



LESSON 4 UNSTABLE KINGDOMS

This lesson covers approximately 40 years from when Abijah came to the throne of Judah in 913 B.C. to the death of Asa in 870 B.C. Instability in both kingdoms will be a point of emphasis throughout this lesson. Israel's instability is easily seen in the fact that she had 5 kings from 4 dynasties, all a result of

Israel		Judah	
Jeroboam	931–910	Rehoboam	931–913
Nadab	910–909	Abijah	913–911
Baasha	909–886	Asa	911–870
Elah	886–885		
Zimri	885		
Omri	885–874		
Ahab	874–853	Jehoshaphat	873–848
Ahaziah	853–852		
Joram	852–841	Jehoram	848–841
Jehu	841–814	Ahaziah	841
		Athaliah	841–835
Jehoahaz	814–798	Joash	835–796
Jehoash	798–782	Amaziah	796–767
Jeroboam II	793–753	Uzziah	792–740
Zechariah	753		
Shallum	752		
Menahem	752–742	Jotham	750–731
Pekahiah	742–740		
Pekah	752–732	Ahaz	735–715
Hoshea	732–722	Hezekiah	729–686
		Manasseh	696–642
		Amon	642–640
		Josiah	640–609
		Jehoahaz	609
		Jehoiakim	608–598
		Jehoiachin	598–597
		Zedekiah	597–586

unfaithfulness to the Lord. Judah seemed far more stable, having only 2 kings during this time. However, unfaithfulness was already a problem in the house of David and portended difficult times in the days ahead.

Judah Under Abijah & Asa

Abijah's military success (2Chronicles 13).

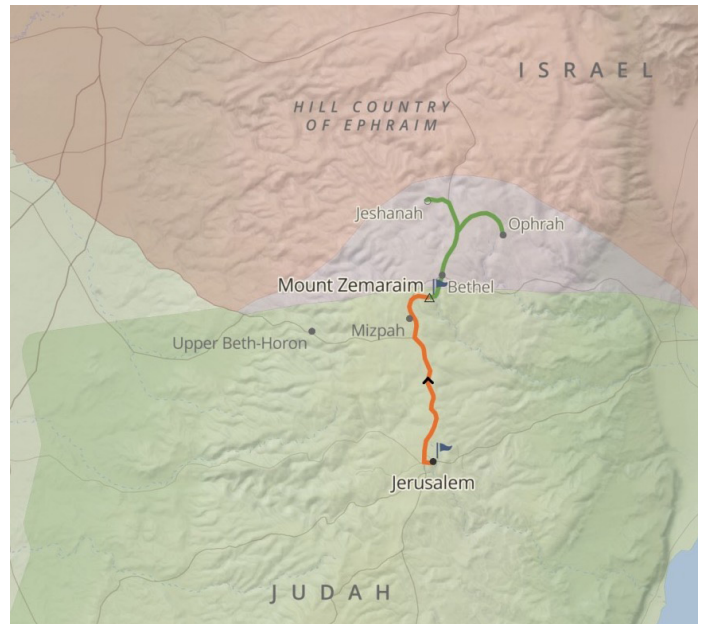
Most of what we know regarding Abijah's reign has to do with his war against Jeroboam. While the Lord granted Judah victory (see vs. 15), that is likely due more to the Lord's displeasure with Jeroboam than with any pleasure the Lord took in Abijah.

» Size of forces (vs. 3). "Because the lexical range for the Hebrew term translated "thousand" includes that of "unit," the meaning intended within these battle narratives may have been that of a military fighting unit (i.e., squad, platoon). Estimates for these family/tribal-based military units usually range from five to thirty men each. Using this approach, a figure currently translated "600,000" would instead be translated as 600 "units," which would total anywhere from 3,000–18,000 men, depending on the estimate of the unit size." (ZIBBC)

» Mount Zemaraim (vs. 4). Approximately 1 mile from Bethel.

» Abijah's challenge to Israel (vss. 5-12). Even though Jeroboam had a substantially larger force, Abijah is clearly the aggressor. It is likely that Abijah's

chief desire was to regain the territory lost by Rehoboam, but Abijah casts the conflict in religious terms. Jeroboam had led Israel into apostasy, but Judah remained faithful in covenant worship. Thus, to fight against Abijah and Judah was to “fight against the Lord God of your fathers” (vs. 11).



- » Covenant of salt (vs. 5). “Because salt was used as a preservative in the ancient world, it was utilized in conjunction with the sealing of treaties and covenants to symbolize a lasting agreement” (ZIBBC). Use of salt in Israel’s sacrifices was a perpetual reminder of their covenant with Jehovah (see Leviticus 2.13; Numbers 18.19).
- » Abijah’s success (vss. 13-22). Jeroboam had both the numerical and strategic advantage, but Abijah was victorious because “it was that God routed Jeroboam and all Israel” (vs. 15). The fact that Abijah captured Bethel, Jeroboam’s cultic center, shows the Lord’s displeasure with Israel.

Abijah’s spiritual weakness (1Kings 15.1-7).

Abijah may have been successful in his military campaign against Jeroboam, but he did not follow in the ways of the Lord. Judah’s success was due to the Lord’s promise to David.

- » Maacah (vs. 2). The mention of Abijah’s mother is significant because she exerted an evil influence, as we will see during the reign of her grandson Asa.
- » Reigned three years (vs. 2). We are not told why his reign was so short, but it likely had to do with what we read in the next verses.
- » Heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God (vs. 3). Abijah continued a trend begun in the days of Solomon (see 1Kings 11.4).

Asa’s early reign (2Chronicles 14.1-15; 1Kings 15.8-12).

- » He reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem (1Kings 15.10). Such stability was unheard of in the northern kingdom of Israel during this era, but given Asa’s devotion to the Lord (vss. 11), such stability was possible in Judah.
- » Maacah (1Kings 15.10). While she is referred to as Asa’s mother, she was his grandmother (see 1Kings 15.2). It is thought that she served in the capacity of “queen mother” and exerted significant influence. Her influence was

for evil (vs. 13), but Asa's devotion to the Lord was such that he removed Maacah from her position.

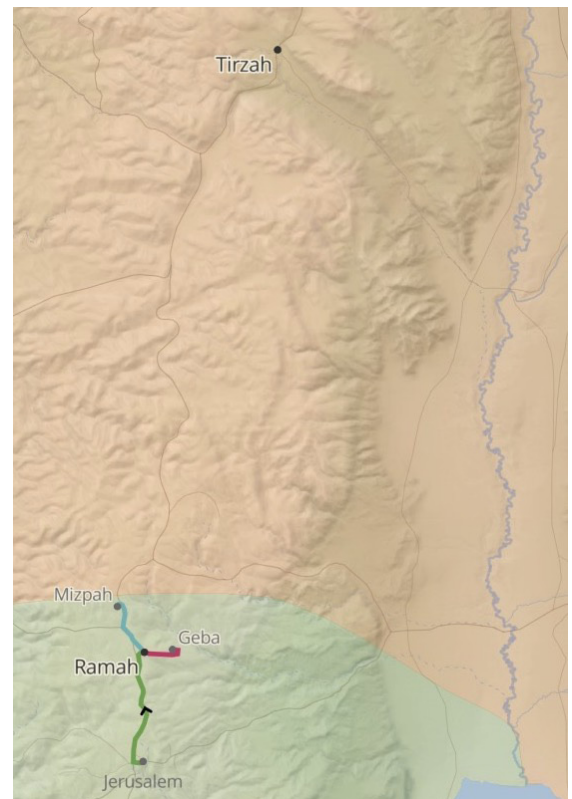
- » Land was undisturbed for ten years (2Chronicles 14.1). This peace was attributed to Asa's faithfulness, both his public acts of destroying idolatry and his charge to the people that they "seek the Lord God of their fathers and to observe the law and the commandment" (vs. 4). However, Asa also took practical measures to defend the kingdom (vss. 6-8). While no negative comment is made of his preparations, his lack of trust in God would be significant in the future.
- » War with Zerah (2Chronicles 14.9-15). Most think that Zerah was a commander for the Egyptian Pharaoh (Osarkon I ca 914-874 B.C.). Zerah brought his forces to Mareshah (vs. 9), one of the cities fortified by Rehoboam. His forces were significantly larger than Asa's, but Asa relied on the Lord's strength and "the Lord routed the Ethiopians" (vs. 12).

Asa's spiritual reformation (2Chronicles 15; 1Kings 15.13-15).

- » Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin (2Chronicles 15.2). While much emphasis was put on the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of the king, the Lord's exhortation was to all the people.
- » For many days Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law (2Chronicles 15.3). While this matched the current situation in the northern kingdom of Israel (2Chronicles 11.14-17), it seems that the Lord was picturing a time in Israel's past, most likely during the time of the Judges.
- » Restored the altar of the Lord (2Chronicles 15.8). Shows how true worship of Jehovah had been ignored during latter period of Solomon's reign and the reigns of Rehoboam and Abijah.
- » Those from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon (2Chronicles 15.9). The exodus of the faithful from the northern kingdom continued (cf. 2Chronicles 11.14-17).
- » 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep from the spoil they had brought (2Chronicles 15.11). Result from the war with Zerah (14.13-15).
- » They entered into the covenant (2Chronicles 15.12). Not a new covenant, but a renewal of the covenant the Lord established with Israel (Exodus 24).
- » Brook Kidron (2Chronicles 15.16). Separated Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives to the east. This would be the site of future reforms in the days of Hezekiah (2Chronicles 29.15-17; 30.14) and Josiah (2Kings 23.1-15).

Asa's war with Baasha of Israel (2Chronicles 16.1-10; 1Kings 15.16-22)

- » 36th year of Asa's reign (2Chronicles 16.1). There are some problems with the number as this would place the conflict with Baasha in 896 B.C., well after Baasha ruled in Israel. This could be the result of a scribal error, but many think the number is from the time when the kingdom divided.
- » Ramah (2Chronicles 16.1). "Jerusalem's fate was so tied to the strategic Benjamin plateau that the capture of Ramah by an enemy effectively cut off Judah altogether." (ZIBBC)
- » Asa brought out silver and gold (vs. 2). Contrast with Asa's reliance on the Lord in (see 2Chronicles 14.11-12).
- » Ben-Hadad (2Chronicles 16.2-4). "when Ben-Hadad began to rule (ca. 900), all of upper Mesopotamia was firmly under Assyrian domination. Ben-Hadad, as well as Asa, Baasha, and other rulers, was certainly well aware of these momentous events to the north and understood clearly what they portended for their own little kingdoms. It is not surprising, then, that treaties were forged between the various states of Syria and Palestine, treaties like those attested to in the Old Testament between Asa and Ben-Hadad, on the one hand, and Baasha and Ben-Hadad, on the other." (Kingdom of Priests page 353)
- » Conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim and all the store cities of Naphtali (2Chronicles 16.4). "Ben-Hadad's attack on northern Israel, at the instigation of Asa, cost Baasha an important trade corridor. The cities captured in this campaign (see 1 Kings 15:20) include Dan (the northern cult shrine), Ijon ('Ayyun) at the northern end of the Huleh Basin (about ten miles north of Dan), Abel Maim (Abel Beth-Maacah in 1 Kings), all of which are on the road between Syria and the Phoenician coastal cities of Tyre, Sidon and Acco." (IVPBBC)
- » Geba and Mizpah (2Chronicles 16.6). "Geba (modern Jeba) lay six miles north-east of Jerusalem and dominated the main road to Jericho. The position of Mizpah (Tell en-Nasbeh) was directly between Bethel to the north and the widening of the Benjamin plateau to the south. There are expansive remains and evidence of massive fortification and administrative architecture exposed in modern excavations. In some places the walls are four to six meters (thirteen to nineteen feet) thick. These features bear witness to the strategic position of the town and Asa's determination to define



the border once and for all. Two of the gates were preserved to a height of several meters and sections of the city wall towered fifteen meters (nearly forty feet) above ground level. (ZIBBC)

- » army of the king of Aram has escaped out of your hand (2Chronicles 16.7). Relying on the Lord would have resulted in the defeat of Israel AND the superior Syrian forces.

Asa's final years (2Chronicles 16.11-14; 1Kings 15.23-24).

Asa's reign had been stable, lasting 41 years and featuring military and diplomatic successes. But his success came from the Lord, and tragically in his final days the king forgot that crucial fact!

Upheaval In Israel

Baasha's failed dynasty (1Kings 15.32-34; 16.1-14)

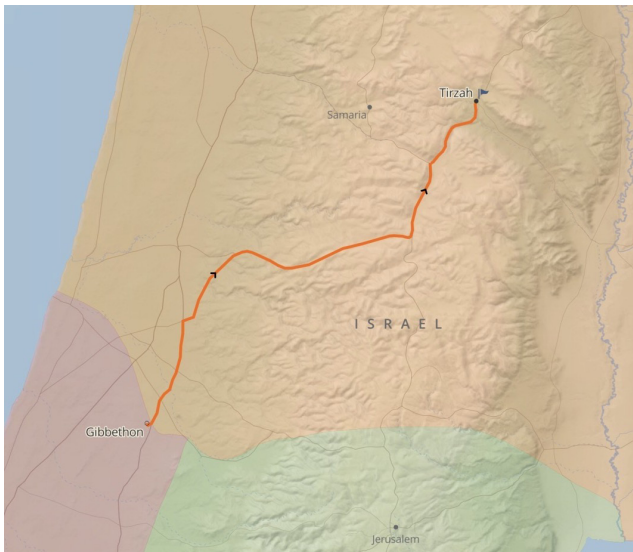
- » Baasha... became king over all Israel (1Kings 15.33). Recall that Baasha fulfilled God's judgment against the house of Jeroboam (1Kings 14.11-14, 27-30).
- » "I exalted you from the dust and made you leader over My people Israel" (1Kings 16.2). Even though we are not told when this occurred, it would seem that the Lord had made a promise to Baasha similar to the one He made to Jeroboam (1Kings 11.37-38). However, Baasha had not been faithful to Jehovah, following instead in the ways of Jeroboam (15.34). As a result, Baasha's house would suffer the same fate as the house of Jeroboam (16.2-4).
- » Elah the son of Baasha became king (1Kings 16.8). Like Jeroboam, Baasha's dynasty would last until the days when his son became king. However, Elah would reign for only 2 years before being assassinated while in a drunken stupor.
- » Zimri went in and struck him (1Kings 16.10). The upheaval in Israel is apparent as one of the king's trusted military commanders assassinated his king. Note that Israel was again at war with the Philistines (vs. 15), but the king was drinking in his capital. It's likely that the war was not going well and the king's detachment from his troops fostered animosity and rebellion.
- » "idols" (1Kings 16.13). literally "worthless things". Note that when Israel is taken captive on the Lord's complaints was that the people "followed vanity and became vain" (2Kings 17.15).

Zimri's one week on the throne (1Kings 16.15-20)

- » "Zimri reigned seven days at Tirzah" (1Kings 16.15). The instability in the king-

dom only worsened.

- » "Omri, the commander of the army" (1Kings 16.16). Zimri was also a military man (vs. 9), but Omri commanded the allegiance of most of the fighting men.
- » "because of his sins which he sinned..." (1Kings 16.19). Zimri's reign was short, but it was already apparent that he had not allegiance to the Lord. We are tempted to see all of these events as being the result of political intrigue, but the text maintains that each king fell because of religious and spiritual failings.



Civil war (1Kings 16.21-22)

» Tibni the son of Ginath (1Kings 16.21). We know nothing of him or why he commanded the allegiance of half the people. All we need to know is that instability in the kingdom continued as civil war erupted in Israel.

» Omri prevailed (1Kings 16.22). It would seem that the civil war lasted 4 years (compare vss. 15 & 23), but the end result was the Omri became king over all of Israel.

Omri Asserts Himself (1Kings 16.24-28)

With Omri's ascension to the throne, Israel's instability came to an end. However, her moral degradation would only continue, most notably in the time of Omri's son Ahab. Interestingly, while we know much more about Ahab, Omri seems to have greater historical significance. Assyrian records would refer to Israel as the "house of Omri" up until her fall in 720 B.C. Omri did three things to stabilize Israel:

1. He chose a new capital (vs. 24) "Omri chose the site for its strategic location. It was not the highest hill in the region, but it was well isolated from surrounding higher hills and also had good access through the valley to its west to the major trade and communication routes and the Mediterranean." (IVP Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books)
2. He entered into a political alliance with the Sidonians via marriage (vs. 31).
3. He suppressed the Moabites. "Apart from biblical material, Omri is known primarily from the Mesha Stela (COS 2.23:137–38; ANET, 320–21). According to that stela, Omri oppressed Moab because Chemosh, Moab's deity, was angry with his land. But in Omri's son's days (or possibly his grandson's days) Mesha was able to regain control of all the Moabite territory." (IVP Dictio-

nary of the Old Testament: Historical Books)

However, like the kings before him, “Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord...” (1Kings 16.25-26). Israel's spiritual degradation would continue, and even though she would enjoy some stability during the days of Omri and Ahab, far worse days were ahead!