

2 Chron 13-16

Good evening and thank you for joining us. Would you please turn in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles 13? Last week we saw the split of the nation of Israel, you'll recall an idolator and former servant of king Solomon now reigns in the northern kingdom. His name is Jeroboam. And Solomon's son Rehoboam ruled the southern kingdom of Judah.

Remember, the context of 1 and 2 Chronicles is that the Hebrews have returned from the 70 years of babylonian captivity. They are being reminded of all this Hebrew history as an exhortation to keep their focus on God and maintain their allegiance to Him.

We're gonna study 4 chapters tonight, 13-16, and the title of tonight's message is Finishing the Race
Let's pray

Though the books of 1 and 2 Kings tell the story of both southern and northern kingdoms, 2 Chronicles focuses mostly on the southern kingdom of Judah. Chapter 13 begins with an all out civil war getting ready to happen between Israel and Judah
1-3

1 In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, Abijah became king over Judah. 2 He reigned three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Michaiah[fn] the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. 3 Abijah set the battle in order with an army of valiant warriors, four hundred thousand choice men. Jeroboam also drew up in battle formation

against him with eight hundred thousand choice men, mighty men of valor. Notice, Abijah and Judah are outnumbered 2 to 1. But before the first sword is swung, Abijah makes an appeal to Jeroboam and Israel

4-5

4 Then Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, and said, "Hear me, Jeroboam and all Israel: 5 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. So a covenant of salt spoke of longevity and perpetuity.

Abijah's argument is that the dynasty of David is the only legitimate house to rule over the tribes of Israel, including these ten northern tribes that rebelled under Jeroboam's wicked leadership.

Abijah continues...

6-8

6 Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, rose up and rebelled against his lord.

7 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. 8 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. Abijah reminds them that Jeroboam is trusting in idols.

9 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? We saw last week that Jeroboam created his own religion-you could buy a priestly position with a bull and 7 rams - be your own priest.

10-11

10 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.

11 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.

There's lot's of churches today that are like the northern kingdom of Israel. They've abandoned God's ways and methods, and make it up as they wish.

12 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!"Abijah is pleading with the northern kingdom to turn back to God.

13 But Jeroboam caused an ambush to go around behind them; so they were in front of Judah, and the ambush was behind them. While Abijah had been talking, and negotiating, Jeroboam had been maneuvering his troops.

14 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. Remember Judah was outnumbered 2 to one!! There seemed to be no hope. So they cried out to God...

15 Then the men of Judah gave a shout; and as the men of Judah shouted, Pause here. " 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."

Let's read all of Verse 15

15 Then the men of Judah gave a shout; and as the men of Judah shouted, 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.

16-18

16 And the children of Israel fled before Judah, and God delivered them into their hand. 17 Then Abijah and his people struck them with a great slaughter; so five hundred thousand choice men of Israel fell slain. 18 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.” The Chronicler wanted the point to be clear. The reason why Judah defeated Israel, even though they were surprised and outnumbered, was that Judah relied on the LORD.

19 And Abijah pursued Jeroboam and took cities from him: Bethel with its villages, Jeshanah with its villages, and Ephraim[fn] 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.

20-22

20 So Jeroboam did not recover strength again in the days of Abijah; and the LORD struck him, and he died.

21 But Abijah grew mighty, married fourteen wives, and begot twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. 22 Now the rest of the acts of Abijah, his ways, and his sayings are written in the annals of the prophet Iddo. It’s interesting, the description of Abijah is overwhelmingly negative in 1 Kings 15:3 And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him; his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David.

Yet the Chronicler doesn't mention Abijah's wickedness does he? This was because the Chronicler wanted to emphasize the good that happened under the reign of Abijah, especially, the great deliverance that came when Judah relied on God.

This would be a great encouragement to the returned exiles to whom the Chronicler first wrote.

Chapter 14 a new king takes over in Judah

1-3

1 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 ten years. 2 Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God, 3 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

4-5

4 He commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to observe the law and the commandment. 5 He also removed the high places and the incense altars from all the cities of Judah, and the kingdom was quiet under him. Here we see the beginning of a revival—the first of five revivals in Judah's history

6 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. Asa used the peace to fortify the cities.

7 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. The Chronicler includes this account to encourage the people to rebuild the destroyed city of Jerusalem after its fall to the Babylonians.

8 And Asa had an army of three hundred thousand from Judah who carried shields and spears, and from Benjamin two hundred and eighty thousand men who carried shields and drew bows; all these were mighty men of valor.” Judah had a big army-580k men. But storm clouds – war clouds – begin to form...

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

10 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.

SHOW PIC In Israel there’s 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. Movies have been shot in the Bell Caves. **CLOSE PIC**

And next to the Caves was a town known as Mareshah. Just like his father, Abijah, Asa is facing an army that outnumbers him 2 to 1. Zerah and the Ethiopians number a million men.

11 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!" Although this prayer is only one verse long, it speaks volumes. Asa could boldly seek the Lord in adversity because he had diligently sought the Lord in prosperity. Asa's prayer took only seconds to utter, but it had a background of ten years of seeking and walking with the Lord.

Notice that Asa put no limitations on God. See God knows nothing of degrees of difficulty. To God, it makes no difference whether you're praying for healing from a cold or from cancer. Everything is equally easy for Him.

But notice Asa said "We rest on You," So often I pray and then I worry. I pray and then I fret. Asa shows us how it's supposed to be done.

Finally his prayer ends in verse 11 "Let not man prevail against You." Asa prayed for the glory of God.

Folks, we have to remember prayer is not to move God. It's to move with God. It is not to rub the proverbial lamp and have the genie pop out. It's to submit to God and say, "Father, what is Your

intention in this situation? I want to line up with what You're doing for Your glory."

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.

13-15

13 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. 14 Then they defeated all the cities around Gerar, for the fear of the LORD came upon them; and they plundered all the cities, for there was exceedingly much spoil in them. 15 They also attacked the livestock enclosures, and carried off sheep and camels in abundance, and returned to Jerusalem. These verses remind us that God is not limited by our lack of size or our lack of power - only by our lack of faith. **Matthew 13:58 Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.**

Chapter 15 describes further reforms of Asa

1-2

1 Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. 2 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.

Speaking through the prophet Azariah, God wanted Asa to know the importance of abiding in the LORD because it's easy to drift after a victory isn't it?

The prophet continues...

3 For a long time Israel has been without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law; 4 but when in their trouble they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them. This is an important principle repeated many times in the Bible. The idea is that when we draw near to God, He reveals Himself to us. God does not hide Himself from the seeking heart.

Deuteronomy 4:29 But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Jeremiah 29:13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

The opposite of course is if you forsake God, He will forsake you. Ultimately, God gives us what we want from Him. God grants to the heart that seeks Him what it wants; He also grants the heart that forsakes Him what it desires.

The prophet continues...

5-7

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. 6 So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity. 7 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.

8 And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded^[fn] 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. 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 just speaking out against evil. It must also take positive steps towards doing Godly things.

9 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 King Asa made it obvious to the inhabitants of the northern tribes that God's blessing was on Judah.

Verses 10-15 a public covenant is made at Jerusalem.

10 So they gathered together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. 11 And they offered to the LORD at that time seven hundred bulls and seven thousand sheep from the spoil they had brought. 12 Then they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their

heart and with all their soul; 13 and whoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel was to be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. 14 Then they took an oath before the LORD with a loud voice, with shouting and trumpets and rams' horns. 15 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. This rest was the fulfillment of the promise in v 2-if they sought God, they would find Him.

16 Also he removed Maachah, the mother of Asa the king, from being queen mother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah;[fn] and Asa cut down her obscene image, then crushed and burned it by the Brook Kidron. Asa's own mom was involved in the fertility cult of the Canaanite goddess Asherah. But Asa has backbone. He refused to allow an idolater to assume power in Israel and he dethrones his own mom.

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.

17 But the high places were not removed from Israel. Nevertheless the heart of Asa was loyal all his days. Asa tore

down the alters in Judah, but he had minimal influence on the northern kingdom of Israel.

18 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. 19 And there was no war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa. Asa enjoyed 3½ decades of peace.

Chapter 16 we'll see that Asa was a good king, but he wasn't perfect. He started out so very well, but ended disastrously.

1 In the thirty-sixth 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 of the northern kingdom of Israel constructs the equivalent of the Berlin Wall, blocking a major route into Judah. Baasha hoped this military and economic pressure on Judah would force Asa into significant concessions.

And how do you think Asa responds to Baasha? Not in the way he has in the past. Rather than trust in God, he tries to buy Syrian protection.

2-3

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, "

3 "Let there be a treaty between you and me, as there was between my father and your father. See, I have sent you silver and gold; come, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel, so that he will withdraw from me." What happened to Asa's faith?

Asa seems to have forgotten that his covenant was with God, not with a pagan king. Under the covenant they made with God, the LORD was responsible to protect Judah. Now they invested their treasure and their trust in a pagan king.

4 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.

5 Now it happened, when Baasha heard it, that he stopped building Ramah and ceased his work. 6 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!

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 actually an opportunity for him.

Baasha's aggression wasn't a problem, it was a potential for victory over the Syrians! So often the situation we fear and try to avoid - God has allowed to show Himself strong on our behalf.

Yes Asa succeeded in gaining Syria's help against Baasha and Israel, but he failed to see what God saw: that the bigger enemy was Syria, and God wanted to give him victory over the greater enemy.

The prophet continues to rebuke Asa...

8 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. The prophet basically says-you trusted God before, why not now?

Here's an important lesson we can sometimes forget. Faith has to stay current. We can't live off yesterday's victories. God wants us to trust Him today – with today's problems.

Verse 9 is a powerful verse

9 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. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars." Verse 9 tells us 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. God won't work on behalf of a person who'll take the credit - or manipulate the outcome for their own benefit. Never forget, God looks for loyalty!

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said in **Matthew 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."**

So this prophet tells Asa of his error, and how does Asa respond?

10 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.

11-12

11 Note that the acts of Asa, first and last, are indeed written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 12 And in the thirty-ninth 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 was a man involved in incredible trust in God, great victory, and the renewal of God's covenant with His people. Asa was a good king, but he did not finish well.

The last years of his life were marked by unbelief, hardness against God, oppression of his people, and disease. Age and time do not necessarily make us better; they only do if we continue to follow God in faith.

13 So Asa rested with his fathers; he died in the forty-first year of his reign. 14 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. Such fires were customary for royal funerals, and were not for cremating the body but as a sign of honor.

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.

