

CHRONICLES OF THE KINGS

16—IN ASA’S DAYS THE LAND WAS QUIET

WHEN we come to consider the life of Judah’s third king, Asa, it is apparent once again that the Chronicles account gives a very different impression from the picture presented in the book of Kings (see Table below). In [1 Kings 15](#), Asa succeeded his father Abijah, and reigned for forty one years. During most of this long reign, Baasha the destroyer of Jeroboam’s house was king over Israel. “And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days” (verses [16](#) and [32](#)), to the point that Baasha tried to stop anyone from the northern tribes defecting to Judah by fortifying Ramah on the southern border of Israel.

The summary of Asa’s reign in Kings is that he “did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, as did David his father” (verse [11](#)).

But the message in [2 Chronicles 14](#) has some distinct differences. It does not concentrate on the long conflict between Asa and Baasha that lasted from the third to the twenty seventh year of Asa’s reign, but says instead that “in his days the land was quiet ten years” ([2 Chronicles 14:1](#)).

In Chronicles, the emphasis is more strongly on Asa’s reforming zeal as he overthrew the idolatrous altars and destroyed the places of false worship. He even deposed his grandmother Maachah because she “made an idol in a grove” ([15:16](#)). For all these actions “the kingdom was quiet before him. And he built fenced cities in Judah: for the land had rest, and he had no war in those years; because the LORD had given him rest” (verses [5](#), [6](#)).

INCIDENTS IN ASA’S REIGN

1 KINGS

2 CHRONICLES

Religious reforms

15:9–15

14:2–7

VICTORY OVER ETHIOPIAN ARMY

14:8–15

OBEYS ODED THE PROPHET

15:1–8

MAKES COVENANT WITH GOD

15:9–19

WAR WITH BAASHA

15:16, 17

16:1

MAKES COVENANT WITH BENHADAD

15:18–22

16:2–6

IMPRISONS HANANI THE PROPHET

16:7–10

FAILS TO SEEK GOD

15:23, 24

16:11–14

When this “rest” was destroyed, the threat came from the south, from a vast Ethiopian army, and not from Baasha’s Israel. It was a test of Asa’s faith, who “cried unto the LORD his God ... help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude” (verse 11).

For his implicit trust in God, Asa’s prayer was heard and God destroyed the Ethiopian host. It was the signal for all in Judah to covenant themselves to God, so that once again “the LORD gave them rest round about” (15:15). Some faithful members of the northern tribes were also involved, “for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the LORD his God was with him” (verse 9).

A League with Syria

This explains why Baasha fortified Ramah. He was intent on stopping this exodus to the south. Instead of directly confronting Baasha, and without specifically calling on God’s aid, as he did when the Ethiopians attacked, Asa made a league with the king of Syria, who attacked Israel from the north and thus relieved the pressure on Judah. Asa meantime used the building materials from Ramah to fortify Geba and Mizpah, border cities in Judah’s territory.

At the end of Asa’s life, therefore, he did not act as faithfully as he did at the beginning. He did not walk perfectly in God’s ways, so “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” (16:12).

We are told, however, even in the Chronicles account, that “the heart of Asa was perfect all his days” (15:17). The two accounts can therefore be reconciled, but the lessons they teach are distinctly different because they were written for a different purpose.

Asa is described in Chronicles as one of Judah’s great reformers. He stands alongside Hezekiah and Josiah as providing a high spiritual example for the people to follow, and the incidents from his life recorded in Chronicles are there to instruct the returned exiles of what was expected of them as they started to provide a foothold for the people of God back in the Land. Like Asa, they were faced by external threats from those who did not want to see Judah restored, and from the possibility of internal apathy and apostasy.

The great themes of Asa’s reign are therefore the call to reformation, and the message of God’s prophets. Two of these are mentioned in Chronicles, and we would not know of their involvement if we only had the Kings account.

“If ye seek him ...”

The first was Oded, who commented on the defeat of the Ethiopian army. This was an important sign to Judah of God’s nearness to them at all times: “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 Chronicles 15:2).

Asa had made a good start. He inherited a kingdom where idolatry had a strong hold over the people. Even within Jerusalem, the holy city, was an *unholy* city where the abominations of other nations were worshipped. Solomon allowed these to be introduced by his foreign wives, and support for the shrines where they worshipped passed to Rehoboam’s wife Maachah. Throughout her son Abijam’s reign, these places of false worship flourished.

Asa was therefore placed in a difficult position when he came to the throne. His grandmother was leading the people in wrong ways, and she was not an influence for good. It is often said that ‘blood is

thicker than water’, and family connections can often blunt a person’s discernment of what is right and wrong. But not in Asa’s case. As a young man and early in his reign, he deposed the dowager queen, and destroyed the “horror” she had erected in a grove (2 Chronicles 15:16, AV margin), burning it at the brook Kidron.

Other religious reforms were also introduced by Asa: “He took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves: and commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment. Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images (literally, the *sun* images): and the kingdom was quiet before him” (14:3–5).

This gave the king a breathing space. He was able to build up the army and also strengthen the fortification of many cities in Judah. It was a busy decade of peace: “In his days the land was quiet ten years” (14:1).

“He built fenced cities in Judah: for the land had rest, and he had no war in those years; because the LORD had given him rest. Therefore he said unto Judah, Let us build these cities, and make about them walls, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is yet before us; because we have sought the LORD our God, we have sought him, and he hath given us rest on every side. So they built and prospered” (14:6, 7).

The disgrace of Rehoboam’s reign, when Shishak king of Egypt ransacked the temple, was partially removed when Asa “brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated, and that he himself had dedicated, silver, and gold, and vessels” (15:18).

For Asa’s devotion to the things of God, it is recorded on more than one occasion that God gave Judah rest. But this must not mask the fact that the nation was far from being wholehearted in its devotion. The situation was extremely fragile. Despite the destruction of many idols, “the high places were not removed” (1 Kings 15:14).

It is apparent that the Ethiopian attack, and the prophet Oded’s appeal were designed to reinforce both in the king and in the people a desire to draw more completely towards God.

The Ethiopian Multitude

It is difficult to understand why there is no reference in Kings to the enormous Ethiopian army—one of the biggest recorded in scripture—numbering a million men, nor to its miraculous overthrow when God listened to Asa’s appeal: “LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee” (2 Chronicles 14:11).

In Chronicles, it provides the background to the prophet’s appeal. ‘You have seen’, Oded said, ‘how God was with you against the Ethiopians. He is always with His people in times of trouble when they cry to Him for help’: “Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded” (15:7).

This was just the encouragement Asa needed to continue with the work, and it is apparent that his early zeal had started to wane with the passage of time: “He took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from mount Ephraim, and renewed the altar of the LORD, that was before the porch of the LORD” (verse 8).

Oded’s prophecy became also the impetus for a national convention for the people to covenant themselves more completely to God. In this act they were joined by “strangers” from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon: “And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and the strangers with them out of Ephraim and

Manasseh, and out of Simeon: “for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the LORD his God was with him” (verse 9).

National Convention

We have seen in earlier articles about Chronicles that there is often an emphasis on national gatherings, intended to bring the people together closely around the things of God. Here is a further example, as Asa “gathered them together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year” (verse 10). As occurred on other similar occasions, there were great sacrifices, and the spoil from the victory over the Ethiopians was offered to the LORD.

The original pattern followed at times of national convention was the great rejoicing in David’s day, when the ark of God was brought into Jerusalem: “Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps” (1 Chronicles 15:28, cp. 2 Chronicles 15:14).

That they were commemorating the ascent into Jerusalem of the ark of the covenant is implicit in the fact that the people in Asa’s day entered into a new covenant with God. This had some specific terms: “Whosoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman” (2 Chronicles 15:13).

The nation was on the crest of a wave, and the people felt invincible. With God’s help the vast Ethiopian army was routed by the men of Judah. Who could possibly withstand them? The expressions of faith were all well and good, but they upheld an almost impossible ideal for the *whole* nation to fulfil: “All Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the LORD gave them rest round about” (verse 15).

Would the people remain true to their covenant with God? And what of Asa their king?

The next test arose from the north, when Baasha king of Israel determined to stanch the flow of religious refugees who were fleeing out of Israel into Asa’s kingdom of Judah. A key strategic city on Israel’s southern border was Ramah. It commanded the main route from Israel to Jerusalem, and Baasha fortified it, “to the intent that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah” (2 Chronicles 16:1).

This was like throwing down the gauntlet before Asa. What would he do?

When the Ethiopian army approached, Asa cried to God for help. Now he sought help from man, and sent treasures from the temple and his own palace to Benhadad king of Syria to induce him to sever his links with Israel. Benhadad responded magnificently, and attacked Israel from the north, causing Baasha to cease his work at Ramah.

The window of opportunity provided to Asa was seized with both hands. He mustered the men of Judah, who spoiled Ramah and used the building materials to fortify their own border cities of Geba and Mizpah.

“The eyes of the LORD run to and fro”

Oded the prophet spoke God’s word to Asa immediately after the defeat of the Ethiopians. The second prophet of Asa’s reign, Hanani (the father of Jehu, 1 Kings 16:1) brought God’s word to the king immediately after he sought the help of the king of Syria. He reminded Asa of God’s help against the Ethiopians, and implicitly of Oded’s statement that “If ye seek (the LORD), he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you” (2 Chronicles 15:2): “The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout

the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars” (16:9).

This was a very telling message for the returned exiles. They knew the administrative arrangements of the Persian empire, where there was a court official with the wonderful title ‘the eyes of the king’. He was at the centre of a vast intelligence network, designed to keep the emperor abreast of all that was happening in his extensive territories. But far surpassing the abilities of any human king, the King of Heaven has His hosts, who are constantly at His command. This was also the message of Zechariah, a prophet of the exile (Zechariah 4:10), and it was sent to encourage God’s people to remain true to God’s ways.

The Prophet Imprisoned

Had Asa listened to Hanani and to the word of God, God would have listened to him. But Asa’s reaction was not good. He imprisoned the prophet and also turned on some of the people—presumably those who supported the prophet’s message, and who disagreed with Judah entering into a treaty with Syria. His folly remained in visible form for three hundred and fifty years. For in the closing years of Judah’s commonwealth when Gedaliah ruled on Babylon’s behalf, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slaughtered eighty men who were going to Jerusalem to worship: “Now the pit wherein Ishmael had cast all the dead bodies of the men, whom he had slain because of Gedaliah, was it which Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel: and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with them that were slain.” (Jeremiah 41:9).

Here again was a man who would not honour God, but who trusted in his own scheming ways. Asa was nowhere near as evil a character as Ishmael, for it is recorded of him that “the heart of Asa was perfect all his days” (2 Chronicles 15:17). But he still made a serious error of judgement, and he tried to overcome it, once it was drawn to his attention, by imprisoning God’s prophet and oppressing the people.

It is significant that Asa lost his temper. “*He was wroth* with the seer, and put him in a prison house; for *he was in a rage* with him because of this thing” (16:10). Part of the human condition leads us to lose our reason when we are crossed, and to distort the truth. Who dared resist the king? was Asa’s immediate reaction, and he would not give the prophet’s words the attention due to them.

Diseased in His Feet

The outcome for Asa was a serious personal decline that manifested itself physically, but was really symptomatic of his spiritual weakness: “And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great” (verse 12, cp. 1 Kings 15:23).

The king chose to walk in *his* ways, and not to walk always in God’s ways. The affliction was therefore highly appropriate. But it was actually a further stimulus to put himself right with God. Asa sought the LORD when he saw the Ethiopian army; he turned to Syria when Baasha started to flex his muscles. What would he do when he was physically afflicted?

Asa the “Healer”?

Ironically, Asa’s name probably means “healer”, and he was certainly in need of healing, for his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians” (2 Chronicles 16:12).

His situation was so grave, and his decline was so serious that his son Jehoshaphat acted as regent in the last years of his life. After starting so well, and with commendable religious reforms that encouraged the people to draw ever closer to God, Asa’s last days are tragic.

“We have in Asa an example of a man who had good intentions without the will to follow them through. He saw the need for reform, but contented himself with merely starting it off. He was ready to rely

on the LORD, if he could see no way of helping himself. He was a man who wanted to made the best of both worlds, who was able to seize an opportunity, but unwilling to commit himself to a steady course of action, and as such he was a failure. In spite of his good deeds and of the help he received from God, he was unable to rise to the challenge of leadership” (Brother Philip Hinde, *The Divided Kingdom*, page 35).

The final comment about Asa is that he had a marvellous funeral! He prepared his own tomb during his lifetime, “dugged for himself in the city of David” (2 Chronicles 16:14, margin). There were fabulous and varied spices; and “they made a very great burning for him”. In this last action, the people of Jerusalem treated Asa as the men of Jabesh-gilead treated Saul (cp. 1 Samuel 31:12). Were the two kings similar in many ways? Both started well, and were involved in outstanding victories over God’s enemies. But at the end they had feet of clay, they turned to others for help and not to God. It is not a pleasant epitaph.

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¹. Vol. 136: The Christadelphian : Volume 136. 2001, c1999. The Christadelphian, volume 136. (electronic ed.). Logos Library System . Christadelphian Magazine & Publishing Association: Birmingham