

CHAPTER 15

Asa and his army were now returning in triumph from the battle, laden with spoils and adorned with the trophies of victory, the pious prince, we may now suppose, studying what he should render to God for this great favour. He knew that the work of reformation, which he had begun in his kingdom, was not perfected; his enemies abroad were subdued, but there were more dangerous enemies at home that were yet unconquered — idols in Judah and Benjamin: his victory over the former emboldened him vigorously to renew his attack upon the latter. Now here we have,

I. The message which God sent to him, by a prophet, to engage him to, and encourage him in, the prosecution of his reformation (v. 1-7).

II. The life which this message put into that good cause, and their proceedings in pursuance of it. Idols removed (v. 8). The spoil dedicated to God (v. 9-11). A covenant made with God, and a law for the punishing of idolaters (v. 12-15). A reformation at court (v. 16). Dedicated things brought into the house of God (v. 18). All well, but that the high places were permitted (v. 17). And the effect of this was great peace (v. 19).

<4450> 2 CHRONICLES 15:1-7

GOD'S MESSAGE TO ASA

It was a great happiness to Israel that they had prophets among them; yet, while they were thus blessed, they were strangely addicted to idolatry, whereas, when the spirit of prophecy had ceased under the second temple, and the canon of the Old Temple was completed (which was constantly read in their synagogues), they were pure from idolatry; for the scriptures are of all other the *most sure word of prophecy*, and most effectual, and the church could not be so easily imposed upon by a counterfeit Bible as by a counterfeit prophet. Here was a prophet sent to Asa and his army, when they returned victorious from the war with the Ethiopians, not to compliment them and congratulate them on their success, but to quicken them to their duty; this is the proper business of God's ministers, even with

princes and the greatest men. The *Spirit of God came* upon the prophet (v. 1), both to instruct him what he should say and to enable him to say it with clearness and boldness.

I. He told them plainly upon what terms they stood with God. Let them not think that, having obtained this victory, all was their own for ever; no, he must let them know they were upon their good behaviour. Let them do well, and it will be well with them, otherwise not.

1. *The Lord is with you while you are with him.* This is both a word of comfort, that those who keep close to God shall always have his presence with them, and also a word of caution: “He is *with you, while you are with him*, but no longer; you have now a signal token of his favourable presence with you, but the continuance of it depends upon your perseverance in the way of your duty.”

2. “*If you seek him, he will be found of you.* Sincerely desire his favour, and aim at it, and you shall obtain it. Pray, and you shall prevail. He never said, nor ever will, *Seek you me in vain.*” See ^{<58106>}Hebrews 11:6. But,

3. “If you forsake him and his ordinances, he is not tied to you, but will certainly forsake you, and then you are undone, your present triumphs will be no security to you; woe to you when God departs.”

II. He set before them the dangerous consequence of forsaking God and his ordinances, and that there was no way of having grievances redressed, but by repenting, and returning unto God. When Israel forsook their duty they were over-run with a deluge of atheism, impiety, irreligion, and all irregularity (v. 3), and were continually embarrassed with vexatious and destroying wars, foreign and domestic, v. 5, 6. But when their troubles drove them to God they found it not in vain to seek him, v. 4. But the question is, What time does this refer to?

1. Some think it looks as far back as the days of the Judges. *A long season ago* Israel was *without the true God*, for they worshipped false gods; it was a time of ignorance, for, though they had priests, they had no teaching priests, though they had elders, yet no law to any purpose, v. 3. These were sad times, when they were frequently oppressed by one enemy or other and grievously harassed by Moabites, Midianites, Ammonites, and other nations. They were *vexed with all adversity* (v. 6), yet when, in their perplexity, they turned to God by repentance, prayer, and reformation, he

raised up deliverers for them. Then was that maxim often verified, that God is with us while we are with him. Whatsoever things of this kind were written aforetime were written for our admonition.

2. Others think it describes the state of the ten tribes (who were now properly called *Israel*) in the days of Asa. “*Now, since Jeroboam set up the calves, though he pretended to honour the God that brought them out of Egypt, yet his idolatry has brought them to downright infidelity; they are without the true God,*” and no marvel when they were without teaching priests. Jeroboam's priests were not teachers, and thus they came to be without law. It is next to impossible that any thing of religion should be kept up without a preaching ministry. In those times there was no peace, v. 5. Their war with Judah gave them frequent alarms; so did the late insurrection of Baasha and other occasions not mentioned. They provoked God with all iniquity, and then he *vexed them with all adversity*; yet, *when they turned to God*, he was entreated for them. Let Judah take notice of this; let their neighbours' harms be their warnings. Give no countenance to graven images for you see what mischiefs they produce.

3. Others think the whole passage may be read in the future tense, and that it looks forward: Hereafter *Israel will be without the true God and a teaching priest*, and they will be destroyed by one judgment after another till they *return to God and seek him*. See ~~2304~~ Hosea 3:4.

III. Upon this he grounded his exhortation to prosecute the work of reformation with vigour (v. 7): *Be strong, for your work shall be rewarded*. Note,

- 1.** God's work should be done with diligence and cheerfulness, but will not be done without resolution.
- 2.** This should quicken us to the work of religion, that we shall be sure not to lose by it ultimately. It will not go unrewarded. How should it, when the work is its own reward?

~~4158~~ 2 CHRONICLES 15:8-19

ASA REFORMS HIS KINGDOM

We are here told what good effect the foregoing sermon had upon Asa.

I. He grew more bold for God than he had been. His victory would inspire him with some new degrees of resolution, but this message from God with much more. Now he took courage. he saw how necessary a further reformation was, and what assurance he had of God's presence with him in it; and this made him daring, and helped him over the difficulties which had before deterred him and driven him off from the undertaking. Now he ventured to destroy all the abominable idols (and all idolatries are abominable, ^{<40B>}1 Peter 4:3) as far as ever his power went. Away with them all. He also *renewed the altar of the Lord*, which, it seems, had gone out of repair, though it was not above thirty-five years since Solomon's head was laid, who erected it. So soon did these ceremonial institutions begin to wax old, as things which, in the fulness of time, must *vanish away*, ^{<38B>}Hebrews 8:13.

II. He extended his influence further than before, v. 9. He summoned a solemn assembly, and particularly brought the strangers to it, who had come over to him from the ten tribes.

1. Their coming was a great encouragement to him; for the reason of their coming was because *they saw that the Lord his God was with him*. It is good to be with those that have God with them, to come into relation to, and contract acquaintance and friendship with, those that live in the fear and favour of God. *We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you*, ^{<38B>}Zechariah 8:23.

2. The cognizance he took of them, and the invitation he gave them to the general assembly, were a great encouragement to them. All strangers are to be helped, but those that cast themselves upon God's good providence, purely to keep a good conscience, are worthy of double honour. Asa gave orders for the gathering of them together (v. 9), yet it is said (v. 10) that they *gathered themselves together*, made it their own act, so forward were they to obey the king's orders. This meeting was held in the third month, probably at the feast of Pentecost, which was in that month.

III. He and his people offered sacrifices to God, as his share of the spoil they had got, v. 11. Their offering here was nothing to Solomon's (^{<40B>}2 Chronicles 7:5), which was owing to the diminution either of their zeal or of their wealth, or of both. These sacrifices were intended by way of thanksgiving for the favours they had received, and supplication for further favours. Prayers and praises are now our spiritual sacrifices. And, as he

took care that the altar should have its gift, so he took care that the temple should have its gold: *He brought into the house of God all the dedicated things*, v. 18. It is honesty to render to God the things that are his. What has been long designed for him, and long laid by for him, as it should seem these dedicated things had been, should at length be laid out for him. Will a man rob God, or make slow payment to him, who is always ready to do us good?

IV. *They entered into covenant with God*, repenting that they had violated their engagements to him and resolving to do better for the future. It is proper for penitents, for converts, to renew their covenants. It should seem, the motion came not from Asa, but from the people themselves. Let every man be a volunteer that covenants with God. *Thy people shall be willing*, ~~HEB~~ Psalm 110:3. Observe,

1. What was the matter of this covenant. Nothing but what they were before obliged to; and, though no vow or promise of theirs could lay any higher obligation upon them than they were already under from the divine precept, yet it would help to increase their sense of the obligation, to arm them against temptations, and would be a testimony to the equity and goodness of the precept. And, by joining all together in this covenant, they strengthened the hands one of another. Two things they engaged themselves to: —

(1.) That they would diligently seek God themselves, seek his precepts, seek his favour. What is religion but seeking God, enquiring after him, applying to him, upon all occasions? We shall not enjoy him till we come to heaven; while we are here we must continue seeking. They would seek God as the *God of their fathers*, in the way that their fathers sought him and in dependence upon the promise made to their fathers; and they would do it *with all their heart* and *with all their soul*, for those only seek God acceptably and successfully that are inward with him, intent upon him, and entire for him, in their seeking him. We make nothing of our religion if we do not make heart-work of it. God will have all the heart or none; and, when a jewel of such inestimable value as the divine favour is to be found, it is worth while to seek it *with all our soul*.

(2.) That they would, to the utmost of their power, oblige others to seek him, v. 13. They agreed that *whosoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel* (that is, would either worship other gods or refuse to join with them

in the worship of the true God, that was either an obstinate idolater or an obstinate atheist) he should be put to death. This was no new law of their own making, but an order to put in execution that law of God to this purport, ^{<517D>}Deuteronomy 17:2, etc. If this law had been duly executed, there would not have been so many abominable idols found in Judah and Benjamin, v. 8. Whether men may now, under the gospel, be compelled by such methods as these to seek the Lord is justly questioned; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, and yet mighty.

2. In what manner they made this covenant.

(1.) With great cheerfulness, and all possible expressions of joy: *The swore unto the Lord*; not secretly, as if they were either ashamed of what they did or afraid of binding themselves too fast to him, but with a loud voice, to express their own zeal and to animate one another; and they all rejoiced at the oath, v. 14, 15. They did not swear to God with reluctance (as the poor debtor confesses a judgment to his creditor), but with all the pleasure and satisfaction imaginable, as the bridegroom plights his troth to the bride in the marriage covenant. Every honest Israelite was pleased with his own engagements to God, and they were all pleased with one another's. They rejoiced in it as a hopeful expedient to prevent their apostasy from God and a happy indication of God's presence with them. Note, The times of renewing our covenant with God should be times of rejoicing, and national reformation cannot but give general satisfaction to all that are good. It is an honour and happiness to be in bonds to God.

(2.) They did it with great sincerity, zeal and resolution: *They swore to God with all their hearts, and sought him with their whole desire*. The Israelites were now in an extraordinarily good frame. O that there had always been such a heart in them! This comes in as the reason why they rejoiced so much in what they did: it was because they were hearty in it. Note, Those only experience the pleasure and comfort of religion that are sincere and upright in it. What is done in hypocrisy is a mere drudgery. But, if God has the heart, we have the joy.

V. We are told what was the effect of this their solemn covenanting with God.

1. God did well for them: *He was found of them, and gave them rest round about* (v. 15), so that there was no war for a long time after (v. 19), no open general war, though there were constant bickerings between Judah

and Israel upon the frontiers, ^{<11516>}1 Kings 15:16. National piety procures national blessings.

2. They did, on the whole, well for him. They carried on the reformation so far that Maachah the queen-mother was deposed for idolatry and her idol destroyed, v. 16. This was bravely done of Asa, that he would not connive at idolatry in those that were nearest to him, like Levi, that *said to his father and mother, I have not seen him*, ^{<5319>}Deuteronomy 33:9. Asa knows he must honour God more than his grandmother, and dares not leave an idol in an apartment of his palace while he is destroying idols in the cities of his kingdom. We may suppose this Maachah was so far convinced of her sin that she was willing to subscribe the association mentioned (v. 12, 13), binding herself to seek the Lord, and therefore was not put to death as those were that refused to sign it, great as well as small, women as well as men: probably it was with an eye to her that *women* were specified. But because she had been an idolater Asa thought fit to divest her of the dignity and authority she had, and probably he banished her the court and confined her to privacy, lest she should influence and infect others. But the reformation was not complete; the high places were not all taken away, though many of them were, ^{<444B>}2 Chronicles 14:3, 5. Those in the cities were removed, but not those in the cities of Judah, but not those in the cities of Israel which were reduced to the house of David; or those that were used in the service of false gods, but not those that were used in the service of the God of Israel. These he connived at, and yet his heart was perfect. There may be defects in some particular duties where yet the heart, in the man, is upright with God. Sincerity is something less than sinless perfection.