



## Second Chronicles - Chapter Fifteen

- III [2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23 - The Kingdom of Judah Down to the Exile \(continues\)](#)
- III.c [2 Chronicles 14:1-16:14 - Asa \(continues\)](#)
- III.c.ii [2 Chronicles 14:9-15:19 - Ethiopian Invasion Repulsed \(continues/concludes\)](#)

### Summary of Chapter Fifteen

This chapter summarises some of the information recorded in Chapter 14 with some additional information as well. It seems that the land had been a troubled place because of the apostasy of the people until a prophecy was given by Azariah to Asa and his people. It stated that if Judah returned to serving the Lord then he would be with them and it seems it was this news that spurred Asa into his reforms. In addition to changing the ways of his own people he also appealed to pious people living in the neighbouring northern tribal lands, who had come to live in Judah because of the Lord. Because the people sought the Lord, the land had peace for the majority of Asa's long reign.

<sup>1</sup> The spirit of God came upon Azariah son of Oded. <sup>2</sup> 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 abandon him, he will abandon you.' <sup>3</sup> For a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law; <sup>4</sup> but when in their distress they turned to the Lord, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them. <sup>5</sup> In those times it was not safe for anyone to go or come, for great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. <sup>6</sup> They were broken in pieces, nation against nation and city against city, for God

troubled them with every sort of distress. <sup>7</sup> But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded.'

### 2 Chronicles 15:1-7

**Azariah** is not otherwise known. His speech is intended to encourage Asa to continue with his reforms and lead the people into covenant renewal. He was one of the lesser-known prophets in the early years of the Kingdom of Judah. He came and bravely spoke a word to a king who was flushed with success after the great victory over the Ethiopians.

**The Lord is with you, while you are with him.** King Asa and the Kingdom of Judah had just enjoyed a significant victory over a mighty army. It would be easy for them to think that they had a permanent claim to God's favour and blessing. Speaking through the prophet Azariah, God wanted Asa to know the importance of abiding in the Lord.

**If you seek him.** This was David's sound advice to his son Solomon and is virtually repeated here by Azariah to Asa: *<<And you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve him with single mind and willing heart; for the Lord searches every mind, and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will abandon you for ever>>* (1 Chronicles 28:9). The theme of 'seeking the Lord' recurs throughout 2 Chronicles Chapter 15. It is the principle that when his people draw near to him, the Lord reveals himself evermore to them. God does not hide himself from the seeking heart:

- *<<From there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul>>* (Deuteronomy 4:29).
- *<<When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart>>* (Jeremiah 29:13).
- *<<Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you>>* (Matthew 7:7).

**If you abandon him, he will abandon you.** The converse is also true. Ultimately, God gives to his creation what they need or want from him. If he gives the heart that seeks him more, then he also gives the heart that rejects him what it desires. Azariah revealed an inclusive philosophy of life under the control of God. The principle is of perpetual application. It represents God as unchanging. All apparent changes on his part are really changes in the attitude of people towards him. Man with God, finds God with him. Man forsaking God, finds that he is forsaken of God.

**For a long time Israel was without the true God.** Verses 3-6 call to mind the unstable time of the Judges, marked by cycles of apostasy and return to God - refer especially to Judges Chapter 3 - and the absence of effective spiritual

leadership: <<*This man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and teraphim, and installed one of his sons, who became his priest. In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes*>> (Judges 17:5-6).

Without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law. The prophet Azariah describes the bad state of Israel in their overconfidence and distance from God. They had rejected God, rejected those who teach them the Word of God, and even rejected the law itself. Without a teaching priest is a reminder that the priesthood and the Levites did much more than administer the sacrificial system. They were to be scattered throughout the tribes of Israel to teach the Word of God to the people. The priests' teaching role was vital to the moral and spiritual quality of national life, for example: <<*and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them through Moses*>> (Leviticus 10:11), <<*They teach Jacob your ordinances, and Israel your law; they place incense before you, and whole burnt-offerings on your altar*>> (Deuteronomy 33:10), <<*In the third year of his reign he sent his officials, Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. With them were the Levites, Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tob-adonijah; and with these Levites, the priests Elishama and Jehoram. They taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord with them; they went around through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people*>> (2 Chronicles 17:7-9), and: <<*For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts*>> (Malachi 2:7). However, when it was neglected, the truth about God declined and the fabric of covenant society was undermined.

But when in their distress they turned to the Lord, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them. The Chronicler used this message from the prophet Azariah to remind the people of Israel in his own day, i.e. Ezra's days of the return from Babylonian exile, that even when the people of God were set low because of their disobedience, God would restore them when they turned to the Lord God of Israel.

But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded. In spite of the great trouble that God had visited on his previously disobedient people, King Asa should be encouraged at God's heart for forgiveness and restoration.

This prophecy is unusual in that it is an exposition of earlier parts of the OT although, as an example of the speeches in Chronicles, it is not untypical. Its style is sermonic, but its prophetic character comes through in the immediacy of its final imperative.

<sup>8</sup> When Asa heard these words, the prophecy of Azariah son of Oded, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns that he had taken in the hill country of Ephraim. He repaired the altar of the Lord that was in front of the vestibule of the house of the Lord.

### 2 Chronicles 15:8

Asa took courage, and put away the abominable idols. This was the good and godly response. Instead of becoming fatalistic or passive, King Asa took action based on the open heart of God to restore and forgive.

Some believe that the forgiving nature of God gives people a reason to sin based on the idea that they can sin now and simply ask forgiveness later: <<*What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?*>> (Romans 6:1-2). Asa's reaction to the word of the prophet shows the correct response to the forgiving nature of God - to respond with a greater love and a greater passion for obedience. It should be noted that this took courage for King Asa to do. He had to combat against:

- The entrenched interests in favour of idolatry.
- The unseen spiritual forces in favour of idolatry.
- The example of his predecessors and neighbour tribes to the north in favour of idolatry.
- His own fleshly inclinations in favour of idolatry and compromise.
- The lethargy of compromise and indifference that supports idolatry.

Many well meaning reformers accomplish little because they lack the courage to really stand for their godly convictions.

From the towns that he had taken in the hill country of Ephraim implies that there had been conflict between Judah and Israel prior to the thirty sixth year of Asa's reign, circa 875 BC. This is confirmed by: <<*There was war between Asa and King Baasha of Israel all their days*>> (1 Kings 15:16). King Baasha reigned from 908-886 BC, the third to the twenty seventh years of Asa's reign in Judah.

He repaired the altar of the Lord. King Asa did more than remove the wrong; he also restored the right. This is an important part of any reform, and any time of renewal must be more than speaking out against the wrong. It must also take positive steps towards the good.

<sup>9</sup> He gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were residing as aliens with them, for great

numbers had deserted to him from Israel when they saw that the Lord his God was with him.

### 2 Chronicles 15:9

He gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were residing as aliens with them. King Asa's bold obedience to God earned the respect of the godly remnant among the apostate northern tribes that made up the Kingdom of Israel. They wanted to be part of a committed return to God and so they migrated back to the southern kingdom.

The Chronicler recorded these events - not included in the history of King Asa found in First Kings - as an encouragement to the returned exiles in his own day. They could believe that if they obeyed God courageously as King Asa had done, that God would also gather a faithful remnant to their small number. They could see that courageously obedient believers attract others.

The Chronicler highlights a number of occasions when northerners are reunited with their fellow Israelites in Judah, always in the context of worship and seeking God; refer to 2 Chronicles 11:16, 30:11-25 and 35:18.

<sup>10</sup> They were gathered at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa.

### 2 Chronicles 15:10

Sivan is the third month. The fifteenth year probably made this event in May/June of 895 BC. The assembly may have taken place during the Festival of Weeks or Harvest, i.e. Pentecost; refer to Exodus 23:16 and Leviticus 23:15-21.

<sup>11</sup> They sacrificed to the Lord on that day, from the booty that they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep.

### 2 Chronicles 15:11

They sacrificed to the Lord on that day, from the booty that they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep. They rightly recognised that their victory came from God, so they gave back to him something from the spoil of the victory over the Ethiopians; refer to 2 Chronicles 14:12-15. Equally, a lack of generosity is often rooted in refusing to recognise that God is the ultimate provider and every good and perfect gift comes from him: <<**Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change**>> (James 1:17).

<sup>12</sup> They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and with all their soul.

## 2 Chronicles 15:12

They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord is effectively a renewal of the Sinai covenant (Exodus Chapters 19, 20 and 24), allowing the people to affirm their total commitment to the Lord with all their heart and with all their soul. Covenant renewal in connection with reform is also featured in 2 Chronicles 23:16, 29:10 and 34:31-32. The implication of these popular acts of religious commitment would have been clear to the Chronicler's own community. After sacrifice, they committed the matter to a covenant between them and God. This was after the pattern of the covenant the people of Israel originally made with God at Sinai: <<*Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.'* Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, 'See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'>> (Exodus 24:7-8).

<sup>13</sup> Whoever would not seek the Lord, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman. <sup>14</sup> They took an oath to the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with horns. <sup>15</sup> All Judah rejoiced over the oath; for they had sworn with all their heart, and had sought him with their whole desire, and he was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest all around.

## 2 Chronicles 15:13-15

Whoever would not seek the Lord should be put to death. This covenant was deliberately connected with these past covenants the Lord made with their ancestors. This was their way of saying, "Lord God, we want the same relationship with you that our great forefathers enjoyed. We want to be bound to you with the same kind of covenant." Refer also to Deuteronomy 13:6-10 and 17:2-7.

This covenant was supported by the threat of punishment and with a public oath. This combination of a public oath and a promised punishment made the whole community accountable to keep this promise they made. This was a demonstration of the fact that it was a covenant made with all their heart and with all their soul. It was not a half-hearted or half-way covenant that no one could be held accountable to.

All Judah rejoiced over the oath. The seriousness of the covenant became a source of joy for the people. There was a sincere and true joy in being fully committed to God and accountable for that commitment in the community.

He was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest all around. Through the Prophet Azariah, God had promised Asa: <<*If you seek him, he will be found by*

**you>>** (v.2c). This was the fulfilment of that promise. Not only the king himself, but the nation as a whole found the Lord when they sought him this way:

- They sought him together, having gathered together at Jerusalem.
- They sought him through sacrifice, trusting in God's promise of atonement through the blood of an innocent victim.
- They sought him through covenant, made with a view to God's working with his people in the past, to seek the Lord God of their ancestors.
- They sought him completely, with all their heart and with all their soul.
- They sought him in an accountable way, promising punishment upon themselves if they were to forsake this covenant.
- They sought him publicly, having taken a public oath together.
- They sought him joyfully, rejoicing in the oath they had taken.

Their reward for seeking God in this way was both that they found the Lord, and when they had found him, he gave them rest all around. Some fear to seek the Lord this diligently because they are afraid that should they really find God, it would be more of a burden than a blessing to them. The Chronicler wanted his readers to know that when they seek God in this radical way and find him, the reward is rest all around. The same applies during any period of human history.

<sup>16</sup> King Asa even removed his mother Maacah from being queen mother because she had made an abominable image for Asherah. Asa cut down her image, crushed it, and burned it at the Wadi Kidron.

### 2 Chronicles 15:16

King Asa even removed his mother Maacah. First Kings 15:12-15 makes it clearer that Maachah was actually the grandmother of King Asa. Skipping generations in genealogies is common in Israelite records. The queen mother played an important role within the family politics of the court as an adviser of the king and teacher of the royal children. Asa's actions demonstrate the thoroughness of Asa's reforms. He was able to act righteously even when his own family was wrong, in particular his own grandmother, someone he was no doubt very close to as a child.

The Wadi Kidron was the small brook that ran through the Kidron Valley, which was just outside Jerusalem and was used as a refuse dump for idolatrous objects; refer also to 2 Chronicles 29:16 and 30:14. An inscription found at the site of Khirbet El-Qom, near modern Hebron, reads: "Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh and by his Asherah; from his enemies he saved him!" The inscription dates to the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC. It reflects the constant struggle in Judah between true servants of the Lord and those who were syncretists and idolaters.

<sup>17</sup> But the high places were not taken out of Israel. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was true all his days. <sup>18</sup> He brought into the house of God the votive gifts of his father and his own votive gifts — silver, gold, and utensils. <sup>19</sup> And there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa.

### 2 Chronicles 15:17-19

The high places were not taken out of Israel probably refers to those cities that had previously belonged to the northern kingdom and were then under Asa's control (out of Israel is the Chronicler's addition to 1 Kings 15:14a); in Judah, by contrast, Asa's reforms had been much more successful: <<*He took away the foreign altars and the high places, broke down the pillars, hewed down the sacred poles, and commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their ancestors, and to keep the law and the commandment. He also removed from all the cities of Judah the high places and the incense altars. And the kingdom had rest under him*>> (2 Chronicles 14:3-5).

The heart of Asa was true all his days is confirmed by: <<*But the high places were not taken away. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was true to the Lord all his days*>> (1 Kings 15:14). This is the overall assessment of his reign, despite the decline of his latter years.

And there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa. Asa and King Baasha of Israel were engaged in frequent skirmishes but these did not break out into open warfare and the land was relatively peaceful, especially compared to the reigns of other kings including Saul and David.

This statement is expanded on in the next chapter than may indicate a copyist error in this statement: <<*In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, King Baasha of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, to prevent anyone from going out or coming into the territory of King Asa of Judah*>> (2 Chronicles 16:1). It was known that Baasha had been dead for a decade by the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign. Since the numerals for years were expressed in Hebraic letters it is possible a scribe might have confused two similar-looking letters (י or yod for 10 and ל or lamedh for 30, letters that looked more alike in early handwritten Hebrew script than they do in modern typography).