

**“Our Stubborn God”**  
**1 Kings 15-16**  
**March 19, 2017**

---

**INTRODUCTION:**

The three chapters we are covering today, 1 Kings 14-16, describe 9 kings of Israel and Judah. Eight of them were evil, and only one had a heart for God, King Asa of Judah. But even in the case of Asa, he sinned at the end by not trusting God when a crisis arose during his reign. If this were a baseball team, it wouldn't be a very good one. There would be eight terrible players and only one with any skills, but even this one had some glaring weaknesses. In an episode of *The Simpsons*, Homer Simpson summarized the Bible like this: “All these people are a mess...except this one guy.”

Why would God continue to put up with this people? There is only one explanation, and it is given to us in verses 4-5 of our text. **“Nevertheless, for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem, 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.”** Even the great King David failed in the matter of Uriah. But God had made a promise to David that one of his sons would reign as Israel's king forever. A lamp is a way of saying that someone is home. In this case, God is saying that he will not leave Jerusalem because of the promise he made. God was keeping his promise to bear with evil Judah and Israel. God is the most stubborn of any being in the universe when it comes to keeping his promise. Once we realize this, it changes our lives dramatically. Have you come to realize at a personal level the difference it makes when you trust the promise of God? It is the difference between life and death, between good and evil, between hope and despair. Let's consider the way God's promise transforms us by looking at one king who believed the promise and three who didn't.

**I. A King Who Believed the Promise**

Asa is an unexpected gift from God to the southern kingdom of Judah. Don't you love God's unexpected gifts? I well remember a large gift that was given to the church right after we completed our new building. The gift allowed us to pay off the entire debt on the building project and still have money to give to other needs, both within and outside the church. Asa was such a gift for Judah. From a human perspective, not much could be expected of him. His father was an evil king named Abijam. We don't read much about him, except the **“he walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God”** (15:3). He only reigned for three

years, so Asa was likely better acquainted with the reign of his grandfather, Rehoboam. As we saw last week, he too was an evil king, but with a much longer reign of eighteen years. Idolatry flourished under his reign and by his encouragement, to the point that the nation **“did according to all the abominations of the nations that the Lord drove out before the people of Israel”** (14:24). The queen mother during Asa’s reign seemed to be an especially prominent person. She was actually Asa’s grandmother, Rehoboam’s wife. She was a leader in the worship of the false goddess Asherah. So it would seem that all the significant people of influence in Asa’s life would lead him into idolatry. His is the classic American narrative of rags to riches, applied not toward material goods but spiritual. Asa went from spiritual rags to riches.

How was it that the pattern of religious evil that he received from his parents and grandparents was reversed? The Bible consistently gives only one answer to that question. In the words of Ephesians 2:8, it is “by grace through faith.” God was gracious to Asa and the outworking of that grace was to give him faith to believe in God’s promises. As he witnessed the sacrifices at the temple altar, he somehow came to see that forgiveness for his sins could be found not by human achievement but only through the blood of a God-approved sacrifice. And he heard about God’s promise to David to keep one of his sons on the throne, and he came to believe that he was that son and that he was to honor the God of David, Jehovah.

Believing God’s promises changed everything for Asa, and it can for you too. It doesn’t matter how many disadvantages you may have been saddled with in your life. When the promises of God become so real to you that you receive them and they begin to be the very foundation of your life, life springs up like flowers in the desert after a soaking rain. Notice what that looked like in Asa’s life. It looked like zeal for worship that became very costly. **“He put away the male cult prostitutes out of the land and removed all the idols that his fathers had made”** (15:12). One of the things pastors learn pretty quickly, either the easy way or the hard way, is that church members, as a rule, don’t like change. They don’t even like it when an unfamiliar song is chosen, or even when a familiar song is sung at a different tempo. Imagine the resistance encountered by Asa when he made such radical changes in Israel’s worship, worship practices that had by then been in place for over two decades.

We read of some of the resistance from a very prominent member of the royal family, Maacah the queen mother. Her resistance rose to the level that Asa had to remove her from her position as queen mother. Imagine such a bold action against your own grandmother. Asa possessed boldness and zeal for the worship of God that produced a reformation in Judah’s worship practices. And that reformation in Judah’s worship practices led to a flourishing of life throughout the nation.

How does this apply to us? Are our worship practices in need of reformation too? I believe that we are in constant need of such reformation, both personally and corporately. Let's think first about the need for the reformation of our personal worship practices. We need to be just as bold and ruthless in ridding our lives of idolatry as Asa was in his idol eradication plan. His grandmother had a favorite idol of the false goddess Asherah, and she had made an image of her. Asa cut it down and burned it. Our American idols of materialism, comfort, technological progress, efficiency and self-fulfillment must be dealt with similarly. I notice that Asa battled these idols through giving, as **“he brought into the house of the Lord the sacred gifts of his father and his own sacred gifts, silver, and gold, and vessels”** (15:15). One very good way to spot idols in our lives is to look at our budget. Money is always put in service of our gods. When we spot one of these idols, we deal with them violently through repentance.

Our practices in corporate worship must also come under this effort of reformation. Asa wasn't just concerned with his private worship. We too need to have a concern for the corporate worship of the church. I fear that for too many within the church corporate worship has become just another item to be consumed for the value it brings to the worshiper. People come looking for inspiration or entertainment or just to feel good about themselves. Asa's efforts at reformation of Judah's worship probably made him feel worse at first, not better. Who enjoys taking action against one's grandmother? But God calls us to value worship as a way to re-center our lives on him. If we would value it appropriately, then we would also value all the things required to make it true and life-giving. We would give ourselves and our gifts, counting it as the greatest privilege to do even simple things like serving as an usher or singing in the choir.

There is one more thing we need to note about Asa's life that was true because he believed God's promise. There was grace when he failed. Though Asa was numbered as one of Judah's good kings, most of the text about him describes a failure that occurred toward the end of his life. Baasha, the king of the northern kingdom of Israel, was working to fortify Ramah, a city only about five miles north of Jerusalem. Ramah was at a strategic location, lying at the crossroads of a major north-south and east-west trade route. Baasha's purposes are clear. He was trying to impose an economic chokehold on Judah. Instead of trusting the Lord, Asa responded by taking all the money that had been given to the temple and bribing Ben-hadad, the king of Syria, to come and attack Israel. His plan succeeded at first, producing the intended result. But Chronicles tells us that when a prophet of God came forward to rebuke Asa for his unbelief in this, he became so angry that he threw the prophet in prison. It was a massive failure, but not one that was unforgiven. We pray against and guard ourselves against just such failures. But sin is such that they still may come. But we can know that God's promises to us in Christ will not fail.

## II. Three Kings Who Didn't Believe

Chapter 16 describes five of Israel's kings, all of them evil. Let's look at just three of them. Zimri was a military officer who had engineered a coup against his predecessor, Elah. After murdering him and then wiping out every single male relative of Elah's predecessor, Baasha, Zimri reigned in the city of Tirzah for all of seven days. His was the briefest reign of all Israel's kings. It was so brief because it seemed that he didn't have the support of the military. Most of Israel's army was preparing to fight the Philistines in Gibbethon when they heard of the coup. They wanted another of their leaders, Omri, to be king. So they went and laid siege to Tirzah, the capital city of Israel at that time. Zimri despaired of all hope and decided to take his own life, burning the king's palace down around him.

Let's talk some about suicide. There are an average of 121 suicides in our nation every day, seventy percent of them by white males. It is the second leading cause of death among those aged 10-24. To end one's life in this way is to declare lordship over your own life, taking the right to your life from God's hands and putting it in your own. The Bible says that God numbers our days. We do not have the authority to do so, no matter how bleak things may appear to be. Zimri had claimed ultimate control over his life up to this point, and he maintains control even at the end. When we seek to control our lives, it never ends well, because only God is wise enough to control our lives.

I can't help but contrast Zimri with an earlier king in Israel, who was forced to flee for his life during a coup attempt that looked to be successful. King David fled Jerusalem when his son Absalom led a coup against him. David wrote Psalm 3 when that happened. He wrote the psalm on the eve of battle between his army and that of Absalom. Instead of being filled with despair and hopelessness, he prayed to the Lord with a confidence that the Lord was his shield. Then he wrote these words: **"I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around"** (Ps. 3:5-6). Do you see there that David was surrounded by two things? He was surrounded by his enemies, but also, and closer to him, by the Lord as his shield. And he had the confidence that nothing would be able to touch him but by the Lord's permission. I suppose most of us at one time or another have entertained thoughts of suicide. What should we do when that happens? We should recognize them as a temptation that comes from hell itself, and answer such temptation with the truth of God's word. He is a shield about me. That doesn't mean that suicide is an unforgiveable sin. It is not; but it is a sin.

Omri is the next evil king mentioned. Other than being told that he was an evil king and that he reigned for twelve years, we are given only one other detail about him. He moved Israel's capital city to Samaria, the land for which he

acquired and fortified. We actually know more about Omri from sources outside the Bible. For about a hundred years, the Assyrians referred to Israel as “Omri’s land.” He was apparently a gifted and effective leader. But that means nothing to the author of the Bible, because Omri **“did more evil than all who were before him”** (16:25). Greatness in the eyes of the world does not make one great in the eyes of the Lord.

Evil in Israel seems to reach a climax with King Ahab. As evil as Omri was, his son Ahab was far worse. He **“did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him”** (16:30). He made a poor choice for a wife when he married Jezebel, though it was undoubtedly seen as a shrewd political move in his day. She was a princess herself, the daughter of a Phoenician king. Phoenicia was a leading seafaring nation, and a partnership with such a nation would undoubtedly be a boon to Israel’s export and import business. But she was a devoted worshiper of Baal. Her father’s name, Ethbaal, means “Baal is with him.” Due at least in part from his wife’s influence, Ahab not only tolerated the worship of Baal, but became a Baal worshiper himself. Baal was a fertility god in Canaan. Baal worship was completely wicked. It was believed that he sent rain as he had sexual relations. So he was worshiped by people attempting to entice him to such actions by their own immoral practices. Young girls were forced into prostitution as part of this ritual. Evil was so unfettered in Ahab’s day that even the city of Jericho was rebuilt, thus defying the curse God had pronounced in Joshua’s day on anyone attempting to do so. But as we are going to see in the next chapter, God answers evil through a mighty prophet he will raise up, the great Elijah.

## **CONCLUSION:**

One good king believed God’s promise and three evil kings did not. Homer Simpson got it right this time. “All these people are a mess...except this one guy.” When the promise of life through the only perfect king, Jesus, is believed, there is no tragedy that can touch us. In his book *Don’t Waste Your Life*, John Piper tells of two elderly missionaries, one single her whole life and the other widowed. Ruby and Laura had given their lives to make Christ known in Cameroon. Then, unexpectedly, both were killed in a car accident. Piper asks, “Was that a tragedy?” Two lives driven by a passion to make Christ known among the poor now taken by a car accident? He answers his own question, “No, that isn’t a tragedy. That is glory. These lives were not wasted.” He goes on to say, “I will tell you what a tragedy is.” He then describes an article about a couple who took early retirement to move to Florida where they “cruise on their 30-foot trawler, play softball, and collect shells.” Piper concludes, “Picture them before Christ at the great day of judgment: ‘Look, Lord. See my shells.’ That is a tragedy!” Lives trusting in God’s promise through Christ end well, no matter how many setbacks may be encountered and no matter how many successes may be achieved.