

# LEGACY

## One Man's Story

### LEGACY—ONE MAN'S STORY

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History is a fascinating subject. And complex. Try as we may, every historian presents a keyhole view of the chosen subject or period. It may not be an intentionally blindered view, but it is inevitably narrow, because they look from the outside in, after much time has passed, with limited information (no matter how thorough their research). And whatever information they may gather, some is left out as they seek reasonable or meaningful patterns for weaving the facts into a story.

The Bible is not a history book, although about one-third of its books are historical. And its recorded history is not comprehensive, but select, because the Holy Spirit has a purpose for its retelling—a communication aim. That aim is to unfold the story of God's redemptive love and the Redeemer who unfurled it. So every bit of Biblical history is in some way tethered to that greater story and purpose. Everything else was left on the cutting room floor.

1 and 2 Chronicles offer us a review of the history of God's chosen people, the Jews.

1 Chronicles identifies the patriarchs and the 12 tribes up to David in the first 9 chapters. The following 20 chapters are devoted to the accomplishments and legacy of King David.

2 Chronicles reports the greatness of the reign of Solomon, followed by the decline of the nation over the next two generations. Then, through the end of the record, the chronicler tracks a series of revivals, followed by decline, of successive kings.

From one point of view, what seems like endless cycles of revival, fading into idolatrous decline, could be discouraging—Will we never get it right?

From another point of view, the same cycle of revivals and declines reminds us that no matter how we have stumbled or fallen, the way back to God's favor remains open to those who will repent and return to Him.

Is the glass half empty, or half full? Confidence in God makes the difference.

For just one bright example of such a cycle as it unrolls, we'll look at the reign of Asa, son of Abijah. In three chapters of 2 Chronicles (14-16), we learn the sum of the life and legacy of Asa, king of Judah.

## Act One

*2 Chronicles 14:1* When Abijah died, he was buried in the City of David. Then his son Asa became the next king. There was peace in the land for ten years. <sup>2</sup> Asa did what was pleasing and good in the sight of the Lord his God. <sup>3</sup> He removed the foreign altars and the pagan shrines. He smashed the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah poles. <sup>4</sup> He commanded the people of Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their ancestors, and to obey his law and his commands. <sup>5</sup> Asa also removed the pagan shrines, as well as the incense altars from every one of Judah's towns. So Asa's kingdom enjoyed a period of peace. <sup>6</sup> During those peaceful years, he was able to build up the fortified towns throughout Judah. No one tried to make war against him at this time, for the Lord was giving him rest from his enemies.

Notice how Asa honored the Lord through his leadership:

*Asa did what was pleasing and good in the sight of the Lord his God.*

Would that every leader, both civic and clerical, would do the same. But there are too many competing goals and too many conflicting values. Yet, for this we pray.

Notice the deeds the Holy Spirit recalled:

*He removed the foreign altars and the pagan shrines. He smashed the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah poles. He commanded the people of Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their ancestors, and to obey his law and his commands. Asa also removed the pagan shrines, as well as the incense altars from every one of Judah's towns.*

That's a wonderful record of achievements. Yet, this brief paragraph is the record of ten years of leadership. Imagine for a moment all the things a king must do that were NOT mentioned!

My tenure as pastor in San Rafael has been over 36 years; yet, if I am remembered at all by the next generation, I'm sure their reference will be only one paragraph, or perhaps only one sentence. It's the nature of historical reflection to compress time and activities to a *summation of significance*.

Our current "cancel culture," driven by Critical Theorists, undermines much historic significance by ignoring the "big picture" implications, while illuminating details of which it disapproves—like the effort to erase the name of Sir Francis Drake from Marin County history, because during a brief period of his young life he assisted a cousin who owned a slave trading ship, even though he later eschewed the practice and accomplished so much to open up the globe to international exploration, discovery, and commerce. This is a Pharisaic approach to secular history, that strains at a gnat, while swallowing a camel.

While we may fill library shelves with endless records of board meetings and events and codes of law, “historical significance” can only be gained by a summary reflection that is distanced from the actual events. The passage of time is usually required in order to recognize the significance of our times.

That’s what made the sons of Issachar stand out from all the rest:

*1 Chronicles 12:32 From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders of the tribe with their relatives. All these men understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take.*

Some people try to beat life into the shape they want, while most just take life as it comes, but to understand the significance of the times in which we live and know the course to follow, is a supernatural gift of foresight from God.

Notice also the result of Asa’s godly leadership:

*So Asa’s kingdom enjoyed a period of peace. <sup>6</sup> During those peaceful years, he was able to build up the fortified towns throughout Judah. No one tried to make war against him at this time, for the Lord was giving him rest from his enemies.*

Peace in the kingdom. During that era of peace, Asa was able to build. With foresight, he built up fortifications and prepared a large army, while no enemy was threatening. This was only possible because THE LORD had given him rest.

The chronicler has given us a “big picture” reflection. Daily details of Asa’s relations and speeches and decisions are notably missing. The focus (as in all of God’s Word) is on the forest, not the individual trees, so that we might discover the direction and flow of God’s work in the earth.

We tend to get so fixated on individual trees, especially those that mark our least productive efforts, or those that mark our least enduring successes, that we seldom see the “forest” of our own legacy in the Lord. Pause right now, and reflect on your efforts to honor the Lord and make Him known to others—regardless of others’ responses or visible results. Can you see that bigger picture? Can you see how God has guided and blessed you?

Can you also see how much God made it possible for you, before and beyond and apart from your own efforts? Give Him thanks.

When an army from North Africa did attack Judah, Asa was ready. However, the invaders troops were three times as many as the Judean army. Something more was required to avoid defeat.

*2 Chronicles 14:11 Then Asa cried out to the Lord his God, “O Lord, no one but You can help the powerless against the mighty! Help us, O Lord our God, for we trust in You alone. It is in Your name that we have come against this vast horde. O Lord, You are our God; do not let mere men prevail against You!”*

Acknowledging their weaknesses and the limit of their ability to overcome such a horde, Asa prayed to God (always a good thing to do). Here's what the Lord did:

*2 Chronicles 14:12* So the Lord defeated the Ethiopians in the presence of Asa and the army of Judah, and the enemy fled. <sup>13</sup> Asa and his army pursued them as far as Gerar, and so many Ethiopians fell that they were unable to rally. They were destroyed by the Lord and His army, and the army of Judah carried off a vast amount of plunder.

Their victory was so clearly the Lord's doing, that the record says Asa and the army of Judah were *merely present*, while it was the Lord who defeated the Ethiopians!

The Ethiopians' defeat was unrecoverable. *"They were destroyed by the Lord AND His army."* It was a partnership, similar to the one God has with the church. Asa and his troops went to war (prayerfully). They fought hard and persistently. But it was the Lord who defeated their foes and gave them the victory. Then, they cleaned up the plunder.

So goes our spiritual warfare today, as well, if we call on the Lord. It will be hard fought and maybe hard won, requiring *your* effort and perhaps painful persistence, but the victory is assured because the Lord fights for us, especially invisibly, behind the scenes. Our enemies are "unable to rally" and we carry off the plunder.

Doesn't this also give us a picture of the final battle of the Last Days? Christ will return WITH His saints to war against the rebels. The Lord will give the victory in that Day, too. And we will fight in His name. Victoriously.

## **Act Two**

Chapter 15 chronicles some of Asa's religious reforms, spurred by a prophetic message he received.

*2 Chronicles 15:2* "Listen to me, Asa!" [Azariah] shouted. "Listen, all you people of Judah and Benjamin! The Lord will stay with you as long as you stay with Him! Whenever you seek Him, you will find Him. But if you abandon Him, He will abandon you. <sup>7</sup> Be strong and courageous, for your work will be rewarded."

So Asa removed the idols from the land and repaired the altar of the Lord.

How long has it been since you surveyed your own life for idols in which you have put your trust instead of the Lord? It's important to do this periodically, because idols tend to creep back into our lives.

And in what shape is the “altar of the Lord” (your habit of prayer)? Has it been neglected? Is it in disrepair as a result of disuse?

These are the “first works” which we must visit and revisit from time to time to keep the flame of faith alive and bright.

Then Asa called together all the people of the land to renew their covenant with the Lord. They rededicated themselves to follow the Lord closely.

*2 Chronicles 15:15 All in Judah were happy about this covenant, for they had entered into it with all their heart. They earnestly sought after God, and they found Him. And the Lord gave them rest from their enemies on every side.*

### **Act Three**

The final chapter of Asa’s reign (16), sadly, chronicles his late life failures.

His cousins, the Israelites invaded Judah and cut them off from the outside world by building fortified blockades at the roads in and out of the kingdom. This forced isolation was more than Asa was prepared for. His faith failed. He gathered up the silver and gold that had been dedicated to God and turned it over to the Aramean king to buy his protection.

It will never work in your favor to take what has been dedicated to the Lord for your own use. This is why we urge people, especially in a season of economic pressure like the present, to fulfill their tithe to the Lord. The tithe belongs to the Lord (the other 90% is yours to manage). If you refuse to return the full tithe to the Lord, He will not bless your faithlessness. He can do more with the 90% than you can do with 100%.

I know this may feel like an impossible loss, like you’re throwing away money you need, but it is actually an investment of faith. There is no more concrete way to demonstrate that you truly depend on the Lord to provide your needs. And He has promised to super-bless your faithful obedience in this matter.

Poor Asa! He lost it. When Hanani the prophet revealed to him his failure, Asa became angry and threw the prophet into prison. Don’t shoot the messenger!

In the end of his life, Asa developed a serious disease in his foot, but even then, he was unable to repent and return his faith to God. He trusted only in physicians, who could not help him. And so he died, in the 41<sup>st</sup> year of his reign.

It was no sin to trust in physicians, just as it is today. But to trust ONLY in physicians, instead of the Lord—that is a costly error. Do not look at this subject as an either/or proposition. It is both/and.

Medical science simply observes closely what God has created and how it works and can be repaired. Rightly practiced, it honors the Lord, our Creator, and He works with it and through it. And sometimes above and beyond it!

## **Your Legacy**

When your children and grandchildren, or your friends and acquaintances, look back and speak to one another about your life, what will they remember?

Your absence, when they needed you?

Your bad attitude, when they sought encouragement?

Your self-reliance, instead of God-dependence?

Or, your faith, and the wonderful works of God in your life?

Will they recall your allegiance to God's Word?

Will they remember hearing you pray over them?

Will they remind one another how you stood tall when people and circumstances opposed you?

What will be the story of *your* legacy?

What could you do about that *today*?

More importantly, what do you *intend* to do about that today? Take a few moments to think about it, and make a plan—just for the next step or two. Then, tell the Lord your intention and ask for His power and support.

The daily details of our lives may form the building blocks of our tomorrows; they cannot be generally dismissed as irrelevant. But our legacies will be crafted from the “big picture” elements of our lives, not the daily details. So, think big. Pray big. And do great things for God with what He gives you.