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Israel and Judah: 21. Good Kings, Bad Kings

by David Sielaff, December 2016

Read first the accompanying [Newsletter for December 2016](#)

Israel and Judah: 21

Good Kings,
Bad Kings

THE SITUATION: Rehoboam, King of Judah and son of Solomon, has died. Rehoboam's son Abijah^a is anointed to rule from the throne of David fulfilling YHWH's prophecy up to Abijah's time (2 Samuel 7:13–16, “forever” meaning “for the age”). Abijah attacked Jeroboam, King of the northern Kingdom of Israel (also called Samaria). Jeroboam still rules and he is antagonistic and at war with Judah to the south.^b While wars and battles are highlighted in these biblical texts, they occur for a reason. There are also long periods with no great wars and times of peace.

This was a time with an expansion of the populations. God controlled such matters as He granted rewarded for faithfulness or punished for idolatry and worshipping other gods in addition to YHWH. God was in control of climate for sufficient rainfall to produce food to sustain larger families and social expansion. This in turn resulted in larger armies. The biblical texts tell of very large armies in this period moving around the landscape of Judea and Samaria, indicating good conditions for population growth.

TEXT: Abijah, King of Judah Takes the Throne

1 Kings 15:1–6

¹ In the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam son of Nebat, Abijah became king over Judah. ² Three years he reigned in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Maacah daughter of Abishalom.

³ He walked in all the sins of his father [Rehoboam] which he had done before him; and he

2 Chronicles 13:1–2

¹ In the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam, Abijah became king over Judah. ² Three years he reigned in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Maacah daughter of Uriel of Gibeah.

^a This Abijah of Judah should not be confused with the son of Jeroboam, Abijah of Israel. Jeroboam's son died through a direct act of God (1 Kings 14:12–13), yet God said Abijah “was well pleasing” to Him. Quite an endorsement!

^b “[Israel and Judah: 20. Civil War and Division](#).”

was not as wholehearted with Yahweh his Elohim as his father David had been in his heart.

⁴ For on account of David, Yahweh his Elohim gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, so as to set up his sons after him and cause Jerusalem to persist. ⁵ For David did what was upright in the eyes of Yahweh, and he did not withdraw from anything that He had enjoined on him, **all the days of his life**, except, surely, in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

⁶ There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam **all the days of his** [Abijah's] **life**.

There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam.

[end text]

Verses 1 and 1. Relating to time between the two kingdoms occurs often in Kings, but only this one time in the Book of Chronicles.^c

Verses 2 and 2. We encounter Maacah, Abijah's mother, later in this article.^d She is a powerful personality close to royalty for a long time, a listener to these texts being read would easily remember Maacah's name when her evil deeds are told later in this article. She is "daughter" of two different people, Abishalom (Absalom), David's rebellious son, was her grandfather, while Uriel of Gibeah is her father.

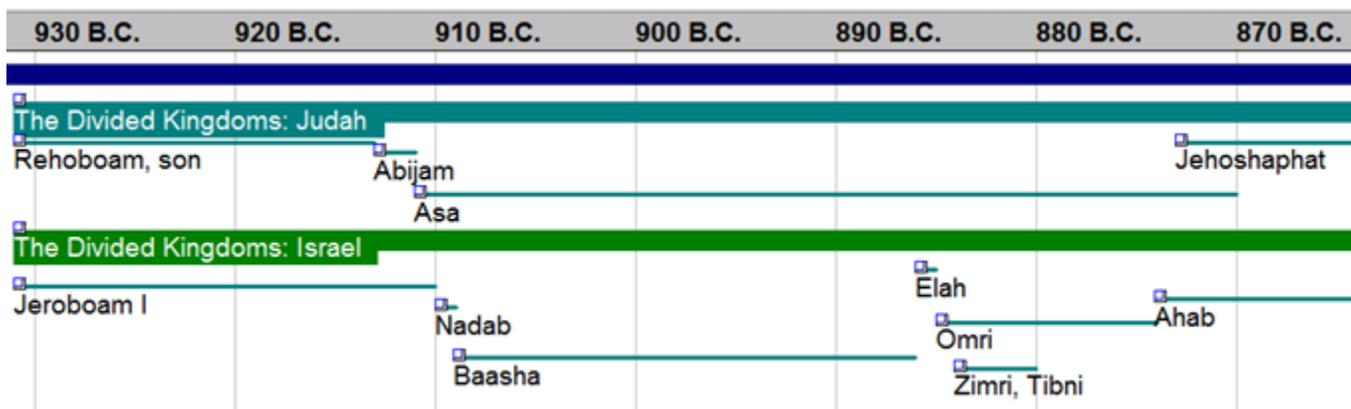
Verse 3. Abijah was a sinful king, probably learned from his mother. King David was Abijah's great-grandfather and founder of the dynasty he ruled. This is what is meant by the phrase "**his father David**." He worshipped YHWH, and did so at the Jerusalem Temple, but he worshipped other gods also. When those words are read, it means trouble is coming.

Verses 4–5. God's promise to David is recalled by the Chronicler while indicting Abijah. Idolatry by a king brings punishment from YHWH. War is one of those punishments.

Verse 6. This verse is similar to 1 Kings 14:30: "**There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days**." That state of war continued during Abijah's 3 year reign as 1 Chronicles 13:2 says.

Timeline of Events

Below is a timeline of the period discussed in this article. It is not precise even though dates are given. We begin with King Rehoboam's death and the ascension of his son Abijam (Abijah) to the throne.



(Timeline from BibleWorks)

^c J.A. Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, vol. 9, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 261–262.

^d The Hebrew text has Micaiah in 2 Chronicles 13:2, but the Concordant Version goes with Maacah because the Greek text, the LXX, has "Maacah" in both the Kings and Chronicles texts, which makes sense.

Refer often to the timeline to understand the flow of events. Notice the following from the timeline:

- Rehoboam ruled for **17 years** (1 Kings 14:21).
- Abijah, named Abijam on the timeline, ruled for **3 years** (1 Kings 15:2, beginning in the 18th year of Jeroboam of Israel)
- Asa ruled for a long time, 41 years (1 Kings 15:10, beginning in the 20th year of Jeroboam).

All three of these rulers of Judah ruled for some portion of the reign of King Jeroboam of Israel during the time covered by this article:

- Jeroboam ruled **22 years** (1 Kings 14:20). He outlives Abijah and dies early in the reign of King Asa of Judah.
- Nadab ruled **2 years** when he was assassinated by Baasha (1 Kings 15:25), also early in Asa's reign.
- Baasha ruled for **24 years**, all within Asa's 41 year reign (as do the reigns of the other two kings).

Events in this article end in the reign of King Baasha of Israel, and the conclusion of the story of his reign and death are in the next installment. The war that went on between Jeroboam of Israel and Rehoboam and his successor Abijah continued for a long time without resolution. Abijah sought to end the stalemate and the conflict by gathering the army of Judah to battle.

Next comes a great battle. Abijah meets the army of the Kingdom of Israel at an arranged battle at a particular time and place. Abijah's move threatens the dynasty of Jeroboam. If Abijah loses, all the royal heirs of David will be killed. The constant warfare threatened both kingdoms and both kings.

TEXT: A Crisis, Battle between Abijah of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel

2 Chronicles 13:3–21

³ So Abijah engaged in the battle with an army of masters of war, 400,000 chosen men. Jeroboam arrayed for battle against him 800,000 chosen men, a masterful army. ⁴ Abijah rose up on Mount Zemaraim in the hill country of Ephraim and said:

“Hear me, Jeroboam and all Israel. ⁵ Do you not know that Yahweh Elohim of Israel has given the kingship over Israel to David for the eon, to him and to his sons, a covenant of salt? ⁶ But Jeroboam son of Nebat, a servant of Solomon son of David arose and revolted against his lord. ⁷ Inane men gathered together around him, sons of worthlessness; they made themselves aggressive against Rehoboam son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was a lad and tender of heart and did not have courage before them.

⁸ And now you resolved to reinforce yourselves before the kingdom of Yahweh in the hand of David's sons. You are a vast throng, and with you are the golden calves that Jeroboam made for you as elohim. ⁹ Did you not expel the priests of Yahweh, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and appoint for yourselves priests like the peoples of other lands? Now anyone who comes to consecrate himself with a bull calf of the herd, and seven rams, even he becomes a priest of no-elohim!

¹⁰ As for us, Yahweh is our Elohim, and we have not forsaken Him; and the priests ministering to Yahweh are sons of Aaron, and the Levites are at their work, ¹¹ making ascent approaches [sacrifices] fume to Yahweh, morning by morning and evening by evening, as well as incense of spices; they set the array of bread on the clean table; they blaze up the golden lampstand and its lamps evening by evening. Indeed we are keeping the charge of Yahweh Elohim of our fathers, but you have forsaken Him.

¹² Behold, with us at the head is the One, Elohim, and His priests have bugles to blast the shout of alarm against you. O sons of Israel, do not fight against Yahweh Elohim of your fathers, for you shall not prosper.”

¹³ Now Jeroboam had sent the ambush around to come from behind them, so that they were before Judah,

and the ambush was behind them. ¹⁴ Then Judah turned around, and behold, the battle against them was both at their face and back. Then they cried to Yahweh, and the priests were blowing the bugles, ¹⁵ and the men of Judah raised a shout of alarm.

And it came about when the men of Judah raised a shout, then the One, Elohim Himself, struck Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah; ¹⁶ and the sons of Israel fled from before Judah, and Elohim delivered them into their hand.

¹⁷ Abijah and his people smote them with a great smiting; 500,000 chosen men from Israel fell slain.

¹⁸ The sons of Israel submitted at that time, while the sons of Judah were resolute because they leaned on Yahweh Elohim of their fathers. ¹⁹ Abijah pursued Jeroboam and took away from him the cities of Bethel and its outskirts, Jeshanah and its outskirts, and Ephron and its outskirts.

²⁰ Jeroboam retained no further vigor in the days of Abijah. Yahweh struck him down and he died.

²¹ Abijah showed himself steadfast. He took up for himself fourteen wives and begot twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. [end text]

Verse 3. The text of Chronicles says that Abijah attacked Jeroboam. The numbers of combatants were huge, 400,000 for Judah, 800,000 for Israel. These numbers are likely approximations, but certainly huge. This was likely the largest ancient battle since David and Israel's army fought against the combined allied armies of the nations of the Middle East, including Israel's future enemy Assyria.^e We do not know what year this battle occurred in Abijah's short 3 year reign (1 Kings 15:2).

Verse 4. Abijah begins a long speech addressed to Jeroboam's army, although it was also intended to encourage his own army of Judah half the size of the enemy. The location of Mount Zemaraim is not specifically known within Ephraim, somewhere north of the border between the two kingdoms. He was speaking from a rise that made it possible for most all soldiers in both armies to hear him.

Verse 5–7. Abijah speaks from a place that was within hearing distance of troops on both sides. Such speeches were made to encourage one's own troops and attempts to persuade the enemy to give up. It seems these types of speeches were usually fruitless. Abijah claims to be taking action in line with YHWH's wishes for David's heir to be King of all the people of a united Israel. He says Jeroboam is a rebel against David, Solomon, and his heir, Abijah's father Rehoboam. He does not mention that YHWH appointed Jeroboam to be king over the ten northern tribes of Israel, which everyone listening to him likely knew. Abijah was presenting selective facts which we call propaganda today.

Verses 8–9. David's sons are the rightful heirs of all Israel. He catalogs Israel's sins against YHWH. He appeals to them, they should realize their errors and return to their rightful king to worship the true God, YHWH.

Verses 10–11. The hypocrisy of Abijah is surprising as he tells of Judah's correct worship of YHWH, rather than the improper rites of the Israel cult of golden calves. "**Indeed we are keeping the charge of Yahweh Elohim of our fathers, but you have forsaken Him.**" Yet we are told in 1 Kings 15:3 above that Abijah himself is an idolater, led by his mother. His speech ends.

Verse 12. Abijah claims the help of YHWH as if he was a good king loyal to his God, without worshipping other gods.

Verses 13–14. Jeroboam was very clever and a good tactician. As Abijah was speaking, an Israelite force circled behind the army of Judah. In military terms this is called a "hammer and anvil" attack, usually very effective. The clever tactical move failed in this case because Abijah's army was inspired by the bugles (trumpets) and the thought that God was behind them.

Verses 15–16. The writer of Chronicles tells us that, surprisingly, the Israelite army was struck with fear and fled the field of battle. He gives two reasons, (1) the shout by the army of Judah and (2) more

^e [Israel and Judah, 7. Conspiracy and War](#) explains the attempted destruction of Israel's king and united Israel as a nation.

importantly, God’s intervention “**struck Jeroboam and all Israel**” without specifying what exactly happened.

Verse 17. Suddenly Jeroboam’s army became fearful and fled. In ancient battles most casualties took place when one army retreated in panic. In fear, hardened soldiers would cast off their shields, their armor, their helmets, and even their weapons — anything that may slow them down in attempting to escape. In this instance, fleeing did not prevent mass slaughter. The text says 500,000 Israelites died, but this is likely a glaring instance of the problem of large numbers in the Bible, that has yet to be resolved.^f However, certainly this defeat was a severe blow to the power of the northern Kingdom of Israel.

Verse 18. The writer of this section of Scripture attributes the victory to the faith in YHWH by the soldiers of the army of Judah. He does not attribute it to any attribute of Abijah’s. After all, the readers (listeners) of Chronicles likely knew well the older account in 1 Kings 15:1–6, that Abijah “**walked in all the sins of his father,**” sins of which the most serious was idolatry.

Verse 19. Even Jeroboam was forced to flee, and he was particularly pursued by Abijah and his army. Perhaps he was injured. Judah captured cities inside the border of Israel.

Verse 20. The battle had two results: (1) That Jeroboam survived the battle, but was injured and/or became sick which reduced his “**vigor**” and as a result (2) Jeroboam died a few years later (after his young son Abijam died). We learn later that Jeroboam died during the reign of King Asa of Judah, Abijah’s son and successor to David’s throne.

Verse 21. Abijah, King of Judah, had many wives and children, yet he was a young man.

Both of the following sources tell us what happened to Abijah after the battle.

TEXT: Abijah Dies, His Son Asa Rules Judah

1 Kings 15:7–8

⁷ The rest of the affairs of Abijah, and all that he did, are they not written on the scroll of the annals of the days of the kings of Judah?

And **there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam.**

⁸ Then Abijah lay down with his fathers; they entombed him in the City of David, and his son Asa reigned in his stead.

2 Chronicles 13:22–14:1

²² The rest of the affairs of Abijah, his ways and his matters are written in the inquiry of Iddo the prophet.

¹ Then Abijah lay down with his fathers; they entombed him in the city of David, and his son Asa reigned in his stead. In his days **the land was quiet for ten years.** [end text]

Verse 7. “**And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam.**” This indicates the war between the two kings continued after the battle. But no aggressive action was taken by either side. Jeroboam became ill.

Verses 7 and 22. The Samuel-Kings text was written hundreds of years after the events occurred. The Chronicles text was written hundreds of years after Samuel-Kings. Both reference previously written sources close to the time they occurred. Both texts focus on different things, while maintaining the basic story flow.

Abijah, Rehoboam’s son ruled only 3 years. The critical victory by Abijah and the army of Judah over the northern kingdom of Israel prevented reunification by the more heretical Israel.

Verse 1. “**The land was quiet for ten years**” means there was no war between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah for ten years. Both kingdoms were recovering from the massive battle between them. This weakened both in their relations with neighboring kingdoms. Life went on for the ordinary people of both kingdoms for the ten years. The biblical texts tell us nothing regarding any other significant events in the political, or

^f Many have tried, none have succeeded — yet. There likely is a pattern or formula related to groups of people, particularly military groups where the word *aleph* does not mean “thousands” as it ordinarily does, but refers to some other term. Perhaps that term is not even a number. It remains a puzzle to be solved.

military realms during that time. It is during times like these that idolatry has an opportunity to simmer below the surface of society. In this case, it is a continuous cycle of idolatry, warnings and curses from God, punishments, reforms, more idolatry, more warnings and curses, etc.

TEXT: Asa, King of Judah, Begins His Reign

1 Kings 15:9–12

⁹ In the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Asa became king over Judah. ¹⁰ Forty-one years he reigned in Jerusalem; and his grandmother's name was Maacah daughter of Abishalom.

¹¹ Asa did what was upright in the eyes of Yahweh, like his father David.

¹² He expelled the cult-prostitutes from the land and took away all the idol clods that his fathers had made.

2 Chronicles 14:2–5

² Asa did what was *good and* upright in the eyes of Yahweh his Elohim.

³ He took away the foreign altars and the high-places. He broke down the monuments and hewed down the Asherah poles.

⁴ Further, he ordered Judah to seek after Yahweh Elohim of their fathers and to observe the law and the instruction; ⁵ from all the cities of Judah he took away the high-places and the incense stands, and the kingdom was quiet before him. [end text]

Verse 9. Two time indicators are given relative to the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. First is that Asa began his rule in year 20 of Jeroboam's reign. The second time indicator is that Asa was to rule for 41 years, a very long time for ancient rulers. It also tells us that Asa probably began his reign when he was a very young man, perhaps still in his 20s.

Again, Maacah is mentioned, this time as Asa's grandmother. Asa reigned as a rightful descendant of King David.

Verses 11–12 and 2–5. Asa did many things that pleased God. He destroyed idolatrous sites and objects, he encouraged the people to worship YHWH, he took away high places and incense stands.

Verse 4. Asa began to rule Judah probably in the 3rd year of the 10 quiet years (2 Chronicles 14:1).

Abijah ruled 3 years (1 Kings 15:1; 2 Chronicles 13:2). Ten years of quiet began after Abijah's victory over Jeroboam's army. Asa was King of Judah during the remaining years of quiet relations with the northern Kingdom of Israel, and with surrounding nations (2 Chronicles 14:1).

Even though there was quiet (but not peace) on the surface, trouble was brewing under the surface of the quiet times. It would come from an unexpected direction with a challenge even greater than Jeroboam's army of Israel presented to young King Abijah. Trouble did not occur from Israel, but from another people, from another direction as we will read later.

TEXT: Review of Jeroboam's Death

1 Kings 14:19–20 (out of sequence)

¹⁹ The rest of the affairs of Jeroboam, how he fought and how he reigned, behold, they are written on the scroll of the annals of the days of the kings of Israel. ²⁰ Now the days that Jeroboam reigned were twenty-two years; then he lay down with his fathers, and his son Nadab reigned in his stead. [end text]

Jeroboam's death occurred in the second year after Asa was crowned King of Judah. The writer of Kings

did not coordinate or present the sequence of events in a strict chronological order. He organized the histories in the books of Kings according to topics and events. It is left for us to work out the details and seeming chronological problems.

The narrative of Kings focuses on the southern kings of Judah and secondarily on the king of Israel in the north. To have continuity with Jeroboam's successors, his son Nadab's short reign is now presented.

TEXT: Nadab, King of Israel, Dies from Conspiracy by Baasha

1 Kings 15:25–31

²⁵ As for Nadab son of Jeroboam, he became king over Israel **in the second year of Asa king of Judah**, and **he reigned over Israel for two years**. ²⁶ He did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh; and he walked in the way of his father and in his sin with which he had caused Israel to sin.

²⁷ Baasha son of Ahijah of the house of Issachar conspired against him; and Baasha smote him at Gibbethon of the Philistines, while Nadab and all Israel were besieging Gibbethon. ²⁸ So **Baasha put him to death in the third year of Asa king of Judah** and reigned in his stead.

²⁹ It occurred as he became king, that **he smote all the house of Jeroboam**. He did not let any breath remain to Jeroboam until he had exterminated him according to the word of Yahweh that He had spoken by means of His servant Ahijah the Shilonite, ³⁰ because of the sins of Jeroboam with which he had sinned and with which he had caused Israel to sin, by his vexation with which he provoked Yahweh Elohim of Israel to vexation.

³¹ The rest of the affairs of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written on the scroll of the annals of the days of the kings of Israel? **[end text]**

Verse 26. Next are presented the seemingly inevitable statement of a king doing **“what was evil”** and walking **“in the way of his father,”** Jeroboam. Nadab was quickly replaced as King of Israel because he **“caused Israel to sin”** by his example of worshipping other gods in addition to YHWH.

Verse 27. Gibbethon was a Levitical city in the territory of Dan (Joshua 19:44). The Philistines captured it and Nadab was besieging the city with the Israelite army. We are told Baasha's ascent to the throne of Israel was arranged by YHWH to fulfill prophecy. Gibbethon was probably lost to the Philistines after Israel's defeat by Judah under Abijah.

Verse 28. See the timeline on page 2 above. Nadab's death was near the end of the year.

Verses 29–30. Baasha was God's agent fulfilling the prophecy given through Ahijah the prophet. He gave three prophecies at one time: **(1)** that Jeroboam's young son, Abijah, would die; **(2)** that all Jeroboam's male heirs would be exterminated; and **(3)** that the ten tribes of Israel (Samaria) would be taken captive and exiled from the land God promised to their ancestors (1 Kings 14:6–16). These three prophecies were given because of Jeroboam's sins against YHWH. Their fulfillment in 1 Kings 15:25–31 helps us understand how serious God is about the matter of idolatry. Paul wrote in the time of the apostles, **“Wherefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry”** (1 Corinthians 10:14), and John warned Christians, **“Little children, guard yourselves from idols!”** (1 John 5:21). (The man who spoke for God, Ahijah, should not be confused with Baasha's father.)

TEXT: Jehu, A Prophet of God, Is Sent to Baasha, King of Israel

1 Kings 15:32–16:3

³² And **there was war** between Asa and Baasha king of Israel **all their days**. ³³ In **the third year of Asa** king of Judah, Baasha son of Ahijah became king over all Israel in Tirzah **for twenty-four years**. ³⁴ He did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh; and he walked in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin with which he had caused Israel to sin. ¹ The word of Yahweh came to Jehu son of Hanani against Baasha, saying,

² **“Inasmuch as, when I exalted you from the dust and appointed you as governor over My people**

Israel, you walked in the way of Jeroboam and caused My people Israel to sin by provoking Me to vexation with their sins,³ behold, I am wiping out the last of Baasha, the last of his house, and I will make his house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat.” [end text]

Verses 32. The phrase **“all their days”** does not mean for the rest of their lives. It means that hostility continued between Israel and Judah for the entire 24 years as both Asa and Baasha reigned over their respective kingdoms. Even though there was war between the kingdoms, no major battles were fought during **“all their days.”**

Verse 33. **“In the third year of Asa”** fits with 1 Kings 15:25 which also dates to the third year of Asa as Baasha’s year of becoming King of Israel.

Verse 1. **“Jehu son of Hanani”** is introduced. He is likely the son of Hanani the seer who later in 2 Chronicles 16:7–10 chastizes Asa of Judah.

Verse 2. YHWH says He exalted Baasha to be King of Israel, but Baasha causing God’s people to sin provoked God’s anger.

Verse 3. YHWH says he will punish Baasha just as He punished Jeroboam, by killing **“the last of his house,”** meaning every last heir. God exalted Baasha, God will destroy Baasha. Why don’t they ever seem to listen? Would you?

In contrast to Baasha, the narrative flow turns to King Asa of Judah and we learn about his loyalty to YHWH. He is a king who conducts himself in direct contrast to Jeroboam, Nadab, and Baasha in the northern Kingdom of Israel. He faces a tremendous challenge, but he seeks God’s help and he receives it.

TEXT: YHWH Saves Judah from a Massive Foreign Invasion

2 Chronicles 14:6–15

⁶ He [Asa] built fortified cities in Judah, since the land was quiet and there was no war against him during those years, for Yahweh had given him rest. ⁷ So he said to Judah,

“Let us rebuild these cities and surround them with walls and towers, double doors and bars, while we have the land before us, because we have sought after Yahweh our Elohim; we sought after Him, and He has given us rest all around. And so they built and prospered.”

⁸ Asa came to have an army of 300,000 from Judah carrying large shields and lances and 280,000 from Benjamin carrying shields and positioning the bow. All these were valorous masters.

⁹ **Zerah the Cushite** marched forth against them with an army of **a thousand thousand** [one million] and 300 chariots and came as far as Mareshah.

¹⁰ Asa marched forth before him, and they arrayed for battle in the ravine of Zephathah at Mareshah.

¹¹ Then Asa called to Yahweh his Elohim and said,

“O Yahweh, there is no one beside You to help the one without vigor against the multitude.

Help us, O Yahweh our Elohim, for we lean on You, and in Your Name we have come against this throng.

O Yahweh, You are our Elohim; do not let mortals restrain You.”

¹² So Yahweh struck the Cushites before Asa and before Judah. The Cushites fled, ¹³ and Asa and the people with him pursued them as far as Gerar. For those of the Cushites who fell there was no preservation of life, for they were broken before Yahweh and before His camp, who carried away very much loot.

¹⁴ They also smote all the cities around Gerar, for the awe of Yahweh came on them. They plundered all those cities, for much plunder was in them. ¹⁵ Moreover, they smote the tents of the cattlemen and captured flocks in abundance and camels; then they returned to Jerusalem. [end text]

Verse 6. There was little or no combat in the quiet war between Israel and Judah, and **“rest”** was given

to Judah by YHWH. These were good times for Asa and for the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and the Levi. Yet Asa prepared for the future conflict, fortifying defenses in strategic cities, both in the north and in the south.

Verses 7 and 8. Asa was a wise ruler, preparing for evil times. Prior to this time, the cities mentioned apparently had no walls or strong defenses. Asa prepares during peace and gives YHWH credit for the peace. Nevertheless, Asa prepares an army of 580,000 fighting men (again there are problems with the large numbers). **“Valorous masters”** means they were trained to fight as soldiers, not as untrained farmers, and each one had to be armed with lances or bows, and protected with shields. This would be a massive industrial project to arm half a million men. **“Valorous masters”** meant they were “masters of war.”

Verse 9. Even more so, the enemy of one million soldiers had to be armed. The foreign threat is now identified to the reader. While Asa likely knew about this huge army coming to attack Judah (it would be hard to hide), this was the likely threat Asa was preparing a defense against. The Greek Old Testament, the LXX, identifies Zera the Cushite as Zera **“the Ethiopian.”** This rendering may be so, as it is used by many English translations.[§] This likely means that this Cushite army came from the southern part of Egypt, perhaps as far south as the country called Ethiopia today. Egyptian dynastic lists do not identify a “Zera,” so we do not know which Pharaoh he was according to Egyptian chronology.

Identifications of biblical events with Egyptian history is still problematic. As we near the end times, information such as this will be clarified so we will have a better understanding of ancient world history than we do at present. Biblical chronology and history is the standard by which all history should be measured. That sounds ridiculous to many scholars, but what standard should we hold to? History is continually being revised with every new find, and experts often say more than they can prove for the sake of headlines, publicity, further grants from donors, and career advancement.

Verse 10. Asa personally led his army to confront the enemy. **“Zephathah at Mareshah”** was a small city believed to be southwest of Jerusalem. It was fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chronicles 11:8). Strangely the text says the battle took place in a ravine. Perhaps this ravine was consequential to the outcome of the battle. Zera thought his army was so massive that he could march them through a potential ambush site.

Verse 11. Like Abijah, Asa also spoke before the battle. He appealed to YHWH and to his army to encourage them. He did not address the enemy. Unlike Abijah, Asa did not lie about the facts to God or to his men. What we read is likely the highlight of his prayer to God.

Verse 12. Simple statements tell the effect of God striking the Cushites. God not only heard Asa’s prayer but He acted even before the armies came into conflict. God’s action makes the Cushite army fearful, they turn and flee from the Judean army and King Asa.

Verse 13. Asa commanded a pursuit of the fleeing enemy. No prisoners were taken. There was no way to safely feed or house many tens of thousands of prisoners in ancient times, although leaders were occasionally ransomed, and slaves taken. They killed the Cushite army and looted their supplies all the way toward Gerar.

Verse 14. More supplies were looted when they arrived at Gerar where the remnant of the defeated Cushite army fled to, perhaps to make a stand to fight. Gerar was a town or city to the west toward Egypt, mentioned in the time of Abraham (Genesis 10:19, 20:1–2). The cities around Gerar were attacked by the army of Judah, again indicating resistance. These cities near Gerar were likely major supply base camps for the huge Cushite army. From there they marched to the battle and to their defeat. Such bases are frequently

[§] Cush can mean the area south of Egypt, or the area in northwest India called the Hindu Kush. Both are referred to as Cush in the Bible, and both traveled from Babel to their respective areas. Dr. Martin wrote about this people in [The Book of Zephaniah](#), footnote 2, beginning with discussing the area of Babel in Mesopotamia after the flood:

“The people of Cush moved out of that region. Many went through Arabia, south, and east to the other side of the Persian Gulf. The southern ones went into Africa and became the Ethiopians, a dark skinned people. Others went east and became the Hindu Cush, a dark skinned people with different racial characteristics from the people of Africa. Both were known in early times as the two Cushites. The Greeks called them Ethiopians. The word Ethiopia means “black skinned.” The Cushites were named Ethiopians by the Greeks because of the color of their black skin. Actually, the Cushites are named because they came from where Cush the son of Ham originally settled.”

also quickly constructed fortresses, hence the army of Judah attacked the bases and cities around them.

Verse 15. The army of Judah captured abundant flocks and camels perhaps maintained by Bedouin tribesmen. These animals were used to haul supplies and provided meat for the Cushite troops. In defeat they returned to Egypt. This defeat probably had political repercussions back in Egypt and Ethiopia.

The plunder of the Cushite-Egyptian army and Egyptian supply camps was perhaps payback for Shishak's earlier capture of Jerusalem and plunder of the Temple in the fifth year of the reign of Rehoboam, Asa's grandfather (1 Kings 14:25–26; 2 Chronicles 12:2–9, "[Israel and Judah: 20. Civil War and Division](#)").

Take notice of the good things YHWH arranged to happen for the people of the Kingdom of Judah: (1) the great victory YHWH gave to King Abijah over the army of Israel to maintain the Davidic kingdom and dynasty, (2) the 10 years of peace for everyone in the kingdom, and (3) the great victory over the Cushite army that YHWH gave to "good" King Asa, with great loot and plunder besides.

You would think the people of Judah would look to YHWH for their safety and security, and obey Him. This meant, of course, worshipping Him only as god. This time the people, not the king, failed.

YHWH respects Asa enough to give the young king a direct warning about the idolatry occurring in the Kingdom of Judah.

TEXT: The Prophet Azariah Warns King Asa of Spiritual Decline

2 Chronicles 15:1–15

¹ As for Azariah son of Oded, the spirit of Elohim came upon him, ² and he went forth before Asa and said to him,

“Hear me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin! Yahweh is with you when you are with Him. If you seek after Him, He shall be found by you. Yet if you forsake Him, He shall forsake you.

³ Now for many days Israel was without the Elohim of truth, without a priest to direct them, and without the law. ⁴ But in their distress they returned to Yahweh Elohim of Israel; they sought Him, and He was found by them.

⁵ In those eras it was not peaceful to fare forth or to come in, for great discomfitures were on all dwellers of the lands; ⁶ and they were pounded down, nation against nation, and city against city, for Elohim, He discomfitted them with every distress.

⁷ As for you, be steadfast and do not let your hands relax, for there is reward for your efforts.”

⁸ As soon as Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Azariah son of Oded the prophet, he showed himself steadfast and removed the abominations from all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and from the cities that he had seized from the hill country of Ephraim. Further, he renewed the altar of Yahweh that was before the portico of Yahweh.

⁹ Then he convened all Judah and Benjamin, as well as the sojourners dwelling with them from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon; for they had fallen to him from Israel in abundance when they saw that Yahweh his Elohim was with him. ¹⁰ They came together in Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's reign. ¹¹ They sacrificed to Yahweh on that day from the loot which they had brought back, of the herd, 700 cattle, and of the flock, 7,000 sheep.

¹² Then they entered into a covenant to seek after Yahweh Elohim of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul, ¹³ and that anyone who would not seek after Yahweh Elohim of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman.

¹⁴ So they swore to Yahweh with a loud voice and with shouting, with bugles and with trumpets. ¹⁵ All Judah rejoiced over the oath, for they swore with all their heart and sought after Him with all their eagerness, so that He was found by them; and Yahweh gave them rest all around. **[end text]**

Verse 2. Azariah the prophet spoke in open council addressing King Asa and all the people of the kingdom. He gave them a message from YHWH. His message is direct and to the point, Seek God, do not

forsake Him. It must have been nice to have a prophet say to you, the King, “**YHWH is with you!**”! Of course, that statement is provisional, “**... when you are with Him.**”

Verse 3. To me it is somewhat ambiguous. When were the “**days Israel was without the Elohim of truth?**” Perhaps the days of the Judges was meant.

Verse 5. Reference to past eras meant that it was not in the recent past.

Verses 6–7. YHWH gives the stick, then he gives the carrot. He promises reward if they do well.

Verse 8. All should admire Asa at this time. He acted immediately to do what was right before YHWH, but also for the sake of the people under his rule. He continued and expanded his anti-idolatry acts wherever he reigned, even up in “**the hill country of Ephraim**” seized from Jeroboam by Abijah and integrated into the Kingdom of Judah.

Verse 9. He gathered the people of the kingdom and rededicated them to YHWH. The people were enthusiastic.

Verse 10. A time indicator is given: the third month, fifteenth year of Asa’s forty-one year reign. This event took place some 5 or 6 months after the great victory, which likely occurred after the harvest of the previous year. (Battles were usually fought after the harvest before winter).

Verse 11. They sacrificed cattle and sheep seized from the Cushites dedicating their trophies of war to God.

Verses 12–13. The covenant with “**YHWH Elohim of their fathers**” was renewed and a death sentence declared to be imposed upon those “**who would not seek after YHWH**” exclusively. This did not mean simply a public declaration, but the words convey a heart-felt personal commitment.

Of course, the people of Israel were never able to keep such a covenant any more than they could keep the Mosaic laws, but they did acknowledge YHWH’s word to them through the prophet Azariah, and they tried to be faithful.

Verses 14 and 15. They swore with a loud voice and instruments. YHWH honored their commitment and “**gave them rest all around.**” We do not know how long the rest lasted.

Asa was not done yet with his reforms. He cleans house, within his own household.

TEXT: King Asa of Judah Continues His Religious Reforms

1 Kings 15:13–16

¹³ As for **his grandmother Maacah**, *he* even made her withdraw from her rank of queen mother, because she had made an obscene idol for Asherah.

Asa cut down her obscene idol and burned it in Wadi Kidron. ¹⁴ Yet the high-places were not taken away. However, Asa’s heart was at peace *with Yahweh* all his days.

¹⁵ And he brought to the House of Yahweh the holy things of his father and his own holy things, silver and gold and vessels.

¹⁶ There was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days.

2 Chronicles 15:16–19

¹⁶ As for **his grandmother Maacah**, *king Asa himself* even made her withdraw from her rank of queen mother, because she had made an obscene idol for Asherah.

Asa cut down her obscene idol, *pulverized* and burned it in Wadi Kidron. ¹⁷ Yet the high-places were not taken away *from Israel*. However, Asa’s heart was at peace all his days.

¹⁸ And he brought to the House of *the One, Elohim*, the holy things of his father and his own holy things, silver and gold and vessels.

¹⁹ There was no war until **the thirty-fifth** [twenty-fifth] **year of Asa’s reign.** **[end text]**

Verse 13 and 16. Maacah was a wife of Rehoboam, the mother of Abijah and the grandmother of Asa. Asa removed her from the position of authority as queen mother.

Verses 14 and 17. It is unclear what is meant by “**the high-places were not taken away from Israel.**” I

think this meant that Asa did not impose his reform in the territory seized from Israel by Abijah.

Verses 15 and 18. Does this mean that the **“the holy things of his father”** were the objects seized by Pharaoh Shishak when he seized the wealth of the Temple? Or were these object of his ancestor David and Solomon (1 Kings 7:37), brought with the Cushites as ritual objects for their cult, as they presumed victory over the Kingdom of Judah? We cannot know, the texts are not explicit.

1 Kings 15:16. This verse is repeated in 1 Kings 15:32. This is part of the material covered on page 7 above. So there was war but no major battles until the following year.

2 Chronicles 15:19. The text says **“the thirty-fifth year of Asa’s reign.”** This must be the twenty-fifth year. From the victory over the Cushites in the 14th year of Asa’s reign (the celebration was the 3rd month of the following year), until the 25th year of Asa’s reign was 10+ years, the time of quiet that transpired after Abijah’s victory over Jeroboam (**“the land was quiet for ten years,”** 2 Chronicles 14:1).

See the note for 2 Chronicles 16 verse 1 below.

TEXT: Judah Attacked by Baasha of Israel

1 Kings 15:17–24

¹⁷ Baasha king of Israel marched up against Judah and rebuilt Ramah, so as to allow no one to go forth or come in to Asa king of Judah.

¹⁸ Now Asa took all the silver and the gold left among the treasuries of the House of Yahweh and among the treasuries of the house of the king and put them in the hand of his officials. Then king Asa sent them to Ben-hadad son of Tabrimmon son of Hezion, the king of Syria who dwelt in Damascus, saying,

¹⁹ **“There is a covenant between me and you, between my father and your father. Behold, I send you a bribe of silver and gold; come, do annul your covenant with Baasha king of Israel, so that he may go up away from me.”**

²⁰ Ben-hadad hearkened to king Asa and sent the chiefs of the armies that he had against the cities of Israel. He smote Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah and all Chinnereth as far as all the land of Naphtali.

²¹ Now it came to pass as Baasha heard of it, that he left off from rebuilding Ramah and dwelt in Tirzah.

²² As for king Asa, he summoned all of Judah — no one was exempt — and they carried away the stones of Ramah and the timbers of it with which Baasha had rebuilt it. With them king Asa built up Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah.

2 Chronicles 16:1–17:1

¹ In **the thirty-sixth** [twenty-sixth] **year** of Asa’s reign,

Baasha king of Israel marched up against Judah and rebuilt Ramah so as to allow no one to go forth or come in to Asa king of Judah.

² Now Asa *brought forth* silver and gold from the treasuries of the House of Yahweh and the house of the king, and sent them to Ben-hadad king of Syria who dwelt in Damascus, saying,

³ **“There is a covenant between me and you, between my father and your father. Behold, I send you silver and gold; come, annul your covenant with Baasha king of Israel, so that he may go up away from me.”**

⁴ Ben-hadad hearkened to king Asa and sent the chiefs of the armies that he had, against the cities of Israel. They smote Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim and all *the provision cities* of Naphtali.

⁵ Now it came to pass as Baasha heard of it, that he left off from rebuilding Ramah *and ceased his work.*

⁶ As for king Asa, he *took* all of Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and the timbers of it with which Baasha had rebuilt it. With them Asa built up Geba and Mizpah.

⁷ At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him,

“Because you leaned on the king of Syria

²³ The rest of all the affairs of Asa and all his masterful deeds, all that he did, and the cities that he built, are they not written on the scroll of the annals of the days of the kings of Judah? But at the time of his old age he travailed in his feet.

²⁴ Then Asa lay down with his fathers and was entombed with his fathers

in the city of his father David;

and his son Jehoshaphat reigned in his stead.

and did not lean on Yahweh your Elohim, therefore the army of the king of Israel escaped out of your hand.

⁸ **As for the Cushites and the Libyans, were they not a vast army with chariots and horsemen in very great abundance? Yet because you leaned on Yahweh, He gave them into your hand.**

⁹ **For, as regards Yahweh, His eyes go to and fro through all the earth to reinforce the heart of those who are at peace with Him. You were exceedingly unwise in this matter; so henceforth there will be wars against you.**

¹⁰ Asa was vexed by the seer, and he gave him over to the house of stocks because he was irate at him about this. Asa also maltreated some of the people at that time.

¹¹ *Now the affairs of Asa, first and last, behold, they are written on the scroll of the kings of Judah and Israel.*

¹² In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was affected with gangrene in his feet until his illness became very severe. Yet even in his illness he did not seek after Yahweh, but resorted to healers.

¹³ Then Asa lay down with his fathers; he died in the forty-first year of his reign, ¹⁴ and they entombed him in his grand tomb that he had dug out for himself in the city of David. They laid him in the bed that was filled with aromatics, all sorts of ointments elaborately compounded. And they burned for him an exceedingly great funeral fire.

¹ His son Jehoshaphat reigned in his stead and showed himself steadfast against Israel. **[end text]**

Verse 1. This time indicator must be wrong, as 2 Chronicles 15:19 was wrong, and for the same reason. Baasha began his reign in the second year of Asa's reign. Asa reigned 41 years (1 Kings 15:10), Baasha reigned 24 years (1 Kings 15:33), so it would be impossible for Baasha to go to war, "**In the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign**" (2 Chronicles 16:1). This is because Baasha became king upon his assassination of Nadab in the third year of Asa's reign (1 Kings 15:27). (Again, review the timeline chart on the bottom of page 2 above.) Therefore 2 Chronicles 16:1 should read "**In the twenty-sixth year of Asa's reign.**"

Verses 17 and 1. "**Baasha ... marched up against Judah.**" He invaded (or prepared to invade) Judah. An Israelite fortress at Ramah would cut a major coastal trade route into Judah.

Verses 18–20 and 2–4. Asa bribed the Syrian King Ben-hadad to attack northern Israel, which he did.

Verses 21–22 and 5–6. Baasha stopped construction of the Ramah fortress. Asa, with Judah's army, tore down the fortifications of stone and wood, and used them to build fortifications at Geba and Mizpah.

Verses 7–9. Hanani gives Asa a message from YHWH: because Asa's did not depend upon YHWH to help with Baasha, God will cause wars to come against Asa to the end of his reign.

Verse 10. Asa imprisoned Hanani and put him in stocks (in confinement). Did Asa maltreat **“some of the people”** because they objected to his treatment of Hanani? We are not told.

Verse 23. Asa performed many **“masterful deeds”** even building cities. He was an interesting man.

Verse 12. This time indicator is likely correct, occurring 2 years before Asa’s death.

Verse 24 and 14. Asa carved out his tomb **“in the City of David,”** likely south of the Gihon Spring.

[I am repeating 1 King 15:33–16:3 that I quoted on page 7 above.]

TEXT: Synopsis of Baasha’s Life and Prophecy of His Death

1 Kings 15:33–16:7

³³ In **the third year of Asa** king of Judah, **Baasha son of Ahijah** became king over all Israel in Tirzah for twenty-four years. ³⁴ He **did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh**; and he **walked in the way of Jeroboam** and **in his sin with which he had caused Israel to sin**.

¹ The word of Yahweh came to Jehu son of Hanani against Baasha, saying,

² **“Inasmuch as, when I exalted you from the dust and appointed you as governor over My people Israel, you walked in the way of Jeroboam and caused My people Israel to sin by provoking Me to vexation with their sins, ³ behold, I am wiping out the last of Baasha, the last of his house, and I will make his house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat.**

⁴ **Anyone belonging to Baasha who dies in the city shall the dogs eat; and anyone belonging to him who dies in the field shall the fowl of the heavens eat.”**

⁵ The rest of the affairs of Baasha, what he did, and his masterful deeds, are they not written on the scroll of the annals of the days of the kings of Israel? ⁶ Baasha lay down with his fathers and was entombed in Tirzah; and his son Elah reigned in his stead. ⁷ Moreover by means of the prophet Jehu son of Hanani, the word of Yahweh had come to Baasha and to his house, because of all the evil that he had done in the eyes of Yahweh by provoking Him to vexation with the work of his hands, that it would become like the house of Jeroboam, and because he had smitten it. [end text]

[See the notes on pages 7–8 regarding 1 King 15:33–16:3.]

Verse 34. Next comes the seemingly inevitable statement of a king doing **“what was evil”** and walking **“in the way of his father,”** meaning Jeroboam. Baasha, a commoner, had no family relationship with Jeroboam. Baasha was God’s tool of vengeance against the House of Jeroboam, murdering his son Nadab and killing all his house. In God’s view, Nadab **“caused Israel to sin”** by his example of worshipping other gods besides YHWH.

Verse 2. Baasha is informed that he has done the same as Nadab and Jeroboam, with God pronouncing the same punishment of Jeroboam upon Baasha and his house.

Verses 3–4. Baasha is told he shall die, and so will **“the last of his house.”** All will die. Jehu describes what happens to the bodily remains.

Verse 5. Baasha did **“masterful deeds,”** which means he was an energetic king. But many of Baasha’s acts were evil, sinful, and done against God’s expressed will. Yes, he was God’s agent in bringing His justice to Jeroboam and his house, but then Baasha went and committed the same sins. **“Annals of the days of the kings of Israel”** probably refers to the court records of the Israelite Kingdom, somehow preserved.

Verses 6 and 7. Baasha was buried in Tirzah in the Kingdom of Israel.

Conclusion

There were good kings and bad kings in Judah. For the kings of Israel, there is a succession of almost all bad kings willing to worship other false gods while worshipping YHWH.