

A lesson from King Asa's bad feet

by Andy Burrows



“**I**n the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe. Yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but sought help from physicians.” (2 Chronicles 16:12)

To some this analysis may seem a little harsh. Is the writer saying that it was wrong to seek help from doctors? I have certainly “sought help from physicians” quite a lot, to put it mildly, over the last few years, being now in my third battle with cancer! So I want to know what King Asa did wrong. As a Christian I want to seek the Lord, but does that mean that I should I shun chemotherapy in favour of prayer alone?

Asa is described in the Bible as a good king (2 Chronicles 14:2). But when you read the story of his reign it seems to start well and end badly. The writer contrasts the way that Asa's initial success was based on his reliance on the LORD, and his ultimate demise was due to pride and hardness of heart.

His early years were God-centred. His first recorded words to the people of Judah were an encouragement to build cities. “The land is still ours, because we have sought the LORD our God. We have sought him, and he has given us peace...” (14:7)

When the Ethiopians came against Judah with a large army, “Asa cried to the LORD his God, ‘O LORD, there is none like you

to help.... Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude.” (14:11)

God encouraged him through the prophet Azariah (15:1-7), “The LORD is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you...” This gave Asa the courage to go through the land of Judah, ridding it of foreign gods, humiliating his own mother in the process (15:16). And for twenty years there was peace.

But late in his reign he messed up. Twenty years of prosperity and peace had made him complacent, and forgetful. We're told that when the king of Israel mounted a blockade, Asa went and made an alliance with the Syrians, bribing them, not with his own wealth but with treasures taken straight out of the LORD's temple (16:2). A prophet came to take him to task, reminding him of his earlier faith and warning him of his foolishness (16:7-9). Asa flew into a rage and threw the poor prophet in prison.

Three years later, when his feet became diseased, he went straight to the physicians, with no mention of asking for prayer. He was acting the same way again. He thought he knew what was required, surely nothing to bother the LORD with. He'd forgotten his earlier faith, and that the nation's continued existence, prosperity and peace, was, “because we have sought the LORD our God.” (14:7)

His early reign was characterised by a passion to take everything to the Lord in prayer. In his latter years he acted as if he didn't need God's help.

The problem was not that he sought help from physicians, nor necessarily that he made an alliance with the Syrians. It was that he did not pray and ask the LORD's help first. When he had defeated the Ethiopians he had still led the people into battle, but he prayed to the LORD first and expressed his total dependence on Him. He should have done the same when faced with the Israelite blockade and the foot disease.

The lesson for me is that I must never go to my doctors without seeking the Lord first. I must take everything to God in prayer, as the hymn says. The doctors are God's instrument of healing and comfort, but God alone is the one who ultimately gives health, victory, peace, prosperity and everything else that we need.

The other lesson is that I must persevere with this humble, God-centred, attitude throughout my whole life. I cannot let age, complacency, pride, tiredness or anything else distract me or deflect me from looking to Him for everything, in Christ.

“Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith...” (Hebrews 12:1-2).