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Which Prophet? Part 2
Kings and Chronicles
Series: In the Days of Elijah
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The Village Church
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- I. Review of Asa
 - A. Studied in first message
 - 1. **Kings of Judah**
 - a. **Solomon**
 - (1) Sins as seeds of demise of united kingdom
 - b. **Rehoboam**
 - (1) Decisions re: forced labor brought Jeroboam to power in north
 - c. **Abijam** (Abijah)
 - (1) Short term, wicked reign
 - d. **Asa**
 - (1) Grandson of Rehoboam
 - (2) Great grandson of Solomon
 - 2. Asa's reign
 - a. Lengthy – 41 years
 - b. On the whole, good
 - (1) “Did what was right in the sight of the Lord, like David...”
 - B. **Story of two prophets**
 - 1. **Azariah (2 Chronicles 15)**
 - 2. **Hanani (2 Chronicles 16)**
 - C. Similar structure to the stories
 - 1. Circumstances challenge Asa
 - 2. Asa makes decisions, acts
 - a. Both occasions – outcome appears, from human vantage point, to be positive for Judah
 - 3. Prophet appears in response to Asa's decisions
 - 4. Asa responds to the prophet's message
 - D. Nature of each prophet's response is very different
 - 1. **Azariah – largely positive message**
 - a. **Admonition to seek God**
 - (1) Includes promise – if you seek Him, you will be found by Him
 - b. **Example – history lesson**
 - (1) Some questions about what part of Israel's history he was referring to

- (2) Inclined toward Judges
 - (3) Confirms the admonition – when Israel sought God, God really did let them find Him
 - c. **Exhortation to be strong**
 - (1) Reminiscent of Joshua
 - E. Occasion for this response – Why this response to Asa?
 - 1. Asa had taken advantage of peace for 10 years
 - a. Fortified cities, strengthened militia
 - b. Religious reform – removed idolatry
 - 2. When attacked by overwhelming odds by Ethiopians
 - a. Cried out to God
 - b. Prayer, not just for help, but aligned Judah with God's honor and glory; God would be the One to fight their battle
 - F. **Asa's response**
 - 1. Continued in the direction he started
 - a. Took courage!
 - b. Pursued religious reforms with even greater zeal
 - c. Engaged the people in a covenant renewal
 - G. Shining moments in the life and reign of Asa
- II. **Hanani's story – 2 Chronicles 16**
 - A. Time problem
 - 1. **2 Chronicles 16:1** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might permit no one to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah.
 - 2. Involves a war against Baasha
 - 3. If this were the 36th year of Asa's reign, Baasha would have been dead for 10 years!
 - 4. Not really a satisfactory explanation
 - a. Josephus – places it in Asa's 26th year
 - (1) Don't know on what basis he did that
 - b. Mistake of transcriber in 16.1 and 15.19
 - 5. How to deal with problems in the text of scripture
 - a. There are some problems
 - b. The more we know, the more those problems resolve
 - c. There are fewer problems today than 100 years ago
 - 6. None of which changes the main issues in the story
 - B. **Asa Sets the Table**
 - 1. **2 Chronicles 16:1** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might permit no one to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah.
 - 2. Northern kingdom had concerns about maintaining political solidarity
 - a. Israel was commanded to worship in Jerusalem
 - (1) Located in Judah

- b. If people in north were always going into Judah to worship, Baasha (as the kings before him) worried that their loyalties might shift
 - c. Northern kings would create worship sites in Samaria, altars on high places to worship Yahweh
 - d. Also why Baasha fortified Ramah – just north of Jerusalem
 - 3. Compare this challenge to the previous one from Ethiopia
 - a. 1,000,000 men, plus chariots
 - b. Far superior – overwhelming
 - 4. Baasha's challenge was minuscule in comparison
 - 5. **First sin of Asa – diminishing trust in God**
 - a. Was able to trust God in face of overwhelming forces
 - b. Now not able to trust God by a minor provocative act, not even in his own country, by a second rate king of Israel
 - 6. Supposed to grow in faith over the years; Asa goes backwards
 - a. Are you growing in your faith?
- C. **2 Chronicles 16:2** (ESV) —
 - 1. 2 Then Asa took silver and gold from the treasures of the house of the LORD and the king's house and sent them to Ben-hadad king of Syria, who lived in Damascus...
 - 2. Not only did he not trust God, **Asa aggravated that sin by stealing from God**, taking resources that belonged to God, devoted to the worship of Yahweh, sent them to a pagan king
 - 3. Sins of aggravation (Puritans)
 - a. When we compound our own sin, add sin upon sin, making it even worse than before
 - b. Not only do you not trust God, you steal from him to concoct your own solution to your problem!
- D. Saying... **2 Chronicles 16:3** (ESV) —
 - 1. 3 "There is a covenant between me and you, as there was between my father and your father. Behold, I am sending to you silver and gold. Go, break your covenant with Baasha king of Israel, that he may withdraw from me."
 - 2. **Third sin – engaging in treaty with pagan king**, natural enemy of Israel and Judah
 - a. Evidently, Israel (northern kingdom), had already made a treaty – committed this sin
 - b. Kind of sin that would make Israel susceptible to judgment of God
 - c. Same kind of sin that Paul warns us about regarding not being unequally yoked with unbelievers (as in a marriage relationship)
 - (1) Can darkness have fellowship with light?
 - d. Now Judah commits that same sin
 - 3. **Fourth sin – provokes Ben-hadad to break a treaty with Israel**
 - a. Wasn't necessarily a sin for a pagan like Ben-hadad to enter into a treaty
 - b. Now Asa not only sins himself, but leads others into sin

- c. It matters how unbelievers sin
 - (1) Tendency to think that, if they don't repent, that they go to hell and that's that
 - (2) But there are gradations of punishment in hell
 - (a) God holds us accountable, not just for having been sinners, but also for the amount and kind of sin we commit
 - (3) Bible speaks of God storing up wrath for the day of judgment
 - (a) The more we sin, the more wrath we deserve
 - (b) And the more wrath we will have unleashed on us at the day of judgment unless we are redeemed
 - (4) Puritans used to say that due to this principle of increasing wrath for increasing sin, a sinner would give all he had acquired in all his lifetime if the number of his sins would be one less
 - d. Not only does Asa sin, he leads Ben-hadad to sin, increasing his wrath on the day of judgment
- E. **2 Chronicles 16:4–5** (ESV) —
- 1. 4 And Ben-hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and they conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim, and all the store cities of Naphtali.
 - 2. 5 And when Baasha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah and let his work cease.
 - 3. So Ben-hadad takes the bribe and complies with Asa's request
 - a. In doing so, captures a number of key cities in the north of Israel
 - 4. Another ramification of sin is evident
 - a. Deuteronomic history (Kings)
 - (1) History rooted in the covenant obligations of Israel as they enter the Promised Land
 - b. Promised Land – land promised to Israel!
 - c. **Asa has invited a pagan to come in and take over land promised** to his own people Israel!
 - 5. Jews were supposed to drive the pagans out; Asa invites them in
 - a. Not into Judah
 - b. But into Israel (north) – still part of the promised land
 - 6. In any event, it worked
 - a. At least from Asa's perspective
 - b. Baasha relented from his provocative military fortification
 - c. Can't always judge the rightness of our actions by pragmatic results
 - 7. I'm sure Asa thought everything was working out wonderfully well, even though he had committed at least five serious sins
- F. **2 Chronicles 16:6** (ESV) —

1. 6 Then King Asa took all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, with which Baasha had been building, and with them he built Geba and Mizpah.
2. Asa completes his plan
 - a. Uses the materials accumulated by Baasha to fortify his own cities against Baasha
 - b. Probably thought there was some poetic justice in that
 - (1) Using Baasha's work against him

III. The Prophet Confronts

A. 2 Chronicles 16:7 (ESV) —

1. 7 At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, "Because you relied on the king of Syria, and did not rely on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped you.
2. Of all the sins Asa has committed, one stands out
 - a. He has relied on a human ally instead of on God
3. Believed that God either could not help him or would not help him in his time of need
 - a. How often do we make such a decision
 - b. How little do we trust God and instead trust some other human ability or resource
 - c. Evidence of this is how prayerless we are as the church
 - (1) Some would point to how poorly attended the midweek prayer service is
 - (2) Probably some truth in that
 - (3) Not necessarily the best measure – much prayer happens apart from the service
 - (4) However, do you really know anyone who would say they pray too much, or even enough?
 - (a) I know I don't pray as much as I should, or even the way I should
4. Another dimension of this sin of not relying on God is how aggravating that is to God and His glory (an aggravation of attacking God's glory)
 - a. What? Are we to treat a mere creature of God – indeed an enemy of God – as more sufficient than the Creator Himself
 - b. Asa's lack of trust in God, and his contrasting trust in Ben-hadad, is a slap in God's face, an attack on His own Glory
 - c. Isaiah 42:8 (ESV) —
 - (1) 8 I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.
5. When we rely on someone or something other than God, or in the place of God, do we think that God will not respond?
 - a. When we slap God in the face by our unbelief, do we think that God will not care?
6. Matthew Henry: It is a foolish thing to lean on a broken reed, when we have the rock of ages to rely upon.

7. Not only has Asa failed to rely on God, he has relied on an enemy of God
 - a. Aggravates the sin even more
 - b. In fact, Ben-hadad is an enemy of Asa and of all the Jewish people
- B. **2 Chronicles 16:8** (ESV) —
1. 8 Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the LORD, he gave them into your hand.
 2. Hanani's first reproof is that **Asa acted against his experience**
 - a. What happened in the case of the Ethiopians? God delivered!
 - b. Why wouldn't He do so again?
 3. How often has God helped us – when we could see no way out of a predicament?
 - a. Yet how easy it is to forget those experiences when faced with a new challenge and a seemingly human means to deal with it!
 4. Has God helped you?
 - a. Indeed – saved you!
 - (1) From the greatest enemy imaginable – Sin, Satan, death
 - b. **Romans 8:32** (ESV) —
 - (1) 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
 - c. If God saved us, would he not also help us in any lesser predicament than that?
 - d. Any predicament that we face is a lesser predicament
 - (1) Nothing worse than being enslaved to sin and destined for an eternity of destruction
 - e. If we can trust Jesus to save us from our sin and from the wrath to come, why not trust him for the incidental challenges that are sure to come our way in the meantime?
 - f. Asa didn't do that
- C. **2 Chronicles 16:9** (ESV) —
1. 9 For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars.”
 2. Hanani's second reproof is that **Asa has acted against his knowledge of God**
 - a. God is sovereign, omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient
 - (1) His eyes move to and fro about the earth
 - b. God acts providentially
 - (1) Always for the benefit of those whose heart is devoted to Him
 - (2) He doesn't just support such people – He strongly supports such people!
 3. When we sin (especially us Christians who are involved in a church like this) we act against our knowledge of God

- a. We forget that God is sovereign, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, and providential
 - (1) And loving!
 - 4. **Romans 8:31–39** (ESV) —
 - a. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?
 - b. 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
 - c. 33 Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.
 - d. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.
 - e. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?
 - f. 36 As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”
 - g. 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
 - h. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,
 - i. 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - 5. It is a serious sin to act against our knowledge of God
 - 6. Hanani offers a third reproof – **Asa has acted against his own interest**
 - a. He has made one who was to be an enemy into a friend
 - (1) Inviting him into the Promised Land
 - (2) As a result, he would always have wars
 - b. Ironically – Asa thinks things are working out according to his plans
 - (1) But if he followed God and trusted Him, God would have defeated Baasha along with anyone allied with him
 - (a) Including Ben-hadad!
 - c. Asa could have had two for the price of one!
 - (1) Instead, he has invited a growing Syrian power and presence into the Promised Land
 - 7. When we fail to trust God we hurt ourselves!
 - a. Matthew Henry: Those that cannot find in their hearts to trust God forfeit his protection and throw themselves out of it.
- D. **2 Chronicles 16:10** (ESV) —
 - 1. 10 Then Asa was angry with the seer and put him in the stocks in prison, for he was in a rage with him because of this. And Asa inflicted cruelties upon some of the people at the same time.
 - 2. **Asa’s Response**

- a. Unfortunately – not one of repentance, but of retaliation
 - (1) Classic “shoot the messenger” approach
 - (2) As if getting rid of Hanani would get rid of God!
 - 3. Not the response to discipline that we are called upon to engage in
 - 4. **Hebrews 12:5–13** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.
 - b. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”
 - c. 7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?
 - d. 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.
 - e. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?
 - f. 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.
 - g. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.
 - h. 12 Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,
 - i. 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.
 - 5. That would have been a good passage for Asa
 - a. Especially since he began to have trouble with his feet!
- E. **2 Chronicles 16:11–12** (ESV) —
 - 1. 11 The acts of Asa, from first to last, are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel.
 - 2. 12 In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe. Yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but sought help from physicians.
 - 3. Even then Asa did not respond to God’s discipline
 - a. Once again it was a matter of trust
 - (1) This time in physicians apart from God
 - 4. Not that we are not called upon to use physicians
 - a. But it was his failure to seek the Lord at all in this, trusting only in physicians
- F. **Contrast** the episodes
 - 1. **Azariah**
 - a. Occasion – acts of faithfulness and obedience on part of Asa

- b. Prophetic message – Azariah comes with admonition, example, exhortation to continue
 - c. Response – Asa does continue to pursue reforms with greater zeal
 - d. Outcome – blessing for years
- 2. **Hanani**
 - a. Occasion – acts of unfaithfulness
 - b. Prophetic message – discipline and reproof
 - c. Response – anger and retaliation against the messenger
 - d. Outcome – growing disability and decline
- 3. Which prophet would you prefer?

IV. Final summary

- A. Study of kings
 - 1. Some good, some bad
 - 2. This one was largely good
- B. Some change
 - 1. Some start poorly, finish well
 - 2. Others, like Asa, start well, finish poorly
- C. Much more important how you finish than how you start
 - 1. Christian life is more about finishing
 - a. Not a sprint; it's a marathon run
 - 2. **Hebrews 12:1–2** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,
 - b. 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
- D. Christian's prayer – Lord, let me have more faith than days
- E. Landscape of Christianity is littered with those who have started well but have not finished well
 - 1. Whatever we do, we must finish well
 - 2. Constantly growing
 - 3. Never satisfied with our own spiritual condition
 - 4. Continuing in the Word, prayer
 - 5. Disciplining ourselves for purpose of godliness
- F. So when the challenges come, we are prepared to respond in faith
- G. Which prophet would we prefer?