

2 Chronicles 16: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] 2 Chronicles chapter 16 In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might permit no one to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah.

Then Asa took silver and gold from the treasures of the house of the Lord and the king's house, and sent them to Ben-Hadad king of Syria, who lived in Damascus, saying, There is a covenant between me and you, as there was between my father and your father.

Behold, I am sending to you silver and gold. Go, break your covenant with Baasha king of Israel, that he may withdraw from me. And Ben-Hadad listened to king Asa, and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and they conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-Maim, and all the store cities of Naphtali.

And when Baasha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah and let his work cease. Then king Asa took all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, with which Baasha had been building, and with them he built Geber and Mizpah.

At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, Because you relied on the king of Syria, and did not rely on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped you.

[1 : 11] Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the Lord, he gave them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.

You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars. 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 upon some of the people at the same time.

The acts of Asa, from first to last, are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 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. And Asa slept with his fathers, dying in the forty-first year of his reign. They buried him in the tomb that he had cut 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. The majority of Asa's reign is one of faithfulness to the Lord, but in 2 Chronicles chapter 16 we discover that tragically he did not end well.

[2 : 26] Judah enjoys rest for the first ten years of Asa's reign, which is followed later on by the attack of Zerah and the Ethiopians. In the fifteenth year he undertakes reformation of the nation, removing idols and leading the people in renewing covenant with the Lord.

Then, according to chapter 15 verse 19, there is rest until the thirty-fifth year of his reign. This takes us to the beginning of chapter 16 and the thirty-sixth year of his reign.

From this point Asa is embroiled in war once more. For the early part of Asa's reign, following the crushing defeat of Jeroboam by his father Abijah, Israel had been mostly in political disarray.

Jeroboam's son Nadab only ruled for a few years, after which Baasha displaced Jeroboam's dynasty and came to the throne. Over the course of Asa's reign, Israel would have four different dynasties on its throne.

There are immediate chronological challenges here. Baasha comes up against Asa in the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign, according to verse 1. However, if we've been keeping mental track of the years of the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel, there are apparent discrepancies here.

[3 : 35] Judah has Jeroboam for seventeen years, followed by Abijah for three, followed by Asa. Israel has Jeroboam for twenty-two years, followed by Nadab for two, followed by Baasha for

twenty-four.

Baasha comes to the throne of Israel in the third year of Asa's reign, according to 1 Kings chapter 15 verse 33. This means that Baasha would long have been dead in the thirty-sixth year of Asa.

1 Kings chapter 16 verse 8 tells us that Elah, Baasha's son, came to the throne in the twenty-sixth year of Asa. Some scholars, such as Edwin Teela, trying to harmonise these details, propose that we date the thirty-six years from the beginning of the split of the kingdom.

This would place these events around the sixteenth year of Asa's forty-one-year reign, well within the reign of Baasha, but only one year after his covenant renewal. There are further complicating considerations.

Elsewhere, in the books of Chronicles, the expression concern never seems to be used with reference to the initial split of the kingdom. In 1 Kings chapter 15 verse 32, we are told that there was war between Israel and Judah all the days of Baasha and Asa, although it seems to have been largely a cold war.

[4 : 45] Yet 2 Chronicles chapter 14 verse 1 tells us that there were ten years of rest during Asa's reign, and 2 Chronicles chapter 15 verse 10 speaks of the covenant renewal of Judah in the fifteenth year, which led to peace until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign.

There is also the spirit of the text to consider. 2 Chronicles presents Asa as a faithful king, whose rule ended poorly. Yet if the condemnation of Hineni the seer comes around the sixteenth year, it seems to conflict both with the text's presentation of Asa, and leaves us wondering why the reign of Asa is so associated with peace, if much of its time was devoted to war.

It would also present the foot disease that Asa suffers, seemingly in consequence of his sin, well over a decade after the offence that caused it. Others, such as Richard Pratt, suggest a transmission issue.

There was a confusion of a twenty and thirty, or a ten and a thirty. W.F. Albright suggests that we need to lop about a decade off the reign of Rehoboam, which causes problems elsewhere.

Raymond Dillard lays out the problems that we face here very well in his commentary on the book. Considering the chronology of events, we should also note that the events described would likely have taken a considerable amount of time.

[6 : 01] Bayasha goes up to build Rama, then Asa, hearing of this, gathers money and sends delegates to Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria. Ben-Hadad determines to fight against Judah, and then defeat several cities.

Bayasha abandons his building project and moves his forces up north. Then Asa and his men carry away all of the stones and timber of Rama, and build two cities of their own.

Perhaps the timing relates not to the first action of Bayasha, but to the coming of Hanani, which might have occurred over a decade into Judah's support of the Syrians against the Israelites.

Whatever we do with these complex chronological questions, we should recognise the strategic concerns and interests of the parties involved. After the covenant renewal of Asa's fifteenth year, Bayasha is hemorrhaging people to Judah, worshippers of the Lord that are turning to join Asa.

The building of Rama is an attempt to prevent this flow, to ensure that Judah makes no further gains among his people and in his territory. He also needs to re-establish Israel's rule over land that has previously been lost to Abijah.

[7 : 06] Asa, on his part, wants to open up another front against Bayasha, to draw Israel's forces away from his own borders. Consequently, he turns to the Syrians. Rather than seeking the Lord, Asa seeks out the Arameans.

Rather than praying towards the temple, Asa takes treasure from the temple to pay off the Syrians, to break their alliance with Israel and to attack Israel in the north. He had formally dedicated these treasures to the Lord in chapter 15 verse 18.

And now he is taking from the Lord what he has formally given to the Lord. He is turning to the Gentiles to fight against his brothers. Indeed, Israel are a people that will one day be restored to the house of David.

He is empowering a treacherous and dangerous force in the north against his brothers. After the defeat of Zerah, the Ethiopian, Azariah, the son of Odet, had visited him, encouraging him and leading him to his reforms of the nation.

Now he is visited by another prophet, Hanani the seer. Hanani condemns Asa for his dependence upon the Gentiles over the Lord. The Lord had already helped Asa to defeat the huge army of the

Ethiopians and the Libyans.

[8 : 14] Why could he not depend upon the Lord to help him against the Israelites? Asa's response was very disappointing. He responded by striking out against the messenger of the Lord, putting Hanani in prison.

He also becomes cruel to his own people. One of the great dangers for the king was always that of treating the people as if they were his personal possession, as if the land was his personal possession also, rather than the people and the land of the Lord, whom he had to guard as the servant of the Lord.

Asa's failures in this regard might remind us of the failures of former people of the house of David, David himself and Solomon. Like a number of key figures in the Davidic line, Asa does not end as he began.

He gets a diseased foot, and even in that situation he only seeks the physicians, without seeking the Lord. Like other kings before him, he trusts in human ingenuity and skill and cunning, but does not truly seek the Lord to grant all such endeavours success.

A question to consider. What cautionary lessons might we learn from Asa and other kings of the Davidic line who did not end as they began?