

BIBLE SERIES: **"EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"**

by Mario Seiglie

OT-72 8-9-2008

1 KINGS 15-16 ABIJAM & ASA OF JUDAH & BAASHA, ZIMRI & OMRI OF ISRAEL



We begin the study of Israel's long decline until it leads to its captivity. Both Rehoboam of Judah and Jeroboam of the House of Israel have died, and their sons are ruling—unfortunately, both are unrighteous.

As Halley brings out, "Every one of the *19 kings* of the Northern Kingdom followed the worship of the Golden Calf. Some of them also served Baal. But not one ever attempted to bring the people back to God...Most of the *kings of Judah* served idols; a few served God. Some bad kings were partly good; some good kings, partly bad. For the first 80 years, there was war, then for the next 80 years there was peace, and they returned to war for the last 50 years. There would only be *one* dynasty in the Southern Kingdom, that of *David*. In the Northern Kingdom, there would be *nine* dynasties" (p. 193-196).

So in Judah, Abijam, son of Rehoboam, "walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him, *his heart was not loyal* to the Lord his God as was the heart of his father David. Nevertheless for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, by setting up his son after him and by establishing Jerusalem, because *David* did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:3-5). Notice how David is praised by God for his *faithfulness* to His laws, and although he was not perfect, no Israelite ruler ever equaled him.

In the north, there wasn't anyone to alleviate the sins occurring in the house of Israel. Nadab, Jeroboam's son, "did *evil* in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin" (1 Kings 15:26).

Remember, Jeroboam's grievous sin was primarily changing the *place* of worship from Jerusalem to Bethel and Dan, where he set up golden calves, and changing the *dates* of the Feast of Tabernacles. When you change the places and dates of God's Feasts, you are committing Jeroboam's heinous sin! Today, this is seen by emphasizing Rome and not Jerusalem. Rome, with its mixture of Christian and pagan practices, has promoted Sunday-worship, Christmas, Easter, and other non-biblical feasts. It is that serious to follow these sins!

As a result of these transgressions, God cursed the short-lived reign of Nadab, that only lasted 5 years,

and this would mark the beginning of the many assassinations of the kings of the house of Israel.

We read, "Then Baasha...conspired against him. And Baasha *killed him* at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines, while Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon. Baasha killed him in the third year of Asa king of Israel, and reigned in his place. And it was so, when he became king that *he killed all the house of Jeroboam*. He did not leave to Jeroboam anyone that breathed, until he had destroyed him, *according to the word of the Lord* which He had spoken by His servant Ahijah the Shilonite, *because of the sins of Jeroboam*...And there was war between Asa and Baasha all their days" (1 K. 15:28-31).

This is the period of time when God begins to send prophets to warn Israel of the final consequences of their sins. Halley points out five objectives these prophets were to carry out:

"1. To try to save the nation from its idolatry and wickedness. 2. Failing in this, to announce the nation will be destroyed. 3. But not completely destroyed. A remnant will be saved. 4. Out of this remnant will come a Person who will bring all nations to God. 5. That Person will be a Great Man who will one day arise of the family of David. The Prophets called him "The Branch." The family tree of David, once the most powerful family in the world, cut down in the days of the Prophets, to rule a kingdom that was disappearing, the family would have a comeback. Out of the family stock would come a Branch who will become King of Kings" (p. 281).

Here we see God's principle that runs throughout the Bible and also applies to the present time. God will always mercifully warn His people before applying punishment. In the Old Testament, it was done through His prophets. We read, "Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?...If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid?...Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets...The Lord has spoken! Who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:4-8).

So as Israel's kings continued to spiritually degenerate, God sent at least *ten* of His prophets to warn them of the impending consequences. Yet, few of the kings ever paid attention--to their people's and their own undoing. Eventually, it led to God's punishment of captivity and both nations' demise.

Thankfully, after Abijam of Judah died, his son Asa was one of the few righteous kings of Judah.

The Bible explains, “Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did his father David. And he banished the perverted persons [the margin says, ‘Hebrew *qedeshim*, that is, those practicing sodomy and prostitution in religious ritual] and removed all the idols that his father had made. Also he removed Maachah his grandmother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah. And Asa cut down her obscene image and burned it by the Brook Kidron. But the high places were not removed. Nevertheless Asa’s heart was loyal to the Lord all his days” (1 Kings 15:11-15). As a result, God blessed him with a long and mostly prosperous reign of forty one years.

Remember, it is the act of homosexuality that is condemned in the Bible, since the person involved can always repent and be forgiven by God. But the widespread and tolerant appearance of homosexuals in the land is a clear indicator of the moral decadence of society. It is this type of sexual immorality that is listed as one of the five reasons for the collapse of the Roman Empire given by the famous historian, Edward Gibbon. Unfortunately, we are seeing the same flagrant and worrisome trend today.

In the north, Baasha, Nadab’s killer, could have turned back the idolatry, but instead, followed Nadab’s footsteps and promoted Jeroboam’s sins. As the Bible says, “He reigned twenty-four years in Tirzah...and did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin” (1 K. 15:34).

God sent a man to warn Baasha of his sins, the prophet and warrior Jehu. God told him through Jehu, “Inasmuch as I lifted you out of the dust and made you ruler over My people Israel, and you have walked in the way of Jeroboam, and have made My people Israel sin, to provoke Me to anger with their sins, surely I will take away the posterity of Baasha and the posterity of his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Baasha and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the fields...So Baasha rested with his fathers and was buried in Tirzah. Then Elah his son reigned in his place” (1 Kings 16:2-6).

Elah, another unrighteous king, only reigned two years before he was assassinated by one of his generals, Zimri. He was killed while drunk at the home of his steward and Jehu’s prophecy was

fulfilled. The Bible says, “Then it came to pass, when he began to reign, as soon as he was seated on his throne, that he killed all the household of Baasha; he did not leave him one male, neither of his relatives nor of his friends. Thus Zimri destroyed all the household of Baasha, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke against Baasha by Jehu the prophet, for all the sins of Baasha and the sins of Elah his son” (1 Kings 16:11-13).

Of course, once the pattern of assassination begins, it’s easy to continue with it. As the saying goes, “There is no honor among thieves.” So Zimri reigned for only seven days and after being besieged by another general, Omri, he committed *suicide*.

We read, “Zimri had reigned in Tirzah seven days. And the people were encamped against Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines. Now the people who were encamped heard it said, ‘Zimri has conspired and also has killed the king.’ So all Israel made Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel that day in the camp. Then Omri and all Israel with him went up...and besieged Tirzah. And it happened, when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the citadel of the king’s house and burned the king’s house down upon himself with fire, and died, because of the sins which he had committed in doing evil in the sight of the Lord, in walking in the way of Jeroboam” (1 K. 16:15-19).

King Omri had a rival named Tibni, but quickly defeated his army and killed him. Omri reigned for twelve years, and built the new capital of the house of Israel, Samaria. The Bible says about him, “Omri did *evil* in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all who were before him...Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and the *might* that he showed, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?” (1 K. 16:25-27).

King Omri is famous in the Assyrian annals. We read about the Assyrian king, “Ashurnasipal’s foray into northern Syria and Phoenicia...put the Near East on notice that Assyria was awakening from its long slumber. Israel itself was not affected by this first incursion of Assyrian troops, but Assyria had become aware of that nation’s existence. From the ninth to the seventh centuries, Assyrian records often call Israel *mat-Omri* (‘land of Omri’) or *bit-Omri* (‘house of Omri’).” (Later, the House of Israel in exile would be identified with the Cimmerians—from Gamir or Gimmirians. Anne Kristensen, author of *Who were the Cimmerians, and Where did they come from?*,

(Copenhagen, 1988), shows proof that the first appearance of Cimmerians was serving in the Assyrian forces and she states her belief that the Cimmerians were in effect re-settled Israelites.)

Also, “The Moabite Stone (also called the Mesha Stele), one of the earliest archaeological finds relating to the Bible, adds to the information available on the reign of Omri. The stone was found at Dibon in southern Transjordan in 1868. It reads, ‘As for King Omri of Israel, he humbled Moab many years...And his son [Ahab] followed him’” (*Archaeology and the Old Testament*, p. 308).

In the meantime, in Judah, King Asa had peace for fourteen years. But then, Judah was attacked by a million-man army of Ethiopians or Egyptians led by a general Zerah (2 Chr. 14:9-15). “Zerah was an Ethiopian, probably commanding the armies of Egypt for Pharaoh Osorkon I, son of Shishak. Outnumbered, Asa faced the Egyptians at Mareshah, where he called on the Lord for help before he engaged the enemy. God routed the Egyptian army, and Asa’s army pursued them as far as Gerar (*Expositor’s*., p. 303).

God’s incredible intervention stirred Asa to further his religious reforms. *Expositor’s* says, “In the third month of the fifteenth year of his reign, Asa, encouraged by the prophet Azariah (2 Chr. 15:1-7), convened an assembly in which all true Israelites were invited to renew the covenant with the Lord. The meeting was attended with great praise and joy (2 Chr. 15:9-15). At the same time Asa instituted stringent spiritual reforms, aimed at removing the remaining vestiges of idolatry and fertility rites (2 Chr. 15:8). Even the politically and religiously powerful Maacah was able to be disposed of once and for all (v. 13). No doubt she had used the outbreak of the war as an occasion to reintroduce the public worship of Asherah (v. 13; 2 Chr. 15:16). While Asa stopped short of a total cleansing of the land, he was a God-fearing man who led the way for his people in public dedication to God.”

Yet, in the 36th year of Asa’s reign, Baasha, king of Israel attacked Judah and then, Asa lost faith and made an alliance with the Syrian king, Ben-Hadad.

We read, “And Baasha...came up against Judah, and built Ramah [a fortress only 4 miles away from Jerusalem], that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. Then Asa took all the silver and gold...and sent them to Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, saying, ‘Let there be a treaty between you and

me...So Ben-Hadad heeded King Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel. He attacked Ijon, Dan, Abel Beth Maachah, and all Chinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali. Now it happened, when Baasha heard it, that he stopped building Ramah, and remained in Tirzah. Then King Asa made a proclamation throughout all Judah; none was exempted. And they took away the stones and timber of Ramah...and with them King Asa built Geba of Benjamin, and Mizpah” (1 K. 15:17-22).

Incidentally, a fragment of a monument at Dan was found from king Ben-Hadad about defeating the house of David.

So God was displeased with this treaty with a pagan king, and sent a prophet to render judgment. We read, “And at that time Hanani the seer said to Asa, ‘Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and *have not relied on the Lord your God*, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand. Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very 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 show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars.’ Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him because of this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at that time...And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and his malady was severe; *yet in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians*. So Asa rested with his fathers” (2 Chr. 16:7-13). Unfortunately, the end of Asa’s reign does not show he retained the same level of faith that he had at the beginning. He didn’t even go to God for healing—and only depended on physical remedies. *Expositor’s* says, “How far he had fallen and from what great spiritual heights! Asa’s life remains as an exemplary admonition to the believer to abide humbly in Christ, lest his life become totally unproductive for God (cf. John 15:5-6; 1 Cor 9:27).”