



First Kings - Chapter Fifteen

Summary of Chapter Fifteen

Abijam ruled over Judah following the wicked ways of his father Rehoboam and the wars with Jeroboam in the north continued. The way of life in Judah then changed as Asa took up the kingship from his father Abijam who followed the ways of the Lord but did not remove the high places that had been set up.

The war between the north and south continued, with King Baasha of Israel laying siege to Asa in Judah. Asa then sent what remained of the treasures of the temple and place to the king of Aram, then an ally of Israel, requesting that he make war with Israel and so he did, bringing relief to Judah.

The wicked son of Jeroboam Nadab had succeeded him as king but as he lay siege on the Philistine city of Gibbethon Baasha killed him and took the throne for himself. He then killed all the remaining descendants of Jeroboam, fulfilling the word of the Lord. Baasha's reign continued the wickedness in Israel.

III 1 Kings 15:1-24 - Abijam and Asa

The authors continue to tell about the kings of Judah before returning to pick up the threads of the history of Israel with Nadab, son of Jeroboam. Abijam (vv.1-8) is a characteristically bad Judæan king, indulging in the idolatry of Solomon in his later days and of Rehoboam; Asa (vv.9-24) is a characteristically good Judæan king, behaving relatively faithfully like David and the earlier Solomon. These two set the pattern for all the Judæan kings who follow, who are measured in terms of whether they have been 'like David' or not.

III.a 1 Kings 15:1-8 - Abijam Reigns over Judah: Idolatry and War

Rehoboam's son Abijam continued to rule Judah as his father had done but the Lord allowed him to for the sake of David. Civil war persisted with the north throughout the reign of Abijam.

¹ Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam son of Nebat, Abijam began to reign over Judah. ² He reigned for three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Maacah daughter of Abishalom. ³ He committed all the sins that his father did before him; his heart was not true to the Lord his God, like the heart of his father David.

1 Kings 15:1-3

Abijam began to reign over Judah. This son of Rehoboam only reigned for three years, showing that God did not bless his reign. Comparing this account with 2 Chronicles Chapter 13 it can be seen that Abijam knew something of the Lord, and knew how to preach, but he did not uproot the idolatry and sexual immorality that was introduced by Rehoboam. The successor of Abijam, his son Asa, would be the one who removed the centres of the sexually-charged idolatry that was so common in this land (vv.12-13).

If Abishalom is the same as David's son Absalom as some commentators suppose, one should remember that the Hebrew terms daughter and father, as well as mother (v.10), do not necessarily refer to first-generation descent, and can mean 'granddaughter' and 'ancestor' (and 'grandmother'). The link between Abishalom and Absalom is perhaps made because the 'daughter' here bears the same name as Absalom's mother: <<*Sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam of Jezreel; his second, Chileab, of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; the third, Absalom son of Maacah, daughter of King Talmi of Geshur*>> (2 Samuel 3:2-3). Maacah was apparently the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah according to 2 Chronicles 13:2, and Tamar (2 Samuel 14:27), hence the granddaughter of Absalom, David's rebellious son.

His heart was not true to the Lord his God, like the heart of his father David. This was the real problem with Abijam's reign - his lack of a real personal relationship with God. David sinned during his reign, but his heart stayed loyal to the Lord his God.

Second Chronicles Chapter 13 fills in more interesting details about the reign of Abijam, known also as Abijah in Second Chronicles. It reveals how there was war between Jeroboam of Israel and Abijam of Judah, and how Abijam challenged Jeroboam on the basis of righteousness and faithfulness to God. Jeroboam responded with a surprise attack, and victory seemed certain for Israel over Judah, but Abijam cried out to the Lord, and God won a victory for Judah that day. Scripture says of that war: <<*Thus the Israelites were subdued at that time, and the people of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the Lord, the God of their ancestors*>> (2 Chronicles 13:18). For David's sake and in response to his faith, he was allowed a spectacular victory over the encircling Israelites whom he had challenged, for being even more apostate

than he was. This is an instance of God blessing the unworthy for the sake of the worthy. Yet Chronicles also reveals his standing at the end of his brief reign: <<*But Abijah grew strong. He took fourteen wives, and became the father of twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters*>> (2 Chronicles 13:21). In the midst of his victory and good leadership for Judah, he never had the relationship with the Lord he should have had.

⁴ Nevertheless, for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem; ⁵ because David did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

1 Kings 15:4-5

For David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem. God preserved the dynasty of David in Jerusalem for the sake of David, not because of the character or quality of his descendants. Chronicles spells his name Abijah, which means 'Yahweh is my father.' Kings spells the name Abijam, which means 'my father is Yam.' Yam was a Canaanite sea god. Could it be that he started out as Abijah, a follower of Yahweh, and ended up as Abijam, a follower of a false god?

David himself was once referred to as the lamp in Jerusalem: <<*But Abishai son of Zeruah came to his aid, and attacked the Philistine and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, 'You shall not go out with us to battle any longer, so that you do not quench the lamp of Israel'*>> (2 Samuel 21:17). **One day it will be Jesus:** <<*And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb*>> (Revelation 21:23).

David was basically committed to God, although even he had sinned in the matter of Uriah the Hittite, sleeping with Uriah's wife Bathsheba in 1 Samuel Chapter 11 and trying to cover up her subsequent pregnancy by having Uriah killed in battle.

⁶ The war begun between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continued all the days of his life. ⁷ The rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? There was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. ⁸ Abijam slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in the city of David. Then his son Asa succeeded him.

1 Kings 15:6-8

The war begun between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continued all the days of his life. There was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. This puzzling juxtaposition

is presumably designed to emphasise the continuity between the two wars; the feud between the houses of Rehoboam and Jeroboam that began with the events of Chapter 12 is still rumbling on.

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

III.b 1 Kings 15:9-15 - Asa Reigns over Judah

At last a good king reigns in Judah and reverses some of the evil things that Rehoboam had set up and which Abijam had allowed to continue.

⁹ In the twentieth year of King Jeroboam of Israel, Asa began to reign over Judah; ¹⁰ he reigned for forty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Maacah daughter of Abishalom. ¹¹ Asa did what was right in the sight of the Lord, as his father David had done.

1 Kings 15:9-11

Asa reigned for forty-one years, from 910 to 869 BC. This great-grandson of Solomon took the throne Judah at the end of Jeroboam's reign in Israel, after his father's brief reign.

His mother's name was Maacah daughter of Abishalom. At first glance it might appear that he had the same mother as his own father. However, as commented on with Abijam's ancestors, terms such as mother, father, daughter and son can simply mean ancestor or descendant, often skipping several generations. This shows that the descent from David is true.

Asa did what was right in the sight of the Lord, as his father David had done. The kings of Judah were usually measured against David, the founder of their dynasty. In contrast to his father Abijah (v.3), Asa followed in the same heart as David. As noted above, the phrase his father David indicates that in Hebrew literature the word father can be used of an ancestor in general, instead of strictly referring to one's biological father. David was actually the great-great-grandfather of Asa.

¹² He put away the male temple prostitutes out of the land, and removed all the idols that his ancestors had made. ¹³ He also removed his mother Maacah from being queen mother, because she had made an abominable image for Asherah; Asa cut down her image and burned it at the Wadi Kidron.

1 Kings 15:12-13

He put away the male temple prostitutes out of the land. These state-sanctioned homosexual idol-temple prostitutes were introduced into Judah during the reign of Rehoboam: <<*there were also male temple prostitutes in the land*>> (1 Kings 14:24a). Asa's father Abijam did not remove these perversions and idols, but King Asa did.

The queen mother played an important role within the family politics of the court, as an adviser of the king and as teacher of the royal children. This demonstrates the thoroughness of Asa's reforms. He was able to act righteously even when his own family was wrong, in particular his own grandmother. It is often within a person's own family circle that their faithfulness is put fairly to the test.

An abominable image for Asherah. Some commentators believe it was some sort of phallic symbol consistent with the fertility cult of Asherah. This is another object associated with the worship of the goddess Asherah to go alongside the Asherim mentioned in 1 Kings 14:15 and 14:23.

The Wadi Kidron, or the Kidron Valley, was just outside Jerusalem and was used as a refuse dump for idolatrous objects. An inscription found at the site of Khirbet El-Qom, near modern Hebron, reads: "Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh and by his Asherah; from his enemies he saved him!" The inscription dates to the second half of the 8th Century BC. It reflects the constant struggle in Judah between true servants of Yahweh and those who were syncretists and idolaters.

¹⁴ But the high places were not taken away. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was true to the Lord all his days. ¹⁵ He brought into the house of the Lord the votive gifts of his father and his own votive gifts – silver, gold, and utensils.

1 Kings 15:14-15

The high places were not taken away. By removing the high places Asa could have focused his reforms upon worship in Jerusalem, but otherwise he was commended for his religious policy; he was faithful enough to bring into the house of the Lord the votive gifts of his father and his own votive gifts. When 2 Chronicles 14:3 says that Asa removed the high places, this should be taken as meaning some but not all of them, as confirmed by: <<*But the high places were not taken out of Israel. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was true all his days*>> (2 Chronicles 15:17). It mentions these high places in connection with altars of the foreign gods. Therefore Asa removed the high places that were dedicated to idols, but not the ones that were dedicated to the Lord. Such places had been tolerated before the temple had been built and it seems Asa saw no harm in allowing them to remain.

Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was true to the Lord all his days. Asa's loyal heart was shown in his reforms against idolatry and state-sanctioned perversion, and in his restoration of certain silver and gold utensils to the temple.

III.c 1 Kings 15:16-24 - Alliance with Aram against Israel

In order to complete the account of Asa the story skips ahead omitting the reign of Nadab in Israel to focus on the war between Asa and Nadab's successor Baasha, king of Israel. The north laid siege to Judah so Asa sent the remaining valuable items from the temple and his palace to the king of Aram, requesting that he cease his support for Israel and fight against them instead. This the Aramæans did, forcing Israel to withdraw its siege and bringing respite to Judah.

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

¹⁷ King Baasha of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, to prevent anyone from going out or coming in to King Asa of Judah.

1 Kings 15:16-17

King Baasha of Israel. Asa's reign in Judah was a long one, and he saw five Israelite kings rise and fall before the infamous Ahab began his rule in 1 Kings 16:29. Baasha is the second of these (1 Kings 15:33-16:7), and he finds Asa's military position so precarious that he is able to push into Benjamin and fortify, i.e. build, Ramah, only a few miles north of Jerusalem. This continues the struggle for dominance between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Baasha gained the upper hand in the days of Asa because he effectively blocked a main route into Judah at the city of Ramah. He hoped this military and economic pressure on Judah would force Asa into significant concessions.

¹⁸ Then Asa took all the silver and the gold that were left in the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house, and gave them into the hands of his servants. King Asa sent them to King Ben-hadad son of Tabrimmon son of Hezion of Aram, who resided in Damascus, saying, ¹⁹ 'Let there be an alliance between me and you, like that between my father and your father: I am sending you a present of silver and gold; go, break your alliance with King Baasha of Israel, so that he may withdraw from me.' ²⁰ Ben-hadad listened to King Asa, and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel. He conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah, and all Chinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali. ²¹ When Baasha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah and lived in Tirzah. ²² Then King Asa made a proclamation to all Judah; none was exempt: they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, with which Baasha had been building;

with them King Asa built Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah. ²³ Now the rest of all the acts of Asa, all his power, all that he did, and the cities that he built, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? But in his old age he was diseased in his feet. ²⁴ Then Asa slept with his ancestors, and was buried with his ancestors in the city of his father David; his son Jehoshaphat succeeded him.

1 Kings 15:18-24



War between Israel and Judah

As Israel and Judah battled each other to determine their permanent border, King Baasha of Israel attempted to restrict access to Judah by moving the border down to Ramah. Rather than fight with Baasha himself, King Asa of Judah bribed Ben-hadad of Aram to attack the northern border of Israel and force Baasha to withdraw from Ramah. Once Baasha withdrew, Asa carried away the building supplies of Ramah and used them to fortify Mizpah further north and Geba near the pass at Michmash.

Then Asa took all the silver and the gold that were left in the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house. Asa was forced to send a substantial bribe to Damascus to try to buy a new friend, reviving the treaty between his father Abijah and the previous Aramaean king Tabrimmon. A marker dedicated to the god Baal Melqart has been found at Aleppo in northern Aram. It bears an Aramaic inscription that mentions Barhada, son of Tabrimmon, son of Hezion.

By entering into an alliance with Ben-hadad at the expense of the temple and his palace, Asa countered the threat from Baasha, but his action reflected a lack of faith in Yahweh, who had delivered him from a greater threat. Foreign alliances are frequently condemned in Scripture.

Asa used this treasure to buy the favour of Ben-Hadad of Aram, so that he would withdraw support from Israel. Apparently, Baasha of Israel could not stand against Judah by himself - he needed the backing of Aram.

Second Chronicles 16:7-10 shows that God was not pleased by this, and delivered this work by the prophet Hanani: *<<Because you relied on the king of Aram, and did not rely on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped you. Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with exceedingly many chariots and cavalry? Yet because you relied on the Lord, he gave them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the entire earth, to strengthen those whose heart is true to him. You have done foolishly in this; for from now on you will have wars>>* (2 Chronicles 16:7b-9). Sadly, Asa did not respond to this word properly. Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him because of this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at that time according to 2 Chronicles 16:10. Asa shows the tragedy of a man who rules well and seeks the Lord for many years, yet fails in a significant challenge of his faith and then refuses to hear God's correction.

Second Chronicles Chapters 14-16 provide many more details regarding the reign of Asa:

- He encouraged national piety, for he: *<<commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their ancestors, and to keep the law and the commandment>>* (2 Chronicles 14:4).

- He built fortified cities and presided over a long period of peace; refer to 2 Chronicles 14:6.
- In response to Asa's prayer, God defeated a huge Ethiopian army that came against Judah; refer to 2 Chronicles 14:9-13.
- He had an encouraging word from the prophet Azariah that encouraged him to continue his reforms; refer to 2 Chronicles 15:1-9.
- Asa led a national re-commitment to the covenant described in 2 Chronicles 15:10-15.

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But in his old age he was diseased in his feet. Second Chronicles provides a more complete analysis: <<*In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe; yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but sought help from physicians*>> (2 Chronicles 16:12). This happened after he refused to hear God's word of correction through Hanani the seer. Some think that Asa's foot ailment was gout, but gout was uncommon in Palestine and ancient Egypt, and it is more likely, in view of Asa's age, the severity of the disease and death within two years, to have been a peripheral obstructive vascular disease with ensuing gangrene. All in all, Asa was a good man who did not finish well. The last years of his life were marked by unbelief, hardness against God, oppression against his people, and disease. Age and time do not necessarily make people better; they only do if a person continues to follow God in faith.

IV 1 Kings 15:25-16:34 - From Nadab to Ahab

The fulfilment of the prophecy against the house of Jeroboam has been delayed until it has been made clear how differently God treats the house of David, whose wicked kings do not bring the downfall of the dynasty 'because for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem' (v.4). Now, however, everything turns out as Ahijah had prophesied in Chapter 14.

IV.a 1 Kings 15:25-32 - Nadab Reigns over Israel

The story now steps back to the reign of Jeroboam's son Nadab, who continued in the wicked ways of his father. After just two years as king he was fighting the Philistines when he was killed by Baasha, who took the throne of Israel and slaughtered the remaining descendants of Jeroboam, fulfilling the prophecy given by Ahijah to Jeroboam's wife.

²⁵ Nadab son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of King Asa of Judah; he reigned over Israel for two years. ²⁶ He did

what was evil in the sight of the Lord, walking in the way of his ancestor and in the sin that he caused Israel to commit.

1 Kings 15:25-26

Nadab did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, walking in the way of his ancestor and in the sin that he caused Israel to commit. Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, did just as his father had done, continuing in his idolatry and hardness towards God. Second Chronicles 11:14 specifically states that both Jeroboam and his sons were responsible for driving God's priests out of the land of Israel. In this, Nadab directly shared in the sins of his father Jeroboam. Nadab's name means willing; and he appears to have been too willing to continue in, and perpetuate, the sin of his iniquitous father.

²⁷ Baasha son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha struck him down at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines; for Nadab and all Israel were laying siege to Gibbethon.

²⁸ So Baasha killed Nadab in the third year of King Asa of Judah, and succeeded him. ²⁹ As soon as he was king, he killed all the house of Jeroboam; he left to the house of Jeroboam not one that breathed, until he had destroyed it, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite — ³⁰ because of the sins of Jeroboam that he committed and that he caused Israel to commit, and because of the anger to which he provoked the Lord, the God of Israel.

1 Kings 15:27-30

All Israel were laying siege to Gibbethon. There is little said about this battle between Israel and the Philistines or how it was lost to Israel in the first place. Gibbethon was located in the land allocation of Dan and was designated as one of the Levitical cities according to Joshua 21:23.

Baasha killed Nadab in the third year of King Asa of Judah, and succeeded him.

This was the end of the dynasty of Jeroboam. Had Jeroboam remained obedient to the Lord, God had promised him a lasting dynasty like the house of David; refer to 1 Kings 11:38. Because of Jeroboam's sin, although he enjoyed a long reign, his son Nadab only reigned for two years before his assassination and the subsequent murder of all of Jeroboam's descendants. Thus God made use of one wicked man to destroy another. Although Nadab reigned for little more than twelve months, the method of inclusive counting used in the region counts it as two years for it covered part of two Hebrew calendar years.

According to the word of the Lord that he spoke by his servant Ahijah. This word is recorded in 1 Kings 14:7-16. Thus the first of the nine dynasties that for two hundred and fifty years ruled or rather misruled the kingdom of Israel ended.

³¹ Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? ³² There was war between Asa and King Baasha of Israel all their days.

1 Kings 15:31-32

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

There was war between Asa and King Baasha of Israel all their days. The civil war continued although Asa would finally have peace because of his piety and faithfulness towards God. The evil Baasha would not know such peace.

IV.b 1 Kings 15:33-16:7 - Second Dynasty: Baasha Reigns over Israel

Baasha may have become king in order to destroy the dynasty of Jeroboam as the Lord had said but he too faced the same fate. God sent the prophet Jehu to tell him that the fate of his descendants would be the same as for Jeroboam's.

³³ In the third year of King Asa of Judah, Baasha son of Ahijah began to reign over all Israel at Tirzah; he reigned for twenty-four years. ³⁴ He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, walking in the way of Jeroboam and in the sin that he caused Israel to commit.

1 Kings 15:33-34

Baasha son of Ahijah began to reign over all Israel at Tirzah. As expected with a man who came to the throne through assassination, Baasha was a wicked man and ushered in a dreadful period for Israel, both spiritually and politically. It seems that Jeroboam had moved his court from Shechem to Tirzah (1 Kings 14:17), and now Baasha continues to reign from there.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, walking in the way of Jeroboam and in the sin that he caused Israel to commit. The summary puts it simply. Although Baasha was not a genetic descendent of Jeroboam, having just murdered his family, he was certainly a spiritual descendent of Jeroboam, perpetuating the evil that pervaded the northern kingdom.