The Point
The God who guided you in the past will guide you now and in the future.

The Passage
2 Chronicles 16:1-13

The Bible Meets Life
George Santayana said: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” While that statement has value in reminding us to learn from the past, it implies that what we did in the past was a failure. However, we also need to remember some things so that we can repeat them. For example, King Asa had previously depended on God and found success. Later in life, though, he forgot how God had faithfully worked in his life. Ultimately, this led to various failures on his part.

The Setting
King Asa was a tower of strength throughout most of his reign. He defeated Zerah the Cushite and called his nation to a solemn assembly to renew their commitment to Yahweh. As a result the Southern Kingdom of Judah rested in peace for about twenty years. But then its rival kingdom Israel raised its belligerent head led by its king, Baasha.
2 Chronicles 16:1-13

1 In the thirty-sixth year of Asa, Israel’s King Baasha went to war against Judah. He built Ramah in order to keep anyone from leaving or coming to King Asa of Judah. 2 So Asa brought out the silver and gold from the treasuries of the LORD’s temple and the royal palace and sent it to Aram’s King Ben-hadad, who lived in Damascus, saying, 3 “There’s a treaty between me and you, between my father and your father. Look, I have sent you silver and gold. Go break your treaty with Israel’s King Baasha so that he will withdraw from me.”

4 Ben-hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies to the cities of Israel. They attacked Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim, and all the storage cities of Naphtali. 5 When Baasha heard about it, he quit building Ramah and stopped his work. 6 Then King Asa brought all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and the timbers Baasha had built it with. Then he built Geba and Mizpah with them.

7 At that time, the seer Hanani came to King Asa of Judah and said to him, “Because you depended on the king of Aram and have not depended on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from you. 8 Were not the Cushites and Libyans a vast army with many chariots and horsemen? When you depended on the LORD, he handed them over to you. 9 For the eyes of the LORD roam throughout the earth to show himself strong for those who are wholeheartedly devoted to him. You have been foolish in this matter. Therefore, you will have wars from now on.”

10 Asa was enraged with the seer and put him in prison because of his anger over this. And Asa mistreated some of the people at that time. 11 Note that the events of Asa’s reign, from beginning to end, are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. 12 In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa developed a disease in his feet, and his disease became increasingly severe. Yet even in his disease he didn’t seek the LORD but only the physicians. 13 Asa rested with his fathers; he died in the forty-first year of his reign.
GET INTO THE STUDY

DISCUSS: Invite group members to discuss Question 1 on page 111 of the PSG (Personal Study Guide): “When has a guide helped you reach a goal?”

SUMMARIZE THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE (PAGE 112): For years I had the privilege of taking students on a week-long backpacking trip into the high mountains of the Sierra Nevada range in California. The terrain was incredibly rugged, but the views were breathtaking. Each year we highlighted the importance of watching your surroundings and being aware of where you were at all times. We stressed this because, in case someone got lost, he could find his way back to the starting place.

» Without fail every year, a few students failed to listen to their guide and got lost.
» After a search, someone would personally guide them back to camp.
» When asked what happened, they told the same story: They couldn’t remember the right way to go.

SAY: Sometimes we fail to remember what God has done. When we do, we may venture down a path where we don’t belong.

LEADER PACK: Direct attention to Pack Item #11, the “God’s Faithfulness” poster. Review the session subpoints. Then ask group members to make a note on how they will accomplish each step, at each subpoint in the session. This will be a good outline for helping them to remember what God has done in the past.

GUIDE: Call attention to The Point on page 112 of the PSG: “The God who guided you in the past will guide you now and in the future.”

PRAY: Transition into the discussion with prayer, asking God to help us remember Him.

TIP: This session presents the ideal time to suggest group members keep a journal. Share that writing down victories, blessings, and answers to prayer will keep their focus on God and remind them of God’s work in the lives.
2 Chronicles 16:1-6

1 In the thirty-sixth year of Asa, Israel’s King Baasha went to war against Judah. He built Ramah in order to keep anyone from leaving or coming to King Asa of Judah. 2 So Asa brought out the silver and gold from the treasuries of the Lord’s temple and the royal palace and sent it to Aram’s King Ben-hadad, who lived in Damascus, saying, 3 “There’s a treaty between me and you, between my father and your father. Look, I have sent you silver and gold. Go break your treaty with Israel’s King Baasha so that he will withdraw from me.” 4 Ben-hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies to the cities of Israel. They attacked Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim, and all the storage cities of Naphtali. 5 When Baasha heard about it, he quit building Ramah and stopped his work. 6 Then King Asa brought all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and the timbers Baasha had built it with. Then he built Geba and Mizpah with them.

READ: Ask a group member to read 2 Chronicles 16:1-6 on page 113 of the PSG. Use the commentary on the next page to highlight steps Asa took against King Baasha.

DISCUSS: Question 2 on page 113 of the PSG: “Where do you typically turn for help when you find yourself in troubling times?”

SAY: When Asa faced trouble, he did not exhibit the confidence and trust in God he had shown in the past.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 114): From a human standpoint, Asa’s strategy was successful. It may have worked, but it came at a cost.

» The temple treasuries were dedicated to God, yet Asa gave away those things as a payment to another king.

» Asa failed to trust God.

» Asa’s lack of trust set a bad example for those who lived under his rule. The king had discredited trust in God, and his subjects would follow his lead.

TRANSITION: In the next verses, Hanani, the seer, gave Asa a message from God.
2 Chronicles 16:1-6 Commentary

Verses 1. The people of Judah were living in peace. However, in the thirty-sixth year of Asa’s rule, King Baasha of Israel (908–886 BC) declared war on Judah. [Note: The dating of Asa’s rule is difficult to harmonize with the rule of King Baasha given in 1 Kings (15:33; 16:8). Some scholars suggest that “the thirty-sixth year” was the length of time since the division of the United Monarchy into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah.] Leading his forces south, Baasha captured and fortified the city of Ramah, threatening their commerce, communications, and security.

Verse 2. Instead of turning to God, Asa sought a political solution. He removed the silver and gold from the Jerusalem temple and his palace to bribe the king of Aram, Ben-hadad I. The Arameans were long-time enemies of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Asa obviously saw the chance to open a second front against Baasha’s army.

The greatest tragedy of this whole situation was that Asa, with one action, virtually annulled the results of his own close and pious relationship with the Lord. He totally compromised his trust in God for his nation’s security by not seeking God and instead putting his confidence in an alliance with a pagan king.

Verse 3. Asa invoked the legacy of an earlier treaty Asa’s father, Abijah, had made with Ben-hadad’s father, Tabrimmon. Asa wrote to Ben-hadad reminding him of their fathers’ pact and asking him to renew it. With gold and silver, Asa sought to bribe the pagan ruler into breaking a non-aggression treaty he had made with Baasha of Israel. Asa’s strategy was that having Aram attack Israel from the north would force Baasha to withdraw his troops from the south.

Verse 4. Ben-hadad agreed to Asa’s offer and accepted the gifts of silver and gold. Ben-hadad immediately ordered his military commanders to invade Israel and attack its northern cities in the region of Upper Galilee as far south as the Sea of Galilee, traveling into Israel on the strategic main international highway. The Arameans, in sort of a blitzkrieg attack, quickly took the town of Ijon, which lay on the route into Israel. From there they marched on the cities of Dan and Abel-maim. Finally they attacked the storage cities of Naphtali.

Verses 5-6. When Baasha heard about the Aramean invasion he immediately ceased his combat operations in the south and abandoned his fortifications at Ramah. King Asa rushed to take advantage of the situation. His troops took the stones and timbers from the fortifications and moved them north to build up the defenses of Geba and Mizpah. Geba was in the territory of Benjamin (Joshua 18:24), about six miles to the northeast of Jerusalem.
2 Chronicles 16:7-9

7 At that time, the seer Hanani came to King Asa of Judah and said to him, “Because you depended on the king of Aram and have not depended on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from you. 8 Were not the Cushites and Libyans a vast army with many chariots and horsemen? When you depended on the Lord, he handed them over to you. 9 For the eyes of the Lord roam throughout the earth to show himself strong for those who are wholeheartedly devoted to him. You have been foolish in this matter. Therefore, you will have wars from now on.”

READ: Ask a group member to read 2 Chronicles 16:7-9 on page 114 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question 3 on page 114 of the PSG: “What has God done for you in the past that helps you trust Him in the present?”

SAY: King Asa had not remained devoted to God. As a result, he would suffer the consequence of wars. There would be no peace in Judah for awhile.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 115): We can avoid Asa’s tragic mistake as we keep God’s faithfulness on our radar. He has taken care of us in the past, and He will do so now. Let’s be people “who are wholeheartedly devoted to him.” When we are, it doesn’t matter how big the army is that stands in front of us, we can trust Him to deliver us far beyond what we might accomplish on our own. God “is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20).

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, gather and bring yarn and scissors. Discuss the idea of tying a string around your finger to help remember something.

» Pass the yarn and scissors around and ask each group member to cut a piece.

» Instruct them to think of a way God has been faithful in the past and tie a string on their finger as a reminder of that for today.

» Suggest that at the end of the day they put the string in a place (wallet, Bible, or car) where it can be a continual reminder to them of God’s faithfulness.

TRANSITION: In the next verses, Asa’s pride would not allow him to accept the message God had sent him through Hanani.
2 Chronicles 16:7-9 Commentary

Verse 7. Believers must not forget what God has done in the past and what He can do in the present and the future. Furthermore, we must never forget that the omniscient God sees everything. This was true for Asa. God sent the seer Hanani to confront Asa. Seer refers to someone called and inspired by God to reveal His word. Hanani delivered a scathing message of rebuke to Asa. He told Asa it did not please God that Asa had relied on his alliance with the pagan king of Aram instead of Yahweh to battle Baasha. The Hebrew term for depended on is the same term used in 2 Chronicles 14:11 that described Asa’s reliance on the Lord to defeat Zerah the Cushite. The seer stated that because Asa had not relied on God, and, though he had beaten Baasha, the Arameans had escaped Asa. Hanani’s words seem to imply that if Asa had trusted the Lord he would not only have repelled Israel, but also conquered Aram. It is likely Aram would have aided Israel, but with the Lord’s help Judah would have crushed them both. In addition, although not stated in the text, Asa would not have forfeited all the gold and silver he spent to bribe Ben-hadad.

Verse 8. Hanani continued his dressing-down of Asa. He asked rhetorically if it was not true that the Cushites and the Libyans were a formidable enemy. They had been an enormous army with chariots and horsemen (2 Chronicles 12:3; 14:9,11). The seer reminded Asa that, despite his overwhelming military disadvantage, when Asa put his full trust in the Lord he had won! Asa’s victory over Zerah the Cushite was not due to Asa’s clever strategy, but entirely because of his dependence upon God’s power. So why had he forgotten?

Verse 9. Hanani then made a significant theological statement. He said, “For the eyes of the Lord roam throughout the earth to show himself strong for those who are wholeheartedly devoted to him.” This anthropomorphic description signified God’s omnipresence and omniscience (see also Psalm 33:18; 34:15; Proverbs 15:3; Zechariah 4:10). No problem exists that the Lord is not aware of and from which He cannot rescue His people, if they will trust Him to do so.

God is actually watching and waiting for opportunities to support those who wholeheartedly trust in Him. He is certainly more capable than some pagan king and far more effective. Asa’s scheme to involve Ben-hadad and the Arameans was reckless. The Hebrew term translated, “You have been foolish,” is the very same word the prophet Samuel used to admonish King Saul.

As for Asa, his impertinence against Yahweh cost him and Judah the peace and security they had long enjoyed under God’s watchful eye. Hanani declared that Asa would suffer wars from that point onward in his reign as king of Judah.
2 Chronicles 16:10-13

Asa was enraged with the seer and put him in prison because of his anger over this. And Asa mistreated some of the people at that time. 11 Note that the events of Asa’s reign, from beginning to end, are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. 12 In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa developed a disease in his feet, and his disease became increasingly severe. Yet even in his disease he didn’t seek the Lord but only the physicians. 13 Asa rested with his fathers; he died in the forty-first year of his reign.

DISCUSS: Question 4 on page 115 of the PSG: “How can our group encourage one another to remember God’s past faithfulness?”

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 2 Chronicles 16:10-13 on page 115 of the PSG.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 116): Asa’s reaction gives us a great example of how not to respond to truth. When those moments of truth come to us, we must take a step back, breathe, be willing to hear the truth, and act accordingly. So how do we receive truth and act on it in a proper and fitting way?
  » Accept the truth and be thankful that someone was willing and courageous enough to tell it to you.
  » Claim ownership of the truth that was pointed out to you.
  » Learn from your mistakes and move forward from them.
  » Trust God to guide you as you move forward.

DISCUSS: Question 5 on page 116 of the PSG: “What steps can we take to guard against pride?”

DO: Instruct group members to complete the activity on page 117 of the PSG on the own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses aloud.

WHOLEHEARTED DEVOTION: Rewrite verse 9a in your own words, “For the eyes of the Lord roam throughout the earth to show himself strong for those who are wholeheartedly devoted to him.” Consider how this truth encourages you and convicts you.
2 Chronicles 16:10-13 Commentary

Verse 10. Pride is a hard emotion to resist. Asa became enraged at Hanani and threw him in prison. Asa’s fury was not limited just to Hanani. Other people suffered the king’s wrath. It’s possible Asa was so enraged at Hanani’s message that he brutality oppressed other people who were Hanani’s supporters. Another possibility is such actions were due to the king exhibiting symptoms of irrational paranoia that sometimes afflicts kings and dictators whose actions are challenged. Asa erroneously thought incarcerating the seer would, in effect, shut him up and alleviate the problem.

Verse 11. The Chronicler closed this section with what amounts to a footnote on the life of King Asa. He noted that the events of Asa’s reign were written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. Ezra also referenced other works in 1 and 2 Chronicles such as: “the Events of the Seer Samuel, the Events of the Prophet Nathan, and the Events of the Seer Gad” (1 Chronicles 29:29), and “the Events of the Prophet Shemaiah and of the Seer Iddo” (2 Chronicles 12:15). Unfortunately, no copies of those books survive. Nonetheless, Ezra’s references show how he, like any good historian, carefully researched many sources to verify his facts.

Verse 12. Ezra documented the final, tragic days of King Asa’s life. In Asa’s thirty-ninth year as king, he developed a foot disease. The text does not state the disease was punishment for his sin as were the wars. The exact nature of the disease is not stated. In those days the diagnosis and treatment of most ailments was limited. Salves, ointments, and herbs were about the extent of the medicine available.

The saddest part of these final years of Asa was that he would not turn to the Lord for the cure of his disease. Instead, he relied exclusively on physicians, even as the disease worsened in its severity. Asa had fallen a long way from his early days when he unwaveringly depended on God for everything. The explanation for his arrogant attitude is difficult to discern. Perhaps it was his stubborn pride, or maybe he felt he was being punished unjustly for his lack of faith. Either case, it inevitably led to his final demise.

Verse 13. Ezra concluded his account of the life of Asa with the king’s death. Asa died in his forty-first year of rule. The length of his reign was a long time for a monarch to rule even by modern standards. He was laid to rest in a tomb he had hewn for himself in Jerusalem, the city of David (16:14). His people built a fire in his honor, signifying the esteem they held for him. (See 21:19; Jeremiah 34:5.)

Read the article “It Began with Hanani” in the Summer 2019 issue of Biblical Illustrator. Previous Biblical Illustrator articles “Who Were the Arameans?” (Fall 2016), “Damascus: Its Role in Old Testament History” (Spring 2006), and “Prophets, Diviners, and Seers” (Summer 1995) relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: Bible Studies for Life.
LIVE IT OUT

SAY: What can you do this week to help you to remember what God has done for you in the past?

GUIDE: Lead group members to consider responses to the Bible study listed on page 118 of the PSG.

» Make a list. Write a list of truths from God’s Word you have learned recently. Evaluate how you responded to each one.

» Memorize the Word. As a reminder of why you can always trust God, memorize 2 Chronicles 16:9a: “For the eyes of the L ORD roam throughout the earth to show himself strong for those who are wholeheartedly devoted to him.”

» Help someone else remember. If you know someone who needs a course correction, ask God for direction in how to speak the truth in love to him or her.

Wrap It Up

SAY: Many people have a tendency to look ahead and forget what lies behind. However, there is one thing Christians should never forget. We should never forget God’s goodness in our lives.

Grow with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog. LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry