

2 Chronicles 14: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] 2 Chronicles chapter 14 Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David, and Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land had rest for ten years. And Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God. He took away the foreign altars and the high places, and broke down the pillars and cut down the asherim, and commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law and the commandment. He also took out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the incense altars, and the kingdom had rest under him. He built fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest. He had no war in those years, for the Lord gave him peace. And 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. And Asa had an army of three hundred thousand from Judah, armed with large shields and spears, and two hundred and eighty thousand men from Benjamin, that carried shields and drew bows. All these were mighty men of valour. Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots, and came as far as Maresha.

And Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up their lines of battle in the valley of Zephatha, at Maresha. And Asa cried to the Lord his God, O Lord, there is none like you to help, between 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 not man prevail against you.

So the Lord defeated the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. Asa and the people who were with him pursued them as far as Gerar, and the Ethiopians fell until none remained alive, for they were broken before the Lord and his army.

The men of Judah carried away very much spoil, and they attacked all the cities around Gerar, for the fear of the Lord was upon them. They plundered all the cities, for there was much plunder in them, and they struck down the tents of those who had livestock, and carried away sheep in abundance and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

In 2 Chronicles chapter 14, Judah faces a serious threat from the south. Abijah fought against the northern kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam, winning a huge victory, and after their catastrophic defeat at the hands of Judah, Israel was thrown into disarray.

[2 : 3 4] During the reign of Asa, there were four dynasties, not just kings, in the north in Israel. Jeroboam, Baasha, Zimri, and Omri. During this period then, even though it would attack Judah under Baasha, Israel was simply not the same level of threat to Judah that it once was.

The significant threat during the reign of Asa comes from the south, from an immense army of Ethiopians and Libyans under Zerah. While the kingdom of Israel goes through several dynasties during the course of its history, the endurance of the Davidic dynasty in the south is an important contrast to it. After Abijah's victory, Asa had the opportunity to rebuild and to strengthen Judah.

Chronicles gives a great deal more attention to the reign of Asa than first kings does. He is another king with a longer reign, which gives an opportunity for growth and development that they would not have in the north, where they were moving from one king and dynasty to another.

Asa is a figure who is complicated by later unfaithfulness, and the initial assessment of his rule in this chapter differs in some ways from the final outcome. However, he does start very well.

He removes foreign altars, high places, pillars and asherim. The fact that such things need to be removed gives us some retrospective indication of the reigns of Abijah and Rehoboam that preceded him.

[3 : 53] They had clearly failed in this regard, this duty of the king to uphold true worship and to ensure that false worship did not take root. Asa also strengthens Judah by fortifying its cities, and the land enjoys peace, which he attributes to the Lord. This rest from war and the taking up of great building projects might remind us of the reign of Solomon in some respects.

In uprooting these false practices, the king is leading the people in reformation. The behaviour of the king was of such importance for the nation when it came to true worship. An unfaithful king could lead the entire nation into unfaithfulness, whereas a faithful king could restore true worship in great measure under his rule.

Both Abijah and Asa his son recognised the importance of faithfulness to the Lord for Judah's fortunes. Asa has a large army of 300,000 men from Judah and 280,000 men from Benjamin.

The threat that comes from Ethiopia comes from a man named Zerah. Perhaps we should think of the twin of Perez, the father of the line of Judah. This man is accompanied by a million men, or a thousand thousands. Faced with such a scale of threat, Asa knows that he and the nation of Judah are completely outmatched. He prays to the Lord for deliverance, expressing the people's extreme dependence upon the Lord for deliverance in their situation. Judah has no strength at all.

Whatever hope they have comes from the Lord. And the Lord, in response to the prayers of Judah and Asa, gives them a spectacular victory. The Ethiopians are routed before them. They pursue them and they plunder their cities. Having gained a very great deal of spoil, they return to Jerusalem.

[5 : 39] A question to consider. The victory of Asa and Judah is attributed to the Lord. What are some of the various ways in which we see God's hand in such victories within the stories of Scripture?