads.”* Asa used the peace to fortify his buffer cities.

“Therefore he said to Judah, “Let us build these cities and make walls around them, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is yet before us, because we have sought the LORD our God; we have sought Him, and He has given us rest on every side.” So they built and prospered.” God’s blessing was on Judah.

“And Asa had an army of 300,000 from Judah who carried shields and spears, and from Benjamin 280,000 men who carried shields and drew bows; all these were mighty men of valor.” But storm clouds – war clouds – begin to form...

Verse 9 “Then Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots, and he came to Mareshah.” Zerah the Ethiopian had a million man army – and he intended to use it to conquer and pillage.

“So Asa went out against him, and they set the troops in battle array in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah.” The battlefield was southwest of Jerusalem.

On our last trip to Israel we visited an area known as the Bell Caves. On the road to the Philistine country there are 800 bell-shaped subterranean caves.

The air in the caves is always cool, and some are huge – 75 feet high.

If you saw Sylvester Stallone’s movie, Rambo III, it was shot in the Bell Caves.

And next to the Caves was a town known as Mareshah. Unlike the fictitious fighting in Rambo III a real war took place outside the caves in the days of Asa.

Again, like his father, Abijah, Asa is facing an army that outnumbers him 2 to 1. Zerah and the Ethiopians number a million men. “And Asa cried out to the LORD his God, and said, “LORD, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O LORD our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O LORD, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You!” Asa realized **one plus God always equals a majority.**

It doesn't matter how outnumbered or overmatched you may be if you're on God's side, He's more than enough to negate the opposition's advantage.

God is the great equalizer! When God is on your side victory is certain.

Verse 12 “**So the LORD struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the Ethiopians fled.**” Again we're not told how... only that God struck the enemy.

“**And Asa and the people who were with him pursued them to Gerar. (south toward Ethiopia) So the Ethiopians were overthrown, and they could not recover, for they were broken before the LORD and His army. And they carried away very much spoil.**” The Lord is not hindered by our littleness. He's more than enough to help us overcome. He is not limited by our *lack of size* - only by our *lack of faith*.

Then they defeated all the cities around Gerar (that Ethiopia had annexed), for the fear of the LORD came upon them; and they plundered all the cities, for there was exceedingly much spoil in them. They also attacked the livestock enclosures,

and carried off sheep and camels in abundance, and returned to Jerusalem.”

Chapter 15, “Now 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 has been without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law; but when in their trouble they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them.” What a sad plight when people are without a teaching priest and without God’s Word. They’re literally lost.

If your church has a teacher of God’s Word never take it for granted. Don’t assume, *“Well, other people will support the church.”* Hey, if you have a church that teaches the Bible be thankful, and support it with your prayers and money.

This is why we’re excited to have pastors with us tonight who are planting Calvary Chapels in communities that lack a teaching priest and God’s law.

Let’s pray for them in the days ahead and seek to encourage them.

Verse 5 “And in those times there was no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the lands.

So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity. But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!" What an encouraging prophecy to King Asa.

"And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim; and he restored the altar of the LORD that was before the vestibule of the LORD."

Needed reforms took place in the days of Asa – spurred on by this prophecy.

"Then he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those who dwelt with them from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, for they came over to him in great numbers from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him."

The prosperity Judah enjoyed under Asa made it obvious to the inhabitants of the northern tribes that God's blessing was on Judah. They repented of their rebellion and returned to the Judah, the Temple, and the true worship.

"So they gathered together at Jerusalem in the 3rd month, in the 15th year of the reign of Asa. And they offered to the LORD at that time 700 bulls and 7000 sheep from the spoil they had brought." A giant BBQ of prime rib and lamb chops.

"Then they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; and whoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel was to be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman.

Then they took an oath before the LORD with a loud voice, with shouting and trumpets and rams' horns. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and sought Him with all their soul; and He was found by them, and the LORD gave them rest all around." A zeal for the Lord swept the nation.

Also he removed Maachah, the mother of Asa the king, from being queen mother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah and Asa cut down her obscene image, then crushed and burned it by the Brook Kidron."

Asa's mom was involved in the fertility cult of the Canaanite goddess Asherah. And when you make a woman your god it's no surprise a woman tries to take over. Maachah took the title "queen mother." She wanted to share the throne with Asa.

But Asa has backbone. He dethrones his own mom. He refused to allow an idolater to assume power in Israel. Asa loved God more than his own mother!

It reminds me of Jesus' words in Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." In other words, our love for Jesus should be so intense - it makes the other loves of our life look like hate.

Asa was a good king, but he wasn't perfect. "The high places were not removed from Israel. Nevertheless the heart of Asa was loyal all his days.

Here's a problem... In 14:5 we're told Asa did remove the high places. Here we're told he did not... There are several ways to reconcile these verses...

First, Asa may've tore down the high places early in his ministry, but in his later years the people built them back and Asa was too lazy to demolish them again.

Second, he tore down pagan high places, but not those dedicated to Jehovah.

Third, he tore down those close to Jerusalem, but not in areas farther away.

There're many possibilities... *the only impossibility is the Bible is in error.*

He also brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated and that he himself had dedicated: silver and gold and utensils. And there was no war until the 35th year of the reign of Asa." Asa enjoyed 3½ decades of peace.

Chapter 16, "In the 36th year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah." Baasha constructs the equivalent of the Berlin Wall. He's tired of losing citizens to the southern kingdom, so he decides to stop their migration.

Ramah was only 8 miles from Jerusalem. It became an Israeli checkpoint.

And Asa responds to Baasha. But not in the way he has in the past – in the way you'd expect. Rather than trust in God, he tries to buy Syrian protection.

Verse 2 “Then Asa brought silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the LORD and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-Hadad king of Syria who dwelt in Damascus, saying...” Asa steals from God to pay for his lack of faith.

He says to Ben-Hadad, “Let there be a treaty between you and me, as there was between my father and your father. Here, I have sent you silver and gold; come, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel, so that he will withdraw from me.” So Ben-Hadad heeded King Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel. They attacked Ijon, Dan, Abel Maim, and all the storage cities of Naphtali.” The Syrians attack the northern border towns of Baasha’s kingdom.

“Now it happened, when Baasha heard it, that he stopped building Ramah and ceased his work. Then King Asa took all Judah, and they carried away the stones and timber of Ramah, which Baasha had used for building; and with them he built Geba and Mizpah.” It seems Asa’s plan worked, but his lack of faith angered God.

Verse 7 “And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said to him: "Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand.” What Asa viewed as *a threat against him was an opportunity for him.*

Baasha’s aggression wasn’t a problem it was a potential for victory. So often the situation we fear and try to avoid - God has allowed to show Himself strong.

The prophet reminds Asa, “Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the LORD, He delivered them into your hand.” You trusted God once, why not a second time? Here’s an important lesson... **Faith has to stay current.**

We can’t live off yesterday’s victories. Yesterday’s faith doesn’t help with today’s challenges. God wants me to trust Him today – with today’s problem.

Here’s a great verse, “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.” Verse 9 tells me that God is an opportunist. He’s on the lookout for the underdog scenario where He can turn the tables, and showcase His power.

He’s searching for a man, woman, boy, girl who’ll trust Him against all odds.

God’s only requirement is a loyal heart. He won’t work on behalf of a person who’ll take the credit - or manipulate the outcome for his own benefit. God looks for loyalty! In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” And they’ll also see Him work miracles in their lives.

Hanani continues his word to Asa, “In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars.” Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him because of this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at that time.” What a tragic end to Asa.

His final act was prideful, willful stubbornness. He refused to accept God's rebuke and attacked his messenger.

Hey, the Christian life is not just about *starting well*, but *ending well*. Faith is a marathon. Asa started well, but pulled up lame and dropped out before the finish.

Verse 11 “Note that the acts of Asa, first and last, are indeed written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. And in the 39th year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and his malady was severe; yet in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians.” Asa does it again.

He trusts man not God. He consults the podiatrists. Asa runs to everybody but God, and God inflicts his feet with a disease – the gout, or arthritis, or a fungus.

God forces Asa to stop running and look up.

We're not told the outcome of Asa's malady, but Asa was taught an important lesson. He learned to love the Lord “*with all his heart, mind, and soul.*”

“So Asa rested with his fathers; he died in the 41st year of his reign. They buried him in his own tomb, which he had made for himself in the City of David; and they laid him in the bed which was filled with spices and various ingredients prepared in a mixture of ointments. They made a very great burning for him.”

Asa wasn't cremated. He was buried. The fire was a ceremonial bonfire.

Chapter 17, “Then Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place, and strengthened himself against Israel. And he placed troops

in all the fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah and in the cities of Ephraim which Asa his father had taken.” Jehoshaphat is gearing up for a major confrontation.

“Now the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the former ways of his father David; he did not seek the Baals (the Canaanite idols), but sought the God of his father, and walked in His commandments and not according to the acts of Israel. Therefore the LORD established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah gave presents to Jehoshaphat, and he had riches and honor in abundance.”

“And his heart took delight in the ways of the LORD; moreover he removed the high places and wooden images from Judah.” This was no small matter.

In ancient times people thought the higher you were in elevation the closer you were to God. The pagans built their altars on mountain tops or raised platforms.

God prohibited Israel from worshipping Him on these high places. God wanted one central location for worship – the Temple. This way the worship stayed pure.

Verse 7 “Also in the third year of his reign he sent his leaders, Ben-Hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Michaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah.

And with them he sent Levites: (he names them) So they taught in Judah, and had the Book of the Law of the LORD with them; they went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught the people.” Asa was zealous... If you didn’t seek Him you were put to death. Asa instituted national reforms, but they didn’t last.

Asa *reformed* laws, but the people were not *informed* and *transformed*.

Jehoshaphat knew *changing laws* without *changing hearts* was a waste of time.

This is why he sent men out to read and teach God's Word. He knew the Bible was the change agent. It convicts, and softens, and cleanses, and empowers...

Only God's Word has the power to transform a man's nature and enlighten his mind. Jehoshaphat knew if the people were taught God's Word they'd love God and want to obey Him. A change of heart would occur. This is still true today.

“And the fear of the LORD fell on all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah, so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat. Also some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents and silver as tribute; and the Arabians brought him flocks, 7,700 rams and 7,700 male goats.

So Jehoshaphat became increasingly powerful, and he built fortresses and storage cities in Judah. He had much property in the cities of Judah; and the men of war, mighty men of valor, were in Jerusalem.” The rest of the chapter tallies up Jehoshaphat's troops. He had a standing army of 1.16 million soldiers... the largest army in Judah's history. Next week Jehoshaphat goes to war...