The Point
God is greater than any challenge we face.

The Passage
2 Chronicles 14:9-15

The Bible Meets Life
Deep down, we know God is greater than anyone or anything in this world. But when the problem is staring us right in the face—overdue bills, a bad medical report, a rebellious child—it’s hard to see beyond the problem. King Asa faced an army twice the size as his, but he still marched forward—and he began by moving forward in prayer. Prayer helps us to remember and depend on God, who is truly greater than any challenge.

The Setting
The Kingdom of Judah had enjoyed a period of peace due to King Asa’s instituting an extensive series of religious reforms. He had removed the paganism that polluted the nation’s spiritual environment and restored worship of Yahweh, the true God. King Asa also had hardened his cities’ defenses and organized his fighting forces. However, Judah’s tranquility was eventually broken. A new enemy’s approach forced Asa’s realm into war. Asa, however, faithfully continued his reliance on God for strength.
2 Chronicles 14:9-15

9 Then Zerah the Cushite came against them with an army of one million men and three hundred chariots. They came as far as Mareshah.

10 So Asa marched out against him and lined up in battle formation in Zephathah Valley at Mareshah.

11 Then Asa cried out to the LORD his God: “LORD, there is no one besides you to help the mighty and those without strength. Help us, LORD our God, for we depend on you, and in your name we have come against this large army. LORD, you are our God. Do not let a mere mortal hinder you.”

12 So the LORD routed the Cushites before Asa and before Judah, and the Cushites fled.

13 Then Asa and the people who were with him pursued them as far as Gerar. The Cushites fell until they had no survivors, for they were crushed before the LORD and his army. So the people of Judah carried off a great supply of loot.

14 Then they attacked all the cities around Gerar because the terror of the LORD was on them. They also plundered all the cities, since there was a great deal of plunder in them.

15 They also attacked the tents of the herdsmen and captured many sheep and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

The Cushite (v. 9)—The identity of the Cushites is uncertain. Some believe them to be Ethiopians (Nubians) located south of Egypt, while others believe them to be a Bedouin group living near Judah.
GET INTO THE STUDY

DISCUSS: Invite group members to discuss Question 1 on page 87 of the PSG (Personal Study Guide): “What’s the most dependable thing you’ve ever owned?”

SUMMARIZE THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE (PAGE 88): It’s great to have the right tools when you need them—those things you can always rely on to get the job done. But what if the “job” is just to get through life? What can you rely on when you face a challenging decision or everything seems to be going against you?

» Some people rely on a horoscope or fortune-teller to guide them in dealing with the daily struggles of life.

» Some people rely on alcohol or other drugs as a way to cope with challenges.

» Some people just look in the mirror and say, “I can handle this myself.”

» Some people let chance make their decisions. They gamble by flipping a coin while ignoring the words on that coin: In God We Trust.

SAY: The things we choose to depend on will prove to not be very reliable when faced with challenging circumstances. In this session, King Asa trusted and depended on God even when the odds were stacked against him. This will encourage us to do the same.

GUIDE: Call attention to The Point on page 88 of the PSG: “God is greater than any challenge we face.”

PRAY: Transition into the discussion with prayer, asking God to strengthen our resolve to trust and depend on Him when faced with overwhelming circumstances.

TIP: Young adults may or may not have dealt with overwhelming odds at this point in their lives. In either case, suggest that during this session they make a list of actions they can take when faced with any of life’s difficulties.

PACK ITEMS:
Pack Item #9
“Map of the Divided Kingdom” poster
2 Chronicles 14:9-11

9 Then Zerah the Cushite came against them with an army of one million men and three hundred chariots. They came as far as Mareshah. 10 So Asa marched out against him and lined up in battle formation in Zephathah Valley at Mareshah. 11 Then Asa cried out to the Lord his God: “LORD, there is no one besides you to help the mighty and those without strength. Help us, LORD our God, for we depend on you, and in your name we have come against this large army. LORD, you are our God. Do not let a mere mortal hinder you.”

READ: Ask a group member to read 2 Chronicles 14:9-11 on page 89 of the PSG.

LEADER PACK: Direct attention to Pack Item #9, the “Map of the Divided Kingdom” poster, to show the city of David and the Cushite’s location. Ask group members how the map supports the overwhelming odds King Asa was facing.

DISCUSS: Question 2 on page 89 of the PSG: “What types of circumstances cause us to feel outmatched and overwhelmed?”

SAY: Asa had experienced a time of peace, but the king was prepared when peace was threatened by war.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 89): Asa didn’t back away from the overwhelming odds in front of him. He and his army of 580,000 men (2 Chronicles 14:8) headed into battle. We know little about his opponent, “Zerah the Cushite.” Cush is usually identified with Ethiopia, and Zerah’s army may well have been made up of mercenaries fighting on behalf of Egypt. With “an army of one million men and three hundred chariots,” we can easily assume Zerah and his men would not have been afraid of attacking an army around half their size.

» Anyone looking only at the odds knew Asa was seriously outnumbered and would probably face a devastating defeat.

» But Asa didn’t let Zerah’s large army deter him from the task at hand.

» They marched forward into unfamiliar territory to take on an army nearly twice their size. Why? Asa had more than just human strength on his side.
2 Chronicles 14:9-11 Commentary

Verses 9. Judah’s period of peace (2 Chronicles 14:1) ended with a threat from a foreign enemy. The Chronicler (Ezra) reported that Judah was invaded by the army of Zerah the Cushite. The exact national identity of Zerah and his army is uncertain. The ancient kingdom of Cush, equated with the kingdom of Nubia, was located south of Egypt. The Hebrew word kushi was identified with Ethiopia from the time of the Septuagint and many later English translations continue that tradition by using the term “Ethiopian” (for example, the English Standard Version, King James Version, and the New American Standard Bible). However, this should not be equated with modern Ethiopia, which is further to the southeast. At differing times the kingdom of ancient Cush had flexible boundaries and may have been made up of differing tribes of people.

Some commentators believe this invading army may have been Bedouin Arabs (they possessed camels), raiders from the southern desert. Others suggest that Zerah was the general of a garrison of mercenary troops under the command of the Egyptian pharaoh. Previously, in the fifth year of the reign of King Rehoboam of Judah (931/0-913 BC), King Shishak of Egypt invaded Judah. He looted the treasuries of both the temple and the royal palace (1 Kings 14:25-26). The Chronicler provided additional information concerning this invasion. First, the invaders under Shishak “captured the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 12:4). The Chronicler also indicated that the Egyptian force included Cushites (v. 3). After conquering Jerusalem, the Egyptian forces moved further north into the Northern Kingdom of Israel. For reasons which are not clear, Pharaoh Shishak eventually withdrew from both Israel and Judah. Some suggest that Shishak left a mercenary force under the leadership of Zerah the Cushite in the region of Gerar to both guard and defend Egypt’s northern frontier.

The Chronicler wrote that Zerah had a million soldiers (literally, “an army of a thousand thousand”). This large number has led some commentators to think that it should be taken as hyperbole. One suggestion is it should be understood to mean they were so many it was impossible to number or, simply, “a vast number.” Another suggestion is that the Hebrew term translated as “thousand” has a broader range that can also mean units, as in military units. In that case, each unit could number between five and thirty-five men. As one commentator notes, “All told, the term translated ‘thousand’ has a semantic domain beyond that of the numeral ‘thousand,’ raising the possibility that the intent of the author was to communicate something other than multiples of 1,000 in certain passages.” The text also details that Zerah’s army was equipped with three hundred chariots. Zerah was certainly a massive threat to Judah. Coming from the south, Zerah brought his forces as far as Mareshah. Asa had no choice but to fight and he quickly mustered his army.
2 Chronicles 14:9-11

9 Then Zerah the Cushite came against them with an army of one million men and three hundred chariots. They came as far as Mareshah. 10 So Asa marched out against him and lined up in battle formation in Zephathah Valley at Mareshah. 11 Then Asa cried out to the LORD his God: “LORD, there is no one besides you to help the mighty and those without strength. Help us, LORD our God, for we depend on you, and in your name we have come against this large army. LORD, you are our God. Do not let a mere mortal hinder you.”

READ: Re-read 2 Chronicles 14:9-11 to emphasize Asa’s dependence on God.

DISCUSS: Question 3 on page 90 of the PSG: “What do you appreciate about Asa’s prayer?”

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 90): “LORD, you are our God.” Asa declared his allegiance to God as his father had done. In declaring this, he committed himself and his armies to God. He declared that the battle and its outcome belonged to the Lord, the one against whom no one could stand.

» We’re not going into a battle like Asa was facing, but we face challenging struggles every day of our lives.

» Many of those challenges confront us with odds that are not in our favor. In those moments, we need to follow Asa’s example and cry out to God, who specializes in the impossible.

» God is there to help us, just as He was there to help Asa. It doesn’t matter to God what size the battle is. His desire is for us to cry out to Him—who is our all-powerful advocate.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Instruct group members to identify something they have with them (apart from the Bible), which they depend on. They might pick a car key, shoe, jacket, glasses, and so forth. Have each member share the item selected and explain why they depend on it. Then ask them to consider what it would mean to depend on God the way they depend on other things.

TRANSITION: King Asa and his army trusted and depended on God, and God delivered their enemy into their hands.
Verse 10. Asa marched his soldiers to engage Zerah’s forces in battle. They faced off in the Zephathah Valley at Mareshah, located in the Judean foothills (known as the Shephelah) in south-central Israel. Zephathah means “watchtower,” which suggests that the two armies could look across the valley at each other. Mareshah means “summit” or “top of a mountain.” It was a Canaanite city that had been annexed into Judah’s territory.

Upon their arrival, Asa strategically deployed his troops in a battle formation to combat Zerah’s army. His men looked across the valley and saw the invading army. They must have felt great trepidation, yet they were ready to fight and die defending their homeland. But Asa had one more thing he needed to do before engaging the invaders. He had a powerful ally that Zerah knew not of!

Verse 11. What was it Asa still had to do? Asa prayed. He cried out to Yahweh his God. It was not the act of a desperate man facing a crisis and then suddenly turning to God. Asa was only doing what he had talked about and modeled for years.

Asa began his prayer by addressing God by name: Yahweh (translated as “Lord”). Yahweh is the covenant name by which God had revealed Himself to Moses and the Israelites and by which He had made the covenant relationship with them. Asa’s addressing God by His covenant name demonstrated his intimate relationship with God. The first part of Asa’s statement, translated as “there is no one besides you,” is a clear theological affirmation of God’s uniqueness in all the universe. There is no being equal in power to God, which is why Asa confidently turned to Him in this situation. Taken with the rest of Asa’s words, the overall meaning of his prayer is that God can help anyone He wants and makes no distinction between the mighty and the weak.

In this case, Asa correctly perceived himself and his army to be the weak one in dire need of the Lord’s help. He nonetheless proclaimed with great faith that nothing is beyond God’s capability. He committed himself humbly to the Lord and expected the impossible, not unlike the father of the boy Jesus healed from demon possession (Mark 9:14-27; see especially vv. 23-24).

Asa invoked the name of Yahweh (translated “Lord”) a second time, telling Him that Asa and his army trusted and depended entirely on Him. Asa audaciously reminded the Lord that it was in His name that they were fighting this war. So, in a way, Asa was putting the Lord’s reputation on the line. Asa then used the divine name a third time, acknowledging Yahweh as the God of the covenant made with Israel. For that reason, the king was confident that no mere mortal could possibly prevail against God.
2 Chronicles 14:12-15

12 So the Lord routed the Cushites before Asa and before Judah, and the Cushites fled. 13 Then Asa and the people who were with him pursued them as far as Gerar. The Cushites fell until they had no survivors, for they were crushed before the Lord and his army. So the people of Judah carried off a great supply of loot. 14 Then they attacked all the cities around Gerar because the terror of the Lord was on them. They also plundered all the cities, since there was a great deal of plunder in them. 15 They also attacked the tents of the herdsmen and captured many sheep and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

READ: Ask a group member to read 2 Chronicles 14:12-15 on page 90 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question 4 on page 91 of the PSG: “When has God led you through a challenge that was beyond your own ability?”

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 92): The Judean army under Asa may have pictured something totally different from what the Lord had planned—but isn’t that how God often works? We trust in Him for victory from our challenges and battles, but we assume He will follow the plan we’ve laid out. However, God’s victories often come in unexpected ways. When we give the Lord our battles, challenges, and impossible situations, they become His, and He will give us the victories according to His plans.

DISCUSS: Question 5 on page 92 of the PSG: “What is the relationship between God’s role and your role in the battles you face?”

DO: Invite group members to complete the activity on page 93 on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses aloud.

GOD IS ABLE: Are you facing impossible situations and see no way of obtaining any possible victory? List below all of the battles, challenges, or impossible situations, big or small, that you are facing or have been putting off facing. Now read back over that list and ask yourself: Is any of these battles or challenges or impossibilities too big for God? Write a brief prayer turning everything over to God.
2 Chronicles 14:12-15 Commentary

Verse 12-13. King Asa and his soldiers trusted in God when faced with the massive enemy army of Zerah, and so it was that the Lord routed the Cushites. Note whom Ezra credited for the victory: the **LORD**. The exact details of how God did it are not given. Whatever the Lord’s method may have been, the Cushites were crushed and fled the field of battle!

Asa’s warriors pursued the Cushites as far as Gerar. **Gerar** was a city between Gaza and Beersheba over twenty miles to the southwest of Mareshah. Gerar was on Judah’s southern border with the Negev (a desert region) and the fastest way for the Cushites to get back to their own territory.

The Cushites fell in such numbers that there were no survivors. Note again how Ezra gave the glory to God. The Cushites were thoroughly vanquished by the **LORD and his army**. It was a holy war; the army of Judah was the Lord’s army.

The Chronicler also reported that the army of Judah carried off a large amount of plunder. It was the common practice of victors in ancient wars to take whatever valuables they could from their defeated enemies. It was considered their rightful reward for risking life and limb in battle.

Verse 14. Asa’s soldiers then continued their plunder attacks on the cities around Gerar. Ezra wrote the **terror of the LORD** had overtaken the citizens, who probably fled their cities. The text does not indicate the relationship of these cities to the Cushites. However, given the actions of the army of Judah these cities must have been aiding the Cushites in some way. The men of Judah attacked and plundered the cities. The “terror of the LORD” is associated with only three kings in the Bible—King Asa of Judah, his son Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 17:10; 19:7; 20:29), and King Saul (1 Samuel 11:7).

Verse 15. The soldiers of Judah did not stop with the defeated cities in their post-war mopping-up operation against their enemies. They also attacked the tent cities of the herdsmen who lived in that region. The herdsmen may have given aid and support to the Cushite invaders when they passed through. Another possibility is that the presence of these tent-dwelling herdsmen is indicative that the Cushites were Bedouin nomads and the tents and herds belonged to them.

Asa’s army had completed its mission. The Cushites and their allies were completely vanquished. Asa now felt secure to return home to **Jerusalem** where he was probably met with a hero’s welcome. The Lord was the One who had routed the enemy, but Asa and the people had still needed to carry through in battle to secure the victory. They surely gave God the glory for what He had done.
LIVE IT OUT

**SAY:** How will you depend on God to be greater than any challenge you face?

**GUIDE:** Lead group members to consider the responses to the Bible study listed on page 94 of the PSG.

- **Share your struggles.** Share with your group one of the challenges you are facing that, from your perspective, is an impossible challenge. Ask them to pray with you regarding that situation.

- **Don’t walk alone.** Invite someone else to walk alongside you in a difficulty you’re facing. Ask this person to “check in” with you regularly and encourage your continued trust in God.

- **Get away.** Take some time this week to have a personal prayer retreat. Get away from any distractions. Spend a few hours—or a full day—in dedicated prayer about the challenges you are facing.

---

### Wrap It Up

**SAY:** People rely on many things as a way to cope, make a tough decision, or face a challenge. But God is the only One we can trust to bring us through. **We should seek Him first when life becomes hard.**

---

**NETS**

Grow with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog.

LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry