

1 Kings 15:1-34, 2 Chronicles 13-16

Abijam and Asa in a Time of War and Conflict

This chapters and the next describe a time of chaos and continued idolatry in the northern kingdom of Israel and tepid faith by leaders in Judah. It is setting the stage for the powerful ministry of the prophets Elijah and Elisha.

Repeated over again is the phrase "he walked in all the sins of his father" continuing the idolatry begun by Solomon.

Israel was given over to idolatry and the situation was little better in Judah.

To clarify, here are the characters:

North (Israel): Jeroboam > Nadab > usurped by Baasha

South (Judah): Rehoboam > Abijam > Asa

The Short Reign of Abijam in Judah

Rehoboam was succeeded by his son, Abijah, who "walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father" (**1 Kings 15:3**).

2 Chronicles 13 adds more details, although it confusingly refers to Abijam as Abijah.

It describes a battle between Abijam and Jeroboam (whose reigns overlapped). Abijam gives a stirring speech condemning Jeroboam's idolatry and rebellion. He contrasts the worship of the golden calves with the "pure table" of the Lord in Jerusalem where Temple service was carried out by legitimate priests and Levites. Then he appeals to the opposing Israelite soldiers:

- **2 Chronicles 13:12** - "And, behold, God himself is with us for our captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight ye not against the LORD God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper."

But while he was speaking, Jeroboam's troops surrounded his army and attacked from behind.

The army of Judah recognized their predicament and cried to the Lord for help.

- **2 Chronicles 13:13** - "Then the men of Judah gave a shout: and as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass, that God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah (Abijam) and Judah."

Abijam is emblematic of the problem with leadership in this stage of Jewish history - they were double-minded, and had a mixed heart and divided loyalties.

God allowed Abijam to continue to rule for a few years, providing him a "lamp" - "a kingdom" according to the Targum - to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem based solely on the merit of his forefather King David. This refers to God's promise to David in **2 Samuel 7:8-17, 27-29** that "thy house and thy kingdom shall be made sure for ever before thee; thy throne shall be established for ever."

1 Kings 15:5 - "Because David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."

In the same way, this points to our situation as believers. Like Abijam, our heart is not perfect. But through our repentance, "for David's sake" i.e. for the righteousness of the Messiah, God honors his promise to Jesus, that He "should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day" (**John 6:39**).

"And his mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom" (**1 Kings 15:2**)

Josephus says (Antiqu. l. 8. c. 10. sect. 1.) she was the daughter of Tamar the daughter of Absalom. She seems to be mentioned here, to observe that she was the cause and means of her son's idolatry.

1 Kings 15:8 - " And Abijam slept with his fathers; and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his stead."

2 Chronicles spells his name Abijah, which means 'Yahweh is my father.' 1 Kings spells the name Abijam, which means 'my father is Yam.' Yam was a Canaanite sea-god. Perhaps this reflects the spiritual devolution of his faith.

The Reign of King Asa in Judah

1 Kings 15:10-11 - "And forty and one years reigned he (Asa) in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom. And Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, as did David his father."

Asa, a good king, reigned a year longer than either David or Solomon.

But wait, wasn't Maachah *Abijam's* mother?

Maachah was Abijam's mother and Asa's grandmother. She is mentioned because she raised Asa, so in that sense she was his "mother." And though he was educated by this idolatrous woman, yet he was not corrupted by her as his father Abijam was.

Asa banished the "sodomites" - the *qadesh* and *qadeshah* - who traded in sex to honor the goddess in the groves.

1 Kings 15:13-14 - "And also Maachah his mother (grandmother), even her he removed

from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa destroyed her idol, and burnt it by the brook Kidron. But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect with the LORD all his days."

The idol Maachah set up is described as "frightening and abominable" in the Hebrew. It was probably a phallic-shaped pillar serving as the male counterpoint to the fertility cult of Asherah/the grove.

Asa's diligent action recalls the Torah command:

- **Deuteronomy 13:6-9** - "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers ... Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people."

2 Chronicles adds that Asa actually *did* remove at least some of the high places:

- **2 Chronicles 14:3-4** - "For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves: And commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment."

How is this reconciled? Some of the high places were also esteemed as places where the Tabernacle had temporarily been set up before resting permanently in Jerusalem. On others, the patriarchs had offered sacrifice to Yahweh. So maybe some of the high places might have been defiled and removed by Asa, but not those.

This reminds us that the high places where we served idols before we encountered the true God were necessary for us to survive and to get us to where we are now, in the same way that the Tabernacle rested on high places. But now that Christ has spiritually "settled" in the New Jerusalem, we can no longer worship God in the previous high places. God has been leading us all along, from birth, without our knowledge. The high places no longer hold fear or enchantment for us. We can "ride" upon them - i.e. have dominion over them in Christ.

Dominion over the High Places:

- **Isaiah 58:13-14** - "If you turn your foot from breaking the Sabbath, from doing as you please on My holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight, and the LORD's holy day honorable, if you honor it by not going your own way or seeking your own pleasure or speaking idle words, then you will delight yourself in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the high places (*bama*) of the land and feed you with the heritage of your father Jacob. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken it."

Jerusalem as God's Chosen City:

- **2 Chronicles 6:5-6** - "Since the day I brought My people out of the land of Egypt, I have not chosen a city from any tribe of Israel in which to build a house so that My Name would be there, nor have I chosen anyone to be ruler over My people Israel. But now I have chosen Jerusalem for My Name to be there, and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel."

Now we are in the New Jerusalem under the rule of Jesus, the Son of David.

- **Revelation 21:2** - "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

Asa Gives Away Dedicated Treasures

1 Kings 15:15 - "And he brought in the things which his father had dedicated, and the things which himself had dedicated, into the house of the LORD, silver, and gold, and vessels."

Abijam apparently had previously vowed to dedicate some treasures to the Temple, even though he was also tolerating idols. Asa's donation would include the plunder gained after defeating Zerah the Cushite, who had attacked Judah (See **2 Chronicles 14:13**)

In fact, it was after this that Asa got a word from God that he should destroy idolatry in the land.

The Message of the Prophet Azariah to Asa (2 Chronicles 15:1-19)

- **2 Chronicles 15:2** - "The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you."

This is both a promise and a warning.

- **Psalms 34:4** - "I sought the LORD, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears."

- **Jeremiah 29:13** - "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart."

This is actually what Jesus was referring to - seeking God:

- **Matthew 7:7** - "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

- **Matthew 6:33** - "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

The cost of not relying on God is the loss of Temple treasures and continual strife. Gold becomes brass. But crowns will be given to overcomers who persevere in trust and faith..

The Reign of Baasha in the North

1 Kings 15:25-31 - Tying Up Loose Prophetic Ends in Israel

Nadab the son of Jeroboam inherited the throne of the northern kingdom but was assassinated by Baasha, who rebelled and seized the throne. In fulfillment of the prophecy earlier (**1 Kings 14:10-11**), he killed off the whole line of Jeroboam - no male was left alive.

1 Kings 15:17 - "And Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, that he might not suffer any to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah."

He stationed a garrison on the border to more effectively prevent anyone from traveling to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage feasts.

Asa's Lack of Faith

Despite Asa's mostly good reputation, he made several mistakes. He had defeated the Cushites earlier. Before that battle he prayed a good prayer:

- **2 Chronicles 14:8-11** - "O LORD, there is no one besides You to help the powerless against the mighty. 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. Do not let a mere mortal prevail against You."

But - taking the dedicated treasures was forbidden, as was bribing the king of Syria to break his covenant with Baasha. He should have relied on God's protection.

So Asa gets a visit from Hanani the seer and is offended by his words:

- **2 Chronicles 16:7-9** - "And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Cushites and Libyans a vast army with many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the LORD, He delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars. Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison house; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people the same time."

1 Kings 15:23 - "The rest of all the acts of Asa, and all his might, and all that he did, and the cities which he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? Nevertheless in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet."

Perhaps his feet were afflicted because he "ran" to seek help from foreign alliances instead of from God. The Chroniclers add another detail:

- **2 Chronicles 16:12** - "And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians."

A sad end indeed.

Summary

What do we learn from these stories? From Abijam we see he knew the right things to say, but his heart was divided. He tolerated idolatry, and was almost defeated in battle except for the grace of God for his forefather David. Then he either forgot God's faithfulness or took it for granted.

Paul warns against "despising" *kataphroneō* - treating lightly or taking for granted - the "the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering." (**Romans 2:4**)

From Asa we find he was obedient to overturn idolatry - even removing his own grandmother from her position - but failed to depend on God in his foreign policy, giving away the Temple treasures as a bribe for an alliance in war. He put the prophet Hanani in prison when he didn't like his message. In his old age what faith he had was failing.

These kings were flawed human beings who knew the truth at some point but did not persevere in faith to the end.

King Abijam said and did some right things, but his heart was not as his forefather David's was toward God.

King Asa's "heart was loyal to the LORD all his days" but he made serious mistakes and errors because of fear. He was blessed with a long reign, but was "diseased in his feet" in the end. His "walk" did not honor God.

The last mention of Asa is one of fear, in **Jeremiah 41:9**, which is discussing events after the destruction of Jerusalem: "Now the pit (cistern) wherein Ishmael had cast all the dead bodies of the men, whom he had slain because of Gedaliah, was it which Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel: and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with them that were slain."

Again, the lesson is "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (**1 Corinthians 10:12**)

Or, as Jesus said:

- **Matthew 7:22-23** - ""Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

The full circle of discipleship is to believe in your heart, confess with your mouth and, as James explains, this will result in good works. If we don't see that circle completed in our lives, the circle might begin to unravel and fray.

Let's pray that God helps us remember these lessons from Abijam and Asa.