

1 Kings 15: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] 1 Kings chapter 15. Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam the son of Nebat, Abijam began to reign over Judah. He reigned for three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Maacah the daughter of Abishalom. And he walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father.

Nevertheless, for David's sake, the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him and establishing Jerusalem, because David did what was right in the eyes 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. Now there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life. The rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam.

And Abijam slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David. And Asa his son reigned in his place. In the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Asa began to reign over Judah.

And he reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Maacah the daughter of Abishalom. And Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as David his father had done. He put away the male cult prostitutes out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made.

He also removed Maacah his mother from being queen mother, because she had made an abominable image for Asherah. And Asa cut down her image and burned it at the brook Kidron. But the high places were not taken away. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was wholly true to the Lord all his days.

[1 : 4 0] And he brought into the house of the Lord the sacred gifts of his father, and his own sacred gifts, silver and gold and vessels. And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. 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 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. And king Asa sent them to Ben-Hadad, the son of Tabarimon, the son of Hezion, king of Syria, who lived in Damascus, saying, Let there be a covenant between me and you, as there was between my father and your father. Behold, I am sending to you a present of 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 conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel, Bethmeacah, and all Kinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali.

And when Baasha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah, and he lived in Terza. Then king Asa made a proclamation to all Judah, none was exempt. And they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, with which Baasha had been building. And with them king Asa built Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah.

Now the rest of all the acts of Asa, all his might, and all that he did, and the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? But in his old age he was diseased in his feet. And Asa slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father. And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place. Nadab the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah. And he reigned over Israel two years.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin which he made Israel to sin. Baasha the son of Ahijah of the house of Issachar conspired against him.

[3 : 38] And Baasha struck him down at Gibbathon, which belongs to the Philistines. For Nadab and all Israel were laying siege to Gibbathon. So Baasha killed him in the third year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his place. And 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 Shalomite. It was for the sins of Jeroboam that he sinned, and that he made Israel to sin, and because of the anger to which he provoked the Lord, the God of Israel. Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. In the third year of Asa king of Judah, Baasha the son of Ahijah began to reign over all Israel at Terza, and he reigned twenty-four years. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin. 1 Kings chapter 15 and 16 cover a considerable amount of time, the whole length of the reign of Asa, the period covered by 2 Chronicles chapter 13 to 16. However, while the reigns of both

Abijam or Abijah and Asa are described and narrated in these chapters, unlike in 2 Chronicles, much of the material relates to the kings of Israel. During the reigns of Abijah and Asa in Judah, Israel suffers a crippling defeat at the hands of Abijah, or Abijam, a defeat which 1 Kings does not relate, a continuing war with Judah, mostly a cold war but intermittently coming into direct conflict, a war with the Syrians, civil war, four different dynasties, and a number of different kings. This should be contrasted with the stability of the dynasty of David. The stability of the Davidic dynasty arises not from the faithfulness of the dynasty, but rather from the faithfulness of God. Although there are faithful kings in Judah in a way that there are not in Israel, Israel's kings are pretty well universally wicked. The nation of Judah is spared the sort of judgment that Israel receives in God's mercy because of God's covenant with David. As we read in verse 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, because David did what was right in the eyes 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. Abijam or Abijah is the son of Maacah, the daughter of Abishalom, who seems to be Absalom, as we see in 2nd Chronicles chapter 11 verse 20. It is possible that she was the granddaughter of Absalom, rather than his daughter. The one daughter of Absalom that we read of in 2nd Samuel is called Tamar. Perhaps Maacah was born to one of Absalom's sons before they died. A few verses later we are told that Asa was the son of Maacah. While some have suggested that this is evidence of incest within the house of David, it seems more likely to me that Maacah is being foregrounded as the woman of greatest influence in both the court of Abijam and of Asa his son. She is the queen mother figure, and she mediates the influence of Absalom. Asa's removal of her from her influence, then, is a very important step in delivering Judah from its idolatry and unfaithfulness. The portrayal of Abijam here is a much less positive one than we find in 2nd Chronicles chapter 13, where his victory over Jeroboam and his appeal to the faithfulness of Judah over against the unfaithfulness of Israel is narrated. This suggests a more complicated picture. In 1st Kings chapter 14 verses 7 to 11, we read of the prophecy of Ahijah the

Shalomite. Go tell Jeroboam, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, because I exalted you from among the people, and made you leader over my people Israel, and tore the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it to you. And yet you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my eyes. But you have done evil above all who were before you, and have gone and made for yourself other gods and metal images, provoking me to anger, and have cast me behind your back. Therefore, behold, I will bring harm upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male, both bond and free in Israel, and will burn up the house of Jeroboam, as a man burns up dung, until it is all gone. Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat, and anyone who dies in the open country, the birds of the heavens shall eat, for the Lord has spoken it. This prophecy is fulfilled as Baasha cuts off Jeroboam and his house. There is a frustration of growth in the northern kingdom. One king cuts off another, one dynasty cuts off another. However, despite this moving from dynasty to dynasty, there is a continuation of the same rebellion of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Israel still walks in the fundamental idolatry that he has set up. Abijah the son of Jeroboam died in chapter 14.

Now his brother, Nadab, is cut off. The characters of Abijah and Nadab might remind us of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, who were cut off as a result of their offering of strange fire to the Lord. Jeroboam takes on negative characteristics of Aaron in a number of different ways, and his sons suffer the same fate as the two judged sons of Aaron. While they are cut off, David is not cut off.

[9 : 14] David was committed to the Lord, even despite his sin concerning Uriah, and so his descendants are preserved. Perhaps we can see this as a fulfilment of the pattern of Deuteronomy chapter 5 verses 9-10.

I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. The generations following the righteous David are preserved, while the unfaithful lines of people like Jeroboam are cut off after only a few generations.

The line of the rebellious is cut off before it can grow to its full potential in evil, whereas the line of the righteous is preserved. Even when one generation falls away, the next may turn back to the Lord. Moving from the stories of Jeroboam and Rehoboam and Solomon and David that preceded, the story of the kingdom now increasingly takes on the form of the story of the judges, moving from one to another, with few isolated incidents being related, and large periods of time being covered. There is alternation between the two kingdoms, and various synchronisations that help us to see when one king arose relative to the history of the other kingdom. The overall impression given is of two wayward siblings caught in an ongoing rivalry. A question to consider, what lessons should we draw from the obliteration of Jeroboam's house? What lessons might faithful people in Israel have drawn?