

## **ASA: THE DELIGHT OF FULL DEVOTION, 2CHRON 14-16**

Return of the King #1

◆Heb.4:14 call to worship.

◆Heb.10:19-25 guide

◆**Intro:** Award-winning investigative journalist Petra Reski is one of the world's leading experts on the Italian mafia. She writes of the odd combination of faith and mobster-hood. For example, Sicilian Mafioso Marcello Fava, who later left his mafia clan, told an Italian journalist: "Before I had to kill someone, I would cross myself. I would say: 'Dear God, stand by me! Make sure nothing happens!' But I wasn't the only one who crossed himself beforehand and prayed to God. We all did." When mafia boss Bernardo Provenzano was arrested, the police found him with five Bibles, with hundreds of his own margin comments and passages underlined. In his home were 91 sacred statues, 73 of them Christ figures. Each one of them bore the inscription: *Jesus, I put my trust in you.* Mafia boss Michele Greco has four books in his prison cell: two liturgical books, the gospels, and a book entitled *Pray, Pray.*

◆"How do these things go together?", you might wonder, and well we should. And I point them out because there was a King of Judah around 869BC that had a surprising mixture of some very good things, and some contradictions.

◆It's the season of Lent, 40 days leading up to Easter Sunday, it's typically a time in the Church year for self-evaluation, repentance, and returning to God. Today we start a short series looking at Kings of Israel that are famous for making a

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turnaround in Israel's history, a return back to God and his ways. All this leads up to Easter, our celebration of the one True King, Jesus who did what no other could hope to do -bring us all the way back to God. That said, let's consider Asa. A little background is necessary.

◆ **Background:** King Asa was the fourth in line from King David, the "man after God's own heart" (Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa). Asa ruled the southern two tribes of Israel, commonly called Judah (see 2Ch15:8), after they split with the northern ten tribes called Israel under Solomon's wicked son, Rehoboam. You might know that Solomon took 700 foreign wives and even built religious shrines for their gods, which was his demise. His son Rehoboam followed his practices, as did Abijah, his son after him. In fact 1Kings 15:3 tells us that Abijah's "*heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God.*" He reigned three whole years. But in contrast we read in v14 that "*the heart of Asa was wholly devoted to the Lord all his days.*" He reigned over Judah for 41 years, while eight different kings would come and go over their sister nation, Israel in the north. Asa brought reform and returning to the people of Judah and there are a number of positive lessons we learn from him which are worth pointing out. And also, some strange contradictions. One of the good things we learn is...

◆ **1. Remove the impurities in your life that compete with God and holiness.** (Read **Ch14** here.) The land of Canaan was

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quite syncretistic religiously and the Hebrew people had joined them in it. "A little of this religion, a little of that one. Everybody can be right. Let's all coexist". Have you seen the car decal: COEXIST made out of symbols of differing religions/philosophies? (the crescent moon of Islam, the peace sign/pacifism, a gender equality symbol, the star of David/Judaism, a Wiccan symbol dotted with a satanist pentagram, the Chinese YinYang of Taoism, the cross of Christianity) This graphic captures ancient Canaan quiet well. Bear in mind that each of these beliefs are mutually exclusive, that is, they contradict each other and declare each other to be wrong. (But let's just all pretend they don't.) So you can see that our present culture is quite similar to King Asa's day.



◆ Asa's answer for his people was, "No. When it comes to true religion, we can't coexist." Asa brought blessing back to Judah by throwing out the things that competed with the true God's commands. He was rather industrious in his ventures. We read in 2 Chronicles that he broke down the altars to foreign gods. He removed the "high places" from the cities of Judah.

◆ [High places are raised platforms for religious ritual, sacrifice, casting of spells, etc. where a local deity would be worshipped. They were often on hills, or raised areas. Temple prostitution, both male and female, was typical of

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pagan religions as a fertility rite. They also included sexual orgies, witchcraft and even child sacrifice.]

◆ Destroying high places was not all Asa did. His grandmother (Queen Mother) built an Asherah pole of her own (a wooden or stone column representing the male organ, for the worship of the god Asherah). So Asa, impeached her, deposed her, however you want to say it. He removed her from authority. That's quite a move when it's your own family line and she was royalty two generations before you! But all this is what the scriptures call "doing right in the eyes of the Lord."

◆ B. What does this have to say to us?

◆ 1) First of all, if you are not a Christian you need to know that there is no such thing as everybody being right. And that means you are not off the hook, trying to stay neutral. If you think about it, you'll have to agree it's irrational. Sure a Buddhist can live a free life in America, have the right to vote, obey the laws, etc. In that sense it is actually the Christian underpinnings of America's melting pot that make coexistence of different cultures possible. But that in no way means Buddhism is true religion at the same time as any other religion. Yes, love all your neighbors, but that does not mean all religions teach the same thing. Hindus believe in thousands of gods. Muslims believe in one, as do Christians, but Muslims say Jesus is not him. Jesus said he was the only one. Buddhists don't even want continued conscious

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existence and don't believe in a heaven or afterlife. Hindus believe in many afterlives. One told me once that he must be kind and loving to me so that he does not reincarnate someday as my dog. So let's dispense with the misinformation that all religions are the same. Just as physical laws are true (gravity is consistent whether you're on drugs or not), and biological laws are real (fish don't live above water, so it is with spiritual things. Something is true. You ought to find out what and have good reasons for your conclusion.

◆2) How about if you are a follower of God? Are there things in your life that don't fit with the faith you profess in Jesus Christ? It's time to throw them out. You will experience the peace and blessing of God to the degree that you get rid of the things that draw you away from him.

*◆James 4:7-8 (NASB) Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

◆You may not be playing the hitman while praying to God. But maybe there are books and magazines under your bed that Christ would not agree to read with you. Or perhaps you are playing games, or watching shows that celebrate immorality, horror, and revenge. Maybe you are going places a follower of God ought not go. You pray to Jesus

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here, but you bow a different idol there. It's time to draw some lines in the sand.

◆ Have you ever wondered, why am I in this distress? How come other people talk about answered prayer but I can't seem to hear from God? Why do things just keep going wrong for me? Well it's not the only answer, but a lot of times is because we aren't making it a practice to clean the spiritual house.

◆ 2 Chronicles 15:2 (NIV) "Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.

◆ And guess what? Like dust balls, and hair balls, and food stains, and oil spots, sin builds up residue on the soul. The human soul needs regular washing that is only possible through Jesus. And we don't take care of it by some thoughtless, blanket confession: "Oh God forgive us all our many sins." Have you ever named one? Asa didn't just say, "All pagan worship is now illegal." He traveled from place to place, pulling down altars, grinding up idols, burning Asherahs,

◆ 2 Chronicles 14:3,5,6 He removed the foreign altars and the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles.. He removed the high places and incense altars in every town in Judah, and the kingdom was at peace under him. He built up the fortified cities of Judah, since the land was at

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peace. No one was at war with him during those years, for the LORD gave him rest.

◆ Do you want peace? Does your life feel like a war zone? Maybe it's time to demolish some things and return to the King. That's another example Asa brings us.

◆ **2. Seek God in your life. In your troubles call on God first.** (Read **Ch15** here.)

◆ 14:4 He commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to obey his laws and commands.

◆ 15:8 He repaired the altar of the LORD that was in front of the portico of the LORD'S temple.

◆ 15:12 They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul.

◆ 15:15 They sought God eagerly, and he was found by them. So the LORD gave them rest on every side.

◆ A. What are you noticing in the text? You never just throw some things out. If you don't replace them with better things, you'll just wind up buying the old things again. Nobody beats a bad habit without replacing it with another good habit.

◆ B. The perfect illustration is the battle with the Zerah the Cushite, from Egypt, in chapter 14:11! Asa was outnumbered but he called on God and won!

◆ Here's a little more history:

◆ 2 Chronicles 12:1-2 After Rehoboam's position as king was established and he had become strong, he and all Israel with him abandoned the law of the LORD. Because they had been unfaithful to

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the LORD, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem in the fifth year of King Rehoboam.

◆Rehoboam, Asa's grandfather didn't win against Egypt. Call on God people. Make it a habit. Pray every day, all during the day. Pray before a meeting. Pray when you walk in the house and things are about to get crazy. Pray after you've argued. Thank God when you are driving your car and it works. Ask God if you should buy that appliance or not. Call on God all the time. God isn't about to be an add-on in your life. Nazi Judge Roland Freisler once said,

◆"We and Christianity are the same in one thing only: We demand the **entire** person!"

◆One more thing we learn from Asa...

◆**3. Don't mix your standards. Theoretical orthodoxy combined with practical atheism doesn't work.** (Read **ch16** here.) The last five years of Asa's reign was a time of war, no longer a time of peace (v9). Baasha of the northern tribes of Israel invades Judah. Asa takes the booty from God's temple that he had put *in* there after the miraculous victory over Zerah, and sends it *out* to bribe Aram to attack Israel's army so they stop invading. So Asa's story begins with a war, a call on God, victory, and a prophet commending his faith. And it ends with a war, a call on a pagan King, a defeat, and a prophet condemning his lack of faith because he mixed his standards. And things go from bad to worse. Asa's rulership suffers (16:10), and his physical health



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suffers too (16:12b). Remember, Asa was God's man. He was a believer! That's what "his heart was wholly devoted" means. But he mixed his standards, just like the Italian Mafia. And where he once had health and peace, he ends up with war and disease.

◆**B.** Where are you mixing your standards? Am I being double-minded anywhere?

◆ You believe in marriage till death do us part; but you're cheating your wife by getting your satisfaction from porn.

◆ You say you want to be like Christ; but there's that certain sin you really don't mind.

◆ You'd never have an affair; but you watch them in detail on the silver screen.

◆ You hope to be pure in heaven someday; but you really don't want it now.

◆ You tell your son not to abuse alcohol, or electronic devices for that matter; but you do it because you're old enough to responsibly do things that are wrong.

◆ Now you might still be king of your house, and you might not be disabled like Asa, but you aren't healthy either. You sort of function normally but you can't push very hard. Listen, there are life consequences to our choices even as we follow God.

◆ **Conclusion:** Halfhearted faith suffers while whole hearted faith blesses. "Is there any hope?" you say. "I have mixed a great many things in my life." Thankfully there is a King whose power

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and Holy Spirit can live in you and overcome all sin. He has proved it by resurrecting from the dead.

◆ Hebrews 7:24-28 (NLT) But because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood lasts forever. Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.

◆ He is the kind of high priest we need because he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin. He has been set apart from sinners and has been given the highest place of honor in heaven. Unlike those other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices every day. They did this for their own sins first and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus did this once for all when he offered himself as the sacrifice for the people's sins. The law appointed high priests who were limited by human weakness. But after the law was given, God appointed his Son with an oath, and his Son has been made the perfect High Priest forever.