

## JEREMIAH WHO ASKED THREE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

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Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered? (Jer. 8:22).

Gilead was famous for trees that produced medicinal balm. It is believed the Queen of Sheba brought seeds to Solomon. and her gift led to a lucrative industry. The scraggy trees had few leaves but produced small white flowers. When the trunk was pierced. it exuded a sticky substance that quickly hardened into globules that were easily removed from the bark. This was used in the manufacture of medicine upon which physicians relied when treating their patients. Gilead had many doctors whose fame spread throughout the country. The prophet's references to these physicians provide food for thought.

#### A Sad Predicament... Prevailing

Jeremiah. the prophet of God, was worried: the anxiety in his soul indicated fear of the future. He remembered how the Lord had said: There shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade: and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them" (Jer. 8:13). He said: "We looked for peace. but no good came: and for a time of health, and behold trouble!" (Jer. 8:15). Israel had become a derelict nation, and the ominous words of the Almighty were clouds obliterating the sunshine. "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this. and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water. Is Israel a servant? is he a houseborn slave? why is he spoiled?" (Jer. 2:12-14). "But where are the gods that thou hast made thee? Let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods. O Judah" (Jer. 2:28).

It was unbelievable that the kingdom that had reached unprecedented heights of excellence during the reign of Solomon had degenerated to the level of slavery. The tribes that had proclaimed the magnificence of Jehovah had erected idols

92

throughout their cities. Such degradation was inexcusable, and the sorrowful prophet could not blame God for the catastrophes that had fallen upon the nation. Captivity was inevitable, and hunger was already spreading through the land. Prolonged drought had ruined the crops. but the unrepentant people continued to make idols and were following a course of self-destruction. Jeremiah stood in the midst of the people and asked: "Is there no balm in Gilead: is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?"

There might have been two reasons for his questions. Since the balm of Gilead was considered to be a gift from heaven, the people could have refused to avail themselves of the God-given remedy. If the precious substance had failed to cure the ailments of the people. the sufferers had refused to appeal to the giver of every good and perfect gift. Their attitude resembled that of a later generation which said, "We have no king but Caesar." Today's world reflects the events that took place in Israel. It is not difficult to believe that all nations are approaching economic and spiritual disaster. Crime is increasing, prisons are overcrowded, gangs of

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irresponsible youths terrorize communities, and, for the most part, governments and citizens remain helpless. Unfortunately, many of the churches are ineffective. People prefer to worship the gods of sport, worldly attractions, and sex. Preachers who recommend a return to the "Old Time Religion" are considered relics of a by-gone age. The people of the twentieth century ignore the Great Physician in order to patronize their own doctors.

#### A Stupid Potentate... Procrastinating

And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign (2 Chron. 16:12-13).

Asa the king of Judah became a pathetic monarch. There may be an excuse for a man who never knew God. but when a person has known fellowship with the Almighty and then permits pride to destroy the relationship, he exhibits inexcusable folly. The story of this disappointing monarch may be considered under six headings. His faith, fame, foolishness, fate, fear, and funeral.

93

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#### His Faith

Asa belonged to a very large family: his father Abijah had fourteen wives, twenty-two sons, and sixteen daughters (2 Chron. 13:21). He was a mighty warrior who valued military conquests more than moral and spiritual fidelity. When he succeeded to the throne he inherited a kingdom filled with idols, high places, images, and groves where idolatry was unashamedly practiced (2 Chron. 14:1-3). The reforms instituted by the incoming king were sensational, and Asa's actions became international news. It was said prior to his coronation: "Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law" (2 Chron. 15:3). Asa became known for his obedience to the laws of Jehovah.

#### His Fame

Asa's onslaught upon the enemies of Jehovah was almost unprecedented, and his foes hesitated before attacking the Hebrews. The Jews were prosperous, and revival came to Israel. The Lord was demonstrating the reliability of a promise made by Jesus centuries later. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness: and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

#### His Foolishness

"In the six and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa Baasha the king of Israel came up against Judah. . . . Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of the LORD and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-hadad king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, There is a league between me and thee, as there was between my father and thy father: Behold, I have sent thee silver and gold; go, break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me" (2 Chron. 16:1-3). Asa's suggestion revealed he had more trust in a heathen neighbor than in Jehovah. When the prophet Hanani rebuked the monarch, Asa became enraged and imprisoned the messenger of God.

#### His Fate

"Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison

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house,' for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And  
Asa oppressed some of the people the same time... . And Asa in

94

the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet,  
until his disease was exceeding great" (2 Chron. 16:10-12). Asa  
should have been a wiser man, but when pride influences deci-  
sions, better judgments are often ignored. The prophet, Azariah,  
had warned the monarch saying: "The LORD IS with you, while  
ye be with him; and if ye seek him he will be found of you: but  
if ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:2). When  
the counsel of God is forsaken, trouble quickly follows. The  
affliction in Asa's feet was caused by malfunctions in his soul.  
He who plays with fire is likely to be burned.

#### His Fear

"In his disease he sought not to the LORD but to the physicians,  
and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign" (2 Chron.  
16:12-13). It is worthy of attention that the king's illness lasted  
two years, and during that time, the ailing monarch repeatedly  
visited the royal physicians; even the balm of Gilead was inef-  
fective, Throughout that period the pity of the Almighty was  
matched only by the pride of Asa. He knew what needed to be  
done, but refused to do it.

#### His Funeral

"And they buried him in his own sepulchers, which he had  
made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed  
which was tilled with sweet odours and diverse kinds of spices  
prepared by the apothecaries' art, and they made a very great  
burning for him" (2 Chron. 16:14). Asa's funeral was one of the  
most impressive ever witnessed in Israel. It was interesting that  
the king made lavish preparation for the repose of his body, but  
neglected the future of his soul. He was given a great farewell by  
his subjects, but it is extremely doubtful if he received an equiv-  
alent welcome when he stood in the presence of God. Actually,  
the unfortunate man died before his time. The great burning of  
enormous quantities of spices made the atmosphere heavy with  
perfume. Regrettably, the dead king was unable to appreciate the  
tribute being paid to him.

#### A Severe Problem... Persisting

And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve  
years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and

95

had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered. but rath-  
er grew worse, when she had heard of Jesus, came in the  
press behind, and touched his garments (Mark 5:25-27).

The woman was impoverished and desperate. A very dis-  
tressing hemorrhaging had baffled the physicians whose fees  
were greater than their skill. She had been treated by numerous  
doctors, but her disappearing savings had made further visits to  
the doctors impossible. Rekindling hope had maintained her for  
twelve years, but, finally, she reached the end of her financial  
resources. Then one day she heard of another Physician, who

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never charged for His services. It was difficult to believe the rumors, but friends assured her that the stories were true.

She stood in the crowd and waited: the new doctor was about to visit the home of Jairus, one of the city's most respected citizens. When the woman saw the Savior, her faith deepened, and she whispered, "If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up: and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. . And he [Jesus] said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole: go in peace, and be whole of thy plague" (Mark 5:28-29, 34).

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that if the ancient Hebrews and Asa, the king of Judah, had been as wise, their problems would have been solved, burdens lifted, and their happiness would have been overwhelming. God is always willing to help His children, but He expects cooperation.

Oh, touch the hem of His garment:  
And thou too, shalt be free,  
His saving power, this very hour,  
Shall give new life to thee.

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