

## SESSION 5

# REMEMBER GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

### ▶ **The Point**

The God who guided you in the past will guide you now and in the future.

### ▶ **The Passage**

2 Chronicles 16:1-13

### ▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

For years I had the privilege of taking students on a weeklong backpacking trip into the high mountains of the Sierra Nevada range in California. The terrain was incredibly rugged, but the views were incredible. Each year we highlighted the importance of watching your surroundings and being aware of where you were at all times. We stressed this because, in case someone got lost, he could find his way back to the starting place.

Without fail every year, a few students failed to listen to their guide and got lost. After a search, someone would personally guide them back to camp. When asked what happened, they told the same story: they couldn't remember the right way to go.

Too often we do the same thing. We rely on God to do something in our lives only to forget the next time what it was He did for us. King Asa was no exception to this. Asa had been an exceptional ruler through most of his reign, but he hit a period in his life when he "forgot to remember."

### ▶ **The Setting**

King Asa was a tower of strength throughout most of his reign. He defeated Zerah the Ethiopian and called his nation to a solemn assembly to renew their commitment to Yahweh. As a result, the Southern Kingdom of Judah rested in peace for about twenty years. But then its rival kingdom Israel raised its belligerent head led by its king Baasha.

## What does the Bible say?

**Store cities** (v. 4)—Cities containing storehouses built to gather, preserve, and protect harvested crops from the weather and animals.

**Seer** (v. 7)—Seer in this context is another word for a prophet of God.

### **2 Chronicles 16:1-13**

<sup>1</sup> In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might permit no one to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. <sup>2</sup> Then Asa took silver and gold from the treasures of the house of the LORD and the king's house and sent them to Ben-hadad king of Syria, who lived in Damascus, saying, <sup>3</sup> "There is a covenant between me and you, as there was between my father and your father. Behold, I am sending to you silver and gold. Go, break your covenant with Baasha king of Israel, that he may withdraw from me."

<sup>4</sup> And Ben-hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and they conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim, and all the store cities of Naphtali. <sup>5</sup> And when Baasha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah and let his work cease. <sup>6</sup> Then King Asa took all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, with which Baasha had been building, and with them he built Geba and Mizpah.

<sup>7</sup> At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, "Because you relied on the king of Syria, and did not rely on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped you. <sup>8</sup> Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the LORD, he gave them into your hand. <sup>9</sup> For 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. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars."

<sup>10</sup> Then Asa was angry with the seer and put him in the stocks in prison, for he was in a rage with him because of this. And Asa inflicted cruelties upon some of the people at the same time. <sup>11</sup> The acts of Asa, from first to last, are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. <sup>12</sup> In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe. Yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but sought help from physicians. <sup>13</sup> And Asa slept with his fathers, dying in the forty-first year of his reign.





## 2 Chronicles 16:1-6 Commentary

**[Verse 1]** The people of Judah were living in peace. However, in **the thirty-sixth year** of Asa's rule, King **Baasha** of Israel (908–886 BC), declared war on Judah. [The dating of Asa's rule in 2 Chronicles is difficult to harmonize with the rule of King Baasha of the Northern Kingdom of Israel given in 1 Kings (15:33; 16:8). Some scholars suggest that "the thirty-sixth year" was the length of time since the division of the United Monarchy into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, not the beginning of Asa's rule. Using that method, the chronology for both kings works. Otherwise the chronology is difficult to harmonize.] Leading his forces south, Baasha captured and fortified the city of **Ramah**, which was situated on a major north-south road along a ridge. Ramah was part of Benjamin's territory and only about five miles north of Jerusalem. This strategic action blockaded all movements in and out of Judah, threatening commerce, communications, and security.

**[Verse 2]** Instead of turning to God, Asa sought a political solution. He removed the silver and gold from the Jerusalem temple and his palace to bribe the king of Aram, Ben-hadad I. The Arameans were a loose confederation of cities and settlements in what is now modern Syria. They were long-time enemies of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Asa obviously saw the chance to open a second front against Baasha's army. From a military perspective, this seemed like a strategically shrewd move.

The greatest tragedy of this situation was that Asa, with one action, virtually annulled the results of his own close relationship with the Lord. He totally compromised his trust in God for his nation's security by not seeking God and instead putting his confidence in an alliance with a pagan king.

**[Verse 3]** Asa invoked the legacy of an earlier treaty Asa's father, Abijah, had made with Ben-hadad's father, Tabrimmon. Asa wrote to Ben-hadad reminding him of their fathers' pact and asking him to renew it. With gold and silver, Asa sought to bribe the pagan ruler into breaking a non-aggression treaty he had made with Baasha of Israel. Asa's strategy was that having Aram attack Israel from the north would force Baasha to withdraw his troops from the south.

**[Verse 4]** Ben-hadad agreed to Asa's offer and accepted the gifts of silver and gold. Ben-hadad immediately ordered his military commanders to invade Israel and attack its northern cities in the region of Upper Galilee as far south as the Sea of Galilee, traveling into Israel on the strategic main international highway. The Arameans, in sort of a blitzkrieg attack, quickly took the town of **Ijon**, which lay on the route into Israel. From there they marched on the cities of **Dan** and **Abel-maim**. Finally they attacked the store **cities of Naphtali**. Store cities were cities built with storehouses to gather, preserve, and protect harvested crops from the weather and animals.

**[Verses 5-6]** When Baasha heard about the Aramean invasion he immediately ceased his combat operations in the south and abandoned his fortifications at **Ramah**. King Asa rushed to take advantage of the situation. His troops demolished Baasha's defensive fortifications at Ramah. They took the stones and timbers from the fortifications and moved them north to build up the defenses of **Geba** and **Mizpah**. Geba was in the territory of Benjamin (Josh. 18:24).





## 2 Chronicles 16:7-9 Commentary

**[Verse 7]** Believers must not forget what God has done in the past and what He can do in the present and the future. Furthermore, we must never forget that the omniscient God sees everything. This was true for Asa. God sent the seer **Hanani** to confront Asa. **Seer** is the English translation for two different Hebrew terms (*roeh*; *hozeh*). Along with a third term *nabi* (often translated “prophet”), they all refer to someone called and inspired by God to reveal His word. **Hanani** delivered a scathing message of rebuke to Asa. He told Asa it did not please God that Asa had relied on his alliance with the pagan king of Aram instead of Yahweh to battle Baasha. The Hebrew term for **relied on** is the same term used in 2 Chronicles 14:11 that described Asa’s reliance on the Lord to defeat Zerah the Ethiopian. The seer stated that because Asa had not relied on God, and, though he had beaten Baasha, the Arameans had escaped Asa. Hanani’s words seem to imply that if Asa had trusted the Lord he would not only have repelled Israel, but also conquered Aram. It is likely Aram would have aided Israel, but with the Lord’s help Judah would have crushed them both. In addition, although not stated in the text, Asa would not have forfeited all the gold and silver he spent to bribe Ben-hadad.

**[Verse 8]** Hanani continued his dressing-down of Asa. He asked rhetorically if it was not true that the Ethiopians and the **Libyans** were a formidable enemy. They had been an enormous army with chariots and horsemen (2 Chron. 12:3; 14:9,11). The seer reminded Asa that, despite his overwhelming military disadvantage, when Asa put his full trust in the Lord he had won! Asa’s victory over Zerah the Ethiopian was not due to Asa’s clever strategy, but entirely because of his dependence upon God’s power. So why had he forgotten?

**[Verse 9]** Hanani then made a significant theological statement. He said, **“For 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.”** This anthropomorphic description signified God’s omnipresence and omniscience (see also Pss. 33:18; 34:15; Prov. 15:3; Zech. 4:10). No problem exists that the Lord is not aware of and from which He cannot rescue His people, if they will trust Him to do so.

God is actually watching and waiting for opportunities to support those who wholeheartedly trust in Him. He is certainly more capable than some pagan king and far more effective. Asa’s scheme to involve Ben-hadad and the Arameans was reckless. The Hebrew term translated, **“You have done foolishly,”** is the very same word the prophet Samuel used to admonish King Saul. Due to Samuel not arriving and the Israelite army beginning to dissolve as men left him, Saul had rashly made an illegitimate burnt offering before fighting against the Philistines (1 Sam. 13:7-10). His arrogance cost him and his progeny their claim to Israel’s royal throne (vv. 11-14).

As for Asa, his impertinence against Yahweh cost him and Judah the peace and security they had long enjoyed under God’s watchful eye. Hanani declared that Asa would suffer wars from that point onward in his reign as king of Judah.





## 2 Chronicles 16:10-13 Commentary

**[Verse 10]** Pride is a hard emotion to resist. Asa became enraged at Hanani and threw him in **prison**. Asa's fury was not limited just to Hanani. Other people suffered the king's wrath. It's possible Asa was so enraged at Hanani's message that he brutally oppressed other people who were Hanani's supporters.<sup>2</sup> Another possibility is such actions were due to the king exhibiting symptoms of irrational paranoia that sometimes afflicts kings and dictators whose actions are challenged. Rather than humbling himself and admitting his sin, Asa became enraged that Hanani would question the king's actions. Apparently Asa erroneously thought incarcerating the seer would, in effect, shut him up and alleviate the problem.

**[Verse 11]** The Chronicler closed this section with what amounts to a footnote on the life of King Asa. He noted that the events of Asa's reign were written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. Ezra also referenced other works in 1 and 2 Chronicles such as: "the Chronicles of Samuel the seer," "the Chronicles of Nathan the prophet," "the Chronicles of Gad the seer" (1 Chron. 29:29), and "the chronicles of Shemaiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer" (2 Chron. 12:15). Unfortunately, no copies of those books survive. Nonetheless, Ezra's references show how he, like any good historian, carefully researched many sources to verify his facts.

**[Verse 12]** Ezra documented the final, tragic days of King Asa's life. In Asa's thirty-ninth year as king, he developed a foot **disease**. The text does not state the disease was punishment for his sin as were the wars. The exact nature of the disease is not stated. In those days the diagnosis and treatment of most ailments was limited. Physicians had little understanding of human anatomy and even less about the nature of disease. Salves, ointments, and herbs were about the extent of the medicine available.

The saddest part of these final years of Asa was that he would not turn to the Lord for the cure of his disease. Instead, almost inexplicably, he relied exclusively on physicians, even as the disease worsened in its severity. Asa had fallen a long way from his early days when he unwaveringly depended on God for everything. The explanation for his arrogant attitude is difficult to discern. Perhaps it was his stubborn pride, or maybe he felt he was being punished unjustly for his lack of faith, or maybe it was just senility that sometimes comes with old age. We simply do not know; but, it inevitably led to his final demise.

**[Verse 13]** Ezra concluded his account of the life of Asa with the king's death. Asa died in his forty-first year of rule. The length of his reign was a long time for a monarch to rule even by modern standards. He was laid to rest in a tomb he had hewn for himself in Jerusalem, the city of David (16:14). His people built a fire in his honor, signifying the esteem they held for him (see 21:19; Jer. 34:5).

1. For more information on this issue of chronology, see J. A. Thompson, 1, 2 Chronicles, vol. 9, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 273–74.

2. *Ibid.*, 275.



5 minutes

# LIVE IT OUT

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to page 120 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week.



## Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Write.** Make a list of truths from God’s Word you have learned recently. Evaluate how you responded to each one and, if necessary, what you could have done differently.
- ▶ **Memorize.** As a reminder of why you can always trust God, memorize 2 Chronicles 16:9a: “For 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.”
- ▶ **Speak.** If you know someone who needs a course correction, ask God for direction in how to speak the truth in love to him or her. Consider carefully your words and pray for the person’s openness to hear the truth from God’s Word.

## Wrap It Up

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the final paragraph from page 120 of the PSG:

Just as one can get lost in the wilderness, we can get lost in life if we “forget to remember.” The God who guided us in the past, will lead us into the future.

**PRAY:** Conclude by thanking God for blessing you in the past. Ask God to help you remember these examples of overcoming in the future.



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