



Second Chronicles - Chapter Fourteen

III 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23 - The Kingdom of Judah Down to the Exile (continues)

Summary of Chapter Fourteen

When Abijah dies, his son Asa succeeds him. He is a good king and follows in the Davidic tradition, restoring worship to the people of Judah and removing idolatrous practices. Initially, the land knew peace under his reign but then a large army of invaders came from the south. Asa knew that only the Lord was strong enough to bring Judah military victory and so he cried out to him. God heard his prayer and army of Israel routed the Ethiopians, taking away all their treasure as the spoils of war.

III.c 2 Chronicles 14:1-16:14 - Asa

The Chronicler's account of Asa's reign (910-869 BC) is also much longer and more complex than that given in the earlier history of 1 Kings 15:9-24. It describes a reign that begins well but ends badly, as trust in God and obedience to the prophetic word give way to a dependence on human alliances and the rejection of the prophetic word.

III.c.i 2 Chronicles 14:1-8 - Asa Reigns

Asa begins his reign in an exemplary way by rooting out idolatry and commanding Judah to seek the Lord. He also re-established good defences in the towns and cities of Judah, and built up a large army for defensive purposes as the Lord gave him peace from war.

¹ So Abijah slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in the city of David. His son Asa succeeded him. In his days the land had rest for ten years. ² Asa did what was good and right in the sight of the Lord his

God.³ He took away the foreign altars and the high places, broke down the pillars, hewed down the sacred poles,⁴ and commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their ancestors, and to keep the law and the commandment.⁵ He also removed from all the cities of Judah the high places and the incense altars. And the kingdom had rest under him.⁶ He built fortified cities in Judah while the land had rest. He had no war in those years, for the Lord gave him peace.

2 Chronicles 14:1-6

So Abijah slept with his ancestors. This brief reign by an evil king came to an end after just three years.

His son Asa succeeded him. This great-grandson of Solomon took the throne of Judah at the end of Jeroboam's reign in Israel, after his father's brief reign.

Asa did what was good and right in the sight of the Lord his God. As related in 1 Kings 15:11, Asa was more like his ancestor David in his character as a king than he was like his own father.

He took away the foreign altars and the high places. Asa launched a reform movement that lashed out against idolatry and officially sanctioned sin. The high places were local sites usually associated with pagan worship and Asa was doing what had been commanded: <<*You must demolish completely all the places where the nations whom you are about to dispossess served their gods, on the mountain heights, on the hills, and under every leafy tree. Break down their altars, smash their pillars, burn their sacred poles with fire, and hew down the idols of their gods, and thus blot out their name from their places*>> (Deuteronomy 12:2-3). However, before the temple was built, the Israelites used to have high places where they would worship the Lord. These were tolerated until a central location for worship was established but now that the temple was available, high places dedicated to the Lord were also to be abolished. These are possibly the high places referred to in: <<*But the high places were not taken away*>> (1 Kings 15:14a), or they may be the high places in the parts of the northern kingdom which Asa controlled at that time: <<*But the high places were not taken out of Israel*>> (2 Chronicles 15:17a). Thus Asa destroyed the pagan worship sites but not those that people used to make their own offerings to the Lord.

The author of the First Book of Kings reveals other interesting aspects of Asa's reforms: <<*He put away the male temple prostitutes out of the land*>> (1 Kings 15:12a), which were state-sanctioned homosexual idol-temple prostitutes who were introduced into Judah during the reign of Rehoboam; refer to 1 Kings 14:24. Asa's father Abijam did not remove these perversions and idols, but

King Asa did. It also states that he removed his grandmother from her position: <<*He also removed his mother Maacah from being queen mother, because she had made an abominable image for Asherah*>> (1 Kings 15:13a). This demonstrated the thoroughness of Asa's reforms. He was able to act righteously even when his family was wrong, in particular his own grandmother who is called Michaiah in 2 Chronicles 13:2.

The sacred poles were Asherim representing the fertility goddess Asherah. The subsequent building projects, large army, and peace are typical blessings for faithfulness and obedience in Chronicles; refer to 2 Chronicles 11:5-12, 13:3, and 17:10.

He commanded Judah to seek the Lord. King Asa could not force people to seek the Lord and obey him. Yet he could command them with moral force and with his own example.

And the kingdom had rest under him. He had no war in those years, for the Lord gave him peace. Because <<*the heart of Asa was true to the Lord all his days*>> (1 Kings 15:14b), the Lord gave Asa and his kingdom rest from war. However, Asa did not take this all for granted and he used this time of peace to prepare defences against any future would-be aggressor: He built fortified cities in Judah while the land had rest.

⁷ He said to Judah, 'Let us build these cities, and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars; the land is still ours because we have sought the Lord our God; we have sought him, and he has given us peace on every side.' So they built and prospered. ⁸ Asa had an army of three hundred thousand from Judah, armed with large shields and spears, and two hundred and eighty thousand troops from Benjamin who carried shields and drew bows; all these were mighty warriors.

2 Chronicles 14:7-8

Let us build these cities. The Chronicler includes this account, not previously recorded in First Kings, to encourage the people in his own day who had been allowed to rebuild the destroyed city of Jerusalem after its fall to the Babylonians.

The land is still ours because we have sought the Lord our God. Asa had trusted in the Lord and was faithful to him. God had favoured his people because of their faith and piety and here Asa recognises that it is the Lord's doing and not his own.

Asa had an army of three hundred thousand from Judah, and two hundred and eighty thousand troops from Benjamin. As well as fortifying their towns for defensive purposes, Asa built up a strong standing army, ready to fight against any

invading army. However, there is no sign that he was preparing them to be an aggressor against his neighbours. He had peace and he wanted it to stay that way.

III.c.ii 2 Chronicles 14:9-15:19 - Ethiopian Invasion Repulsed

Finally, the peace was broken and a large army of Ethiopians came against Judah. Asa, knowing that only God could prevail against such overwhelming odds, cried out to the Lord, who won a decisive victory for Judah; they earned much in the way of the spoils of war.



Zerah Attacks Judah in 898 BC

During the fifteenth year, i.e. 895 BC, of Asa's long and prosperous reign over Judah, Zerah the Ethiopian led a vast army from the south to attack Judah at a valley near Mareshah. Asa's army routed Zerah's forces and pursued them to Gerar until none of them remained. Perhaps as punishment for Philistia allowing Zerah's army to pass through their nation, Asa's men then plundered many towns in the region around Gerar before returning to Jerusalem.

⁹ Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots, and came as far as Mareshah. ¹⁰ Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up their lines of battle in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah.

2 Chronicles 14:9-10

Zerah the Ethiopian, literally ‘the Cushite,’ was from modern Sudan. He is not otherwise known in historic records, but was possibly a general in the service of Pharaoh Osorkon I (circa 924-884 BC), son of King Shishak or Shoshenq I who had come against Rehoboam and had been given all the treasures in Jerusalem as payment for not attacking the city; refer to 2 Chronicles 12:1-12.

A million men is literally ‘a thousand thousands’ and represents an enormous number. An alternative way to understand this is ‘a thousand units’ - refer to the comment made on 1 Chronicles 12:23-37 regarding such large numbers. Taken at face value, this is almost double the size of the army following Asa (v.8). Yet Asa could know that God’s power was not limited because the army of Judah was smaller by what God had already done for Judah under the reign of Abijah, his father: <<*Abijah engaged in battle, having an army of valiant warriors, four hundred thousand picked men; and Jeroboam drew up his line of battle against him with eight hundred thousand picked mighty warriors*>> (2 Chronicles 13:3), and: <<*God defeated Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah*>> (2 Chronicles 13:15b).

Mareshah was one of Rehoboam’s fortified cities on Judah’s south-western border; refer to 2 Chronicles 11:8.

¹¹ Asa cried to the Lord his God, ‘O Lord, there is no difference for you between helping the mighty and the weak. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. O Lord, you are our God; let no mortal prevail against you.’

¹² So the Lord defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. ¹³ Asa and the army with him pursued them as far as Gerar, and the Ethiopians fell until no one remained alive; for they were broken before the Lord and his army. The people of Judah carried away a great quantity of booty. ¹⁴ They defeated all the cities around Gerar, for the fear of the Lord was on them. They plundered all the cities; for there was much plunder in them. ¹⁵ They also attacked the tents of those who had livestock, and carried away sheep and goats in abundance, and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 14:11-15

Asa cried to the Lord his God. Asa’s prayer reflects the situation envisioned by Solomon in: <<*If your people go out to battle against their enemies, by whatever way you shall send them, and they pray to you towards this city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, then hear*>>

from heaven their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause>> (2 Chronicles 6:34-35). Many of the motifs of sacred warfare found in Chapter 13 are expressed here as well and will recur in Chapter 20: a prayer or speech is made by the king before battle, expressing trust in God, Judah faces overwhelming odds, and the Lord strikes the enemy.

In his prayer Asa correctly understood that God's power was not enhanced or limited by man's apparent strength or weakness. He recognised that this battle belonged to the Lord and called upon God to defend his honour, i.e. let no mortal prevail against you.

So the Lord defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. God fought on behalf of King Asa and the Kingdom of Judah; He fought so effectively that they were broken before the Lord and his army.

The fear of the Lord was on them. God's power and the way he used it often brought fear into those who would oppose him: *<<For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. As soon as we heard it, our hearts failed, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below>>* (Joshua 2:10-11), *<<The fame of David went out into all lands, and the Lord brought the fear of him on all nations>>* (1 Chronicles 14:17), and: *<<The fear of God came on all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel>>* (2 Chronicles 20:29). The livestock element of the plunder was used for sacrifices: *<<They sacrificed to the Lord on that day, from the booty that they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep>>* (2 Chronicles 15:11).

The people of Judah carried away a great quantity of booty. Not only were the people of God delivered from this danger, they were also enriched when the Lord fought on their behalf. In this sense, they were more than conquerors in that the Lord did the fighting and they shared in the spoil.

Because the opposing army was so vast the amount of valuables they would have had with them and the vast herds and flocks for food would have been significant. Judah was starting to recover some of the wealth it had lost to the Egyptians in the days of Rehoboam.