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### **Which Prophet?**

#### **Kings and Chronicles**

#### **Series: In the Days of Elijah**

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**The Village Church**

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I. Primary character in this lesson is Asa

A. **Kings of Judah**

1. Following Solomon

a. **Rehoboam**

- (1) When kingdom divided; Solomon's son; northern 10 tribes went with Jeroboam
- (2) Solomon's sins and neglect had set the stage for the collapse of the united kingdom
  - (a) Foreign wives
  - (b) Idolatry
  - (c) Practically – conscripted laborers which sowed discontent among the northern tribes especially
  - (d) An industrious Jeroboam was placed as overseer of the forced labor; position that he used to advantage to encourage the discontent and place himself in a position of power
- (3) Rehoboam contributed as well
  - (a) When faced with rising discontent from the forced labor he consulted advisors
    - i) Older advisors – needs to be a servant to his people
    - ii) Younger advisors – needs to assert his power and increase their labor
- (4) All of this was from the Lord who used it to fulfill a prophecy made to Solomon, that his kingdom would be rent asunder

b. **Abijah** (Abijah in Chronicles)

- (1) Short reign – 3 years
- (2) Wicked reign
  - (a) 1 Kings 15.3-5 (ESV) 3 And he walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father. 4 Nevertheless, for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing

Jerusalem, 5 because David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

- (3) Operating on the borrowed capital from David
  - (a) Allowed to have a son to continue the line
- c. Son was Asa
- 2. Asa had a lengthy reign – 41 years
  - a. General testimony
    - (1) 1 Kings 15:11 (ESV) — 11 And Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as David his father had done.
    - (2) 2 Chronicles 14:2 (ESV) — 2 And Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God.
    - (3) 1 Kings 15:14 (ESV) — 14 But the high places were not taken away. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was wholly true to the LORD all his days.
- 3. Bible has a way of summarizing the general assessment of the kings of Judah and Israel
  - a. On the whole – Asa was a good king
  - b. But not perfect
    - (1) Asa had some problems
    - (2) Particularly as his reign continued
- 4. Most information from the Chronicles account
  - a. Kings – part of the Deuteronomistic history
    - (1) History written in light of Deuteronomy in regard to how the nation should possess and occupy the Promised Land
    - (2) Finally produced just before the exile, or perhaps updated by an editor early the exilic period
  - b. Chronicles – post exile (traditionally Ezra; probably others contributed)
    - (1) Purpose – encourage right conduct for the relatively oppressed band of Israelites who had returned to a decimated Jerusalem
  - c. Served the Chronicler's purpose to engage in greater detail, at least with Asa's account
    - (1) Brief summarized assessment was not sufficient

## II. Tale of two prophets

- A. Interesting aspects of Asa was that two prophets addressed him during his reign
  - 1. Azariah (2 Chronicles 15)
  - 2. Hanani (2 Chronicles 16)
- B. Those prophets respond to two different episodes in Asa's reign
  - 1. And their prophecies are followed by two different responses by Asa
- C. Instructive to examine each of them
  - 1. Not just to educate ourselves about Asa

2. But to ask ourselves the question, which prophet would we like to have come to us?

### III. Azariah

#### A. 2 Chronicles 15:1–7 (ESV) —

1. 1 The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded,
2. 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.
3. 3 For a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest and without law,
4. 4 but when in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them.
5. 5 In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands.
6. 6 They were broken in pieces. Nation was crushed by nation and city by city, for God troubled them with every sort of distress.
7. 7 But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded.”

#### B. Message – 3 parts

1. Admonition – seek God
  - a. “If you seek Him, He will be found by you”
2. Example – history lesson
  - a. Most would see this as a recollection of the times of Judges
  - b. When Israel turned away from the Lord, they were afflicted
  - c. When they were distressed, they returned to the Lord; He let them find Him
  - d. Main point – turn away from God, He will turn away from you; seek God, He will let you have a relationship with Him
3. Exhortation – be strong

#### C. Admonition – seek God

1. “The Lord is with you while you are with Him”
  - a. More than a truism (of course He is with me if I am with Him)
  - b. We have a responsibility to nurture our relationship with God
2. Example: Many times people are under great stress and affliction; God seems absent
  - a. “Where is God?”
  - b. There are times when that is a relevant question
    - (1) Psalms are full of those exclamations by those who feel God’s absence
    - (2) Heman: Psalm 88:7–9 (ESV) — 7 Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah 8 You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a horror to them. I am shut in so that I cannot escape; 9 my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every

day I call upon you, O LORD; I spread out my hands to you.

- (3) **Psalm 88:13–14** (ESV) — 13 But I, O LORD, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you. 14 O LORD, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me?
- (4) Perhaps you've been there – can't think of a reason why God is absent
- (5) Psalm 88 is unlike all the other Psalms of its nature; never resolves
  - (a) Like a 20th Century musical composition, with all its dissonance
  - (b) Ends in dissonance; no word of encouragement; no hope; depressing

3. Most of the time, when we sense God's absence, before we ask where God is, we should ask where we are

- a. Most of the time, I'm not where I should be in my walk with the Lord
- b. God never moved; I moved – in the wrong direction

4. Azariah – The Lord is with you while you are with Him

5. "If you seek Him, He will be found by you"

- a. The way you get to be where God is, is by seeking Him
- b. **Proverbs 8:17** (ESV) —
  - (1) 17 I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.
- c. **Matthew 7:7–8** (ESV) —
  - (1) 7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.
  - (2) 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.
- d. **Matthew 6:33** (ESV) —
  - (1) 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

e. Great antidote for anxiety

6. Seeking God is the way to find Him and be with Him

7. Problem – we don't seek God by nature

- a. **Romans 3:10–11** (ESV) —
  - (1) 10 as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;
  - (2) 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God.
- b. Quoted from Psalm 14 and 53

8. Solution – regeneration – being born again

- a. God gives us a disposition to actually desire Christ
- b. Chief activity of the true Christian is the seeking of God

D. **Example** – probably from Judges

1. If you want a roller coaster of a relationship with God, do what the Israelites did during the period of Judges
    - a. When things seem to be going ok, forget God
    - b. When the going gets tough, seek God
    - c. Christian life goes up and down with that approach to spirituality just as the fortunes of Israel went up and down for 400 years
  2. These histories are to have a demonstrable effect on us as Christians – examples to be acted upon
    - a. **1 Corinthians 10:11** (ESV) —
      - (1) 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.
- E. **Exhortation – be strong**
1. Reminiscent of God’s instruction to Joshua
    - a. **Joshua 1:9** (ESV) —
      - (1) 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”
    - b. **Ephesians 6:10** (ESV) —
      - (1) 10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.
- F. Character of the message
1. Not a harsh message
    - a. Certainly contains a warning
    - b. Contains a promise which is conditional upon our appropriate response
      - (1) v 7 – “Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded”
  2. But it is an exhortation, an encouragement
- G. Why this message to Asa at this time?
1. Asa had just done the right thing!
  2. 14.1 – land was undisturbed for the first 10 years of Asa’s reign
    - a. Didn’t abuse that opportunity; used that opportunity
      - (1) Religious reform – removed foreign altars and high places used for idolatry
      - (2) Commanded Judah to seek God and obey the covenant
      - (3) Military preparation – used time to fortify cities, make preparation for when there were attacks; strengthened the militia, both in Judah and in Benjamin
        - (a) One of those things that we don’t often do as Christians
        - (b) Things would go much better for us when the attacks and afflictions and trials come if we prepare now for them by strengthening our walk with Christ

- (c) Don't spurn the easy times; use them for our own preparation
- 3. 14.9ff – then the attack did come – from the Ethiopians
  - a. Extraordinarily threatening – 1,000,000 men, 300 chariots!
  - b. How did Asa handle it?
    - (1) Rely on his preparations?
      - (a) Certainly those preparations were important
      - (b) But he looked out and when he saw the Ethiopian army, he knew that he was in over his head
    - (2) **2 Chronicles 14:11** (ESV) —
      - (a) 11 And Asa cried to the LORD his God, "O LORD, there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, you are our God; let not man prevail against you."
    - (3) Recognizes that Israel is without strength compared to the Ethiopians
      - (a) Dirty Harry: "A man's got to know his limitations"
      - (b) Proclaims his trust, not in his army or in his fortifications, but in God alone
      - (c) Declares his purpose in the battle
        - i) Not to save himself or his people
        - ii) But to glorify God – they are fighting in His name
      - (d) Reasons that the Ethiopians are not really attacking Israel, but they are attacking God – appeals to God to defend Himself
      - (e) Marvelous prayer
    - (4) God did strike the Ethiopians
      - (a) They never would recover from that defeat
      - (b) Judah would receive all the plunder
- 4. That's what took place before Azariah's prophecy
  - a. Occasion for the prophecy
  - b. As if Azariah was saying, "Good job, Asa! This is why you were successful! Keep up the good work and you will continue to have success!"
  - c. Like a coach of a football team
    - (1) When you win, the coach wants you to know why you won so you will continue in that vein
- H. **Asa's response – 2 Chronicles 15:8-19**
  - 1. **2 Chronicles 15:8a** (ESV) —
    - a. 8 As soon as Asa heard these words, the prophecy of Azariah the son of Oded, he took courage and put away the detestable idols

from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities that he had taken in the hill country of Ephraim, ...

- b. Reforms, which he had started, grew with greater boldness
    - (1) He “took courage”
    - (2) Did exactly what Azariah told him to do
  - c. Reforms involved doing away with idolatry
    - (1) Not just in some places, but everywhere his power extended, even over territories that had been newly conquered
  - d. He has seen what God would do as He relied on Him
    - (1) He was encouraged to pursue God’s purposes for him with a greater zeal and abandon
2. **2 Chronicles 15:8b** (ESV) —
- a. 8 ... and he repaired the altar of the LORD that was in front of the vestibule of the house of the LORD.
  - b. Restored the altar
    - (1) Evidently had fallen into deterioration, maybe even disuse
      - (a) Even though it had just been less than a generation since Solomon and built and consecrated it
  - c. Didn’t just attack that which opposed God – instruments of idolatry
    - (1) He also reestablished the proper place of worship in Judah
3. **2 Chronicles 15:9–10** (ESV) —
- a. 9 And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were residing with them, for great numbers had deserted to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.
  - b. 10 They were gathered at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa.
4. Extended his influence
- a. Recognized that in his position he had the capacity to advance to kingdom of God beyond its current bounds and limits
  - b. Gathered, not just Judah, but all those from the northern tribes who had defected to him
    - (1) They had defected because they saw that God was with him!
  - c. If you want to extend your influence, live by seeking God, in the presence of God, so it is apparent that God is with you
    - (1) Not by talking about God all the time
    - (2) But by living in trust on God, in a living relationship with God
    - (3) That happens so rarely in this world, it will get the attention of people; they will come just as those from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon came
5. **2 Chronicles 15:11** (ESV) —

- a. 11 They sacrificed to the LORD on that day from the spoil that they had brought 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep.
  - b. Led the people in worship of the Lord
    - (1) Using the spoils from the conquests!
  - c. Incredible sacrifices
    - (1) The most since Solomon's dedication of the temple
  - d. Our worship doesn't consist of animal sacrifices, but in sacrifices of praise!
    - (1) That kind of worship ought to characterize our lives
    - (2) We have been blessed beyond measure; why shouldn't we lift our voices together and join the chorus of praise and thanksgiving?
6. **2 Chronicles 15:12–15** (ESV) —
- a. 12 And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul,
  - b. 13 but that whoever would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman.
  - c. 14 They swore an oath to the LORD with a loud voice and with shouting and with trumpets and with horns.
  - d. 15 And 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.
7. Entered into covenant with the people
- a. Nothing in this covenant they weren't already commanded to do
  - b. Re-establishing covenants are important acts of recognition and worship of God's people throughout the ages
  - c. Remind us of what God has promised to us as we fulfill our covenant responsibilities
  - d. Encourage us to continue to pursue the actions God calls us to perform
  - e. Covenant was to seek the Lord
    - (1) Echoed the very content of Azariah's prophecy
    - (2) The main business of the Christian is the seeking of God
8. How they affirmed the covenant!
- a. With all their heart and soul
  - b. With a loud voice, shouting, trumpets and horns
  - c. With rejoicing
  - d. With earnest seeking
  - e. No half-hearted approach to religion
    - (1) Neither are we to be luke-warm about our faith
    - (2) If we enter into covenant, we need to do so whole-heartedly, strongly, with great zeal and abandon
  - f. Even affirmed it with discipline!
    - (1) Those who would not seek the Lord would be put to death!
      - (a) They were serious about it



- (2) That might not be the form of discipline we are called upon to use
  - (3) But the church is called upon to discipline those who claimed to be believers but who exhibit a pattern of life contrary to the explicit commands of scripture
- 9. **2 Chronicles 15:16** (ESV) —
  - a. 16 Even Maacah, his mother, King Asa removed from being queen mother because she had made a detestable image for Asherah. Asa cut down her image, crushed it, and burned it at the brook Kidron.
  - b. Extent of the reform
    - (1) Even to the removal of his own grandmother from being Queen mother!
    - (2) She had been an idolater, very influential in the life of Asa's predecessor, Abijah
    - (3) Queen mothers are mentioned in connection with the Kings of Judah, but not of Israel
    - (4) Very clearly they are seen to be important to the spiritual health of the kings
    - (5) Removed Asherah she had made – ridding from his palace any vestige of idolatry
  - c. Positive note – likely that Maacah had repented of her idolatry
    - (1) She had not been killed as indicated should happen for those who did not seek the Lord
    - (2) She had been removed from her position so as not to influence others and as a matter of discipline
- 10. **2 Chronicles 15:18** (ESV) —
  - a. 18 And he brought into the house of God the sacred gifts of his father and his own sacred gifts, silver, and gold, and vessels.
  - b. Gave of his treasure to the Lord
    - (1) Those dedicated things, not just his own, but of those of his father
    - (2) Things that rightly belonged to the Lord, were to reside in the temple for holy use

#### IV. **Summary**

- A. First of these two prophetic encounters
  - 1. Occasioned by godly, obedient, wise acts of Asa
  - 2. Characterized by
    - a. Admonition to seek the Lord
    - b. Encouragement through an example from Israelite history
    - c. Exhortation to be strong in fulfilling his covenant responsibilities
  - 3. Responded to
    - a. By an increase of boldness
    - b. Continuing religious reformation
    - c. Extending remarkable spiritual leadership even though he was a civil leader

- B. Unfortunately, not the only encounter Asa would have with a prophet
  - 1. The other one we will consider in the next message