

# A Lamp in Jerusalem: The LORD will not forget His Promise

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 10 September 2023

Preacher: Philip Copeland

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bibles and our reading for this evening, which is in the Old Testament in 1 Kings. If you don't have a Bible yourself, there's lots piled up at the sides there and in the transepts and around about the place.

So grab one, don't be embarrassed, and it'll help you to follow along. We're in 1 Kings and we're reading together from the middle of chapter 14, verse 21.

I'm going to read to the middle of chapter 15. We're in the history of Israel and Judah after the time of David and Solomon when the kingdom has been divided.

And chapter 13 talks about Jeroboam, who's a king in the northern kingdom, while Rehoboam has come to the throne in the south, in Judah.

And after dealing with Jeroboam, we're now back with Rehoboam at verse 21 of chapter 14. Now Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, reigned in Judah.

[ 1 : 09 ] Rehoboam was 41 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 17 years in Jerusalem, the city that the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel to put his name there.

His mother's name was Nama, the Ammonite. And Judah did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. And they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed more than all that their fathers had done.

For they also built for themselves high places and pillars and asherim on every high hill and under every green tree. And there were also male cult prostitutes in the land.

And they did, according to all the abominations of the nations that the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak, king of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem.

He took away the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house. He took away everything. He also took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made.

[ 2 : 19 ] And King Rehoboam made in their place shields of bronze and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard who kept the door of the king's house. And as often as the king went into the house of the Lord, the guard carried them and brought them back to the guardroom.

Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually.

And Rehoboam slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. His mother's name was Nehmer the Ammonite. And Abijam, his son, reigned in his place.

Now in the 18th year of King Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, Abijam began to reign over Judah. He reigned for three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Makah, the daughter of Abishalom.

And he walked in all the sins that his father did before him. And his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God as the heart of David his father.

[ 3 : 28 ] Nevertheless, for David's sake, the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him and establishing Jerusalem because David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn aside from anything that he had commanded him all the days of his life except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

Now there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life. And the rest of the acts of Abijam and all he did, are they not written in the book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah?

And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. And Abijam slept with his fathers and they buried him in the city of David. And Asa, his son, reigned in his place.

In the twentieth year of Jeroboam, king of Israel, Asa began to reign over Judah. And he reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Makah, the daughter of Abishalom.

And Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as David his father had done. He put away the male cult prostitutes out of the land and removed all the idols that his father had made.

[ 4 : 50 ] He also removed Makah, his mother, from being queen mother because she had made an abominable image for Asherah. And Asa cut down her image and burned it at the brook of Kidron.

But the high places were never taken away. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was wholly true to the Lord all his days.

And he brought into the house of the Lord the sacred gifts of his father and his own sacred gifts, silver and gold and vessels. And there was war between Asa and Basha, king of Israel, all their days.

But Asa, king of Israel, went up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might permit no one to go out or to come in to Asa, king of Judah.

Then Asa took all the silver and the gold that were left in the treasuries of the house of the Lord and the treasuries of the king's house. And he gave them into the hands of his servants. And king Asa sent them to Ben-Hadad, the son of Tabramam, the son of Hazion, king of Syria, who lived in Damascus, saying, Let there be a covenant between me and you, as there was between my father and your father.

[ 6 : 04 ] Behold, I'm sending you a present of silver and gold. Go, break your covenant with Basha, king of Israel, that he may withdraw from me. And Ben-Hadad listened to king Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel and conquered Ision, Dan, Abel, Beth, Makkah, and all Chinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali.

And when Basha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah, and he lived in Tirzah. Then king Asa made a proclamation to all Judah. None was exempt.

And they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber with which Basha had been building. And with them, king Asa built Geber of Benjamin and Mizpah.

Now the rest of all the acts of Asa, all his might, all he did, all the cities he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? But in his old age, he was diseased in his feet.

And Asa slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father. And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place.

[ 7 : 19 ] Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, please do have your Bibles open to the passage we had read in 1 Kings.

A Friday evening, the Rugby World Cup kicked off.

Currently, it's obviously still in the group stages of the competition. But things really get exciting when the knockout rounds, the knockout stages come. And often, big knockout matches these days, they actually take place at the same time.

More than one match. And when that happens, a TV channel will show one of the games as the main broadcast. But then from time to time, what they'll do is they'll jump away to highlights of another match taking place.

So that we're updated about what's going on. Now this section of 1 Kings is a little bit like that. We've been looking at the kingdom in the north. And we're jumping away to get an update from the south.

[ 8 : 37 ] This is the middle of chapter 12, really. The writer has kept our focus on the northern kingdom of Israel under the rule of Jeroboam. And what a dismal king he showed himself to be.

He despised the Lord. He despised the Lord's grace. And he led all of the people under his reign to do the same. And last Sunday, those of you who were out last Sunday evening, at the start of chapter 14, we heard the Lord announcing heartbreaking judgment.

Heartbreaking, but just judgment upon Jeroboam's household and upon the whole northern kingdom of Israel. It's headed for exile.

But at 14, verse 21, the author, as I say, suddenly takes our attention off of the north down to the south to show us highlights from the life of Judah with these three kings that are mentioned.

Rehoboam, Abijam, and Asa. And we're going to look at each of them and their reigns. And we're going to apply the word of God as we go through these different reigns.

[ 9 : 44 ] So firstly, let's look at the reign of Rehoboam. That's verse 21 to 31. And in this section, we see a faithless nation and a fading glory.

A faithless nation and a fading glory. Verse 21. Now Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, reigned in Judah. And this isn't the first time we've met Rehoboam in the book.

He's mentioned back at the start of chapter 12. He took over from his father Solomon as ruler over, remember, all 12 tribes of Israel united as one nation. And you remember, it was a long time ago, but you might remember, he made some really stupid decisions.

Dealing with his people harshly. Threatening them with a really hard life. And that led to the kingdom being ripped apart and divided into two. And then even after that, after the kingdom split, he then threatened to carry out even more damage upon the people of God until God stepped in and sent word to this king and said, stop.

And do you know what? Rehoboam listened. He obeyed at that moment. It was a wonderful moment there. And so when he's mentioned here in verse 21, you might be thinking, oh great, here is a king who listens to the Lord.

[ 11 : 06 ] I feel quite optimistic. Especially after all that we've had to read about the northern kingdom. And in verse 21, we're also reminded of the fact that he reigns in Jerusalem.

The city that the Lord has chosen out of all the other tribes of Jerusalem to put his name there. Again, this is something that makes us feel optimistic. We think, excellent.

Rehoboam rules in the home of the temple where the Lord is. The center of orthodoxy for its day. That's where Rehoboam calls home. Totally different to the horrible mess that you have up north.

The Jeroboam has got going with all the bullcalf cult religion. Surely, we're going to read something more positive. Sadly, our optimism is short-lived, isn't it?

For another name is mentioned in verse 21. Even before we get on to the description of what Rehoboam was like. Another name is mentioned alongside the name of the Lord. Rehoboam's mother's name was Nema the Ammonite.

[ 12 : 12 ] And can I just say, she is mentioned again in exactly the same phrase down in verse 31. So she bookends the account of his reign. She engulfs this king's reign.

Now, I can't find any other king in this section of the book where a king's mother is named and her background is stated in that way and repeated. I take it this is very deliberate in the book.

Very unique. I think the author has given us a more than subtle hint of the fact that this woman had a very strong influence on the reign of her son. And who was she?

Answer? She was clearly one of Solomon's foreign wives. Pagan and unbelieving wives. She was an Ammonite. An Ammonite.

She would have been one of the many women mentioned back in chapter 11 that seduced Solomon's heart away from the Lord to love idols. And here she is now with her pagan influence on this next king of Judah.

[ 13 : 19 ] Friends, let me just say this. This is yet another reminder in the book. We've seen it already when we looked at Solomon. But it's another reminder, I think, of the dangers of God's people becoming romantically entangled with those who do not love the Lord.

Who do not trust in him as the only living God. As Christians becoming romantically entangled with an unbeliever, it can be disastrous.

It can eventually lead your heart away from the Lord Jesus. And if you marry them, that unbelieving spouse can lead the hearts of any children that you might have away from the Lord Jesus as well.

So friend, please, first king begs with you. If you're a Christian and you're currently entangled or thinking about becoming entangled with someone who doesn't love Jesus, please turn away.

Please flee. It's very dangerous, says this book. Well, the author seems to confirm our theory that Rehoboam was mixed up in pagan idolatry, probably egged on by his mother, by giving us a report of what happened to the people of Judah under his reign.

[ 14 : 28 ] Please look at verse 22. And Judah, Judah, the whole southern nation, did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. And they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed, more than all that their fathers had done.

So Rehoboam isn't directly identified as an evil king. He will be in a minute when we get to 15 verse 3. Okay, we'll get to that. But here, we are to draw the same conclusion about Rehoboam by looking at the fruits of his reign displayed in the lives of his people.

We saw the same thing with Jeroboam last week. Bad leadership has produced bad community, which has produced bad worship. Rehoboam's reign seems to have opened the door to idolatry in the land of Judah.

Let's just run through what we're told. Verse 23 tells us a report that the people built high places. Remember, these weren't necessarily up on the hills. They just had this name because they were alternative shrines where you would go and worship many foreign deities, but even worship the Lord.

People thought that you worshiped the Lord in this way at the high places, even though the Lord had said not to. Remember, after the temple was built, that was the place where you approached God and worshipped him in that way.

[ 15 : 48 ] That was God's way. And we're always to worship him according to his word. The people also made pillars, we're told. Not just any pillars. These were the symbolized male deities in the Canaanite fertility worship.

They also made Asherah poles. These are kind of the feminine, the female version of the male pillars that were made to represent Asherah, the Canaanite female mother goddess.

It's a mess. And just look at verse 23 again. Do you notice what's repeated? Everything, everywhere, all, all. Emphatically, it says that these idolatrous things were everywhere in the land.

Everywhere in the land. The people had filled the land that the Lord had so graciously given them with all of this abominable stuff. Also, verse 24.

Look at verse 24. The land of Judah was now full of male cult prostitutes. That's how you worshipped in ancient pagan religion.

[ 16 : 56 ] You would go and visit the pagan place of worship, and you would meet a cult prostitute. And often, not always, but often the thought was, as you went in and did whatever it was you did with the cult prostitute, the pagan gods above you, the male and female gods, would look at you in your activity and copy you so that they would start being together.

And the fallout from their cosmic lovemaking would fall down on top of you and bless you. The land was full of these cult prostitutes. And let me just say, Judah didn't come up with this stuff.

Have a look at verse 24, the end of it. What does it say? They did according to all the abominations of the nations that the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.

And as you read that, you're supposed to really see a veiled threat. A veiled threat. As one writer says, Since the people of Judah delight to ape and copy Canaanite religion, they will suffer a Canaanite fate, relieved of their place in the promised land.

And you see, friends, verse 22 to 24, heartbreakingly, they not only give us a description of Rehoboam's reign, they also give a summary, actually, of what to expect throughout the rest of the years in Judah, the years that lie ahead in the book.

[ 18 : 20 ] There's going to be years and years, more and more of this stuff popping up again and again. And eventually, there will be a dark end for the kingdom, just like those in the north.

Judah will show itself to be a faithless kingdom, and it too will be uprooted and scattered out in darkness in exile. That's what's been reported here.

As one writer puts it, the seeds of Judah's demise are already there at the beginning in the reign of Rehoboam. And I also think the future exile of Judah, I think it's previewed in what the Lord allows to happen in verse 25.

In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak, king of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem. He took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, the temple, and the treasures of the king's house.

He took away everything. And clearly, we're meant to understand Shishak's plundering expedition as an initial blow of the Lord's judgment on Judah's infidelity, and as a sign that they would be more of the same if they carried on in their ways.

[ 19 : 33 ] And then just notice that little detail in verse 26. It says this, Shishak took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made, and Rehoboam made in their place shields of bronze, and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard who kept the door of the king's house.

Earlier, I summarized Rehoboam's reign as a faithless nation and a fading glory. And friends, here is the fading glory. The remaining glimmers of glory, of what life was once like when Solomon was a good and wise king, all those years ago, that glory is rapidly fading.

Notice that like Jeroboam in the north, notice Rehoboam refuses to turn to the Lord in any way, shape, or form. He doesn't even recognize that this Egyptian raid was the Lord's loving warning to him and his people to turn back to him.

No, the king seems to totally ignore what has happened, and he just, he carries on, doesn't he? He carries on as though nothing is wrong, making these new shields, no longer from precious gold, but now from cheap brass.

And it would have been obvious to everyone that the glory of Judah was fading. Everyone would have seen it. But the king doesn't seem that bothered at all. Instead, he just wants to carry on going through the motions.

[ 21 : 03 ] Verse 28, It's just so pitiful, isn't it?

Rehoboam's kingdom is in a crisis, and he just carries on with all of his empty ceremonies, all of his formal religion, no commitment of heart, no engagement of the mind with the Word of God.

He just keeps up appearances, is really what he's doing, isn't he? Making it look like he's worshipping the Lord, whilst at the same time, his kingdom is a mess. And brothers and sisters, that's something, it's a sober word for us today.

It's a sober word for me today, as a minister, for all of us in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is possible that one day, we could end up doing this same sort of thing.

You know, we come along here on Sundays, to just go through the motions, make it look like we are worshipping the Lord, whilst actually in our hearts, we are far from the Lord.

[ 22 : 09 ] In our minds, we never engage with the Word. But that doesn't really matter, just as long as it looks like we are. And tragically, there are churches like this today in the world.

The glory of the Lord departed long ago, for the people departed from the Lord a long time ago. And yet they still gather. They still gather, to carry out their ceremonies, and their empty rituals.

So friends, let's guard our hearts. Let's learn from Rehoboam here, and take warning from the fading glory, of the faithless kingdom. Let me just read to you some words, from James Philip, about this as well.

He says this, The replacement of the gold shields by others made of brass is a startling indication of the spiritual devaluation that took place during these fateful years.

He says this, This is what always happens when men turn from God. The enemy of souls steals all that is precious and fine, an individual and national character, and base metals are put in its place.

[ 23 : 26 ] Think of the lives of those who used to, but now no longer give the things of God the highest place and honor. Think of our nation, which used to give moral and spiritual leadership to the world.

Has not gold been replaced by brass? Well, that's Rehoboam's reign, a faithless kingdom, and a fading glory.

And friends, again, this is another really heavy passage, just like last Sunday. It's somber, it's sober. Is there any hope? Is there hope for Judah? Is there hope for the house of David?

The answer is yes. Wonderfully. Despite all of the disturbing things that we've just seen. And that brings us to our second point this evening. The next reign. Abijam's reign.

And here we see a father-like king and a faithful God. A father-like king and a faithful God. And what do I mean when we see a father-like king?

[ 24 : 27 ] Well, please look at 15, verse 3. And he, Abijam, walked in all the sins that his father did before him.

And his heart was not wholly true to the Lord as God, as the heart of David, his father. Abijam showed himself to be a king who reigned just like his father, Rehoboam.

And just like his father, his heart was not wholly devoted, not wholly true to the Lord. But friends, what does that mean? Having a heart that's wholly true to the Lord.

Does it mean having a heart that is sinlessly perfect? Living a life that is flawless in God's eyes? Well, actually, no. Surprisingly. It can't mean that.

For David is described as having a heart wholly devoted to the Lord. And yet, he wasn't flawless, was he? David sinned, in fact, in technicolor. That's a fact that we're reminded of at the end of verse 5.

[ 25 : 25 ] He sinned in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. Now, having a heart that is wholly devoted to the Lord is just another way, friends, of talking about being a real believer.

Someone who trusts in the Lord as their only Savior and God, trusting in His grace, looking to Him for forgiveness and refuge, not following the gods of the pagans or worshipping them alongside the Lord.

To be wholly devoted to the Lord is what Psalm 24 says, not lifting up your soul to what is false, that is, to a false religion, a false God, but instead, looking to the Lord alone as the true and living God, as the only place of salvation, and to take His word seriously, to let it shape your life, to walk by the obedience of faith.

That is what Solomon refused to do at the end of his life. That is what Rehoboam refused to do through the vast majority of his life, and it is also what Abijam refuses to do here.

But doesn't that raise a key question in your head? The key question is this, how come then there is still a kingdom in Judah? Yes? Why doesn't the Lord completely wipe out the house of David there and then?

[ 26 : 41 ] Take care of it. Verse 4 and 5 give us the answer. Look at this. This is marvelous. Nevertheless, for David's sake, the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him and establishing Jerusalem, because David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

Why is there a kingdom still in Judah? Well, one answer is, and this might surprise us, because of David, because of his faithfulness, his wholehearted devotion and covenant faithfulness to the Lord, which of course were a gift of God's grace.

But more than that, there is a kingdom in Judah because, more importantly, of the Lord's faithfulness to his promises that he so graciously made with David.

Remember back in 2 Samuel 7, the Lord promised that he would build up a house for David, a dynasty. And that the Lord would mercifully discipline any of David's kingly descendants when they stepped out of line.

The Lord would bring them back. And that one day, the Lord even seems to say that a descendant of David will rule over God's perfected kingdom forever. That's what the Lord promised, and this is why there's still a kingdom.

[ 28 : 10 ] because the kingdom is established and run by grace. Just another thing. Flick back, please, to 1 Kings 11, verse 36.

I don't usually do this, but 1 Kings 11, verse 36. And in context, this is where the Lord is promising to discipline the house of David after Solomon's death for Solomon's disobedience.

But even here, even in this discipline, there is great grace. Now just notice if anything here sounds familiar from the verses that we've read in chapter 15.

So 1 Kings 11, verse 36. The Lord says, Yet to his son, that is to Solomon's son, I will give one tribe that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem.

The city where I have chosen to put my name. Flick back, please, to chapter 15. And here we see again the Lord's promise is repeated.

[ 29 : 18 ] The Lord will always see that there is a lamp, a king of David, in Jerusalem for David's sake. Because God is a God of grace. The Lord had promised these things to David, and so that's why there's still a kingdom of Judah.

Despite all of the unfaithfulness, the mess, the sin, all of the failings of David's descendants, despite all of the terrible things they've done. And let's not joke about here, friends, they've done terrible things.

There is still a kingdom in Judah because the Lord is steadfast to his word. Listen to Ralph Davis on this point. He says, The Lord made a promise, and in that very promise he seemed to recognize that David's descendants might well be scoundrels.

And indeed they are. But the kingdom remains, not because man obeys, but because God has decided. Why don't the kingdom and the people of God vanish into the mists of history?

Why is it that we, the church, don't vanish into the mists of history? Because our God will not permit it. He has decided that his kingdom will come.

[ 30 : 32 ] Grace is not only more stubborn than our sins, oh sorry, grace is not only greater than our sins, but more stubborn than our sins. So friends, let's remember this, especially if we are struggling with sin in our own lives, and as we as a church struggle on, and make mistakes, and mess up.

Yes, God's grace is not cheap grace, and so we must walk by the obedience of faith. But ultimately, we walk by grace, we are kept by grace, all the days of our lives, just like David and his kingdom.

Well, that's the reign of Abijam, a father-like king and a faithful God. And finally, let's look at our last king in this section, King Asa.

And in his reign, we see a faithful king and a foolish gift. A faithful king and a foolish gift. Well, having just been reminded of the Lord's faithfulness to his gracious covenant promises to David, we read of the next arrival in his family line, the next king in Judah, King Asa.

Please look at verse 9. In the 20th year of Jeroboam, king of Israel, Asa began to reign over Judah. He reigned 41 years in Jerusalem.

[ 31 : 58 ] His mother's name was Maka, the daughter of Abishalom. So let's just get this straight here. Asa was the son of Abijam, but confusingly, both Asa and Abijam are described as having the same mother.

If you're a Hawkeye reader, then you will have noticed that in verse 2 and verse 10. Now some commentators suggest that this detail communicates just how wicked Abijam was.

He had an evil, incestuous relationship with his mother, they claim. Asa was then the product of this relationship, this horrible relationship. Friends, I'm not that convinced by that.

It seems to me that if a writer wanted us to know that, he would have told us plainly in verse 3. I think the more reasonable explanation is that the word mother back then could be used to describe not only your mother but also your grandmother, your great-grandmother.

Same goes with the word father. The word father didn't just refer to your father but could be referred to as your grandfather and your great-grandfather. In fact, in verse 3, David is called Abijam's father.

[ 33 : 11 ] But in reality, he was his great-great-grandfather. So it could well have been, this is probably most likely, that Asa's mother wasn't around to raise him and instead, Maka, daughter of Abishalom, was there to raise him instead.



We can't be certain of that, sure. What we can be certain of is that Asa truly was a gift of God's grace. He was a remarkable king.

He was a great gift for the house of David and to Judah for he is so beautifully different in his heart from both his father and his grandfather. Look at verse 11.

So clear. Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord as David his father had done. What a glorious gift from the Lord this king is.

Here at last is another king who walks like David by the obedience of faith, not turning to idols, not mixing worship of the Lord with the worship of Canaanite deities.

[ 34 : 14 ] Bob Fyle says this, the appearance of Asa shows the power of grace to flourish in unexpected places. Nothing in the life of his hapless father or formidable grandfather explains his openness to God or his substantial reforms.

Godliness is not carried in the genes. Well Asa's godliness is distinctive and it's also helpfully destructive.

And his early reign is marked by godly demolition work. Just run your eye over verse 12 please. You'll see there that he gets rid of all of the male cult prostitutes in the land.

He has a real purge and he also removes all of the idols that his fathers had built. And just look at verse 13. Look at this boldness here. Look at this boldness.

Maka, the woman called Asa's mother in verse 10, she's described there as being the queen mother. And literally in the Hebrew, I'm not saying this, this is literally in the Hebrew, she's called the big lady.

[ 35 : 21 ] She's called the big lady. It sounds like she was a woman not to be messed with. She was a big lady. Obviously holds a position of great power and influence in the royal household.

We're also told she loves a good idol. She loves a good bit of Asherah worship. So much so that she uses her power and status to commission the construction of this abominable image.

We don't know what it was, but it was abominable in the eyes of the Lord. And it was an image for a Canaanite goddess. And what does Asher do in response to the woman he may well have called mother?

He purchased what she's done. He cuts down her image that she's built and he burns it to ashes in the Kidron Valley. And do you know what he does? He then removes the big lady from her position of power and influence.

Here is a king with real guts about the honour of the Lord. Friends, the glory of the Lord is more important than anything, even our biological families.

[ 36 : 31 ] Asherah knew this and so his purge extended even into his own family, the royal household. He is so faithful here.

And as you read this you think, oh what a breath of fresh air. What hope. Will this king bring about permanent transformation in Judah? And the answer is no.

Asherah is a truly faithful king. He is truly faithful friends. And he shows wholehearted devotion to the Lord. However, there were limitations in his reform. Look at verse 14.

The high places remained in the land. And they will remain in the land in Judah for years to come until the Lord raises up finally another king who reigns like David.

God willing we shall get to him when we get into 2 Kings. So Asherah's reform was limited and towards the end of his life Asherah also showed that whilst he was a faithful king he was also flawed.

[ 37 : 34 ] And you can see that from the fact that he gave what I think is a foolish gift. That is really what this scene is all about from verse 16 onwards. So Asherah's reign was long and throughout his days there were constant changes in the north and one of the kings in the north was Basha.

Seems to be a king that he was at war with quite a lot. One of the kings of Israel. We'll hear about him next Sunday. And in verse 17 we're told that Basha stirred up a political crisis.

He basically comes down with his forces down from the north and he comes down to Judah and he takes over this place called Ramah. And he builds up Ramah.

And really the Hebrew word there is fortified. He turns it into a military base. And what was so strategic about that was that it was only five miles north of Jerusalem and also some of the key trade routes, some of the key roads ran through Ramah to Jerusalem.

So basically Basha's plan is pretty obvious. He has built an economic blockade. Stop resources getting in and out of Jerusalem in order to damage the city and its inhabitants.

[ 38 : 42 ] especially its king. And in response to this, in verse 18, Asa takes all the remaining silver and gold in the treasures of the house of the Lord and in the king's household.

And what he does is he gives it to his servants. He says to his servants, I want you to go on a mission, take all of these treasures from the house of the Lord and take them up to Damascus to the king of Syria who was called Ben-Hadad.

And Asa gets them to deliver the riches to this pagan king as a gift and also wants to pass on a message to this king. Look at verse 19, please.

He says to king Ben-Hadad of Syria, let there be a covenant between me and you as there was between my father and your father.

Behold, I am sending you a present, a gift of silver and gold. Go, break your covenant with Basha king of Israel that he may withdraw from me.

[ 39 : 49 ] So it turns out that this king of Syria was in covenant relationship with Basha king of Israel. And basically Asa here is giving the king of Syria a bribe.

If you look at the Hebrew word in our translation it says present, it says gift in other translations. Really the word is used all the way through the Old Testament as a bribe and usually an immoral bribe.

And he's doing it in order to make the king of Syria break covenant and turn against Israel in the north. And I'm sure you can see the tactics here. Basha, once he's in Ramah and he hears that Syria has turned against him and is attacking the north, what he will do is he will flee from Ramah and he will go back up north and thus Jerusalem and Judah will be freed.

And do you know what? The plan works. The plan works. Just as Asa plans. Asa Syria attack Israel, Basha flees Ramah to defend his land and Judah then goes and takes over Ramah for themselves.

It was successful, but was it the right thing to do? Well, let me just say, if you were to read this charitably, I think you might say that this is at best ambiguous.

[ 41 : 16 ] Ambiguous. Personally, from the little details, I think this was actually a foolish move to give that gift to the king in Syria. I think Asa walks by sight here instead of trusting in the Lord to deliver him.

Remember what I said before, one of the themes to the book of Kings is ending badly. Even if you're a good king, there's always a theme of usually at some point ending badly and I think here, Asa, despite being faithful, he shows that he's flawed.

Let me just give you some reasons why I think that. As I say, the Hebrew word for present here is actually translated as bribe. Also, the law of the Lord took covenant keeping very seriously.

Even covenants made with people outside of the promised land. And yet here is Asa encouraging king of Syria to break covenant. And it is true that Solomon entered into a treaty with the king of Syria in the past.

But in that treaty, Solomon clearly had the position of power and the result of his treaty with the king of Syria actually led to the extension of the promised land.

[ 42 : 29 ] The kingdom grew under Solomon. Contrast with this treaty, the end result in verse 20 is that many parts of the promised land in the north actually end up under Syrian rule.

the promised land is taken away here. Bits of it anyway. That is not a good thing. Also, once Basha flees Ramah, Asa takes Ramah for Jerusalem.

Now, there's nothing wrong with that. He took that strategic military place and he continued to fortify it and to build it up into his own defense just above Jerusalem. But notice what he does.

Look at verse 22. We're told Asa makes all of Judah, everyone in Judah, and makes them his enslaved laborers.

He takes all of Judah into forced labor, not just selecting a few and those from the army like Solomon had done back in his reign. Here, all Judah are now enslaved to take part in this work.

[ 43 : 36 ] And that wasn't right for the kings to do that to the people of God. This may be the reason why at the end of his life we're told that Asa has an awful sickness. The foot disease that's mentioned there in verse 23.

Now, there's loads more we could say about this. These are just some of the reasons why I think this is a bad move on Asa's part. The gift he gave to the king of Syria was a foolish thing to do.

So, friends, Asa was a flawed king who made mistakes. However, at the same time, he was a faithful king, a gift of the Lord's grace.

He came out of nowhere, and he loved the Lord and lived for him and ruled for him throughout most of his days. And in his better moments, he really does give us a glimpse of King David's greater son, who was to come.

The king born unexpectedly for those around him. The king born to fulfill all of the great promises made with David. The king born to save his people from sin and idolatry.

[ 44 : 44 ] The king who alone has the power to transform his people's hearts, turning them into true worshippers of the Lord alone. The king who has never yet and who never will ever make any mistakes in his reign, for he himself is flawless, perfect.

The king who will one day soon come and establish his kingdom, the new Jerusalem on earth in all its fullness. The Lord Jesus Christ is what we see in Asa in his better moments.

Just think about this before we close. In Revelation 21, we are told that that new Jerusalem, in the new Jerusalem, there will be no sun or moon.

Why? For there will be a lamp shining brightly in Jerusalem for all eternity. Who is the lamp?

The lamp is the lamb that we heard about this morning. King Jesus, David's son. Friends, the Lord our God never forgets his gracious covenant promises.

[ 45 : 54 ] These promises we see here made to David and affirmed and kept going by his grace despite all of the mess of David's household. We must rejoice in them for they are gospel promises fulfilled fully in the Lord Jesus.

And because our God always remembers his promises and never forgets them, that means that you and I really can trust them. We can build our lives upon them with great confidence, strong assurance and with holy joy.

In the world that we live in, leaders will come and leaders will go, some will be good, some will be bad. In the end there is only one king greater than all the rest in whom we must put our trust.

And that is the lamb who is the lamb, the one who will forever burn brightly in the new heavens and the new earth. Well, let's bow our heads and be quiet for a moment and then I'll pray for us.

our gracious heavenly father, we praise you that you are a God of faithfulness, a God of grace, who is always steadfast to your covenant promises.

[ 47 : 23 ] Help us not to presume upon your grace, but this is not cheap grace. Instead, help us to walk obediently before you in wholehearted devotion to you, all in response to what you've done for us in the person of your son.

And we pray this name. Amen.