Leader guide

In this lesson:

SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 15-16

CORE VIRTUE: JOY

Joy (John 15:11): I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

TAKE HOME TRUTH

Our best and worst "kings" still fall short, but King Jesus satisfies both God and man perfectly.

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Good King, Bad King, the Best King

OVERVIEW

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."

Charles Dickens was not writing an introduction to 1 Kings 15-16, but it certainly fits the text. For Judah, it was the best of times, as the nation was led in a revival by King Asa. For Israel, it was the worst of times as one evil king after another led the nation into a deadly spiral of sin and destruction.

This week we will look at a good king, an evil king, and the best King. How fitting that we point to King Jesus during the Easter season! May the contrast between good and evil remind us this week that God did not send us the king we wanted (or deserved), but He sent the King we needed.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS WEEK

Zechariah 9:9 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

INTRODUCTION

Why do we take the time to look at the narratives and examples in the Old Testament?

Which of the gospel accounts of the Triumphal entry is your favorite? Why?

Looking back at your notes from this week's sermon, was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged or confused you?

Make sure you ask this question this week. It gives people the opportunity to discuss questions or issues that come up beyond the written questions. People's responses can often lead into one of the questions in the "Digging Deeper" section. Also, some weeks this question will result in a lot of discussion, other weeks, not so much.

READ THE TEXT

Things just keep worsening for the northern tribes. And though there are some bright spots for the southern tribes, it is a mixed bag. This week we see the contrast between good King Asa of Judah and the evil King Baasha of Israel. Read 1 Kings 15-16.

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DIGGING DEEPER

In this section, feel free to develop your own questions to help guide your group's discussion. Below are some suggestions. Remember, if you are hearing from everyone in your group, chances are you won't have to time to discuss every question. You may start with one that catches your attention so you don't run out of time. For example, it's not odd to start with Question #6, then go to Question #5 and if you have time come back to Question #4.

From what you see in 1 Kings 15, briefly describe the reign of King Asa of Judah.

Asa had a long, 41-year reign over the Southern Kingdom (1 Kings 15:10). And note a significant fact: he was not influenced by his grandmother Maacah's false worship (1 Kings 15:13).

On the contrary, Asa carried out a religious reform throughout Judah (1 Kings 15:11-14). Just as David had done, he lived a righteous life before the Lord and established a just and moral government throughout the land. The first ten years of his rule were peaceful years: no wars or battles threatened the borders of the Southern Kingdom (2 Chron. 14:1). This meant that for ten years, he could focus solely on his religious reforms. Note four significant facts about his efforts to establish a righteous, just government:

- *He banished the religious prostitutes, expelling them from the land of Judah (1 Kings 15:12; 14:24). Engaging in sexual rituals was forbidden throughout the nation.*
- *He removed all the idols his forefathers had made and encouraged the people to worship (1 Kings 15:12). Undertaking this task no doubt took an enormous effort, for idolatry and false worship had become embedded in the nation, more so than ever before in the history of Israel (1 Kings 14:22).*
- *Asa was even able to depose or remove his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother (1 Kings 15:13). For years she had influenced the people to worship the repulsive, obscene image of the Asherah pole. Note that Asa actually cut the pole down and burned it in the Kidron Valley. Removing his own grandmother from her exalted position shows just how deeply committed Asa was to the Lord. Obviously, his love for the Lord was the deepest attachment he had, even deeper than his affection for his family. He loved the Lord above all and he was determined to cleanse the land of idolatry and false worship.*
- *But note: Asa did not destroy all the high places (1 Kings 15:14). Keep in mind that some high places had true worship centers where the Lord was genuinely worshipped (1 Kings 3:2; 1 Samuel 9:12), but other high places were used as false worship centers where idolatry was practiced (2 Chron. 14:2-3). Most likely, Asa destroyed the high places where idols were worshipped, but he allowed other high places to remain where the Lord Himself was worshipped (1 Kings 15:14).*

Whatever the case, Scripture says that his heart was perfect. He was fully committed to the Lord throughout his entire life. And he was not only committed to the Lord, but also to the temple. Remember that his grandfather had used the wealth of the temple to pay tribute to the king of Egypt to keep the Egyptians from destroying Jerusalem (1 Kings 14:25-28). Here King Asa is said to have replenished the treasury that his grandfather had depleted.

After enjoying ten years of peace, war broke out between Asa and King Baasha, who was then ruling over the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 15:33–16:7). This was a major military engagement demanding all-out mobilization for war. Note five facts:

- *King Baasha of the Northern Kingdom invaded Judah, conquering city after city including Ramah, which was only four miles north of Jerusalem itself (1 Kings 15:17). Capturing a town so close to the capital of the Southern Kingdom was a grave threat to Asa and his people. King Baasha's ambition was clear, for he began to fortify Ramah to cut off all traffic and trade routes leading into Jerusalem. He was determined to conquer the Southern Kingdom.*

- *Asa immediately sought a military alliance with Ben-Hadad, who was king of Syria or Aram (1 Kings 15:18). This was a severe failure of Asa's, for he was trusting in man and failing to trust in God (2 Chron. 16:7-10). Note the high cost it was to the nation: he emptied the treasuries of the temple and palace and sent a delegation with the riches to King Ben-Hadad requesting two things of the Syrian king. He wanted Ben-Hadad to break his treaty with the Northern Kingdom and to sign a new treaty between Judah and Syria (1 Kings 15:18-19). Sadly, Asa had failed to pray, to ask God for help during this crisis. He was placing his trust in man instead of in God. As a result, he was forced to strip the treasury of his palace and that of the temple, which he had formerly built up and where he had no doubt dedicated the gifts to God and His service.*

- *When the delegation arrived with the enormous treasure and wealth, Ben-Hadad was more than willing to accept King Asa's terms. He could greatly enrich his wealth by breaking his treaty with the Northern Kingdom of Israel and supporting King Asa against their invasion (1 Kings 15:20). Quickly mobilizing the Syrian forces, he swiftly invaded the Northern Kingdom of Israel and conquered a large area that gave him access to major trade routes running from Egypt and Phoenicia to Syria.*

- *As soon as King Baasha heard of the invasion of the Northern Kingdom by the Syrians, he was forced to retreat from Judah to block the invaders (1 Kings 15:21).*

- *When the army of the Northern Kingdom withdrew, Asa was able to mobilize his own forces, march out, and retake Ramah (1 Kings 15:22). Note that he confiscated the building materials left behind by Baasha and that he used these materials to fortify Geba and Mizpah. These were two major cities that needed to be fortified as military strongholds to strengthen the border between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. By reinforcing these cities, Asa hoped to prevent any future invasion by the Northern Kingdom. And he was successful, at least during his reign. For no other invasion occurred during his lifetime.*

But Asa had trusted in man instead of in God. He failed to trust the Lord for deliverance. He had suffered a spiritual defeat that almost led to the conquest of Judah. In another Scripture, God sent His prophet Hanani to rebuke Asa for his unbelief, for having forsaken God and having trusted in man and the power of his military. Instead of receiving the rebuke humbly and in repentance, Asa had the prophet arrested, thrown in prison, and treated harshly. And from this point on, the prophets of God were often to be persecuted, treated harshly by the rulers of Israel (2 Chron. 16:7-10; also see 2 Kings 17:13-14).

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Asa's achievements and a summary of his life are recorded in the book The History of the Kings of Judah (1 Kings 15:23). An interesting fact is that he had diseased feet in his old age. This statement seems disconnected from the context of the passage. Perhaps it is mentioned to indicate what caused his death. After his death he was buried in Jerusalem and succeeded by his son Jehoshaphat.

For those who grew up in a broken, dysfunctional family, what encouragement can you take from King Asa?

A child can reject the evil influence of his or her parents. Asa did, and many others have. Just because a parent lives a wicked life does not mean that the child has to walk in the same footsteps of evil. Just because a parent fails does not mean a child will fail. The trend of evil can be broken, overcome, and conquered. No child can legitimately blame his parents for his own sinful behavior. A child can break the weak or sinful behavior of a parent and walk in strength and righteousness before God.

As we see illustrated in 1 Kings 15, King Asa broke the deep-seated, ingrained wickedness of his parents. He walked righteously before the Lord—not perfectly, but righteously—throughout his entire life.

Every one of us is responsible for his or her own behavior and actions. When we live righteously, we will be rewarded, and the rewards will not be given to someone else. So it is with sinful behavior: when we live wicked lives, we stand responsible for the wickedness. Neither our mothers nor fathers nor anyone else is to be blamed for our failures and weaknesses. Despite others' harmful or corrupt influence upon us, we are responsible to break the trend of corruption and wickedness. We are accountable for our own personal behavior, whether good or evil.

Take hope. We are doomed to failure because we come from a dysfunctional family.

1 Kings 16 can be described as Israel's descent into evil. Why is this a good description?

As the story focuses upon the rulers of the Northern Kingdom, one picture stands out above all others: these six leaders all lived evil, wicked lives. They walked in the ways of Jeroboam, the first ruler of the Northern Kingdom. Just as he was a terrible stumbling block to the Israelites, so too were these evil kings. They led the people to continue in their lives of sin and false worship, giving their allegiance to false gods who had no power to help them in their hour of need. Consider this downward spiral of sin and destruction:

1. *The evil reign of Nadab: a lesson on the surety of judgment (vv.25-31).*
2. *The evil reign of Baasha: a legacy, example of terrible evil (ch.15:32–16:7).*
3. *The evil reign of Elah: a scene of drunkenness and murder (vv.8-14).*
4. *The evil reign of Zimri: a picture of hopelessness and suicide (vv.15-20).*

5. *The evil reign of Omri: a spirit of worldly ambition and self-exaltation (vv.21-28).*

6. *The evil reign of Ahab: a life of utter depravity, corruption (vv.29-34).*

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Zeroing in on King Baasha, how would you describe this evil king's reign?

The long 24-year reign of Baasha began in the third year of King Asa's rule over the Southern Kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 15:33). Baasha ruled from the capital city of Israel, which was Tirzah (1 Kings 15:33).

Baasha was engaged in constant warfare with King Asa of the Southern Kingdom (1 Kings 15:32). Instead of attempting to establish the social and religious reforms as King Asa had done, Baasha was gripped by a spirit of greed. He coveted more and more power, seeking more territory for himself (1 Kings 15:9-24). Keep in mind that he had come to power by assassinating King Nadab, the son of Jeroboam. But he was just the first of several assassins who would take the throne of the Northern Kingdom by murdering the existing ruler (1 Kings 15:15-16; 2 Kings 10:1-17; 15:10-13; 15:14-16; 15:25-26; 15:30-31).

Baasha failed as miserably in his rule as Jeroboam and Nadab had in theirs, for he failed to remove the corrupt, false worship instituted by Jeroboam. Continuing to commit the very same evil as his predecessors, he became a terrible stumbling block. He caused Israel to continue in their idolatry and false worship (1 Kings 15:34).

A scathing condemnation was pronounced upon Baasha by God's prophet Jehu (1 Kings 16:1-14). Jehu was the son of Hanani, who was probably the seer or prophet who issued a warning to King Asa of Judah (2 Chron. 16:7-9). God's message to King Baasha through Jehu was direct and to the point:

- *King Baasha had been raised up by God Himself to rule over the Northern Kingdom (although his murderous ways of securing power were not sanctioned by God).*
- *But instead of instituting religious and social reforms, he had chosen to walk in the evil ways of Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:25-33; 14:16).*
- *Thus, he had become a terrible stumbling block to Israel. He caused God's people to sin and to provoke God to anger by their sins.*
- *Consequently, he was to face the hand of God's judgment (1 Kings 16:3-4). His house—the kingdom and family dynasty—were to be destroyed just as Jeroboam's had been. Also, his family was to be shamed, not buried with respect and honor. Instead, their dead bodies would be eaten by dogs and birds, scavengers of the earth.*

A brief statement of Baasha's achievements and a summary of his life are given by the author (1 Kings 16:5-7). The accomplishments of his reign are recorded in the book The History of the Kings of Israel (1 Kings 16:5). After Baasha's death, he was buried in the capital of Tirzah and succeeded by his son Elah (1 Kings 16:6). Note that his tragic legacy is reemphasized:

- *He was a man who had to be confronted by God's prophet to hear a scathing condemnation of God's judgment against himself.*
- *He was a man who was guilty of terrible evil in the eyes of the Lord, an evil that provoked the Lord to anger.*

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- *He was a man who was guilty of slaughtering the entire house of Jeroboam.*

Baasha was a man who set a terrible example for his family and all his generation. He was guilty not only of engaging in false worship and encouraging others to do the same but also of mass murder to secure the throne. Scripture says he did all kinds of evil things, committing all forms of sin and wickedness (1 Kings 16:7). And because of the life he lived, he left behind an appalling legacy of evil. This is just one example of an evil king among a long line of evil kings!

Where do you see God's finger pointing to Jesus in this week's timeline of the various kings in the north and south? (There may be more than one)

BECOMING A HOUSE OF PRAYER

> *"Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices; Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." – Isaiah 56:7.*

Prayer Focus for the Week of March 25

Close your time in prayer. Praise God for sending Christ to be the king we needed, not the king we wanted. Ask God to help your group worship Him with their whole lives.

NEXT STEPS

Questions to consider as you continue to reflect on what you learned this week:

- **Take Action:** What kind of legacy are you leaving for your family? Take inventory of your life and compare it to the word of God. Where do you need to make corrections or repent so that your legacy is one of godliness and obedience to King Jesus?
- **Take Courage:** Many of us can feel doomed by our family legacy. As we saw this week, you have a voice in your life and legacy. Your decision to follow God and live a life of obedience to Him is your decision, not something that has been handed down to you by your parents. For good or bad, you own your legacy.

Work to memorize this week's memory verse: Zechariah 9:9 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

This week's Core Virtue is Joy (John 15:11): I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Remember to use the Daily Bible Reading plan as part of your walk with Christ, taking the time to reflect on each passage and what it means for your lives.

STUDY NOTES

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1 Kings 15

15:2 Abijah's three-year reign in Judah (913-911 B.C.) was within Jeroboam's reign in Israel (931-910 B.C.). Abijah was a son of Rehoboam and Maacah, a daughter of Absalom (Abishalom is a variant spelling), (2 Chr 11:21), of Uriel (2 Chr 13:2). Hence, it has been thought probable that Tamar, the daughter of Absalom (2 Sam 14:27; 18:18), had been married to Uriel, and that Maachah was their daughter.

15:3 Abijam walked in all the sins of his father—he followed his father's pattern. Papa was to blame, also, for the way his son turned out; papa set the example. Abijam was not brought up in a very good home. He was a rotten, corrupt king, and his father and mother are responsible to a certain degree. We are also told that "his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David, his father." David had become the standard for these kings. It is true that David was a human standard, but it was a standard that God accepted. (Thru the Bible Commentary, Volumes 1-5: Genesis through Revelation: Genesis through Revelation)

15:4 God's patience with Abijah was because of His promises to David more than to Abijah's character. ("Him," v. 4, refers to David, not Abijah.) A lamp is a picturesque way of describing a successor or successors who would dispel all kinds of darkness; the figure refers to the whole of David's dynasty (Cf. 2 Sam 21:17; 2 Kgs 8:19).

15:6 The war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam (cf. 1 Kgs 14:30) continued throughout Abijah's lifetime. One episode is recorded in 2 Chronicles 13:2-20 where Abijah's trust in God resulted in victory in spite of his being outnumbered. Abijah did not abandon the Lord even though he tolerated idolatry.

15:7 A somewhat more pious portrait of Abijam is given in 2 Chr 13:1-22. Notably, in the oration Abijam made against Jeroboam, he seems to evidence some faith in Jehovah. Perhaps Abijam, like many others, could preach better than he could practice. The second reference to war with Jeroboam (cf. 15:6) suggests that the antagonism between Israel and Judah at this time was intense.

15:8 Eight of the 19 kings of Judah were evaluated by God as good even though some of their recorded deeds were evil. Four of these good kings led Judah in religious reforms designed to restore the nation to a purer form of worship and to return the people to obey the Mosaic Law. Asa was the first good king of Judah (v. 11) and the first reformer.

15:9 Asa reigned 41 years (911-870 B.C.). Maacah was his grandmother (not "mother" as in some versions; cf. v. 2).

15:13 The expulsion of the sodomites and the destruction of idols introduced by Rehoboam and Abijah were part of this reform, as was Asa's deposing of his grandmother Maacah from the official position of queen mother because of her repulsive Asherah pole, which he burned in the Kidron Valley east of Jerusalem.

15:14 Asa removed some of the high places (2 Chr 14:3) but not all of them (1 Kgs 15:14). Nevertheless, his heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life. Given Asa's self-reliance later in his life this statement probably means that he did not tolerate idolatry but worshiped only the true God.

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15:16 Asa enjoyed a ten years' peace after Jeroboam's defeat by Abijam, and this interval was wisely and energetically spent in making internal reforms, as well as increasing the means of national defense (2Chr 14:1–7). How do we invest during times of national peace?

15:19 Asa's plan to divert Baasha from strengthening Ramah included emptying his treasuries to buy a treaty with Ben-Hadad I, the king of Aram in Damascus. Asa tried to induce Ben-Hadad to break his treaty with Baasha, and Asa's plan succeeded.

15:23 Asa's achievements were recorded in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah (cf. 14:29; 15:7). At the end of his life, Asa again failed to seek the Lord. When his feet became diseased, he did not ask for the Lord's help but relied only on the physicians (2 Chr 16:12). Though Asa's faith was not what it might have been, all in all, his relationship with God was characterized by fidelity and blessing during his long reign.

15:24 Perhaps because of Asa's poor health his godly son Jehoshaphat reigned as co-regent with him during the last three years of his life (873-870 B.C.). When Asa died, Ahab (874-853 B.C.) was reigning in Israel.

15:25 Nadab was the brother of Abijah who had died in childhood (14:17). Whether Nadab was older or younger than Abijah is not known. He was the second ruler of the Jeroboam dynasty and reigned for under two years (910-909 B.C.). It must be remembered that while some eight dynasties were succeeding each other in northern Israel, to the south of Judah but one dynasty, the Davidic house, held sway.

15:29 Baasha's destruction of the house of Jeroboam was intended to secure his throne. It fulfilled Ahijah's prophecy of the destruction of Jeroboam's dynasty (14:14).

15:33 Baasha took the throne of Israel in the third year of Asa and reigned in Tirzah the capital (cf. 14:17; 15:21) for 24 years (909-886 B.C..). His was the third-longest reign of the Israelite kings.

1 Kings 16

16:2 God said He had lifted Baasha up from the dust and made him the leader of the Israelites. This implies that Baasha had a lowly origin.

16: 4 Almost the same words used to describe Baasha's future judgment had been given to Jeroboam by the Prophet Ahijah (cf. 14:7, 10-11) and were given later by Elijah to Ahab (21:24).

16:8 Elah assumed the throne of Israel and reigned in Tirzah, the capital; his reign (886–885 B.C.), a brief and unhappy one, lasted just one year, continued the wicked policies of his predecessors (v. 13) and ended in a violent death.

16:10 As commander of half of Elah's chariots Zimri was a powerful military officer. No specific accomplishments are recorded for him. He is infamous as the king who was murdered while getting drunk. Elah and Belshazzar had at least this in common. Thus the third dynasty came to the throne of Israel—if, indeed a line that ruled for only seven days can be dignified with the name of dynasty.

16:14 Zimri destroyed Israel's second ruling family plus friends of the family to avoid retaliation against his coup d'etat. Thus Jehu's prophecy (cf. v. 3) was fulfilled. Again the writer identified the spiritual root of the judgment (v. 13).

16:15 Zimri's seven-day reign (885 B.C.) proved to be the shortest of any Israelite king. Gibbethon in Philistia was again under siege by Israel's army (cf. 15:27).

16:18 Zimri apparently knew he could not retain his throne or save his life, so he did as much damage to the palace as he could while taking his life.

16:21 The death of Zimri (vv. 17-18) did not automatically place the kingdom in Omri's hands. Half the population including the army sided with him, but the other half preferred Tibni. During this time civil war-ravaged Israel and threatened to split the Northern Kingdom into two parts. Tibni's strength can be seen in that he was able to oppose Omri successfully for six years (885-880 B.C.).

16:24 No doubt the desolation wrought by Zimri's fire was one of the factors that made a new capital highly desirable, if not necessary.

16:28 In this he was the worst Israelite king so far (vv. 25-26). Omri's 12-year reign ended with his death and burial in his new capital city. Omri was the founder of the fourth dynasty of Israelite kings. His rule passed to his son, Ahab. And here Omri's key significance seems to have been that he fathered Ahab who was, without question, the evilest ruler to that point.

16:30 Ahab's wickedness consisted of perpetuating all the sins of Jeroboam; he even considered them trivial.

16:31 Also, Ahab married a pagan princess, Jezebel, who zealously tried to promote her depraved cult as the exclusive religion of Israel. Jezebel's father, Ethbaal, was king of the Sidonians (Phoenicians), with his capital in Tyre. He was a priest of Ashtaroth or Astarte, who, having murdered Philetes, king of Tyre, ascended the throne of that kingdom, being the eighth king since Hiram.

Jezebel was the wicked daughter of this regicide and idol priest—and, on her marriage with Ahab, never rested till she had got all the forms of her native Tyrian worship introduced into her adopted country. Evidently, Ahab was not forced to marry Jezebel; his choice to marry her is something for which the text held him responsible.

16:32 Ahab built a temple for Baal in the capital of Israel and constructed an altar for Baal in it.

COMING DATES THIS SPRING

03/25/2018 – Palm Sunday

03/30/2018 – Good Friday

04/01/2018 – Easter Sunday (No Groups)

05/13/2018 – Mother's Day

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