

Thursday, July 25

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2 Chronicles 14:1 - 16:14

14 **1** When Abijah died, he was buried in the City of David. Then his son Asa became the next king. There was peace in the land for ten years. **2** Asa did what was pleasing and good in the sight of the LORD his God. **3** He removed the foreign altars and the pagan shrines. He smashed the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah poles. **4** He commanded the people of Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and to obey his law and his commands. **5** Asa also removed the pagan shrines, as well as the incense altars from every one of Judah's towns. So Asa's kingdom enjoyed a period of peace. **6** During those peaceful years, he was able to build up the fortified towns throughout Judah. No one tried to make war against him at this time, for the LORD was giving him rest from his enemies. **7** Asa told the people of Judah, "Let us build towns and fortify them with walls, towers, gates, and bars. The land is still ours because we sought the LORD our God, and he has given us peace on every side." So they went ahead with these projects and brought them to completion. **8** King Asa had an army of 300,000 warriors from the tribe of Judah, armed with large shields and spears. He also had an army of 280,000 warriors from the tribe of Benjamin, armed with small shields and bows. Both armies were composed of well-trained fighting men. **9** Once an Ethiopian named Zerah attacked Judah with an army of 1,000,000 men and 300 chariots. They advanced to the town of Mareshah, **10** so Asa deployed his armies for battle in the valley north of Mareshah. **11** Then Asa cried out to the LORD his God, "O LORD, no one but you can help the powerless against the mighty! Help us, O LORD our God, for we trust in you alone. It is in your name that we have come against this vast horde. O LORD, you are our God; do not let mere men prevail against you!" **12** So the LORD defeated the Ethiopians in the presence of Asa and the army of Judah, and the enemy fled. **13** Asa and his army pursued them as far as Gerar, and so many Ethiopians fell that they were unable to rally. They were destroyed by the LORD and his army, and the army of Judah carried off a vast amount of plunder. **14** While they were at Gerar, they attacked all the towns in that area, and terror from the LORD came upon the people there. As a result, a vast amount of plunder was taken from these towns, too. **15** They also attacked the camps of herdsmen and captured many sheep, goats, and camels before finally returning to Jerusalem.

15 **1** Then the Spirit of God came upon Azariah son of Oded, **2** and he went out to meet King Asa as he was returning from the battle. "Listen to me, Asa!" he shouted. "Listen, all you people of Judah and Benjamin! The LORD will stay with you as long as you stay with him! Whenever you seek him, you will find him. But if you abandon him, he will abandon you. **3** For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach them, and without the Law to instruct them. **4** But whenever they were in trouble and turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him out, they found him. **5** "During those dark times, it was not safe to travel. Problems troubled the people of every land. **6** Nation fought against nation, and city against city, for God was troubling them with every kind of problem. **7** But as for you, be strong and courageous, for your work will be rewarded." **8** When Asa heard this message from Azariah the prophet, he took courage and removed all the detestable idols from the land of Judah and Benjamin and in the towns he had captured in the hill country of Ephraim. And he repaired the altar of the LORD, which stood in front of the entry room of the LORD's Temple. **9** Then Asa called together all the people of Judah and Benjamin, along with the people of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who had settled among them. For many from Israel had moved to Judah during Asa's reign when they saw that the LORD his God was with him. **10** The people gathered at Jerusalem in late spring, during the fifteenth year of Asa's reign. **11** On that day they sacrificed to the LORD 700 cattle and 7,000 sheep and goats from the plunder they had taken in the battle. **12** Then they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and soul. **13** They agreed that anyone who refused to seek the LORD, the God of Israel, would be put to death—whether young or old, man or woman. **14** They shouted out their oath of loyalty to the LORD with trumpets blaring and rams' horns sounding. **15** All in Judah were happy about this covenant, for they had entered into it with all their heart. They earnestly sought after God, and they found him. And the LORD gave them rest from their enemies on every side. **16** King Asa even deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother because she had made an obscene Asherah pole. He cut down her obscene pole, broke it up, and burned it in the Kidron Valley. **17** Although the pagan shrines were not removed from Israel, Asa's heart remained completely faithful throughout his life. **18** He brought into the Temple of God the silver and gold and the various items that he and his father had dedicated. **19** So there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign.

16 **1** In the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign, King Baasha of Israel invaded Judah and fortified Ramah in order to prevent anyone from entering or leaving King Asa's territory in Judah. **2** Asa responded by removing the silver and gold from the treasuries of the Temple of the LORD and the royal palace. He sent it to King Ben-hadad of Aram, who was ruling in Damascus, along with this message: **3** "Let there be a treaty between you and me like the one between your father

and my father. See, I am sending you silver and gold. Break your treaty with King Baasha of Israel so that he will leave me alone.” **4** Ben-hadad agreed to King Asa’s request and sent the commanders of his army to attack the towns of Israel. They conquered the towns of Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah, and all the store cities in Naphtali. **5** As soon as Baasha of Israel heard what was happening, he abandoned his project of fortifying Ramah and stopped all work on it. **6** Then King Asa called out all the men of Judah to carry away the building stones and timbers that Baasha had been using to fortify Ramah. Asa used these materials to fortify the towns of Geba and Mizpah. **7** At that time Hanani the seer came to King Asa and told him, “Because you have put your trust in the king of Aram instead of in the LORD your God, you missed your chance to destroy the army of the king of Aram. **8** Don’t you remember what happened to the Ethiopians and Libyans and their vast army, with all of their chariots and charioteers? At that time you relied on the LORD, and he handed them over to you. **9** The eyes of the LORD search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. What a fool you have been! From now on you will be at war.” **10** Asa became so angry with Hanani for saying this that he threw him into prison and put him in stocks. At that time Asa also began to oppress some of his people. **11** The rest of the events of Asa’s reign, from beginning to end, are recorded in **12** In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa developed a serious foot disease. Yet even with the severity of his disease, he did not seek the LORD’s help but turned only to his physicians. **13** So he died in the forty-first year of his reign. **14** He was buried in the tomb he had carved out for himself in the City of David. He was laid on a bed perfumed with sweet spices and fragrant ointments, and the people built a huge funeral fire in his honor.

Romans 9:1 - 24

9 1 With Christ as my witness, I speak with utter truthfulness. My conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm it. **2** My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief **3** for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them. **4** They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God’s adopted children. God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave them his law. He gave them the privilege of worshiping him and receiving his wonderful promises. **5** Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. **6** Well then, has God failed to fulfill his promise to Israel? No, for not all who are born into the nation of Israel are truly members of God’s people! **7** Being descendants of Abraham doesn’t make them truly Abraham’s children. For the Scriptures say, “Isaac is the son through whom your

descendants will be counted,” though Abraham had other children, too.**8** This means that Abraham’s physical descendants are not necessarily children of God. Only the children of the promise are considered to be Abraham’s children. **9** For God had promised, “I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.” **10** This son was our ancestor Isaac. When he married Rebekah, she gave birth to twins. **11** But before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, she received a message from God. (This message shows that God chooses people according to his own purposes; **12** he calls people, but not according to their good or bad works.) She was told, “Your older son will serve your younger son.” **13** In the words of the Scriptures, “I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau.” **14** Are we saying, then, that God was unfair? Of course not! **15** For God said to Moses, “I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose.” **16** So it is God who decides to show mercy. We can neither choose it nor work for it. **17** For the Scriptures say that God told Pharaoh, “I have appointed you for the very purpose of displaying my power in you and to spread my fame throughout the earth.” **18** So you see, God chooses to show mercy to some, and he chooses to harden the hearts of others so they refuse to listen. **19** Well then, you might say, “Why does God blame people for not responding? Haven’t they simply done what he makes them do?” **20** No, don’t say that. Who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, “Why have you made me like this?” **21** When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn’t he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into? **22** In the same way, even though God has the right to show his anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who are destined for destruction. **23** He does this to make the riches of his glory shine even brighter on those to whom he shows mercy, who were prepared in advance for glory. **24** And we are among those whom he selected, both from the Jews and from the Gentiles.

Psalms 19:1 - 14

19 1 The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. **2** Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. **3** They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. **4** Yet their message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world. God has made a home in the heavens for the sun. **5** It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding. It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race. **6** The sun rises at one end of the heavens and follows its course to the other end. Nothing can hide from its heat. **7** The instructions of the LORD are perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. **8** The commandments of the

LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are clear, giving insight for living. **9** Reverence for the LORD is pure, lasting forever. The laws of the LORD are true; each one is fair. **10** They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb. **11** They are a warning to your servant, a great reward for those who obey them. **12** How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults. **13** Keep your servant from deliberate sins! Don't let them control me. Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin. **14** May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Proverbs 20:1

20 1 Wine produces mockers; alcohol leads to brawls. Those led astray by drink cannot be wise.