

LESSON SEVENTEEN 12-14

EGYPT INVADES ISRAEL, JEROBOAM, AND THE NORTHERN KINGDOM ASA AND THE ETHIOPIANS.

2. THE REIGN OF REHOBOAM—Continued (11-12)

INTRODUCTION

The shields of gold were exchanged for shields of brass as Rehoboam had trouble with the Egyptians. Jeroboam set up the golden calves and led his people away from God. Asa, king of Judah, blessed by Jehovah, repulsed an Ethiopian attack.

TEXT

(Scripture text in Lesson Sixteen)

PARAPHRASE

(Scripture text in Lesson Sixteen)

COMMENTARY

Three chapters in this record describe the life and times of Rehoboam. His kingship covered a very critical period in Hebrew history. Solomon's sins and Rehoboam's foolishness brought Israel to a tragic turning point resulting in the division of the kingdom. In the early part of his reign Rehoboam showed some concern for the genuine Hebrew religion. The presence of the Temple in Jerusalem and the migration of priests and Levites into the borders of Judah were beneficial in this regard. Chapter 12:1 describes Rehoboam's course of action. He established his kingdom, fortified numerous villages, set up an extensive harem, made expensive provisions for his children and "forsook the law of Jehovah." If what he had done would have affected only himself, the results would not have been so serious. All of his people followed the leadership of the king. About 925 B.C. Jehovah allowed Shishak, king of Egypt, to come into Judah with a great army. Jeroboam, king of Israel, had found refuge in Egypt under Shishak (I Kings 11:40). As the Egyptians came into Rehoboam's territory at this time they

intended to take Jerusalem. Rehoboam and his people "Had trespassed against Jehovah" (verse 2). They had forsaken God (verse 5). Shishak brought allies with him. The Lubim were the Libyan people who lived on the northern coast of Africa. The Sukkiim probably were Arabs living in North Africa. The Ethiopians lived within the limits of Shishak's territory as Ethiopia bordered Egypt on the south. The enemy came with twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen, and an army of foot soldiers that was not numbered. Without opposition Shishak took all of the villages in Judah (11:5-12) which had been fortified against such an invasion.

Again, the history of Judah was delicately balanced. Shemaiah, the prophet who had told Jeroboam that he would be a king, appeared before Rehoboam and his princes to charge them with forsaking Jehovah. God's great mercy was exercised once more. Rehoboam and his counselors were convicted of their sins and confessed the "righteousness" of Jehovah's judgment. Jehovah's decision not to bring Judah to a full end was communicated to Shemaiah who, most likely, made this known to the king. However, Rehoboam and his people would have to pay tribute to Egypt and through this they should know that they were being judged for their sins against Jehovah. God did not grant permanent immunity to Jerusalem, He said that Shishak would not destroy the city. When Jehovah's people humble themselves, He forgives (7:14).

In the days of David and Solomon the treasures of the nations poured into Jerusalem. This happy circumstance was reversed in the days of Rehoboam. Shishak would have taken Jerusalem at this time if Jehovah had allowed him to do so and if the Hebrew leaders had not been able to buy temporary freedom with the treasures. Some of the precious things were brought out of the Temple and some out of other buildings where they were housed. The diminishing glory of the kingdom is most graphically described in the exchange of shields of gold for shields of brass. Solomon had fashioned the golden shields (9:15, 16) to demonstrate the wealth and splendor of his kingdom. Those who knew this former glory surely were heart

broken when they had to look upon Rehoboam's shields of brass. The glory had departed. The self-humiliation of the king was the only redeeming consideration. There were still some people in Judah who loved God; but the spiritual climate was far from ideal.

Rehoboam was more concerned about making a name for himself as a king than he was about being a spiritual leader for his people. His reign of seventeen years offered many opportunities for him to strive for the ideal established in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. He was forty one years old when he became king. He had a remarkable heritage. In large measure Rehoboam failed. He did not "set his heart to seek Jehovah."

Shemaiah and Iddo prepared written accounts of Rehoboam's reign. There was constant civil strife between the southern and the northern kingdoms. Rehoboam was buried in the royal cemetery established in David's day. He was succeeded on the throne by his son, Abijah.

3. THE REIGN OF ABIJAH. (Chapter 13)

TEXT

Chapter 13:1. In the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam began Abijah to reign over Judah. 2. Three years reigned he in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Micaiah the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. 3. And Abijah joined battle with an army of valiant men of war, even four hundred thousand chosen men: and Jeroboam set the battle in array against him with eight hundred thousand chosen men, who were mighty men of valor. 4. And Abijah stood up upon Mount Zemaraim, which is in the hill-country of Ephraim, and said, "Hear me, O Jeroboam and all Israel: 5. "Ought ye not to know that Jehovah, the God of Israel, gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt? 6. "Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, rose up, and rebelled against his lord. 7. And there were gathered unto him worthless men, base fellows, that strengthened themselves

against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and tenderhearted, and could not withstand them. 8. "And now ye think to withstand the kingdom of Jehovah in the hand of the sons of David; and ye are a great multitude, and there are with you the golden calves which Jeroboam made you for gods. 9. "Have ye not driven out the priests of Jehovah, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and made you priests after the manner of the peoples of other lands? so that whosoever cometh to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, the same may be a priest of them that are no gods. 10. "But as for us, Jehovah is our God, and we have not forsaken him; and we have priests ministering unto Jehovah, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites in their work: 11. "and they burn unto Jehovah every morning and every evening burnt-offerings and sweet incense: the showbread also set they in order upon the pure table; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening: for we keep the charge of Jehovah our God; but ye have forsaken him. 12. "And, behold, God is with us at our head, and his priests with the trumpets of alarm to sound an alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight ye not against Jehovah, the God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper."

13. But Jeroboam caused an ambushment to come about behind them: so they were before Judah, and the ambushment was behind them. 14. And when Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind them; and they cried unto Jehovah; and the priests sounded with the trumpets. 15. 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 and Judah. 16. And the children of Israel fled before Judah; and God delivered them into their hand. 17. And Abijah and his people slew them with a great slaughter: so there fell down slain of Israel five hundred thousand chosen men. 18. Thus the children of Israel were brought under at that time; and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon Jehovah, the God of their fathers. 19. And Abijah pursued after Jeroboam, and took cities from him, Beth-el with the

towns thereof, and Jashanah with the towns thereof, and Ephron with the towns thereof. 20. Neither did Jeroboam recover strength again the days of Abijah: and Jehovah smote him, and he died. 21. But Abijah waxed mighty, and took unto himself fourteen wives, and begat twenty and two sons, and sixteen daughters. 22. And the rest of the acts of Abijah, and his ways, and his sayings, are written in the commentary of the prophet Iddo.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 13:1. Abijah became the new king of Judah, in Jerusalem, in the eighteenth year of the reign of King Jeroboam of Israel. He lasted three years. His mother's name was Micaiah (daughter of Uriel of Gibeah). Early in his reign war broke out between Judah and Israel. 3. Judah, led by King Abijah, fielded 400,000 seasoned warriors against twice as many Israeli troops—strong, courageous men led by King Jeroboam. 4. When the army of Judah arrived at Mount Zemaraim, in the hill country of Ephraim, King Abijah shouted to King Jeroboam and the Israeli army: 5. "Listen! Don't you realize that the Lord God of Israel swore that David's descendants would always be the kings of Israel; 6. Your King Jeroboam is a mere servant of David's son, and was a traitor to his master. 7. Then a whole gang of worthless rebels joined him, defying Solomon's son Rehoboam, for he was young and frightened and couldn't stand up to them. 8. Do you really think you can defeat the kingdom of the Lord that is led by a descendant of David? Your army is twice as large as mine, but you are cursed with those gold calves you have with you, that Jeroboam made for you—he calls them your gods! 9. And you have driven away the priests of the Lord and the Levites, and have appointed heathen priests instead. Just like the people of other lands, you accept as priests anybody who comes along with a young bullock and seven rams for consecration. Anyone at all can be a priest of these no-gods of yours! 10. "But as for us, the Lord is our God and we have not forsaken him. Only the descendants of Aaron are our priests, and the Levites alone may help them in their work. 11. They burn sacrifices to the Lord every morning and evening—burnt offerings and sweet

incense; and they place the Bread of the Presence upon the holy table. The golden lampstand is lighted every night, for we are careful to follow the instructions of the Lord our God; but you have forsaken him. 12. So you see, God is with us; he is our Leader. His priests, trumpeting as they go, will lead us into battle against you. O people of Israel, do not fight against the Lord God of your fathers, for you will not succeed!"

13, 14. Meanwhile, Jeroboam had secretly sent part of his army around behind the men of Judah to ambush them; so Judah was surrounded, with the enemy before and behind them. Then they cried out to the Lord for mercy, and the priests blew the trumpets. 15, 16. The men of Judah began to shout. And as they shouted, God used King Abijah and the men of Judah to turn the tide of battle against King Jeroboam and the army of Israel, 17. and they slaughtered 500,000 elite troops of Israel that day. 18, 19. So Judah, depending upon the Lord God of their fathers, defeated Israel, and chased King Jeroboam's troops, and captured some of his cities—Bethel, Jeshanah, Ephron, and their suburbs. 20. King Jeroboam of Israel never regained his power during Abijah's lifetime, and eventually the Lord struck him and he died. 21. Meanwhile, King Abijah of Judah became very strong. He married fourteen wives and had twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. 22. His complete biography and speeches are recorded in the prophet Iddo's History of Judah.

COMMENTARY

I Kings 15:1-8 records the brief reign of Abijah emphasizing his military conflict with Jeroboam, king of Israel. Twenty two verses in II Chronicles, chapter thirteen, give attention to Abijah's life and times. Jeroboam's reign continued through twenty two years. Three kings were to reign in Judah in Jeroboam's time. There were Rehoboam, Abijah, and Asa. Late in Jeroboam's reign (the 18th year) Abijah began his reign in the sister kingdom. II Chronicles 11:22 names Maacah as Abijah's mother. Here his mother is named Micaiah. Uriel of Gibeah may be identified as the husband of Tamar, Absalom's

daughter. Absalom was grandfather of Abijah's mother.

The reasons for military conflict between Judah and Israel are not carefully traced in this record. Jeroboam was determined to guard his position as king and to prevent any effort to unify the two kingdoms. He may have attempted to enlarge his territory and move into areas occupied by the southern kingdom. Abijah was concerned to maintain his position in Judah and he had the assurance that from a religious viewpoint his military involvement was justified. Jeroboam drew up an army of eight hundred thousand men. Abijah countered the move by drawing up an army of four hundred thousand men. In the reign between Bethel and the Jordan river in the mountains of Ephraim at a place called Mount Zemaraim Abijah made a dramatic plea to Jeroboam and the representatives of the northern kingdom. Apparently he asked to be heard not because Judah was outnumbered, but because there were deep national and religious ties which civil strife would violate.

Jehovah's promise to David (II Samuel 7) was a basic consideration. "A covenant of salt" was one that could not be broken. Certainly, Jehovah would never break such a pact. Abijah reminded Jeroboam that he was a servant to Solomon, yet he had dared to try to take Solomon's throne. The king of Judah charged the king of Israel with folly in that he had gathered around him men who were empty headed and wicked. Abijah excused his father, Rehoboam, as being young and inexperienced in matters of government. Rehoboam was forty one years of age when he became king and he did not demonstrate gentleness in his dealings with the people at Shechem. Abijah was deeply concerned that Jeroboam would not recognize the sanctity of the Davidic line. "You withstand the kingdom of Jehovah in the hand of the sons of David." (Verse 8)

As if he were a prophet, Abijah, called attention to Israel's golden calves and to the general disregard for the priests and Levites. Like Elijah on Mount Carmel, Abijah affirmed Judah's confidence in Jehovah. He reminded Jeroboam and the Israelites that the priests and Levites were serving in Judah by

divine appointment and with government approval. All of the regular services were being observed in the Temple. The burning of the incense, the morning and evening sacrifices, the showbread (twelve loaves—all Israel) regularly placed on the table designed for this purpose, the golden candlesticks lighted every evening constituted Abijah's proof that Judah had not forsaken Jehovah. In righteous wrath Judah's king leveled this charge at the northern kingdom—"but ye have forsaken Him (Jehovah)" (verse 11). If there was to be civil war, Abijah said it would be a holy war. "The trumpets of alarm" may well have been the silver trumpets appointed to the priests at Sinai (Numbers 10:1). If Jeroboam dared to go to war under these conditions, he was warned that he would be fighting against Jehovah.

In spite of his eloquent appeal and of the basic spiritual considerations, Jeroboam lost no time in joining the battle. Probably while Abijah was speaking, Jeroboam planned the strategy of the attack. While Judah's attention was diverted, a large division of Israel's soldiers moved behind Abijah's army to set an ambush. Caught between the ranks of the enemy, all that Judah could do was to call upon Jehovah for help and then proceed to attack. The sounding of the trumpets and the soldiers' shouts remind us of the overthrow of Jericho (Joshua 6). Miraculously Jehovah gave Abijah and Judah a great military victory. Israel lost five hundred thousand warriors (verse 17). Admittedly, this was a very large number, but this is the record. On one occasion Shennacherib, king of Assyria, lost one hundred eighty five thousand warriors in one night (II Kings 19:35). There is no estimate as to how many Egyptian soldiers perished in the trap of the Red Sea when Jehovah brought Israel out of Egypt. This was a serious defeat for Jeroboam. Not long after this event his reign ended in shame with Abijah's prediction of the extinction of Jeroboam's house. Certain villages in Ephraim were annexed to the southern kingdom. Abijah's accomplishments were attributed to his reliance on Jehovah. Jeroboam's death resulted from his having been smitten by Jehovah. Even though Abijah had made his

impassioned speech on Mount Zemaraim, he was not careful to follow Jehovah in every matter. Fourteen wives, twenty two sons, and sixteen daughters composed his household. The prophet, Iddo, wrote an account of Abijah's life and times.

4. THE REIGN OF ASA (14 - 16)

TEXT

Chapter 14:1. So Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David; and Asa his son reigned in his stead. In his days the land was quiet ten years. 2. And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of Jehovah his God: 3. for he took away the foreign altars, and the high places, and brake down the pillars, and hewed down the Asherim, 4. and commanded Judah to seek Jehovah, the God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment. 5. Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the sun-images: and the kingdom was quiet before him. 6. And he built fortified cities in Judah; for the land was quiet, and he had no war in those years, because Jehovah had given him rest. 7. For he said unto Judah, "Let us build these cities, and make about them walls, and towers, gates, and bars; the land is yet before us, because we have sought Jehovah our God; we have sought him, and he hath given us rest on every side," So they built and prospered. 8. And Asa had an army that bare bucklers and spears, out of Judah three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin, that bare shields and drew bows, two hundred and fourscore thousand: all these were mighty men of valor.

9. And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an army of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots; and he came unto Mareshah. 10. Then Asa went out to meet him, and they set the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. 11. And Asa cried unto Jehovah his God, and said, "Jehovah, there is none besides thee to help, between the mighty and him that hath no strength: help us, O Jehovah our God; for we rely on thee, and in thy name are we come against this multitude. O Jehovah, thou art our God; let

not man prevail against thee." 12. So Jehovah smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled. 13. And Asa and the people that were with him pursued them unto Gerar: and there fell of the Ethiopians so many that they could not recover themselves; for they were destroyed before Jehovah, and before his host; and they carried away very much booty. 14. And they smote all the cities round about Gerar; for the fear of Jehovah came upon them: and they despoiled all the cities; for there was much spoil in them. 15. They smote also the tents of cattle, and carried away sheep in abundance, and camels, and returned to Jerusalem.

Chapter 15:1. And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded: 2. and he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, "Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: Jehovah is with you, while ye are with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you. 3. "Now for a long season Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law: 4. "but when in their distress they turned unto Jehovah, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them. 5. "And in those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in; but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the lands. 6. "And they were broken in pieces, nation against nation, and city against city; for God did vex them with all adversity. 7. "But be ye strong, and let not your hands be slack; for your work shall be rewarded."

And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and put away the abominations out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from the hill-country of Ephraim; and he renewed the altar of Jehovah, that was before the porch of Jehovah. 9. And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and them that sojourned with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon: for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw Jehovah his God was with him. 10. So they gathered themselves together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. 11.

And they sacrificed unto Jehovah in that day, of the spoil which they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep. 12. And they entered into the covenant to seek Jehovah, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul; 13. and that whosoever would not seek Jehovah, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. 14. And they swore unto Jehovah with a loud voice, and with shouting and with trumpets, and with cornets. 15. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath; for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and Jehovah gave them rest round about.

16. And also Maacah, the mother of Asa the king, he removed from being queen, because she had made an abominable image for an Asherah and Asa cut down her image, and made dust of it, and burnt it at the brook Kidron. 17. But the high places were not taken away out of Israel: nevertheless the heart of Asa was perfect all his days. 18. And he brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated, and that he himself had dedicated, silver, and gold, and vessels. 19. And there was no more war unto the five and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa.

Chapter 16:1. In the six and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, that he might not suffer any one to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. 2. Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of Jehovah and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-hadad king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, 3. "There is a league between me and thee, as there was between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent thee silver and gold; go break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me." 4. And Ben-hadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel; and they smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abel-maim, and all the store-cities of Naphtali. 5. And it came to pass, when Baasha heard thereof, that he left off building Ramah, and let his work cease. 6. Then Asa the king took all

Judah; and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha had builded; and he built therewith Geba and Mizpah.

7. 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 hast not relied on Jehovah thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thy hand. 8. "Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim a huge host, with chariots and horsemen exceeding many? yet, because thou didst rely on Jehovah, he delivered them into thy hand. 9. "For the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly; for from henceforth thou shalt have wars." 10. Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in the prison-house; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time.

11. And, behold, the acts of Asa, first and last, lo, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 12. And in the thirty and ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet; his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to Jehovah, but to the physicians. 13. And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign. 14. And they buried him in his own sepulchres, which he had hewn out for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odors and divers kinds of spices prepared by the perfumers' art: and they made a very great burning for him.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 14:1. King Abijah was buried in Jerusalem. Then his son Asa became the new king of Judah, and there was peace in the land for the first ten years of his reign, 2. for Asa was careful to obey the Lord his God. 3. He demolished the heathen altars on the hills, and broke down the obelisks, and chopped down the shameful Asherim-idols, 4. and demanded that the entire nation obey the commandments of the Lord God of their

ancestors. 5. Also, he removed the sun-images from the hills, and the incense altars from every one of Judah's cities. That is why God gave his kingdom peace. 6. This made it possible for him to build walled cities throughout Judah. 7. "Now is the time to do it, while the Lord is blessing us with peace because of our obedience to him," he told his people. "Let us build and fortify cities now, with walls, towers, gates, and bars," So they went ahead with these projects very successfully. 8. King Asa's Judean army was 300,000 strong, equipped with light shields and spears. His army of Benjaminites numbered 280,000, armed with large shields and bows. Both armies were composed of well-trained, brave men.

9, 10. But now he was attacked by an army of 1,000,000 troops from Ethiopia with 300 chariots, under the leadership of General Zerah. They advanced to the city of Mareshah, in the valley of Zephathah, and king Asa sent his troops to meet them there. 11. "O Lord," he cried out to God, "no one else can help us! Here we are, powerless against this mighty army. Oh, help us, Lord our God! For we trust in you alone to rescue us, and in your name we attack this vast horde. Don't let mere men defeat you!" 12. Then the Lord defeated the Ethiopians, and Asa and the army of Judah triumphed as the Ethiopians fled. 13. They chased them as far as Gerar, and the entire Ethiopian army was wiped out so that not one man remained; for the Lord and his army destroyed them all. Then the army of Judah carried off vast quantities of plunder. 14. While they were at Gerar they attacked all the cities in that area, and terror from the Lord came upon the residents. As a result additional vast quantities of plunder were collected from these cities too. 15. They not only plundered the cities, but destroyed the cattle tents and captured great herds of sheep and camels before finally returning to Jerusalem.

Chapter 15:1. Then the spirit of God came upon Azariah (son of Oded), 2. and he went out to meet King Asa as he was returning from the battle. "Listen to me, Asa! Listen, armies of Judah and Benjamin!" he shouted. "The Lord will stay with you as long as you stay with him! Whenever you look for him,

you will find him. But if you forsake him, he will forsake you. 3. For a long time now, over in Israel, the people haven't worshiped the true God, and have not had a true priest to teach them. They have lived without God's laws. 4. But whenever they have turned again to the Lord God of Israel in their distress, and searched for him, he has helped them. 5. In their times of rebellion against God there was no peace. Problems troubled the nation on every hand. Crime was on the increase everywhere. 6. There were external wars, and internal fighting of city against city, for God was plaguing them with all sorts of trouble. 7. But you men of Judah, keep up the good work and don't get discouraged, for you will be rewarded."

8. When King Asa heard this message from God, he took courage and destroyed all the idols in the land of Judah and Benjamin, and in the cities he had captured in the hill country of Ephraim, and he rebuilt the altar of the Lord in front of the Temple. 9. Then he summoned all the people of Judah and Benjamin, and the immigrants from Israel (for many had come from the territories of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, in Israel, when they saw that the Lord God was with King Asa). 10. They all came to Jerusalem in June of the fifteenth year of King Asa's reign, 11. and sacrificed to the Lord seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep—it was part of the plunder they had captured in the battle. 12. Then they entered into a contract to worship only the Lord God of their fathers, 13. and agreed that anyone who refused to do this must die—whether old or young, man or woman. 14. They shouted out their oath of loyalty to God with trumpets blaring and horns sounding. 15. All were happy for this covenant with God, for they had entered into it with all their hearts and wills, and wanted him above everything else, and they found him! and he gave them peace throughout the nation.

16. King Asa even removed his mother Maacah from being the queen mother because she made an Asherah-idol; he cut down the idol and crushed and burned it at Kidron Brook. 17. Over in Israel the idol-temples were not removed. But here in Judah and Benjamin the heart of King Asa was perfect before

God throughout his lifetime. 18. He brought back into the Temple the silver and gold bowls which he and his father had dedicated to the Lord. 19. So there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of King Asa's reign.

Chapter 16:1. In the thirty-sixth year of King Asa's reign. King Baasha of Israel declared war on him and built the fortress of Ramah in order to control the road to Judah. 2. Asa's response was to take the silver and gold from the Temple and from the palace, and to send it to King Ben-hadad of Syria, at Damascus, with this message: 3. "Let us renew the mutual security pact that there was between your father and my father. See, here is silver and gold to induce you to break your alliance with King Baasha of Israel, so that he will leave me alone." 4. Ben-hadad agreed to King Asa's request and mobilized his armies to attack Israel. They destroyed the cities of Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim and all of the supply centers in Naphtali. 5. As soon as King Baasha of Israel heard what was happening, he discontinued building Ramah and gave up his plan to attack Judah. 6. Then King Asa and the people of Judah went out to Ramah and carried away the building stones and timbers and used them to build Geba and Mizpah instead.

7. About that time the prophet Hanani came to King Asa and told him, "Because you have put your trust in the king of Syria instead of in the Lord your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped from you. 8. Don't you remember what happened to the Ethiopians and Libyans and their vast army, with all of their chariots and cavalymen? But you relied then on the Lord, and he delivered them all into your hand. 9. For the eyes of the Lord search back and forth across the whole earth, looking for people whose hearts are perfect toward him, so that he can show his great power in helping them. What a fool you have been; From now on you shall have wars." 10. Asa was so angry with the prophet for saying this that he threw him into jail. And Asa oppressed all the people at that time.

11. The rest of the biography of Asa is written in The Annals of the Kings of Israel and Judah. 12. In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa became seriously diseased in his feet but

he didn't go to the Lord with the problem, but to the doctors. 13, 14. So he died in the forty-first year of his reign, and was buried in his own vault that he had hewn out for himself in Jerusalem. He was laid on a bed perfumed with sweet spices and ointments, and his people made a very great burning of incense for him at his funeral.

COMMENTARY

Asa, the son Abijah, succeeded his father on the throne in Judah. The military activity of Abijah in the civil strife with Jeroboam and the northern kingdom brought a brief period (ten years) of comparative peace to Judah. Certain alliances between the southern kingdom and Syria had been established (I Kings 15:19). It is possible that Asa became king when he was quite young. He reigned for forty one years. Verses 1-8 describe the first ten years of Asa's reign. He launched a religious reformation. Jehovah's will was the primary consideration. Strange gods had been carried into Judah along with all of the related idolatrous ritual. There was but one genuine altar for religious sacrifices. It was located in the Temple. "The foreign altars," by Asa's command, were to be destroyed. "The high places" were sometimes established on a natural elevation. On occasion devotees of a god would expend much labor to prepare a place suitable for the worship of the idol. The term "pillar" may mean an obelisk, a four sided post tapering as it rises and terminating in a pyramid. A "pillar" may simply refer to an image designed for worship. The Asherim were fashioned like poles or posts and sometimes were set up as groves of trees. The word is the plural for "Asherah" which was the female counterpart for Baal. Any reference to the Asherim immediately involved the Baalistic fertility cult. The "sun images" were made in the form of a pyramid and were often located in very prominent positions in the temples of Baal. They probably combined expressions of worship both of Baal and of the sun. In the days of Ahaz, king of Judah, shrines dedicated to sun worship were built in Jerusalem. These were equipped with priests, priestesses, horses and chariots (II Kings 21:3-6). Asa

indicated his intentions to be a worthy successor of David by clearing out all of the idolatrous establishments. When the land was well saturated with the furniture of paganism and when the people had so widely adopted heathen worship, a complete reformation was impossible. Asa "commanded Judah to seek Jehovah." He was urgent about the matter. Jehovah rewarded Asa's good faith. "The land was quiet; Jehovah had given him rest." The king busied himself with fortifying the villages in Judah. He encouraged his people as he said, "the land is yet before us." The tribe of Judah provided an army of three hundred thousand men trained to carry spears and shields. The tribe of Benjamin equipped two hundred eighty thousand archers. The raising of this large army indicated that the peaceful days would soon be past.

Asa was soon called upon to do battle with the Ethiopians.¹ This attack probably came about 900 B.C. Zerah was a Cushite who had a great army of about one million foot soldiers supported by three hundred chariots. He brought this army into the country of Judah to Mareshah which lay about twelve miles northwest of Hebrón. This is the same Mareshah of which Micah spoke (Micah 1:15). Asa's military forces were ill-equipped to engage this great host out of Ethiopia. Asa demonstrated his true metal when he "cried unto Jehovah his God." The king admitted Judah's helplessness apart from Jehovah. He confidently believed that Judah's God could scatter the enemy and he appealed for Jehovah to prove once more that no enemy of Jehovah could prevail as he contested Jehovah's righteous reign. The historian sets the record in proper perspective when he writes, "so Jehovah smote the Ethiopians."

Gerar lay some twenty miles south west of Mareshah. With the Ethiopians in full retreat, Asa's army took full advantage of the situation. The enemy was "broken before Jehovah." Asa's army was able to recapture much that the enemy had taken and the people of the southern kingdom returned loaded with the spoils of battle. The villages around Gerar were on the south west border of the Judah country. Asa took advantage of this

¹Cook, F. C., *The Bible Commentary*, I Samuel-Esther, p. 390

military exercise as he spoiled these border villages and took with him cattle, sheep, and camels. The victory march back to Jerusalem must have been one of the truly happy occasions of Asa's reign.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

LESSON SEVENTEEN 12-14

620. What did Rehoboam do about the law of Jehovah?
621. Who was Shishak and why did he appear in Jerusalem?
622. How numerous was the army that challenged Rehoboam?
623. Who was Shemaiah and what did he say?
624. What were the effects of the repentance of the leaders of Judah?
625. With regard to Jerusalem, what was Shishak able to do?
626. Explain the reference to Solomon's shields of gold.
627. Who was Rehoboam's mother?
628. How long did he reign over Judah?
629. Who wrote accounts of Rehoboam's reign?
630. What was the usual relationship between Rehoboam and Jeroboam?
631. Who succeeded Rehoboam as king?
632. Who was the mother of the new king?
633. How many men did Abijah assemble for battle and how many did Jeroboam bring together?
634. Locate Mount Zemaraim.
635. What is a covenant of salt?
636. How does Abijah account for some of his father's failures?
637. What is Abijah's concept of the Davidic kingdom?
638. How does Abijah describe Israel's gods?
639. Who could be a priest in the Northern kingdom?
640. What does Abijah say about Jehovah worship in Jerusalem?

641. What was the nature of Abijah's request?
642. Explain Jeroboam's military maneuver.
643. How many men did Jeroboam lose in the battle? Explain this great loss.
644. Where was Bethel located? Why had this place been so important to Jeroboam?
645. What finally happened to Jeroboam?
646. Who wrote the history of Abijah?
647. Describe the reforms instituted by Asa.
648. What advice did Asa give to the people?
649. Explain Asa's concern about building cities in Judah.
650. How many men were in Asa's army?
651. How many are a thousand thousand?
652. Locate Mareshah.
653. When Asa faced this great enemy what did he do?
654. Locate Gerar.
655. What were the results of this military engagement?