



SESSION 2

DEPEND ON GOD

▶ **The Point**

God is greater than any challenge we face.

▶ **The Passage**

2 Chronicles 14:9-15

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

It's great to have the right tools when you need them—those things you can always rely on to get the job done. But what if the “job” is just to get through life? What can you rely on when you face a challenging decision or everything seems to be going against you?

- ▶ Some people rely on a horoscope or fortune-teller to guide them in dealing with the daily struggles of life.
- ▶ Some people rely on alcohol or other drugs as a way to cope with challenges.
- ▶ Some people just look in the mirror and say, “I can handle this myself.”
- ▶ Some people let chance make their decisions. They gamble by flipping a coin while ignoring the words on that coin: In God we trust.

Instead, King Asa gave us the right model to follow. He knew and understood what it meant to fully depend on God and turn to Him first when facing an incredibly overwhelming challenge.

▶ **The Setting**

The Kingdom of Judah had enjoyed a period of peace due to King Asa's instituting an extensive series of religious reforms. He had removed the paganism that polluted the nation's spiritual environment and restored worship of Yahweh, the true God. King Asa also had hardened his cities' defenses and organized his fighting forces. However, Judah's tranquility was eventually broken. A new enemy's approach forced Asa's realm into war. Asa, however, continued his reliance on God for strength.

What does the Bible say?

The Ethiopian (v. 9)—The identity of the Ethiopians is uncertain. Some believe them to be the Nubians, who were located south of Egypt, while others believe them to be a Bedouin group living near Judah.

2 Chronicles 14:9-15

⁹ **Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots, and came as far as Mareshah.**

¹⁰ **And Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up their lines of battle in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah.**

¹¹ **And Asa cried to the LORD his God, “O LORD, there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, you are our God; let not man prevail against you.”**

¹² **So the LORD defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled.**

¹³ **Asa and the people who were with him pursued them as far as Gerar, and the Ethiopians fell until none remained alive, for they were broken before the LORD and his army. The men of Judah carried away very much spoil.**

¹⁴ **And they attacked all the cities around Gerar, for the fear of the LORD was upon them. They plundered all the cities, for there was much plunder in them.**

¹⁵ **And they struck down the tents of those who had livestock and carried away sheep in abundance and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.**



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

2 Chronicles 14:9-10

⁹ Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots, and came as far as Mareshah. ¹⁰ And Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up their lines of battle in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 2 Chronicles 14:9-10 on page 91 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to describe the army that Asa and his people faced.

RECAP: King Asa and the nation of Judah had experienced a time of peace and the people had accomplished much good work, but the winds of change were coming. No one ever wants to go into war, but this battle especially looked like one Asa and his army would want to avoid. It would have been far easier for them to stay within the newly fortified cities, but that’s not how battles are won.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 91 of the PSG: **“What do you most appreciate about Asa’s prayer?”**

RECAP: Asa had learned from his father that God is available to help no matter how big or small the challenge ahead may be. Asa knew the outcome of their battle was not going to be determined by man alone. So he cried out to God in prayer. He praised God for who He was and His consistent availability to help both those in positions of power and those who have no strength in themselves. Because Asa knew nothing was impossible for God, he asked God specifically to help them by providing the might and strength they needed.

2 Chronicles 14:9-10 Commentary

[Verse 9] Judah's period of peace (2 Chron. 14:1) ended with a threat from a foreign enemy. The Chronicler (Ezra) reported that Judah was invaded by the army of **Zerah the Ethiopian**. The exact national identity of Zerah and his army is uncertain. The ancient kingdom of Ethiopia, equated with the kingdom of Nubia, was located south of Egypt. At differing times the kingdom of ancient Ethiopia had flexible boundaries and may have been made up of differing tribes of people.

Some commentators believe this invading army may have been Bedouin Arabs (they possessed camels—v. 15)—raiders from the southern desert. Others suggest that Zerah was the general of a garrison of mercenary troops under the command of the Egyptian pharaoh. Previously, in the fifth year of the reign of King Rehoboam of Judah (931/0–913 BC), King Shishak of Egypt invaded Judah. He looted the treasuries of both the temple and the royal palace (1 Kings 14:25-26). The Chronicler provided additional information concerning this invasion. First, the invaders under Shishak “took the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem” (2 Chron. 12:4). The Chronicler also indicated that the Egyptian force included Ethiopians (v. 3). After conquering Jerusalem, the Egyptian forces moved further north into the Northern Kingdom of Israel. For reasons which are not clear, Pharaoh Shishak eventually withdrew from both Israel and Judah. Some suggest that Shishak left a mercenary force under the leadership of Zerah the Ethiopian in the region of Gerar to both guard and defend Egypt's northern frontier.

[Verse 10] Asa marched his soldiers to engage Zerah's forces in battle. They faced off in the Zephathah Valley at Mareshah, located in the Judean foothills (known as the Shephelah) in south-central Israel. **Zephathah** means “watchtower,” which suggests that the two armies could look across the valley at each other. **Mareshah** means “summit” or “top of a mountain.” It was a Canaanite city that had been annexed into Judah's territory. It was located about thirty miles southwest of Jerusalem and about four miles northeast of Lachish. It had long before been fortified by Asa's grandfather Rehoboam (11:8). That may be why Zerah stopped his advance there.

Upon their arrival, Asa strategically deployed his troops in a battle formation to combat Zerah's army. His men looked across the valley and saw the invading army. They must have felt great trepidation, yet they were ready to fight and die defending their homeland. But Asa had one more thing he needed to do before engaging the invaders. He had a powerful ally that Zerah knew not of!



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

2 Chronicles 14:11

11 And Asa cried to the LORD his God, "O LORD, there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, you are our God; let not man prevail against you."

READ: Ask a group member to again read aloud 2 Chronicles 14:11 on page 91 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to share background for Asa's use of God's covenant name in his prayer.

RECAP: We're not going into a battle like Asa was facing, but we face challenging struggles every day of our lives. Many of those challenges confront us with odds that are not in our favor. Many of those battles and challenges look like impossibilities for us to overcome. Many of us would rather just stay within our own walls and pretend like the battles are not even there. In those moments, we need to follow Asa's example and cry out to a God who specializes in the impossible. God is there to help us, just as He was there to help Asa.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 92 of the PSG: **"What does dependence upon God look like in the life of a believer?"**

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity, "Facing Our Challenges" on page 93 of the PSG to help them.

Choose one of the following images of challenges that people face. Then write what you would say to God to profess your dependence upon Him in that situation. [PSG has four images from which to choose.]

TRANSITION: We should call on God when problems arise. In the next verses, we see that we should also trust in God as we face our problems.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What principles of prayer can we learn from Asa's example?

2 Chronicles 14:11 Commentary

[Verse 11] What was it Asa still had to do? Asa prayed. He cried out to Yahweh his God. It was not the act of a desperate man facing a crisis and then suddenly turning to God. Asa was only doing what he had talked about and modeled for years. He had long before removed the high places and other things associated with the false gods that had contaminated his nation's faith; he and his people had put their full trust back in Israel's true Deity, Yahweh.

Asa began his prayer by addressing God by name: *Yahweh* (translated as "**LORD**"). Yahweh is the covenant name by which God had revealed Himself to Moses and the Israelites and by which He had made the covenant relationship with them. Asa's addressing God by His covenant name demonstrated his intimate relationship with God. The first part of Asa's statement, translated as "**there is none like you,**" is a clear theological affirmation of God's uniqueness in all the universe. There is no being equal in power to God, which is why Asa confidently turned to Him in this situation. Taken with the rest of Asa's words, the overall meaning of his prayer is that God can help anyone He wants and makes no distinction between the mighty and the weak. It is no harder for God to assist the powerless than it is for Him to aid the powerful.

In this case, Asa correctly perceived himself and his army to be the weak one in dire need of the Lord's help. He nonetheless proclaimed with great faith that nothing is beyond God's capability. He committed himself humbly to the Lord and expected the impossible, not unlike the father of the boy Jesus healed from demon possession (Mark 9:14-27; see esp. vv. 23-24).

Asa invoked the name of Yahweh (trans. "**LORD**") a second time, telling Him that Asa and his army trusted and depended entirely on Him. He audaciously reminded the Lord that it was in His name that they were fighting this war. So, in a way, Asa was putting the Lord's reputation on the line. Asa then used the divine name a third time, acknowledging Yahweh as the God of the covenant made with Israel. For that reason, the king was confident that no mere mortal could possibly prevail against Him. In this case, even Zerah with all his massive forces could not defeat the almighty Lord of Hosts!

2 Chronicles 14:12-15 Commentary

[Verses 12-13] King Asa and his soldiers trusted in God when faced with the massive enemy army of Zerah, and so it was that the Lord routed the Ethiopians. Note whom Ezra credited for the victory: the Lord. The exact details of how He did it are not given. Whatever the Lord's method may have been, the Ethiopians were crushed and fled the field of battle!

Judah was victorious, and Asa's warriors pursued the Ethiopians as far as Gerar. Gerar was a city between Gaza and Beersheba over twenty miles to the southwest of Mareshah. Gerar was on Judah's southern border with the Negev (a desert region) and the fastest way for the Ethiopians to get back to their own territory.

The Ethiopians fell in such numbers that there were no survivors. Note again how Ezra gave the glory to God. The Ethiopians were thoroughly vanquished by the Lord and his army. It was a holy war; the army of Judah was the Lord's army.

The Chronicler also reported that the army of Judah carried off a large amount of plunder. It was the common practice of victors in ancient wars to take whatever valuables they could from their defeated enemies. It was considered their rightful reward for risking life and limb in battle. In this instance, the spoils were probably military equipment, other provisions, and treasures of gold, silver, and so forth formerly possessed by the defeated, dead Ethiopians.

[Verse 14] Asa's soldiers then continued their plunder attacks on the cities around Gerar. Ezra wrote, the fear of the Lord had overtaken the citizens, who probably fled their cities. The text does not indicate the relationship of these cities to the Ethiopians. However, given the actions of the army of Judah these cities must have been aiding the Ethiopians in some way. The men of Judah attacked and plundered the cities. The "fear of the Lord" is associated with only three kings in the Bible—King Asa of Judah, his son Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 17:10; 19:7; 20:29), and King Saul (1 Sam. 11:7).

[Verse 15] The soldiers of Judah did not stop with the defeated cities in their post-war mopping-up operation against their enemies. They also attacked the tent cities of the herdsmen who lived in that region. The herdsmen may have given aid and support to the Ethiopian invaders when they passed through. Another possibility is that the presence of these tent-dwelling herdsmen is indicative that the Ethiopians were Bedouin nomads and the tents and herds belonged to them.

Asa's army had completed its mission. The Ethiopians and their allies were completely vanquished. Asa now felt secure to return home to **Jerusalem** where he was probably met with a hero's welcome. The Lord was the One who had routed the enemy, but Asa and the people had still needed to carry through in battle to secure the victory. They surely gave God the glory for what He had done. Yet, the army had risked their lives to defeat the invaders. They deserved some measure of honor from the people of Judah for their sacrifice.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 96 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week.



- ▶ **Share.** Talk with your group about one of the challenges you are facing that, from your perspective, is an impossible challenge. Ask them to pray with you regarding that situation.
- ▶ **Invite.** Ask someone else to walk alongside you in a difficulty you're facing. Invite this person to "check in" with you regularly and encourage your continued trust in God.
- ▶ **Retreat.** Take some dedicated time this week to have a personal prayer retreat. Get away from any distractions. Leave your cell phone in your car. Spend a few hours—or a full day—in dedicated prayer about the challenges you are facing.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 96 of the PSG:

We all face multiple challenges in a given week. If we're not careful, we'll try to carry the burden of those challenges all on our own shoulders. But it's good to be reminded that we have a God who will be there for us to see us through.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking God for being One we can always depend on. Ask Him for courage to trust in Him in those moments when we are most inclined to give up.



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