

## BIBLICAL CHALLENGES 2007 (OG).

March 11, 2007.

### King Asa.

Last Lord's Day I used King Asa as an example of prayerlessness. Over the next few days my mind kept coming back to King Asa and I began to sense the necessity to deal with his story in a little more detail. So this is what I want to do as we begin this morning. We noted in **2Chron.16:12** King Asa's failure to seek the Lord when he got sick. Instead he sought the help of the physicians. Now, it has been noted that many early physicians "*indulged in magical practices or necromancy*". (NCB 1 & 2 Chron.) But before I comment further on what Asa did and the sinfulness of his actions, let us back up and look again at Asa's life before he fell into sin.

Please turn to **2Chron.14**. When Asa became king, the first big challenge he faced was war with the Ethiopians. And he did that which he was accustomed to doing. He sought the Lord. **2Chron.14:4** says Asa commanded Judah to seek the Lord God. In **vs.7** Asa said to the people, "we have sought the Lord our God; we have sought Him." Now look at **2Chron.14:11**. (read). **Vs.9** makes it very clear that the Ethiopian army was very powerful. Asa called on the Lord and **vs.12** tells us that the Lord routed the Ethiopians. **Vs.13** says Asa and his army pursued and defeated the Ethiopian army. Here is the proper combination of prayer, the Lord working and man working. This practice of seeking the Lord became the pattern in Asa's life until the thirty-sixth year of his reign.

After this great victory, we are told in **2Chron.15:1-2** that the prophet Azariah spoke to Asa. Let us read **2Chron.15:1-2**. (read). "The Lord is with you when you are with Him." This reminds us of **Jas.4:8** which says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." Asa is encouraged to keep on seeking the Lord. And this is exactly what

Asa and the people did. **2Chron.15:12** tells us that the king and the people “entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God ... with all their heart and soul.” **Vs.15** says, “they had sworn with their whole heart and had sought [the Lord] earnestly, and He let them find Him.”

**2Chron.15** also shows us that King Asa restored the true worship of the Lord and lived a blameless life before the Lord. (**vs.17**). **1Kings 15:14** says Asa was wholly devoted to the Lord. The Lord also gave to Asa and his people many years of peace. (**2Chron.15:15, 19**).

This brings us to **2Chron.16** and the thirty-sixth year of Asa’s reign. Asa is facing war. And instead of seeking the Lord and relying on the Lord, as he did in the past, he sought out and relied on the king of Aram for help. The Lord sent the prophet Hanani to confront Asa with his foolish action. But Asa responded with arrogance. Instead of repenting, Asa was greatly offended over the prophet’s rebuke and became very enraged. Asa’s anger clearly shows that the prophet’s rebuke was rooted in truth and had hit the mark.

Asa’s response to the prophet’s rebuke was to seize the prophet and put him in jail and then begin to oppress the people. For three years he would pursue this path of folly. Asa’s arrogant response to the rebuke was sad but also quite typical.

The question arises : what happened to Asa? Here was a man whose pattern of life was one of seeking the Lord, who was wholly devoted to the Lord and who lived blamelessly before the Lord. Did Asa gradually fail to maintain his soul before the Lord during the years of peace? It would seem so. When Asa faced his first major battle, he knew he was powerless. He confessed in his prayer that they had no strength and were facing a powerful enemy. (**2Chron.14:11**). And he placed his trust in the Lord for help and deliverance.

Victory from the Lord against such a powerful enemy combined with a heart that was devoted to God and reforming the worship of God in Judah resulted in great blessings from the Lord. We are told that Asa and the people “built and prospered.” (*2Chron.14:7*). It would seem that in his prosperity Asa began to think that he could trust in his own power, wisdom and wealth to defend Judah against its enemies. And so, instead of relying on God, he used his wealth to hire the king of Aram to fight the war he was facing. (*2Chron.16:2-4*). You men and women who are growing old in the Lord, I say to you and to myself, beware and keep remembering Asa.

I want you to note one more point here. In his war against Asa, King Baasha had hired, Ben-hadad, the king of Aram to assist him. Asa used his greater wealth to induce King Ben-hadad to break his agreement with Baasha and to fight against Baasha. The prophet Hanani told Asa that if he had sought the Lord and relied on the Lord, the Lord would have defeated both King Baasha and King Ben-hadad. (*2Chron.16:7*). But by relying on Ben-hadad, Asa got only the half victory he paid for.

This brings us to the thirty-ninth year of Asa’s life. We are told that “Asa became diseased in his feet [and] his disease was severe.” (*2Chron.16:12*). Asa’s disease should have acted as a warning of God’s displeasure with him. And the remedy should have been repentance, putting right what had gone wrong, and returning to the attitude which had characterized the first thirty-six years of his reign.

But, with arrogance and utter foolhardiness Asa remained unrepentant and stuck to his unfaithfulness and prayerlessness. He refused to seek the Lord. Instead he substituted seeking the Lord with seeking for help from the physicians. There would have been nothing wrong if Asa had followed his earlier practice of combining prayer with wise human action. Keep this fact in mind : **Asa’s primary sin was that he substituted prayer and reliance on the Lord with reliance on human wisdom and human ability.**

## **Lessons.**

There are several lessons to be learned from the life of Asa. I want us to take note of them now. *Firstly*, in answering your prayers, the Lord does not relieve you of your normal responsibilities in any given matter. You can pray for a job but the Lord will not apply for the job on your behalf. The Lord will not submit the application. The Lord will not attend the interview on your behalf. Asa was facing war. Asa gathered his army, prayed and went out to war. Now the Lord could have acted and destroyed the Ethiopian army without any help from Asa. But the Lord chose not to do that. The Lord chose to work on behalf of Asa and his army and through Asa and his army.

*Secondly*, let us note Asa's prayer in *2Chron.14:11*. (**read**). What did Asa's prayer reveal about him? Asa's prayer revealed that he believed in the one true and living God. Asa's prayer revealed that he fully embraced the truths that God is sovereign and all powerful. Asa's prayer revealed his own consciousness of his powerlessness in the face of a very powerful enemy and the humility to publicly acknowledge his powerlessness. Asa's prayer revealed his trust in God to hear and deliver him and his people from the powerful enemy they were facing.

We noted in an earlier sermon what prayer ought to reveal about you. We have seen what prayer revealed about Asa. The question is this : what do your prayers reveal about you? Finally, Asa's prayer reveals to us that faith can hold in the face of overwhelming odds and conquer. In other words, nothing is too difficult for the Lord to do. (*Jer.32:17, 27*). Note also that Asa's prayer of helplessness, faith and trust is hemmed in by two statements about God : "Lord there is no one besides You", and "O Lord, You are our God."

*Thirdly*, you cannot substitute prayer to God and reliance on God with reliance on human wisdom and human ability. That is the sin of failing to glorify God and the sin of glorifying human wisdom and human ability. God is sovereign and He can intervene and stop or overturn your best laid plans. As a Christian, your dependence upon God must be

total. Prayer is one of the key expressions of your recognition of God's sovereignty and your dependence upon God. When you get up and have your devotions, your practice of prayer has not come to an end. Every task you face, every challenge you face, every problem you face, should be approached with prayer, even if that prayer is only a brief expression of cry to God for help.

The example of Nehemiah speaks to us at this point. In *Neh.1:4-11* we are told that Nehemiah spent several days in prayer and fasting before God. And when he came before the king and the king began to question him, we are told in *Neh. 2:4* that Nehemiah "prayed to the God of heaven" before he answered. Your best laid plans, your seeking the help of others, all these things must never become a substitute for prayer. They must be coupled with prayer, intense periods of prayer and brief on the spot prayers. The clear command is to pray without ceasing. (*1Thess.5:17*). This is what we must do.

When Asa failed to seek the Lord for His help and instead relied on human wisdom, human ability and the great wealth the Lord had given to him, he robbed himself of completely defeating his enemy, King Baasha, and he robbed himself of the bonus of defeating and destroying the mercenary, King Ben-hadad of Aram. When you fail to seek the Lord and rely on the Lord, you may win small victories, but the losses will be greater.

**Fourthly**, as a person who must be devoted to prayer, who must be devoted to seeking the Lord, beware how you deal with rebuke. Beware of Asa's arrogance and folly. The Bible makes it clear that rebuke can be gentle, patient, sharp, or severe but it must always be done with meekness. (cf. *1Tim.5:1; 2Tim.2:25; 4:2; Tit.1:13; Gal.6:1*).

*Prov.27:5* says, "Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed." *Prov.28:23* says, "He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue." The man who rebukes tells the truth. The man who flatters tells lies. *Prov.17:10* says, "A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a

hundred blows into a fool.” *Prov.19:25* says, “reprove one who has understanding and he will gain knowledge.” In *Psa.141:5* the psalmist prayed, “Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; It is oil upon my head; Do not let my head refuse it.”

On the other hand *Prov.13:1* says, “A scoffer does not listen to rebuke.” *Prov.9:7-8* says, “He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, and he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, reprove a wise man and he will love you.” On the other hand, *Prov.15:12* says, “A scoffer does not love one who reproves him.”

Let us note the following words. A **“fool”** is not necessarily one who lacks mental intelligence. The Hebrew word that is used here describes the **“fool”** as a morally insensitive person. The word **“wicked”** describes one who is a moral reprobate.

The **“scoffer”** is also a fool, but the worst kind of fool. He has no respect for authority, reviles the worship of God, and is unteachable because he thinks he knows it all. He is known for not responding to instruction or rebuke at any level. *Psa.119:51* says, “The arrogant utterly deride me, Yet I do not turn aside from Your law.” The idea is that the arrogant deride, scoffs, scorns the psalmist utterly, that is, to excess because of the psalmist’s confidence in and embrace of the law or word of God. Note the association of arrogance with scoffing.

It is obvious that the words **“fool, wicked and scoffer”** do not describe one who is a Christian. This is how you would expect one who is not a Christian to respond to rebuke. But sadly, this is how so many who are Christians respond to rebuke. Now Brethren, here are the choices you face : **(1)**. True Christ-like love that cares and rebukes, that watches over your soul and guards your soul and seeks to ensure that you grow in Christ and ultimately get to heaven. **(2)**. No love, no caring, no rebuke, apostasy and hell. Which will you choose?

As a Christian, you should make it a matter of earnest prayer before God that your Brethren in Christ would love you enough to watch over your soul and rebuke you whenever it becomes necessary. And you must also pray that the Lord would suppress the arrogance in your heart, keep your heart humble and give you the grace to accept the rebuke because, whether genuine or not, such rebuke is good for the spiritual and eternal welfare of your soul.

Now, Brethren, the risk you run when you when you confront someone with rebuke is the risk the prophet ran. You run the risk of rejection and persecution. The prophet obeyed God and rebuked King Asa and he ended in prison and most likely remained in prison until Asa died. It was this kind of risk that gave rise to false prophets in Israel and Judah who were paid to flatter the king and tell the king what he wanted to hear.

The people in the N.T. era are no different to the people in the O.T. era. Paul solemnly charged Timothy to “reprove, rebuke and exhort with great patience and instruction.” He warned Timothy that the people will not want to hear him and the time will come when “they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires”, that is , teachers who will tell them what they want to hear. (*2Tim.4:1-3*). If it is your intent and desire to be true to God, then you cannot tell people what they want to hear. Regardless of the cost to you, you will have to tell them the truth.

Now, here is the million dollar question : what do you do when a professed believer responds to you like Asa or like a scoffer when you rebuke him / her? Do you stop this gracious work and responsibility God has given to every Christian? The answer is an emphatic “**NO!**”. You pray for this person, but you do not stop. You do not stop until you have clearly warned this person because you do not want their blood on your hands. (cf. *Ezek.3:17-18*).

The man whom we excommunicated wanted me to tell him, warn him and rebuke him when he was going wrong. When I did, he thanked me and professed to accept my

rebuke. But in his heart he was angry with me. In his heart he began to hate me. And he was rejecting everything I was saying to him because I was negative, unreasonable, harsh, and whatever else. I knew about his attitude but I persisted in doing good because I did not want to sin against God and sin against him. And I did not want his blood on my hands. His arrogance and rejection of the warnings and rebukes brought him to excommunication and the road to apostasy.

*Fifthly*, beware of failing to maintain your soul before God in times of peace, prosperity and other blessings. Such failure results in gradual spiritual deterioration. Sometimes your spiritual deterioration is imperceptible to you and others watching you. And then suddenly you are over the edge and sliding into a major fall. Asa fell after thirty-six years of trusting in God. **Major falls into sin and even apostasy in the closing years of your life are not impossible realities.**

We often pray for prosperity but beware of prosperity. Prosperity is a double-edged sword. As you seek God earnestly and faithfully and walk in obedience to Him, prosperity may be a clear sign that God is pleased with you and blessing you. But the danger is what happened to Asa. Unless you are carefully guarding your soul and maintaining your walk and growing in Christ, then the dangers of presumptuousness and spiritual neglect become very real for you. The sad reality is that out of sheer habit you can maintain all the spiritual formalities and yet be neglecting your soul. This problem of maintaining spiritual formalities and yet neglecting your soul is a real problem and challenge for pastors. I know the reality of this because I have experienced it. Spiritual neglect will lead to spiritual dryness. And then you are open game to Satan.

What can you do to pre-empt this kind of danger? Please turn to *Phil.1:27*. (**read**). The unity Paul demanded of the Philippian believers is emphasized by the expression, “in one spirit, with one mind (soul).” Now note, with oneness of soul and mind they are to strive together as they march forward to face the enemy in this Christian warfare. They are to lock arms and carry the line forward. In locking arms the fainthearted cannot break ranks and run from the enemy.

You need to lock arms with the entire church. But you also need to lock arms with a few chosen Brethren and march forward together with them. They must be the people who will not let you go. They must be the people who will keep you moving forward when you are growing fainthearted, when you are being tempted, when you are growing weary, and even when you fall. They must be the people who are committed to encourage you, rebuke you, pray with you and for you. They must be the people whom you must trust to do the right thing for your soul's spiritual and eternal welfare. And you must pray for continued humility to receive their help.

There is absolutely no room for lone-ranger Christians in the body of Christ. A lone-ranger Christian is a misnomer and a spiritual contradiction. **A lone-ranger Christian is a selfish person who claims that the selfless Christ is the Lord of his / her life.** A lone-ranger Christian is an arrogant person marching towards a fall. To use Jesus' point in *Jn.15*, a lone-ranger Christian is a branch detached from the vine, drying up and getting ready for the fire.

*Sixthly*, the question is : did Asa finally repent and return to the Lord? We are not given a specific answer to this question. But the two verses that summed up his life point in the direction that Asa did finally repent and return to the Lord. *2Chron.15:17* says, "Asa's heart was blameless all his days." *1Kings 15:14* says, "Asa's heart was wholly devoted to the Lord all his days." Asa's heart was complete with devotion to the Lord all of his days.

Asa's failure to seek the Lord was a sad and sinful hiccup in his life. We are told about it to warn us, but the Lord did not use this sad failure to obliterate all the years of blameless living and complete devotion to the Lord. He was a godly man who failed. But his failure did not erase the fact in the Lord's eyes that he was a godly man. On the other hand, it would seem that Asa's ultimate repentance did not remove the judgment that Lord placed upon him. The Lord's judgment of the disease led to his death. And here is a serious warning for us. One sin does not wipe out a lifetime of blameless living and

complete devotion to the Lord. But one sin can bring an end to that life of complete devotion to the Lord.

The *last* point I want to set before you is the prophet's message to Asa in *2Chron.15:2*, "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." *Jer.29:13* says, "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." The prophet message was fulfilled in Asa's life. Asa drew near to the Lord and the Lord drew near to him. Asa sought the Lord with all his heart and soul. Asa sought the Lord earnestly and the Lord let Asa find Him. But then Asa forsook the Lord and the Lord forsook him.

The prophet's message is for you also. In the N.T. the Lord's command for you is to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness." (*Matt.6:33*). Paul put it this way in *Col.3:1-2*, "keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." You have found the Lord in your salvation. Have you found the Lord in your daily walk before the Lord? Are you earnestly seeking Him with all your heart and with all your soul?

### **Lowering The Standards.**

It was not my intent to spend most of the time today studying the life of Asa. But this is what the Lord has done for us and we accept it as from His hands. I want to move on now and make two points before I close. Firstly, I want to continue with this point of lowering the standards and the implications for prayer. I turn your attention to *Psa.66:18-19*. (**read**). What does "**regard**" mean? "**Regard**" means to discern, to see and to make a mental note of what you have seen. The idea is that you discern, you see and you take note of the fact that there is iniquity in your heart. But instead of dealing with it, you begin to cherish it.

And example of what we are talking about is found in *Gen.3:5*. We are told that Eve “saw the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that it was desirable to make one wise.” The verb “saw” is our verb “regard”. “Regard” led to “delight” and “desire” and finally to eating. I want you to note also that the focus in *Psa.66:18* is not on public sin. The focus here is on sin in the heart. The focus here is on sin in a place where no one can see it except you and God.

The question arises : are you lowering the standards God has set by regarding iniquity in your heart? Are you cherishing, delighting in and desiring sin in your heart? In other words, are putting roadblocks in the path of your prayers? The clear promise is that the Lord will not hear your prayers. The psalmist was confident that the Lord had heard his prayers. He was confident because he knew that he was not regarding iniquity in his heart.

The challenge you and I face is this : deal with those sins that you know that are in your hearts. Regardless of what that sin or those sins may be, deal with them and deal with them ruthlessly. Do not play with the serpent of sin in your heart. And daily search your heart and make sure that you are not cherishing any sin in your heart. Let the psalmist’s prayer be your daily prayer, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.” (*Psa.139:23-24*). Sin will hurt you and hurt you real bad, especially those secret sins that are hidden and cherished in the heart.

You need the Lord. You need an uninterrupted relationship with Him. Why deliberately and foolishly put roadblocks in your relationship with the Lord? You need the Lord to hear and answer your prayers. Why deliberately and foolishly put roadblocks in the path of your prayers to the Lord?

There is a **second verse** I want to set before you. And it is *Jas.4:17*, “Therefore, to one who knows the right to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.” This is a verse most people try to ignore, hide from and conveniently forget. The person described here

possesses the knowledge and understanding of what is “**right**”, that is, morally excellent and praiseworthy. Knowledge of what is right creates the obligation to do what is right or to ensure that this right is done.

But this person is in the habit of failing to do what is right because he / she either passively ignores what they see and know is the right thing to do or actively refuses to do the right thing. James wrote with emphasis, “sin to him it is.” The emphasis is on the word “**sin.**” In other words, this failure to do the right thing is inexcusable and puts a roadblock in the path of your prayers to God.

Does God expect you to be perfect before He answers your prayers? NO! But if you desire to become a true man or a true woman of prayer, the Lord expects and requires of you to pursue holiness towards Him and to pursue holiness towards your fellow-man. He expects and requires of you to weigh your choices in the light of His word and make the right choices. Making the right choice may cost you. But He expects and requires of you to make the right choices. There must be no deliberate lowering of the standards with the expectation that God will accommodate you and answer your prayers. That is sheer presumptuousness.

### **A Life Of Answers.**

Lastly, God has called us to a life that is devoted to prayer. We must pray without ceasing. But the average Christian life today is marked by answers to prayer that are few and far between. And when an answer is received, there is sheer surprise and astonishment. My point to you is this : **our lives ought to be marked by an ongoing process of answers to our prayers.** Answers to our prayers should not be the surprise. The surprise should be when God does not answer and no answer should drive us to our knees seeking to find out the reason for no answer.

I know all the objections you can raise and all the “**what if**” questions you can ask. But let me ask you, if God intended to give few and far between answers to our prayers, why did He give us all those promises? Why did He root His promises in His graciousness, tender mercies, lovingkindness and compassion? Why did the Lord Jesus say to us, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”? (*Matt.7:11*).

Why did the Lord Jesus say to us, “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full”? (*Jn.16:24*). Why did the Holy Spirit say to us through the apostle Paul that our God is “able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think”? (*Eph.3:20*).

The Lord’s message to Israel is His message to us today. The Lord said, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not short that it cannot save; nor is His ear dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.” (*Isa.59:1-2*). The problem is not with God. The problem is with us and our cherished sins that we are not willing to let go. Our sins have created a gulf between God and us. Our sins have brought about a divine alienation. As a dark rain cloud hides the sun and blocks off the sunlight, so our sins have hidden God’s face. The result is the absolute statement, “so that He does not hear.”

My exhortation to all of us as I close is this : let us forsake our sins, especially those sins and idols we love and cherish so much. Let us return to the Lord. His promise is that He will have compassion and abundantly pardon. Let us bring an end to the separation. Let us remove the dark sinful cloud covering the Lord’s face. (cf. *Isa.55:6-7*). Let us pray : You who are enthroned above the cherubim, shine forth. Show us Your glory. Stir up Your power. O Lord God of hosts, restore us; Cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved. (*Psa.80*).

