

## **Judah During the Divided Kingdom (2 Chronicles 10:1 – 28:7)**

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**The Reign of Asa, part 1: Introduction; Asa Under Divine Blessing, part 1: Asa's Early Years of Reform and Blessing; Asa's Victory, Prophetic Approval and Obedience, part 1: Asa's Victory and Conflict (2 Chronicles 14:1b–15)**

### *The Reign of Asa (14:1b-16:14)*

The Chronicler continued his account by turning to the reign of Asa (911/10-870/69 B.C.). His record of Asa focuses on two contrasting actions and their equally contrasting results. Asa served God faithfully and received the blessings of peace and prosperity. Yet, war, trouble, and death came to him when he turned from God. As such, the reign of Asa gave a clear picture of the options which the post-exilic community faced.

### *Comparison of 14:1b-16:14 with 1 Kgs 15:9-24*

The Chronicler's record of Asa differs significantly from its parallel in Kings. This difference is evident in that Chronicles increases the 16 verses of Kings into 47 verses. At this point, it will help to compare the two accounts on a large scale (see figure 32). More detailed analyses for each section will follow.

As this large scale comparison indicates, the account of Kings is much simpler than the record of Chronicles. Kings introduces Asa (1 Kgs 15:9-11), describes his reforms (1 Kgs 15:12-15), records his war with Baasha (1 Kgs 15:16-22), and closes his reign (1 Kgs 15:23-24a). The Chronicler omitted the synchronization with the north (1 Kgs 15:9-10) and the notice of cultic prostitution (1 Kgs 15:12) as he usually did in his history. Nevertheless, after an introduction (14:1b-2) he added a record of Asa's reforms and resulting prosperity (14:3-8). He then added a lengthy section dealing with war and prophecy (14:9-15:15). After this addition, the Chronicler returned to following Kings in his description of reforms (15:16-19 // 1 Kgs 15:13-15), and another battle (16:1-6 // 1 Kgs 15:16-22). He then added a second prophecy (16:7-10), and closed his account with a slightly expanded summation and notice of death (16:11-14). As in the reign of Rehoboam (see 10:1-12:16), the book of Kings is oriented toward only one battle in Asa's reign, but Chronicles focuses on two conflicts. These two battles permit the Chronicler to draw striking contrasts between the earlier and later years of Asa.

<b>2 Chr</b>		<b>1 Kgs</b>
-----	Synchronization with North (omitted)	15:9-10
14:1b-2	General Evaluation (slightly expanded)	15:9-11
-----	Prostitution and Idols Eliminated (omitted)	15:12
14:3-8	Reforms and Prosperity (added)	-----
14:9-15	War with Zerah (added)	-----
15:1-15	Prophecy and Response (added)	-----
15:16-19	Further Reforms (parallel)	15:13-15
16:1-6	War with Baasha (parallel)	15:16-22
16:7-10	Prophecy and Response (added)	-----
16:11-14	Closure of Reign (expanded)	15:23-24a

*Comparison of 2 Chr 14:2-16:14 and 1 Kgs 15:9-24 (figure 32)*

*Structure of 14:1b-16:14*

The Chronicler's expansion from one to two battles shaped his record of Asa into two symmetrical sections. These halves mirror each other in a number of ways (see figure 33).

- Opening of Asa's Reign (14:1b)
  - ◆ Asa Under Divine Blessing (14:2-15:19)
    - Asa's Early Year of Reform and Blessings (14:2-7)
      - Asa's Reforms (14:2-5a)
      - Asa's Blessings (14:5b-7)
    - Asa's Victory, Prophetic Approval and Obedience (14:8-15:19)
      - Asa's Victory in Conflict (14:8-15)
        - Asa's Standing Army (14:8)
          - Asa and Zerah Draw Battle Lines (14:9-10)
            - Asa Invokes Divine Intervention (14:11)
          - Asa Defeats Zerah in Battle (14:12-15a)
        - Asa's Army Returns to Jerusalem (14:15b)
      - Asa's Prophetic Approval and Obedience (15:1-19)
        - Prophetic Approval (15:1-7)
          - Introductory Setting (15:1-2a)
          - Doctrinal Principle (15:2b)
          - Historical Illustrations (15:3-6)
          - Contemporary Application (15:7)
      - Asa's Response (15:8-19)
        - Asa's Worship Reforms (15:8)
        - Asa's Assembly for Reform (15:9-15)
          - Assembly Called (15:9-10)
            - Assembly Opening Ceremonies (15:11)
              - Assembly Oaths (15:12-13)
            - Assembly Closing Ceremonies (15:14)
          - Assembly Results (15:15)
        - Asa's Other Reforms (15:16-19)
  - ◆ Asa Under Divine Judgment (16:1-12)
    - Asa's Failure, Prophetic Disapproval and Disobedience (16:1-10)
      - Asa's Failure in Conflict (16:1-6)
        - Asa Threatened (16:1)
          - Asa Appeals to Syria for Help (16:2-3)
            - Syria Attacks Israel (16:4)
          - Asa No Longer Threatened (16:5-6)
        - Asa's Prophetic Rebuke and Disobedience (16:7-9)
          - Accusation and Result (16:7)
          - Contrast with Earlier Conflict (16:8-9a)
          - Accusation and Sentencing (16:9b)
        - Asa's Response of Disobedience (16:10)
      - Asa's Final Years of Judgment (16:11-12)
- Closure of Asa's Reign (16:13-14)

*Outline of 2 Chr 14:1b-16:14 (figure 33)*

After the opening of Asa's reign (14:1b) which is balanced by its closure (16:13-14), the record divides into the early years under the blessings of God (14:2-15:19) and the later years under divine judgment (16:1-12).

Chronological notices appear throughout this material to separate these two sections. The Chronicler mentioned Asa's first **ten years of peace** (14:1b). He also noted an **assembly** of celebration in Jerusalem during **fifteenth year** (15:10). The first half closes with a report that Asa's peace extended **until the thirty-fifth year** of his reign (15:19). The second half begins, however, with war **in the thirty-sixth year** (16:1), followed by his disease **in the thirty-ninth year** (16:12) and his death **in the forty-first year** (16:13).

These two sections mirror each other structurally. The first half opens with reforms and prosperity (14:2-7); the second half closes with failure and disease (16:11-12). The first portion reports a sequence of victory, prophetic approval, and Asa's positive response (14:8-15:19); the second portion reports a sequence of failure in battle, prophetic disapproval, and Asa's negative response (16:1-10).

#### *Opening of Asa's Reign (14:1b)*

Although he omitted any notice of the northern kingdom (see 1 Kgs 15:9-11), the Chronicler expanded the notice of Asa's rise to include the comment that **the land had rest for ten years** (14:1b). "Rest" appears as God's blessing in a number of places in Chronicles (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*). It often describes the condition of peace and prosperity given to kings as they were faithful to God. This positive outlook on Asa sets positive mood for the reign which is confirmed by the burial notice (16:14; see *Introduction: 28) Healing and Long Life/Sickness and Death*).

#### *Asa Under Divine Blessing (14:2-15:19)*

The account begins with the first thirty-five years of blessing in Asa's reign (see 15:19). Asa's positive achievements and the resulting prosperity during this time come to the foreground.

#### *Comparison of 14:2-15:19 with 1 Kgs 15:9-15*

Although Chronicles depends on Kings for some material in this section (14:1b-2 // 1 Kgs 15:11 and 15:16-19 // 1 Kgs 15:13-15), it also omits and adds information. Some of these variations amount to insignificant matters of style, but other shifts reveal important perspectives on Asa's early years.

First, in his usual fashion the Chronicler omitted the synchronization of Asa's reign with the northern kingdom (1 Kgs 15:9). The Chronicler omitted references to events in the North except in connection with the history of Judah (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*).

Second, enthusiasm for Asa is evident in the expansion of "he did what was good" (1 Kgs 15:11) to ... **he did what was good and right** (14:2a). Nevertheless, Kings says that Asa was "like David his father" (1 Kgs 15:11), but Chronicles omits these words (14:2). It is likely that the Chronicler did not want to compare Asa with David because of his idealization of David and his emphasis on Asa's sins in the second half of his reign (see 16:1-14).

Third, the reference to Asa removing "the male shrine prostitutes" and "all of the idols his fathers had made" (1 Kgs 15:12) are omitted. The presence of male prostitutes in Judah's past was probably irrelevant to the needs of the post-exilic community. The Chronicler omitted every mention of this practice in the book of Kings (see 1 Kgs 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kgs 23:7).

Fourth, in the place of 1 Kgs 15:12 the Chronicler lists a number of reforms Asa implemented (14:3-5). These reforms are described in ways that spoke to specific needs of the post-exilic readers.

Fifth, an additional account of war and prophetic approval appears (14:6-15:15). This material illustrates Asa's positive acts and contrast them with the later battle sequence (see 16:1-6).

Sixth, summary and chronological notice are added in 15:19. This information provides a temporal framework for the Chronicler's division of Asa's reign into good and bad years.

### *Structure of 14:2-15:19*

The record of Asa's positive years divides into two main sections. This first half of Asa's reign focuses on his reforms and blessings (14:2-7) and on his victory (14:8-15:19). These two segments themselves divide into two smaller units each (see figure 33).

### *Asa's Early Years of Reform and Blessing (14:2-7)*

At first, the reign of Asa was a time of extensive reforms and prosperity. This material contrasts with 16:12-14, a time of trouble and sickness for Asa (see figure 33). This portion of Asa's reign divides into his reforms (14:2-5a) and the resulting blessings (14:5b-7; see figure 33).

*Asa's Reforms (14:2-5a)*

The Chronicler began his record with a general characterization of Asa as one who did **good and right in the eyes of the Lord** (14:2 // 1 Kgs 15:11). Although the Chronicler omitted the comparison with David (see 1 Kgs 15:11), he added that Asa did **good and right** (14:2 // 1 Kgs 15:11). This expansion indicated his enthusiasm for this period of Asa's life.

The Chronicler's record of Asa's reforms (14:3-5) replaced the report of male shrine prostitution (see 1 Kgs 15:12) with the notice that Asa destroyed pagan worship centers (14:3). The **foreign altars** may have been those altars Solomon erected for his foreign wives (see 1 Kgs 11:7-8). He also razed the **high places**, worship centers in Judah other than the temple in Jerusalem (14:3). Moreover, he crushed **sacred stones**, pillars erected next to pagan altars as representations of the deities or as phallic symbols. Such stones were strictly forbidden in Mosaic Law (see Ex 23:24; Lev 26:1; Dt 16:21-22). **Asherah poles** were probably wooden representations of the divine consort of Baal (see Jdg 3:7; 2 Kgs 23:4) or another kind of phallic symbol associated with the goddess. They were also demolished in Asa's reforms. The description of Asa's efforts closely follows the instructions of Deut 12:1-3. The Chronicler cast the king's reforms in this traditional language to present him as an example of what Judah's kings were always to do.

The Chronicler also summarized the instructions Asa delivered to Judah during his reform efforts. First, the king ordered his people **to seek the Lord** (14:4). This terminology alludes to the programmatic promise given to Solomon at the dedication of the temple (7:14). "Seeking" God in sincere prayer and worship was the way to the favor of God (see *Introduction: 19) Seeking*). Moreover, the use of this terminology early in Asa's reign anticipates the dominance of the theme of seeking God throughout this account. The term occurs no less than eleven times in his reign (14:4,7 [twice]; 15:2 [thrice], 4,12,13,15; 16:12).

Second, the king commanded his people to submit to God's **laws and commandments** (14:4). The importance of obedience to the Law of God appears throughout Chronicles. The standard the Chronicler held for his post-exilic readers was the same Asa held for his community (see *Introduction: 14) Standards*).

The Chronicler's initial record of Asa's reforms closes with another reference to **high places** and the mention of **incense altars** (14:5; see 14:3). The meaning of the latter term is not altogether certain. It has been translated "sun pillar," but modern research points in the direction of the NIV translation. Whatever the specific meaning, the term is associated with pagan worship in several places (see Lev 26:30; 2 Chr 30:14; 34:4,7; Isa 17:8; 27:9; Ezk 6:4,6).

The Chronicler noted here that Asa destroyed the **high places ... in every town in Judah** (14:5). Some interpreters have seen this statement as a contradiction of 15:17 ( // 1

Kgs 15:14) where it is reported that Asa did *not* remove the high places. A similar juxtaposition occurs in the reign of Jehoshaphat (see 17:6 and 20:33). There is no reason for finding a contradiction here. 14:5 refers to Asa's practices during his early years of blessing; 15:17 is limited to his later years of disobedience and judgment. Moreover, 14:5 explicitly mentions **Judah** and 15:17 speaks of **Israel**. It is possible that the Chronicler distinguished here between what Asa did early in Judah itself and what he did not do in the territories of northern Israel which he conquered during his lifetime.

### *Asa's Blessings (14:5b-7)*

In 14:5b the Chronicler shifted attention away from Asa's reforms to the blessings he received. Traditional versification and the NIV obscures this change of topic, but the shift is apparent. In fact, 14:5b forms an introduction to 14:6-7 much like 14:2 introduced the actions of 14:3-5a. At this point, the text is concerned with how **the kingdom** experienced a time of **peace** as a result of Asa's reforms (14:5b).

**Peace** is an important goal the Chronicler set before his readers. As elsewhere in the Old Testament, it connoted not only the absence of war, but economic prosperity and social well being. In this positive half of Asa's reign the Chronicler mentioned the theme of peace four times (see 14:1,5,6; 15:5). This portion of Asa's reign depicts the benefits of fidelity for God's people; it brings them peace (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*).

The Chronicler's record of Asa's early prosperity divides into straight narration of his actions (14:6), royal decree (14:7a-c), and a straight narration of further actions (14:7d). The chief focus of the material stands out in the repetition of the concept of "building" (14:6,7 [twice]).

Asa **built up fortified cities** (14:6). In line with common ancient Near Eastern beliefs, the Chronicler saw the king's success in building as a demonstration that God had blessed him. Asa was able to concentrate on his fortifications **since the land was at peace** (14:6; see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*). This note was important to the Chronicler's evaluation of Asa's fortifications. If a king built fortifications as a result of peace given by God, the Chronicler approved the projects as God's blessing. If a king built in response to the threat of an enemy, the fortification demonstrated a lack of trust in God (see *Introduction: 24) Building and Destruction*).

Beyond this, the Chronicler also described this time of Asa's kingdom as a period of **rest** (14:6). The term **rest** appears three times in this portion of Asa's reign (14:6b,7; 15:15). The association of rest and peace in this material suggests that the Chronicler drew a line of contact between these years of Asa's reign and David and Solomon. He used both of these terms to describe the splendor of the ideal reigns of David and Solomon (see *Introduction: 23*)

*Victory and Defeat*). Although Asa fell short of reaching the full stature of the ideal monarchs, this portion of his reign reflected the goodness experienced in those days.

Perhaps the Chronicler's readers wondered if the blessings afforded David and Solomon were far beyond their grasp. The Chronicler's description of Asa's reign demonstrated that Judah can enjoy the blessings of peace and rest at any time if she responds faithfully to God.

The Chronicler paused to make his theological perspective on these events plain. Why did Asa enjoy this period of peace? **The Lord gave** him these blessings (14:6). Many times the Chronicler pointed to divine activity as the ultimate cause of events in Israel's history (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). This period of prosperity was not the result of human effort; it was divine response to Asa's fidelity.

The account of Asa's blessing turns to a summary of his speech that inspired the building projects (14:7). Asa ordered the people to **build** because "**the land is still ours**" (14:7). God had kept Judah safe in her land. Asa's words made it clear, however, why this divine protection had come. It was "**because we sought the Lord ... we sought him**" (14:7). These words recall the earlier account of Asa's reforms (14:4). He and the nation had fulfilled the requirement of "seeking" help from God (see *Introduction: 19) Seeking*). Consequently, God gave **rest on every side** (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*).

To close off this section of his account, the Chronicler pointed out that the nation **built and prospered** (14:7). Once again, the blessing of building comes to the foreground (see *Introduction: 24) Building and Destruction*). The terminology of "prosperity" appears many times in Chronicles as a description of a time economic well being resulting from obedience blessed by God (see *Introduction: 26) Prosperity and Poverty*). The result of Asa's reforms was grand prosperity for the entire nation of Judah.

As the Chronicler's readers heard these descriptions of Asa's time, they were to yearn to see the same blessings in their own day. Rebuilding and prosperity were among their goals as well. The Chronicler left no room for misunderstanding the way that would lead to these results. Seeking the Lord as Asa did was the key to their desires.

#### *Asa's Victory, Prophetic Approval, and Obedience (14:8-15:19)*

The next section of Asa's reign covers several closely related events. These materials also demonstrate that Asa was under divine blessing during this portion of this reign.



### *Structure of 14:8-15:19*

This material divides into two main sections. First, Asa won a victory in battle against Zerah (14:8-15). Second, the battle is followed by two more closely related events: a prophetic encouragement to the king (15:1-7), and the king's positive response to the prophet (15:8-19). With the exception of 15:16-18 (// 1 Kgs 15:13-15), all of this material came from the Chronicler's hand (see figure 32). On a large scale, these verses balance with 16:1-10 (see figure 33).

### *Asa's Victory in Conflict (14:8-15)*

This first battle of Asa's reign ended with a resounding victory for Judah. As such, it contrasts with the second battle of defeat in 16:2-6. Here Asa fought in an exemplary manner, demonstrating full reliance on God.

### *Structure of 14:8-15*

The episode divides into five symmetrical parts (see figure 33). The opening describes the size and quality of the king's standing army in Jerusalem (14:8). The end of the story notes that this army returned to its original position in Jerusalem (14:15b). The tension rises as Zerah approaches with a huge army and Asa goes out to meet him (14:9-10), but the drama begins to resolve as Asa defeats Zerah's army (14:12-15a). The turning point in the narrative is Asa's prayer for divine assistance (14:11).

### *Asa's Standing Army (14:8)*

In many respects this verse bridges the gap between the preceding context of Asa's blessing and this battle. The size and quality of the king's army is another example of Asa's prosperity. His standing army (presumably housed in Jerusalem [see 17:13]) consisted of **three hundred thousand men from Judah and two hundred and eighty thousand from Benjamin** (14:8). For comparisons with other records of Judah's army, see 11:1. The total of 580,000 soldiers seems very large. As with other passages where high numbers occur, several explanations are possible. (For the Chronicler's use of large numbers of soldiers see comments on 1 Chr 12:24-37.) However one handles these numbers, the point is that Asa's army is extraordinarily large. The text makes it plain that Asa's army was of fine quality as well. His soldiers were **brave fighting men** equipped with **large shields, spears, small shields, and bows** (14:8).

*Asa and Zerah Draw Battle Lines (14:9-10)*

Despite the size and quality of Asa's army, his enemy was even greater. **Zerah the Cushite** came against Judah **with a vast army** (14:9). At this time, Cush (Ethiopia) was under Egyptian rule, and Zerah was probably acting on behalf of the Egyptian Osorkon I. Literally, the Hebrew text describes Zerah's soldiers as "a thousand thousands" (i.e. one million). Again, there are several options for interpreting this extremely large number. (For the Chronicler's use of large numbers of soldiers see comments on 1 Chr 12:24-37.) However one handles this calculation, Asa was greatly outnumbered. As in Abijah's conflict with Jeroboam (see 13:1-20) the enemy of Judah is nearly twice his size. Moreover, Zerah had **three hundred chariots** at his command (14:9). The motif of Judah facing an enemy with a larger army appears a number of times in Chronicles. In each case, the apparent inadequacy of Judah's army demonstrated that divine intervention was the cause of victory (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*).

Asa took his army **to meet Zerah in the Valley of Zepthah near Mareshah** (14:10), one of Rehoboam's fortified cities (see 11:8). The tension of the narrative builds as the battle ensues against formidable odds.

*Asa Invokes Divine Intervention (14:11)*

Asa prepared for battle against his sizable foe by calling for help from God. His actions recall the similar responses of Rehoboam (12:6) and Abijah (13:14), and anticipate the prayers of Jehoshaphat (18:31; 20:6-12; see *Introduction: 17) Prayer*; see also *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*).

Asa's prayer was straightforward. First, he declared his confidence in the supremacy of God as a helper of the weak: "**There is no one like you to help the powerless**" (14:11). The acknowledgment of Judah's weakness appears again in Jehoshaphat's prayer (see 20:12). Asa confessed his inability to withstand the attack of Zerah's army in his own strength.

Second, Asa asked God to **help** (14:11). In the Chronicler's vocabulary, God helps his people by furthering their causes (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). Why should God help? Asa declared, "**for we rely on you**" (14:11). The Chronicler mentioned reliance on God four times in his history (see 13:18; 14:11; 16:7,8). In each case relying on God amounted to seeking his help in times of military struggle. Such reliance on God always resulted in victory for God's people. At this point in his life, Asa depended on God instead of himself or any human ally (see 13:18; 16:7,8).

Asa specified that he trusted "**in [God's] name**" (14:11). Here Asa recalled the theological perspective that the temple was the place of God's Name, his invocable powerful

presence (see *Introduction: 11) Name of God*). Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple described a situation like that which Asa faced (see 6:34-35).

Third, Asa concluded that God should help him instead of letting **man prevail against [him]** (14:11). Once divine assistance had been sincerely invoked, the battle was no longer Asa's. It became God's battle. As a result, defeat for Judah would amount to defeat for God. This belief was also confirmed by the close connection established between God's throne and the throne of David (see *Introduction: 8) Divine Kingship*).

Asa's prayer served well as an instrument of the Chronicler's message to his post-exilic readers. As they faced various international threats, Asa's appeal for divine help was exemplary of the sort of actions and attitudes they should follow. They should acknowledge God as their only hope by relying on him and calling on his Name (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*).

#### *Asa Defeats Zerah in Battle (14:12-15a)*

The Cushites were severely defeated. Judahites chased them southward **as far as Gerar** (14:13). Gerar was a southern city bordering the Negeb that served as an Egyptian outpost at the time. The Cushites and Egyptians had occupied many villages in the region, but the Judahites **destroyed all the villages around Gerar ... and plundered ... much booty** (14:14).

The Chronicler's outlook on this event becomes evident in the role God plays in these scenes. Asa called on God's name (14:11) and for the first time God becomes a major character in the story: **the Lord struck ... before Asa and Judah** (14:12). Three times the Chronicler mentioned that it was God's effort that brought defeat to the Cushites (14:12,13,14). It is not altogether clear what the Chronicler had in mind when he mentioned **the Lord and his forces** defeated the Egyptians (14:13). The reference could be to the army of Judah, the heavenly army, or both. The third option seems likely in the light of the Chronicler's comparison of the army of Israel with the army of God (see 1 Chr 12:22) and the connection he drew between the throne of Judah and the divine throne (see *Introduction: 8) Divine Kingship*). In all events, the emphasis of this passage is on the fact that **the terror of the Lord** - not Asa - **had fallen upon them** (14:14). This was a miraculous victory, the kind of victory the post-exilic readers of Chronicles hoped for in their own day (see Hag 2:6-10).

#### *Asa's Army Returns to Jerusalem (14:15b)*

Having shown the miraculous victory brought about through prayer and reliance on God, the Chronicler closed his story with a simple note. Asa and his army returned to their standing position in **Jerusalem** (14:15b). This note signaled the end of the episode.