

Session 3

August 4, 2019

ACT WITH COURAGE

2 Chronicles 15:1-9

One would think that by now, King Asa would be riding high on the wave of his success. His reign of peace had allowed him to rebuild his cities and strengthen his military. His resounding defeat of Zerah (see chapter 14) enabled him to plunder the neighboring cities and expand his influence. So why would he need encouragement now? The answer is simple: with great success comes the potential of great pride. And great pride comes before an even greater fall! (Prov. 16:18). The prophet's encouraging words to Asa served to keep the king humble, as well as to keep him moving in the right direction. Three principles of encouragement are evident.

Encouragement comes from God's promises (vv. 1-2). Prophets are God's spokespersons. While we do not know who Azariah is (other than as the son of Oded), we do know who the Spirit of God is. For this reason, this prophet was a trustworthy messenger. Notice that the proclamation was not directed solely to the king, but to all of God's people (v. 2). And although the overall message is one of encouragement, the declaration is filled with conditional promises. The promises of God's presence, His accessibility, and His continued abiding are all dependent on the cooperation of Asa and the people. The encouragement is found in God's faithfulness to His promises. If the people did their part, God would do His.

Encouragement comes from God's faithfulness (vv. 3-7). In these verses, the prophet reminds Asa of Israel's general historical cycle of oppression—and its accompanying misery—followed by repentance, followed by deliverance (see especially Judges chapter 2; Judges 3:9; 3:15, et al.). Entire nations (regions and/or peoples) were crushed, as were individual cities, all as an act of God's judgment because of sin (v. 6). It's important to note that oppression on a national level always trickles down to misery at the personal level (v. 5). Even the daily activities of the average citizen were affected in these days of distress. Judges 5:6, for example, states "In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways." The prophet began this section with the *reasons* for Israel's demise: no vital connection to the one true God; no godly priests setting an example; and no instruction of God's word (v. 3). He ends this section with the *remedy*: "Be strong" and "don't be discouraged" (v. 7). The encouragement is found in God's faithfulness to reward those who steadfastly seek and serve Him.

Encouragement comes from God's reward (vv. 8-9). Emboldened by Azariah's affirmations, King Asa renewed his quest to clean up the kingdom. After approximately 15 years of his reign, there were still "detestable idols" in the land (v. 8). Whether leftovers from the past or newly constructed by resistant, stiff-necked people, there was a concerted effort to remove these pagan altars from the "whole land of Judah" as well as the outlying cities likely inherited from his father's reign before him (see 2 Chr. 13). While the altars to false and foreign gods were being destroyed throughout the land, the altar of the Lord was repaired and rededicated at the temple in Jerusalem. Once accomplished, King Asa took stock of his kingdom and gathered the people together at Jerusalem (see v. 10 ff). Not surprisingly, his kingdom had grown from an influx of defectors from the northern kingdom of Israel (v. 9). These had come not only to escape the

idolatrous ways of the north, but to serve the one true God and enjoy the blessings that came with commitment to Him. In this case, the encouragement is found in receiving God's blessings for doing things God's way.