

Main Idea: Revival is not a cure all, and what happens *after* revival is just as important as the revival itself. That truth is illustrated powerfully when we look at King Asa. We're going to examine two things in 2 Chronicles 14-16, first the big picture of his life, and then a close-up look at the revival he experienced and what happened afterwards.

I. Let's examine the big picture of Asa's life.

- A. Phase #1: Reforms (ch 14a)
- B. Phase #2: Results (ch 14b)
- C. Phase #3: Revival (ch 15)
 - 1. The key agent of revival was the Spirit of God (1).
 - 2. The key instrument of revival was the Word of God (2).
 - 3. The key word in revival was SEEK (2, 4, 12, 15).
 - 4. The key effects of revival were very visible (8-18).
 - 5. The key focus of revival was the heart (17).

D. Phase #4: Refusal (ch 16)

II. Let's take a close-up look at Asa's revival (15:2).

A. The Responsibility of revival

--A wicked person is not necessarily an immoral person (it may lead to that). Rather a wicked person is someone who won't seek God.

B. The Result of revival

--"If every church would discard the entertainment business, cease making God's house a house of merchandise, make His house the house of prayer, and commit itself in penitent earnestness to prevailing prayer, our revival stream would run ocean floods and all our churches would be aflame with God's glory." (E. M. Bounds, *Prayer and Revival*)

C. The Reverse of revival

--Asa is a clear reminder to us that revival is not the end of the story.

Response Time: Something to think about...

--Both David and Asa sinned. The difference was that when confronted, David repented and confessed his sin to the Lord and others, but Asa didn't.

The Church stands in need of revival, genuine revival. With that in mind we are in the middle of a series, "Revive Us Again!" Our aim is to experience firsthand the reviving work of our sovereign God as He transformed His people in the past.

Erwin Lutzer, pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, wrote the book *Flames of Freedom* in which he records the fascinating record of revivals that have taken place in past decades. Lutzer shares an experience of historian, J. Edwin Orr. Orr says that he once saw a sign in the San Fernando Valley that read, "Revival Every Monday." Five miles down the road he saw another sign, "Revival Every Night Except Monday."

There is much confusion about revival. That's why we are looking at *biblical* examples of revival. In our first message we looked at the revival that took place in Hezekiah's day, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 29. There we saw five marks of genuine revival: repentance, rededication, reconciliation, recovery of true worship, and rejoicing.

Last time, we considered another great leader from the seventh century BC, King Josiah, who was used by God to turn the entire nation back to Him. We noticed six events associated with the revival in his day. Josiah removed sin, repaired the temple, recovered the Law, responded with obedience, received God's favor, and renewed the covenant.

The biblical revival we're going to examine today was different in some significant ways. For starters, it happened towards the beginning of Judah's history, around 900 BC, just twenty years or so after Israel divided into two kingdoms. That's more than 200 years before Hezekiah and Josiah. What's more, if you'll recall, in the first two revivals, the situation was

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

bleak, politically, economically, and of course spiritually. But this revival happened during a time of relative peace and prosperity.

This morning we want to investigate the revival that God worked through King Asa. You'll find it in 2 Chronicles 15. The question before us is this. *Does revival last?* To answer it, we're going to look at Asa's life in 2 Chronicles 14-16 from two perspectives. First...

I. Let's examine the big picture of Asa's life.

To get the big picture, we need to know some facts about Israel's history:

- 2000 BC -- God chose Abraham and promised to bless His family
- 1400 BC -- God redeems Israel from Egypt, then takes them to the Promised Land
- Period of the Judges follows
- 1000 BC -- God chooses David to be King; Solomon follows
- 931BC -- Civil War: The nation divided, Jeroboam leading the north, and Rehoboam the south

In Judah (as in the northern kingdom), the leaders led God's people astray. Concerning Rehoboam, 2 Chronicles 12:14 states that he "did evil." And concerning Abijah, 1 Kings 15:3 records, "And he walked in all the sins of his father (KJV)."

Then in 911 BC, Asa became king of Judah. The nation had been divided for twenty years. And notice something unusual stated in 2 Chronicles 14:1 about the early tenure of Asa's reign, "In his days the country was at peace ["quiet" in the KJV] for ten years."

Now let's quickly scan Asa's life to get the big picture view. Asa went through four key phases in his life.

A. Phase #1: Reforms (ch 14a)

According to 14:1, Judah enjoyed peace in the early years of Asa. And the peace afforded Asa the opportunity to carry out some much needed house cleaning, as we're told in 2 Chronicles 14:2-6, "Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God. He removed the foreign altars and the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to obey his laws and commands. He removed the high places and incense altars in every town in Judah, and the kingdom was at peace under him. He built up the fortified cities of Judah, since the land was at peace. No one was at war with him during those years, for the LORD gave him rest."

Verse 2 is so refreshing. It says King Asa did that which was "good and right in the eyes of the Lord." He resembled his great, great grandfather David, for his heart was right with God. And when that's the case, it affects your life.

How did Asa do right? In two ways, one negative and the other positive.

1. *NEGATIVE--He eliminated that which was unacceptable (3).* In verse 3, Asa initiated a spiritual spring cleaning in Judah. The altars and images and high places and idols were removed.

2. *POSITIVE--He encouraged the acceptable (4).* In verse 4, Asa urged his people to return to the Book, God's Law. What's more, he encouraged them to "seek the Lord." That's key.

What did the people experience as a result of these reforms? Verse 5 says *peace*. And don't miss that the LORD was the One who gave them this peace (1, 5, 6, 7).

So that's phase one. Asa brought about great reforms. And keep this in mind. The reform phase initiated by Asa lasted fifteen years before the actual revival began, as we'll see in chapter 15. But first, a second phase...

B. Phase #2: Results (ch 14b)

The reforms and the period of rest afforded Asa the opportunity to perform several types of needed upgrades. First there were *civil projects*, for according to verses 6-7, old cities were renovated and new cities constructed. Then came a major *military project*, as verse 8 indicates Asa built up the army for defense purposes.

Then Asa faced his first major obstacle. Listen to the text in 14:9-10, "Zerah the Cushite marched out against them with a vast army [the KJV says, "with an host of a million"] and three hundred chariots, and came as far as Mareshah. Asa went out to meet him, and they took up battle positions in the Valley of Zephathah near Mareshah."

Notice the odds. Asa is outnumbered 2 to 1. He knows he can't win with those odds. He knows he needs help. So what does he do?

Verse 11 says, "Then Asa called to the LORD his God and said, 'LORD, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. O LORD, you are our God; do not let man prevail against you.'"

So Asa called on the Lord for help. And the Lord helped! Notice verses 12-15, "The LORD struck down the Cushites before Asa and Judah. The Cushites fled, and Asa and his army pursued them as far as Gerar. Such a great number of Cushites fell that they could not recover; they were crushed before the LORD and his forces. The men of Judah carried off a large amount of plunder. They destroyed all the villages around Gerar, for the terror of the LORD had fallen upon them. They plundered all these villages, since there was much booty there. They also attacked the camps of the herdsmen and carried off droves of sheep and goats and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem."

Wow! Asa trusted God in the face of an impossible challenge. And he saw God perform the miraculous. That brings us to phase 3 in Asa's life.

C. Phase #3: Revival (ch 15)

We'll take a closer look at the revival phase later, but for now allow me merely to mention five key ingredients of the revival:

1. *The key agent of revival was the Spirit of God (1).* "The Spirit of God came upon Azariah son of Obed." True revival is something man cannot produce. God's Spirit is always the agent, as He was in this case.

2. *The key instrument of revival was the Word of God (2).* "He [Azariah] went out to meet Asa." Stop there. Who was Azariah? We don't know much about him. We know he was a prophet, according to verse 8. And we know he delivered the Word of God to King Asa.

According to verse 2, "He went out to meet Asa and said to him, 'Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you'."

Billy Sunday once remarked, "One spark of fire can do more to prove the power of gunpowder than a whole library written on the subject."¹ It was God's Word that was the instrument for this revival.

3. *The key word in this revival was SEEK (2, 4, 12, 15).* Scan through the text and you'll see it again and again. Verse 2—"If you seek him, he will be found by you." Verse 4—"They turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him." Verse 12—"They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD." Verse 15—"They sought God eagerly, and He was found by them." So when true revival occurs, people seek the Lord.

4. *The key effects of revival were very visible (8-18).* Here are some of the visible effects in Asa's revival.

a. Asa removed sin (8).

¹ Lutzer, 191

- b. Asa influenced others to do likewise (9-10). It's worth noting, as verse 16 indicates, that Asa removed even his own grandmother!!
- c. God's people sacrificed (11).
- d. God's people renewed the covenant with God (12-13).
- e. God's people rejoiced (14-15).

So when revival occurs, there are visible effects to prove it. You can see the results.

5. *The key focus of revival was the heart (17).* Verse 17 concludes, "Asa's heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life."

Don't miss this. Revival happens from the inside out, not outside in. Revival does not begin on the outside. Revival begins on the inside. Revival is a change of the heart.

I've had people say to me, "I've got these bad habits in my life. I'm working on straightening these things out so I can be right with the Lord." Wrong order. Give the Lord your heart FIRST, then He'll give you the power to clean up the vessel.

Unfortunately, there's one more phase in Asa's life, a very tragic one.

D. Phase #4: Refusal (ch 16)

Don't miss this. Asa faced two great tests in his life. We already saw the first in chapter 14--the Ethiopians. What did he do in test #1? He trusted God, and passed the test! In fact, shortly after that, his nation experienced revival.

How did he do in test #2? Take a look at 16:1, "In the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and fortified Ramah to prevent anyone from leaving or entering the territory of Asa king of Judah."

Who was Baasha? The king of the northern ten tribes. He was a wicked king. In fact, the northern kingdom never did have a godly king, and never sought the Lord.

What did Baasha do? He started building a fortress city at Ramah. Why? To box in Asa and his people. It was a case of military aggression.

Remember what Asa did in test #1? He cried out to the Lord (14:11). What did Asa do in this test? Sadly, he trusted in his own wisdom. How? He tried to buy help, from Beh-Hadad king of Syria.

Listen to 16:2-3, "Asa then took the silver and gold out of the treasuries of the LORD's temple and of his own palace and sent it to Ben-Hadad king of Aram, who was ruling in Damascus. 'Let there be a treaty between me and you,' he said, 'as there was between my father and your father. See, I am sending you silver and gold. Now break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so he will withdraw from me.'"

Sounded like a good plan. In fact, pretty clever. "Why bother God with this predicament. I can handle it all by myself," Asa reasoned.

Did Asa's plan work? We find the answer in 16:4-6, "Ben-Hadad agreed with King Asa and sent the commanders of his forces against the towns of Israel. They conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel Maim and all the store cities of Naphtali. When Baasha heard this, he stopped building Ramah and abandoned his work. Then King Asa brought all the men of Judah, and they carried away from Ramah the stones and timber Baasha had been using. With them he built up Geba and Mizpah."

So did Asa's plan work? You say, "Sure it did. He got rid of his problem. He figured out a way to take care of the problem all by himself. You don't need to trust God with *all* your problems, do you? After all, the Good Book says, 'God helps those who help themselves.'"

Oh really? For starters, that's certainly *not* what the Good Book says. What's more, look what happened next for Asa. He received a visitor by the name of Hanani, a seer (prophet). Listen to what Hanani said to Asa in 16:7-9, "Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and

horsemen? Yet when you relied on the LORD, he delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war.”

Wow! Hanani pulled no punches with Asa! As God's spokesman, he told Asa the sobering truth. "Since you refused to trust Me, since you thought you could handle your problems on your own, you've just forfeited the peace you've known all your life. From this point on, you can expect war."

It was all downhill from that point for Asa. Here's what happened. First, he cast Hanani into prison (10). Just think of that! He deliberately rejected God's message and God's spokesman. Apparently some people pleaded with Asa to listen. What did he do to them? Verse 10 indicates he oppressed those who didn't see things his way.

You say, "Well Asa just had a bad day, didn't he?" Listen. What began as a bad day turned into a characteristic of his life. He refused to trust God one time, and that led to another, and another. Then he became a self-sufficient man. And he died that way. He actually refused to trust God when he was inflicted with a disease in his feet.

Here's a sad verse, 16:12, which says, "Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the LORD, but only from the physicians." He died less than two years later. The point of the passage isn't to suggest we don't need doctors.² The point is to show that Asa stopped trusting God in his life and chose instead to put his trust in man.

That is dangerous. It's something we're all prone to do. I can relate to Asa, can't you? Look again at Asa's life. In test one, he heard God's Word, he trusted God, and the result was peace. In test two, he heard God's Word, he rejected God's Word and trusted his own ingenuity, and the result was war.

Friends, just because we trusted the Lord *yesterday* is no guarantee we're trusting Him today. Who are you trusting in today for life's challenges?

A few years ago I read the book *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, by Jim Cymbala, pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle in New York City. It's a book about a pastor and a church that's committed to making prayer the heartbeat of its ministry.

When Pastor Cymbala first went to this inner-city work, the church had about fifteen people and a mortgage it couldn't meet. But early on the pastor and his wife determined that if the church was going to survive, the answer was prayer. Today God is using the church in a powerful way to rescue sinners from the clutches of the evil one.

In his chapter "*Too Smart for Our Own Good?*", Cymbala writes, "Often when our pastoral staff meets together, amid the flurry of busy days and what the world would term 'church success'--a large membership, nearly twenty branch churches, the choir performing at Billy Graham crusades, our videos being televised nationwide, invitations to speak here and there--a nagging thought from the Lord spreads across the edges of our hearts: *Remember who has done all this. Your need for me hasn't lessened at all.*

Cymbala continues, "If you have been a Christian for any length of time, the same is true for you individually. Your first rush of emotion at how God wonderfully saved you from sin has faded. Your desperate early days when you cried out to the Lord because you didn't know what you were doing...have given way to a degree of confidence and assurance. You and I have learned a lot, seen and heard a lot, built a track record, and accumulated a fair storehouse of 'wisdom.'

"That's why we are at great risk."³

It's true. Any church--or any Christian--is "at risk" the moment we start taking for granted our desperate need for God.

² The physicians mentioned here were possibly idolatrous medicine men who used incantations.

³Jim Cymbala with Dean Merrill, p. 157.

So there's the big picture of Asa's life, four phases: the reforms, the results of the reforms, the revival, and the refusal. Now let's take a close-up look at the revival itself.

II. Let's take a closeup look at Asa's revival (15:2).

What is revival? Here's a definition: "Revival" is something that happens to God's people, to Christians. Certainly, the spillover effects touch the lives of lost people, and a by-product of revival is evangelism. The word revival is derived from two Latin words, *re* which means "again" and *vivo* which means "to live." Literally, it means "to live again." Revival is, "The inrush of the spirit into a body that threatens to become a corpse!"⁴

Lutzer points out two obvious features of revival: It is primarily the restoration of believers (only those with life can be REvived). And it is the product of the Holy Spirit's work, not dependent on human strategy--though human beings are of course directly involved.⁵

So here's a word of caution. We can't cause revival by using tear-jerking music or frightening stories. We can get emotional responses, but not genuine revival. And emotional responses, like the seed that fell on rocky soil in Matthew 13, don't last.

2 Chronicles 15:2 reveals three key aspects about revival for us.

A. The Responsibility of revival

What was it that God wanted from Asa? From the people of Judah? From you? What responsibility do we have if we're to experience revival? Verse 2 says, "If you SEEK Him."

Revival occurs, from a human perspective, when we SEEK. The word is used at least five times in 2 Chronicles 15. Let's consider three questions about our responsibility to "seek."

1. *Who are we to seek?* We are to seek a *person*, "Him," says verses 2, 4, 12, 15, "the Lord God". Christianity is a personal matter. It's not a religion. It's a relationship, a life-changing relationship.

2. *With what are we to seek God?* The answer, says verse 12, "with all their heart and all their soul." God desires your heart, all of it. He doesn't want a piece of your life. He's not interested in leftovers. Jesus summed it up in Matthew 22:37, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with ALL thy heart, and with ALL thy soul, and with ALL thy mind."

3. *What prompts people to seek God?* The *ultimate cause* is the sovereign working of God's Spirit. Romans 3:11 states, "There is none that seeks after God." Psalm 14:2-3 declares, "The Lord looked down from heaven. . . to see if any did seek God. . ." Psalm 10:4 records, "The wicked through the pride of his heart, will not seek after God..."

By the way, *a wicked person is not necessarily an immoral person (it may lead to that). Rather a wicked person is someone who won't seek God.* The true God is not in his thoughts.

The Spirit prompts men to seek God. How does He do that? Often He uses an *immediate cause*. In this case it was "distress" ("trouble" in the KJV), as 15:4 indicates, "But in their distress they turned to the Lord...and sought him."

Sometimes God uses "trouble" to get our attention. For the Israelites, the trouble came in the form of enemies raiding their land during the days of the judges. For us trouble may come in all shapes and sizes. A broken marriage causes some to seek God. For others, a wayward teenager. Or a lost job. Or a health challenge.

And as a result of the challenge, people *seek* the Lord. Then what happens?

B. The Result of revival

⁴ Observation by Lutzer

⁵ Lutzer, p. 136.

Here it is--15:2, "If you seek Him, He will be FOUND by you." Jesus put it this way (Mt 7:7), "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find."

E. M. Bounds, a man of God and a man of prayer who lived during the Civil War, wrote this in his book, *Prayer and Revival*, "It is much easier to send for a reputed evangelist to stir up a revival than to pray fervently until revival happens...It is much easier to preach about saving the heathen than it is to place ourselves in their stead, as their substitutes before God, and plead with Him until He touches, overpowers, and influences all the springs of human and divine action...The spirit of prayer cannot be in harmony with the spirit of entertainment in the church of God. *If every church would discard the entertainment business, cease making God's house a house of merchandise, make His house the house of prayer, and commit itself in penitent earnestness to prevailing prayer, our revival stream would run ocean floods and all our churches would be aflame with God's glory* [italics added] and resonant with His praises and the Lord would add daily to our churches thousands of the saved. Then the beauty of the Lord our God would be upon us."

Friends, it's not complicated. The Lord God offers Himself to us. It's why He sent His Son into the world, who went to the cross and died a terrible death, then conquered the grave, and returned to heaven. The Lord God is seeking to restore wayward sinners to Himself. He chose to punish His own Son on the cross so that He might pardon sinners who seek Him. He even sent His Spirit into the world to enable sinners to seek Him.

His promise remains. *If you seek Him, He will be found by you.*

But there's another side to His promise, and that brings us to a third principle.

C. The Reverse of revival

Here's the other side of the promise. According to 15:2, "If you forsake Him, He will forsake you." Sadly, that's precisely what Asa did later in his life. He did it when Baasha, king of Israel, threatened him. Sadly, he trusted in his own wisdom and tried to buy his way out of his problem. Again, humanly speaking, it seemed like a good idea. "God gave me a brain, didn't He? Why bother God with this situation. I can handle it." Ever been there?

And his plan worked, sort of, if by "work" you mean he got rid of his immediate problem. But in so doing he gained an even bigger problem, the displeasure of God Himself.

Jim Cymbala's observation of Asa is worth pondering, "The people realized they had a very clever leader. Many churches today are making the same assumption: Whatever 'works' is the way to go. If a technique gets the building filled and the bills paid, it must be blessed by God. Visible results are the proof that a strategy is heaven-ordained. Such thinking is due for a rude awakening when we stand before the Lord."⁶

Look at Asa. He still believed in the Lord. I'm sure he still brought sacrifices to the temple and called himself a follower of Yahweh. But for all practical purposes, he stopped trusting in the Lord for the living of his life, and sadly, starting trusting in Man and consequently died a pitiful sight. As Jim Cymbala observes, "The young king who once led a whole nation in seeking God now became a coldhearted oppressor of that nation. Asa's story illustrates how people who stop seeking God tend to get crusty and arrogant. They think they know everything."⁷

Friends, the Word of God couldn't be clearer, "If you forsake Him, He will forsake you."

Why does the Bible include 2 Chronicles 16? Asa's life was great, until chapter 16. Why not leave it out? Why not stop with the revival in chapter 15?

The Bible is realistic. Asa was human. He blew it later in life. The Bible does not hide his flaws. They were there. And they were ugly. The Bible tells it like it is. God works

⁶ Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, p. 164.

⁷ Jim Cymbala, p. 166.

with people where they are. Asa is a clear reminder to us that sin has consequences, severe ones.

Now think back. Asa's great-great-grandfather blew it later in life, too. Remember? In fact, David's blunders were even worse--a one night stand with a married woman and the murder of her husband.

But there was a huge difference between David and Asa. Yes, both men sinned later in life. Both men were personally confronted by a prophet of God. But Asa defended his actions and threw the prophet in prison. To the contrary, when David was rebuked, by Nathan in one case, and Gad in another, David was filled with godly sorrow. "I have sinned greatly in what I have done," he confessed (2 Sam 24:10).

The Bible doesn't call David "a man after God's own heart" because he never blew it. He did. We all do. But when the conviction came, he repented.

Pastor Cymbala remarks, "People who have a seeking heart still make mistakes. But their reaction to rebuke and correction shows the condition of that heart. It determines what God is able to do with them in the future."⁸

If only Asa, like David, had broken before God, who knows how his life would have ended. But he didn't. Sadly...he *didn't*.

Friends, *Asa is a clear reminder to us that revival is not the end of the story*. Does that mean revival is not important and that we don't need it? Certainly not. But revival is merely a jump start in the race, and God expects us to trust Him until the race of life is finished.

Here is the good news. No matter what you have done, or where you are today with God, this is *the good news*. God sent His Son to rescue sinners from their self-centered lives and the destruction it brings. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, then died to pay the penalty for sinners who would believe in Him, and then conquered sin, the devil, and death itself in His resurrection.

The truth is, when a sinner repents and believes in Jesus Christ, God saves that sinner. Which means, my non-Christian friend, if you will call upon the Lord, if you will *trust* in Him this morning, He will save you.

But is that the end? No. Every day we must choose to *trust* in Him for living. And when we stop seeking Him and start depending on our own ingenuity, look out. What happened to Asa should be a serious warning to us. Revival is not the end of the story.

May I encourage you to seek the Lord today. *If you seek Him, He will be found by you*. Do you need to be saved? Seek Him, and He will save you. Are you in trouble and in need of help? Seek Him, and He will be found by you. Has your heart grown cold? Have you begun to take the Lord for granted? Then I urge you to *seek Him*.

Response Time: Something to think about... *Remember, both David and Asa sinned. The difference was that when confronted, David repented and confessed his sin to the Lord and others, but Asa didn't.*

Let's be like David. I invite you to spend some time in personal confession before the Lord. Hear the Word of the Lord, the same message Asa heard in 2 Chronicles 15:2, "The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you."

This is God's promise. If we seek Him, we will find Him. It's amazing, yet true. He is interested in us. He knows about our needs, but He wants us to seek Him. Then He receives the glory when we respond rightly to the work He is doing in our behalf. So let's seek Him as individuals. Then let's seek Him together in groups of three or four. Let's tell the Lord together that as a church we are seeking Him.

⁸ Jim Cymbala, p. 166.