



## Second Chronicles - Chapter Sixteen

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

#### III.c 2 Chronicles 14:1-16:14 - Asa (continues/concludes)

##### Summary of Chapter Sixteen

In order to stop more people from departing the northern kingdom and going over to King Asa, King Baasha of Israel built fortifications at Ramah. Therefore, Asa sent payment to King Ben-hadad of Aram to withdraw his support from Israel and actively oppose them instead. This he did and Israel withdrew from Ramah to face this new threat from their north. However, the Lord sent word through the seer Hanani saying he was not pleased with Asa because he had turned to Aram instead of trusting in God. Asa in turn locked Hanani in prison and also mistreated many of his own people in his anger. Even when he became ill he did not turn to the Lord and so he died from his disease.

#### II.c.iii 2 Chronicles 16:1-10 - Alliance with Aram Condemned

To avert the attention of King Baasha, Asa paid the Aramæan king to withdraw his support for Israel and attack them instead, which he did. This relieved the pressure on Judah but it invoked the wrath of the Lord as Asa had not trusted in him but had looked for human strength instead.

<sup>1</sup> In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, King Baasha of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, to prevent anyone from going out or coming into the territory of King Asa of Judah.

#### 2 Chronicles 16:1

The thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa would be circa 876 or 875 BC. As it stands, the text raises a problem, since Baasha had already been dead for about

10 years by this time; refer to 1 Kings 15:33 and 16:8; and the comments made on 1 Kings 15:16-17. One possible explanation offered by commentators is that the text here has suffered from a copying error. Letters from the Hebrew alphabet were originally used to denote numbers, and here and in 2 Chronicles 15:19 a scribe might have confused two similar-looking letters, i.e. י or *yod* for 10 and ל or *lamedh* for 30, letters that looked more alike in early handwritten Hebrew script than they do in modern typography. If so, then perhaps the original said that this was the ‘sixteenth year of the reign of Asa’ – i.e. 896 or 895 BC. However, King Ben-hadad of Aram did not come to his throne until 885 BC, the year after Baasha’s death. It is possible that Ben-hadad was leading the army before his accession to the throne.

**King Baasha of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, to prevent anyone from going out or coming into the territory of King Asa of Judah.** 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.

**Ramah** lay about 5 miles or 8 km north of Jerusalem, and commanded the main road to and from the city.

<sup>2</sup> Then Asa took silver and gold from the treasures of the house of the Lord and the king’s house, and sent them to King Ben-hadad of Aram, who resided in Damascus, saying, <sup>3</sup> ‘Let there be an alliance between me and you, like that between my father and your father; I am sending to you silver and gold; go, break your alliance with King Baasha of Israel, so that he may withdraw from me.’ <sup>4</sup> Ben-hadad listened to King Asa, and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel. They conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim, and all the store-cities of Naphtali. <sup>5</sup> When Baasha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah, and let his work cease. <sup>6</sup> Then King Asa brought all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, with which Baasha had been building, and with them he built up Geba and Mizpah.

### **2 Chronicles 16:2-6**

**Then Asa took silver and gold from the treasures of the house of the Lord and the king’s house, and sent them to King Ben-hadad of Aram.** 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 and he needed the support of Aram.



### 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.

Charles Spurgeon comments, “I will say nothing about what belonged to his own house. He might do as he liked with that so long as he did not spend it upon sin, but he took of the treasure that belonged to the house of the Lord, and gave it to Ben-hadad to bribe him to break his league with Baasha, and be in league with himself. Thus God was robbed that the unbelieving king might find help in an arm of flesh.”

Let there be an alliance between me and you. 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 the Lord, who had delivered him from a greater threat (v.8). Foreign alliances are condemned in 2 Chronicles 19:2, 20:35-37, 22:5, and 28:16-21.

Asa was trying to keep the way open for pilgrims from the northern kingdom to come to Jerusalem, and this was a noble objective. His method was completely wrong. He gave treasure from the house of the Lord to a pagan king, and he made a treaty with that king. Asa seems to have forgotten that his covenant was with God, not with a pagan king. Under the covenant they had made with God, the Lord was responsible for the protection of Judah. Now they put their treasure and their trust in a pagan king. Asa would find that Ben-hadad and Aram were worse enemies than Israel.

Spurgeon comments further, “The power of Ethiopia was broken before him, and Judah’s armies returned laden with the spoil. You would not have thought that a man who could perform that grand action would become, a little after, full of unbelief; but the greatest faith of yesterday will not give us confidence for to-day, unless the fresh springs which are in God shall overflow again.” He comments further, “But this was a smaller trouble altogether, and somehow, I fancy, it was because it was a smaller trouble Asa thought that he could manage it very well himself by the help of an arm of flesh. In the case of the invasion by countless hordes of Ethiopians, Asa must have felt that it was of no use calling in Ben-hadad, the king of Aram, or asking any of the nations to help him, for with all their help he would not have been equal to the tremendous struggle. Therefore he was driven to God. But this being a smaller trial, he does not seem to have been so thoroughly divorced from confidence in man.”

Ben-hadad listened to King Asa, and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel. The pagan king Ben-hadad did have some power, and because of the treasure and under the treaty with Asa, he used that power on behalf of Asa.

The cities of Israel included Chinneroth according to 1 Kings 15:20, which became Gennesaret in the postexilic period (Josephus, Jewish Wars, 2.573). Jesus brought fame to this area by healing the sick; refer to Mark 6:53-56.

**When Baasha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah, and let his work cease.**

Because of the intervention of the King of Aram, Baasha king of Israel stopped his work of building the fortress city of Ramah to keep the faithful of Israel from visiting Jerusalem and Judah. It could be said that Asa's trust in a pagan king worked but that does not excuse his wrong choices.

**They carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, and with them he built up Geba and Mizpah.** Instead of Baasha reinforcing his own defences he unintentionally supplied Asa with the materials to prepare his own fortifications.

<sup>7</sup> At that time the seer Hanani came to King Asa of Judah, and said to him, '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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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 16:7-9**

Not much is known about **the seer Hanani**, other than his bold word to King Asa here, and that his son was also a prophet who spoke to King Baasha of Israel (1 Kings 16:1 and 16:7), and to King Jehoshaphat of Judah (2 Chronicles 19:2).

The rebuke by **Hanani** contrasts with Azariah's exhortation (2 Chronicles 15:2-7). **Asa**, who had once **relied** on Yahweh (2 Chronicles 14:11), has **relied** instead on **the king of Aram** and will now face future **wars** (v.9); this should be contrasted with 2 Chronicles 15:15 and 15:19.

**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.** Hanani implies that Asa could have defeated the Aramæans as well as Israel (v.7), had he trusted in God alone. During the reign of Asa's son Jehoshaphat, Judah will in fact be at war with Aram; refer to 2 Chronicles 18:30.

This was a complete surprise to Asa. He believed that the main enemy was Israel, because of King Baasha's aggressive building of the Ramah fortress. He succeeded in gaining Aram's help against Baasha and Israel, but he failed to see what God saw: that the bigger enemy was Aram, and God wanted to give him victory over the greater enemy.

**Yet because you relied on the Lord, he gave them into your hand.** God wanted Asa to remember the great victories of the past. Asa failed to remember that the

same God who gave him victory over a greater enemy, i.e. the Ethiopians, was able to also give him victory over the lesser enemy, Aram.

The eyes of the Lord range throughout the entire earth. Hanani's message was clear. God looks for ways to defend and show his strength on behalf of those who are committed to him. Asa's fear that God could not be trusted with the defence of Israel was foolish and wrong; God wanted to show his strength of behalf of his trusting people. God continuously watches and evaluates everyone's inner thoughts, attitudes, and convictions, i.e. the heart. Similar wording appears in Zechariah 4:10b: <<*These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth*>>.

<sup>10</sup> Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in the stocks, in prison, for he was in a rage with him because of this. And Asa inflicted cruelties on some of the people at the same time.

### 2 Chronicles 16:10

Asa was angry with the seer. Instead of taking this word from God to heart and humbling himself, King Asa attacked the messenger. Instead of being humbled he was enraged. 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. Asa's response is the first act of persecution of a prophet by a king recorded in the OT; refer also to 2 Chronicles 18:26, 24:21, 25:16, and 36:16.

Put him in the stocks calls to mind the persecution of Jeremiah: <<*Then Pashhur struck the prophet Jeremiah, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of the Lord*>> (Jeremiah 20:2). The Hebrew word used is literally 'house of stocks' and may refer more to a jail structure than traditional stocks.

Asa inflicted cruelties on some of the people at the same time. He struck out against not only Hanani, but also against others who were committed to God and could see the error of the king's ways. As a man in compromise and unbelief, the presence of those truly loyal to God was convicting and oppressive to Asa.

### III.c.iv 2 Chronicles 16:11-14 - Asa's Disease and Death

Even when Asa became ill he would not seek the Lord but turned to his doctors instead and so he died two years later without regaining his health.

<sup>11</sup> The acts of Asa, from first to last, are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. <sup>12</sup> 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 16:11-12

The Book of the Kings of Judah and 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.

Asa was diseased in his feet. The Chronicler does not specify whether Asa's foot disease is divine punishment for his lack of faith and his abuse of Hanani, although this may be implied. An explicit connection between sickness and divine punishment is made in 2 Chronicles 21:16-20 and 26:16-23. The primary concern here is Asa's response: he did not seek the Lord. He is not criticised so much for seeking help from physicians, i.e. 'healers', but for doing so apart from the Lord, his healer: <<for I am the Lord who heals you>> (Exodus 15:26b), and his promises of 'healing the land' in 2 Chronicles 7:14.

Overall, the Bible is positive about the role of physicians and medical care/advice: *<<After this happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured>>* (Acts 28:9), *<<Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you>>* (Colossians 4:14), *<<No longer drink only water, but take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments>>* (1 Timothy 5:23), and: *<<Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven>>* (James 5:14-15). However, it is never right to seek the physicians instead of the Lord. One may rather trust the Lord and when appropriate, see his hand move through a physician.

<sup>13</sup> Then Asa slept with his ancestors, dying in the forty-first year of his reign. <sup>14</sup> They buried him in the tomb that he had hewn out for himself in the city of David. They laid him on a bier that had been filled with various kinds of spices prepared by the perfumer's art; and they made a very great fire in his honour.

## 2 Chronicles 16:13-14

Then Asa slept with his ancestors, dying in the forty-first year of his reign. Asa ruled between 910-869 BC. Funeral reports in Chronicles are often used to pass a theological judgement on a reign.

They made a very great fire in his honour. The honour shown Asa at his funeral indicates that he was held in high esteem by the people, as would also be the case with King Zedekiah: *<<Yet hear the word of the Lord, O King Zedekiah of Judah! Thus says the Lord concerning you: You shall not die by the sword; you shall die in peace. And as spices were burned for your ancestors, the earlier*

*kings who preceded you, so they shall burn spices for you and lament for you, saying, 'Alas, lord!' For I have spoken the word, says the Lord>> (Jeremiah 34:4-5), but not Jehoram: <<In course of time, at the end of two years, his bowels came out because of the disease, and he died in great agony. His people made no fire in his honour, like the fires made for his ancestors>> (2 Chronicles 21:19). The Chronicler also seems to have taken a generally positive view of his reign, despite the decline of his latter years.*