

## **JULY 25**

### **2 Chronicles 14-16**

These three chapters are all about Asa. He was a great king who we hardly got to know in 1 Kings 15. As you read these chapters, take care to think about the time markers that the Spirit is giving. What we're reading here is both amazing and awful. Asa, like David, is someone you would want to be like, or name your son after. Yet, like David, he fell. What is frightening is that the kings will all "fall" differently, and it will look like something we are just as prone to do. They will have great faith when they are young, but when they are older, established, secure and strong, something will tempt them and they'll give in. David gave into dishonesty and adultery. Solomon gave in to stuff, pleasure and finally idolatry. So here's your job. Figure out what it was that shook Asa.

#### **2 Chronicles 14**

Vs. 1-8 The mentioning of time and years is the key to understanding this section. They are not here by accident. This is Asa's first act of devotion and it established him as a godly king. Notice the mention of Asa leading the people to seek God and notice that it was God who gave him peace. You wonder why he spent so much of his energy fortifying the land when it was God who was helping him. Ironically, none of Asa's military strengthening would help him regarding the challenge he was about to face. This is good to consider.

What would you say is the strength of Asa?

Vs. 9-15 No other king ever faced an army this big. In spite of his military might, it was small compared to the million men who came against him. Yet, Asa's victory came through the Lord, and Asa had faith to cry out to God.

V. 13 I'll bet it was like Christmas, but the gift God gave Asa was a Wal-Mart.

#### **2 Chronicles 15**

Again, do you see what God required and what Asa did? (Vs. 2, 12-13) Asa was a great man and this is what defined his walk with God and his leadership. I'm sure Ezra wants Israel to see this.

Vs. 1-7 This is God's promise and blessing to Asa. Asa responded well because he was a man of deep faith. Notice that with God's promise there is also a warning. I'm sure Ezra wanted Israel to see this too.

It is sobering to think that in most of the places God has warned people, they did exactly what He warned them against. He knew they would fall in a hole. That should have given God's warnings an even greater significance.

Vs. 8-15 This is now the second time Asa cleansed the land. What is amazing is v. 9. People in the northern kingdom were drawn by Asa's devotion and by God's blessing on the land. I'm sure that this is what God always had in mind. The godly people of all lands would be drawn to Israel.

Vs. 16-19 This was Asa's third cleansing. Notice that v. 17 says that Asa was wholly true to the Lord all of his life. Hold that thought.

V. 19 This note is important, and in order to figure out what happens next, you need to understand how long Asa had lived in peace and blessing without a fight. How long was it between fights? Asa had peace for 10 years and then there was a huge challenge. Then there was peace until his 35<sup>th</sup> year, meaning that from one challenge to the next there were 25 years of peace. The question is, did his faith grow in that peace or did peace make him weak and sloppy?

#### **2 Chronicles 16**

Vs. 1-6 This seems like a shrewd move, but it wasn't. Asa was aggravated and threatened. He didn't seek God. This new threat shook him, irritated him and got him mad. He figured out a way to get even and it was sweet and tricky and it worked. And it was without God.

Vs. 7-9 This is the verdict and it scares me to read it because I can see me doing something like this. When he was young and the threat was great, Asa had outstanding faith and received a great reward. Now, 25 years later (or 15 if a scribe messed up), he reacts in rage and trickery and doesn't seek God. There are lots of possibilities here as to what motivated him, but the result is the same.

V. 9 is a famous verse. Who would have guessed it came as God's judgment on a formerly faithful king?

Vs. 10-14 Asa got mad at God, took it out on the prophet and hurt some of the godly people, I presume, who tried to get him to see reason. And then for at least two years nothing happened. God didn't punish him. Why not? It looks to me like God wanted to test Asa's heart. If there weren't an immediate punishment, would Asa come to Him, seek Him? Also, notice the prophet's name. You'll meet his son in 2 Chronicles 19.

Vs. 12 is a terrible commentary to Asa's anger and stubbornness. The seeking of God, that had been the mark and strength of his faith when he was young, was gone. When he was younger he had the faith to lead Israel against the largest army ever named in the OT. But after years of peace, when he was older, the frustration of a smaller, incessant irritation drove him to forget God and make an agreement with the ungodly to punish his enemy.

Now, knowing all of this, what did God and Ezra mean by saying that Asa remained wholly true all his days? It seems to me that although Asa got mad at God, he never went after other gods. He grew bitter and backslidden, but he never worshiped anyone but Yahweh.

As disciples, regardless of our acts of faith and obedience in the past, it is possible, in our comfort, to suddenly become enraged at something small and persistent that shreds our faith and our desire to seek God. I have heard of godly people saying and doing the most ungodly and unspiritual things to office clerks and family members over small, frustrating things. As disciples we need to keep our hearts before the Lord, always following and working in the harvest, aware of what the Spirit is showing us about ourselves. Sin is always dangerous. We always need to submit to God in the unexpected events that plague us and to seek God.

## **Romans 9:1-21**

So, what is this change of topic all about? Did Paul think, "I'll write eight chapters about salvation by faith and then eight chapters about something else?" When you read this section today, you have to wonder.

It seems to me that all of Romans has to do with the redemptive plan of God. Chapters 1-8 describe one purpose of God and one way to salvation and completion in Him. Chapters 9-11 describe one plan of God involving two peoples, the Jews and the church, and how these are distinct and yet still one plan. God didn't make a first trial and then come up with a better idea. Chapters 12-16 don't present any problem. They are practical chapters dealing with issues in the Roman church.

Chapters 9-11 expose a misunderstanding in the thoughts of some people. How could God begin the plan of redemption one way and then finish another way? Paul will show it was always one plan, and that Israel, the nation, will fulfill its destiny. Chapter 9 presents the biggest problem to our understanding; because Paul gets in the face of those who are "large of brain" and argumentative, basically saying to them, "Who are you to try to out-think God and tell Him what He does is unfair?" Remember those words back in Romans 3:4b, *That you may be justified in your words and prevail when you are judged.* God will come out righteous and fair. In chapter 9 Paul and the Spirit sound hard, but this will soften by the end of chapter 11. These arguments here, though hard to understand at first, are God's way of smoking out the arrogant and telling them to submit themselves and their understanding of the things to a wise, sovereign God. That is the same argument God used on Job and his friends.

Vs. 1-5 Paul will show that God's plan with the Jews did not fail in spite of what people thought. Notice that when he uses the word *belong*, it is still the present tense. These things still belong to the Jews.

Vs. 6-13 This is an interesting argument. When I read it, I thought, "Yeah, that's right." Abraham had Ishmael and Isaac had Esau. They were all descendants of Abraham, but did not belong to the promise.

V. 13 You have to understand OT history to understand this. God didn't dislike Esau because he was hairy or chewed with his mouth open. This has nothing to do with "love" in the emotional sense. Actually the quote is from the first chapter of Malachi. Both nations sinned against God. Both were taken into exile. Only one nation returned. Guess which one. Why did it return: God was faithful to His purpose and calling as promised to Abraham. It was all a part of God's eternal plan of redemption. If you really want to see this up close and personal, go back to Genesis and read about Esau. He was his own raw kind of person, but God still blessed Esau. He just wasn't a man of faith in the promise.

This is not saying that the church and Israel are the same because of faith. As seen in chapter 4, a true Jew not only had the blood connection to Abraham, but also had the faith connection to Abraham.

V. 14 The question here has to do with unfairness in God's calling and use of people. This is definitely a deep subject. The immediate subjects are Esau and then Pharaoh, but it will extend to the nation of Israel in a few verses. The only real answer Paul will give is that a person ought to trust God and not question His integrity. In essence, this is the same answer God gave to Job.

Vs. 15-21 This break at v. 21 is unfortunate. Keep reading to v. 24 to keep the thought together.

Vs. 15-16 What is said here needs to be understood along with God's love and wisdom. There is no injustice on God's part, but there might be a lot we don't understand.

Vs. 17-18 Pharaoh hardened his own heart and God then hardened his heart. God used this arrogant man for His purposes.

Vs. 19-21 The key to understanding what Paul is saying here, and what balances this argument, is v. 20. This is exactly what Job did. He questioned God. We know from the book of Job that many things were going on around Job and behind the scenes. God's answer to Job is simply to trust His wisdom, and Job shut his mouth and declared God righteous.

The thought to keep in mind is that God doesn't create anyone just to go to hell, but God can use those who resist Him for His own ends. We have too much Scripture telling us that God is good and doesn't desire anyone to be lost.

I think the way to understand this is by God's foreknowledge, mentioned in chapter 8. God knows who will come to Him and who won't. (For an interesting thought on this read John 6:64.) Once this is known, God has the right to mold and make and use a person as He wills. We do something similar. For example, in the past presidential election, guess who the large prison population in the US voted for: no one. The guilty forfeit their rights. Why you need those next verses, 22-24, is to see that God uses these people for His purpose and still shows them incredible patience and kindness, knowing full well that they will rebel against Him until they die. That can't be pleasant for a holy, loving God to be scorned and spit on by those He made and is seeking to save.

A final thought: When we come to Christ and become disciples, we also give up our rights to control or to lead our own lives. We live for Him and His glory, right? We submit to His purpose and His will, knowing that He is wise and loving and knows what is best. Right? Romans 8:28, again in the RSV, *We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.* The real issue is whether we really believe and trust that God is wise, loving and good. If so, then as disciples we can lay it all on the altar as we serve our Lord in the harvest.

## **Psalm 19**

It's interesting being in Romans and then reading this psalm.

Vs. 1-3 sound like Romans 1:19-20.

Vs. 4-6 Believe it or not, Paul will quote v. 4 in Romans 10 to show that the Jews all heard the Word of God.

Vs. 7-14 Think of these verses in terms of what Paul is saying in Romans 9. Anyone who would accuse God of being unfair in His dealings with people does not understand God or this time of harvest.

## **Proverbs 20:1**

To make anything an idol is dangerous. God brings trial, pain, and "pruning" into our lives to show us our need for Him and to make us stronger in Him. Putting our hope in wine or anything to "escape and ease the pain or make us forget or cope" is to be led astray. These things, like all things in submission to God, can be what He designed them to be. In Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, when Aslan brings the thaw and allows Bacchus (the Roman God of wine) into Narnia, Lucy remarks that if it were not for the presence of Aslan, she'd be afraid of Bacchus and his girls. The same should be true of us.