

March 1, 2023, Lenten Midweek 2

Blood Money: Asa

2 Chronicles 14:1–7; 16:1–13

Psalms 33:10–22; Colossians 1:15–20; Matthew 26:14–16; 27:3–6

Hymns: LSB 432, 575, 423

Last week, on Ash Wednesday, we began our consideration of the good kings of Judah with the great King David. Tonight, we skip a few kings, including Solomon, and continue with David’s great-great-grandson Asa.

We read in the Book of 2 Chronicles, “*Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God*” (14:2). This is in stark contrast to Rehoboam, the son of Solomon and grandfather of Asa. Rehoboam “*did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the Lord*” (12:14). The kingdom was divided into Israel in the north and Judah in the south, which were at constant war. Egypt also came up against Judah. Although Jerusalem and Judah retained strength from the days of Kings David and Solomon, there was no rest or peace in the land God had given them. Abijah, Asa’s father, also “*walked in all the sins that his father did . . . and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God*” (1 Kings 15:3).

So, King Asa ascended to the throne in a difficult time, but as it is written, ***“The land had rest for ten years”*** (2 Chronicles 14:1). Asa understood why: ***“We have sought [the Lord], and he has given us peace on every side”*** (14:7).

Ten years of peace must have seemed like an eternity for the Judeans, who had endured constant struggle to gain and retain the Promised Land. Peace did not come from Asa’s strength nor even his faithfulness, but as a gift of the Lord. Then after the ten years of peace, an army of a million Ethiopians and Libyans came up to Judah. This was twice the army of Judah, but King Asa cried to the Lord, ***“We rely on you,”*** and was given a great victory (14:11).

After thirty-five years of ruling, Asa faced a new challenge. Israel, the Northern Kingdom, which had been docile but never friendly to Judah was militarizing the border. Baasha, the king of Israel, was building a fortress at Ramah. Ramah was a city on the border between Judah and Israel to the north. The point of this was to ***“permit no one to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah”*** (16:1). That is, Baasha would make difficult any travel and trade to pass through Judah.

A major source of Judah's wealth was trade from the Mesopotamian region of the Tigris and Euphrates and the Hittite region to the north to Egypt and Africa to the south. This was a serious act of war, and Asa would not stand for it.

We would expect that a good king of Judah would turn to God for help in this crisis. Hadn't the Lord devastated a million-man army of Ethiopians and Libyans? And so, Asa turned to the temple, the place of God's presence. But did he go there to seek the Lord in prayer? Did he go to seek atonement for his sins? Did he go to hear the Word of God?

No! He went to raid God's house! He ***“took silver and gold from the treasures of the house of the Lord”*** (16:2). He looted the very temple Solomon had built on the land David bought. He robbed God's house to bribe Ben-hadad of Syria. Syria was neutral in the ongoing cold war, but Asa gave lavishly to Ben-hadad in Damascus to break his covenant with the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

King Asa of Judah hired foreign mercenaries to distract Israel, attacking from the north, thereby forcing Israel to cease its adventurism on the border of Judah.

King Asa turned the temple treasury into blood money, which bought the lives of his enemies.

Asa got the result he wanted. The Syrians attacked Israel and raided her northern cities, which forced King Baasha to abandon Ramah and deal with the threat from Syria. But all was not well in Judah, nonetheless.

Unbelievably, after facing down a massive army with the Lord's protection, Asa plundered the house of God to buy protection from a pagan king. When Hanani the seer came to call the king back to God, rather than repenting, Asa threw the prophet in prison! Hanani had revealed that God would have given him victory over Israel and Syria if only the king had inquired. Alas, in his latter days, King Asa grew hostile to the Word of God and inflicted cruelties on his people.

As an illustration and culmination of his turning away from God, Asa suffered from a debilitating disease of his feet. Scripture says, ***“Yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but sought help from physicians”*** (16:12).

Apparently, Asa had given up the practice of seeking God and relying on him for every need of body and soul. So, he died of the disease and was buried with his fathers.

Remember, the kingdom of Asa was good and prosperous. It was not one of the bad times in the history of Judah. And yet King Asa couldn't provide a lasting peace. He couldn't even survive foot disease. How success, peace, and rest had corrupted the heart of King Asa! As for so many of us, success became a stumbling block that led him to trust in himself and his resources in a time of trouble.

Still, we know that the Lord gives support to the faithful. Hanani told Asa, ***“The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him”*** (16:9). Hanani revealed that the Lord would have given not only Israel but also the Syrians into the hand of Judah. We don't know about the foot disease, but certainly Asa could have done no better than to call on the name of the Lord in that trouble as well. For we know that the Lord hears the prayers of the faithful.

God will stop at nothing to provide rest and peace for his people. Asa couldn't do it. Even good King Asa's heart was not pure before the Lord, and his body could not bear up against the ravages of sin.

If we are to have the peace of God, we need a king to lead us into paths of righteousness. This king was promised to David as his son who would reign forever. This king was promised to Isaiah as the Prince of Peace.

This Son of Asa would have to come into the royal city and bring peace to his people. First, he would take our illnesses and bear our diseases (Matthew 8:17). And having shouldered the burdens of the bodily manifestation of sin, and after he was acclaimed the Son of David and King of Israel on Palm Sunday, Jesus would come into the temple during Holy Week.

So, the King of Judah went into the temple and saw the animal sellers and money-changers. But unlike Asa, Jesus didn't come for the money! He didn't want the money in the temple treasury. Instead, he upset the tables and poured out the coins, upset the priests and elders who relied on that money to maintain their place.

He had come to cleanse the temple of that corrupting influence, which had turned the house of God, the house of prayer, into a robbers' den.

The Son of Asa also sat at the treasury, not to find wealthy men to ask for donations, but to focus on a poor widow. The one without power or pretense gave more than the wealthiest tither, for she gave her life.

How differently this King viewed the treasures of the temple than his father Asa. He could see past the money, the treasures of the temple, to the purpose of the temple—forgiveness and peace with God.

So easily did silver and gold tempt the guardians of the temple treasury that they sought to cast out their rightful King by means of treasure. It was surely far less than Asa had taken, but for thirty pieces of the temple's silver, they bought the life of Jesus, the Son of Asa.

This payment was given to Judas to break his covenant with his Lord and give him over to the pagan governor, Pontius Pilate. How the tables are turned! In fact, when Judas saw what horror was wrought by his betrayal, he tried to return the money. But it could not be! This blood money could never reenter the temple.

It had accomplished its unholy purpose and could never be returned to God—as if the rest of the filthy loot in the temple were not already defiled by the wicked hearts of the chief priests and the elders who controlled it.

But indeed, God’s purposes were not thwarted. The Son of David had come and would be the King of Salem in Jerusalem, the city of peace. From the temple treasury came blood money, which bought redemption. By means of silver from the house of the Lord, the King of the Judeans was hanged on a cross. The Son of Asa paid the price for peace in His own blood.

All the money in the temple or in all Jerusalem couldn’t bring peace. It wasn’t silver or gold which were needed to redeem Asa and Judah and bring peace; the peace we need isn’t from a hostile neighbor. The peace we need is with God, whom we’ve constantly put aside in our fleeting days of rest.

When the peace of the world is not enough, we see that King Jesus has come to give us the victory over sin and death. It was the blood that he shed that brings peace.

And this peace is not for ten or thirty-five years, but a peace for eternity and an eternal Sabbath rest for the people of God.

This is a peace on which we can rely. Indeed there is nothing else in which we trust but the blood of King Jesus, Son of Asa, the Prince of Peace.

Amen